

Prof. **Anil** Gupta

RECOGNISING KNOWLEDGE of the Poor

It is a world brimming with opportunities, and also challenges. It is a millennium living upto the Darwinian maxim of survival of the fittest. With such cut throat competition around, we cannot afford to be left behind in making use of information communication technology for our progress. We need to work upon innovative ideas for the purpose of working towards this end.

I have on various occasions spoken and written about few ideas, which I believe can bring tremendous change in the state of affairs. These include, making use of the inherent talents and knowledge of the poor man, spending savings from our microfinance into development and working towards a horizontal growth pattern, coming up with portals of various kinds, changing the education system, sensitizing ourselves to the needs of various sections of society, using the existing talents etc. I would now like to elaborate upon them in a refreshed way. All my ideas, except one or two, to reap fruit need ICT application in one form or the other.

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Let me start by saying that there is huge digital divide prevalent in our society in urban and rural India, in the formal and the informal sector, in the organized and the unorganized sector, between the literate and the not so literate or uneducated. This disparity is the biggest paradox of our country. The big question is how to make best use of digital economy, digital technology to empower the knowledge and culture rich, but economically poor people, so that we can bridge this huge divide.

It is an irony that a country which claims to be a world leader in IT today and provide services to the top companies of the world, is unable to provide content in the local languages for its children in government schools, community schools, village schools. While computers are reaching, the content is not reaching. The content we are talking about is within the sphere of education. Me and my students at NIG Surat have come up with an open source animation software. 70 per cent of the content for science, maths, history and other subjects has been put together. It is very important to give practical demonstrations to children for teaching purpose. For example, processes like lunar and solar eclipses can be explained with the help of animation. The illustrative mode is definitely more comprehensible.

It is democracy damn it! Why not inclusive education?

In a country like India with rural stronghold, where class teachers in the village schools are often just class X passouts, and have never been taught scientifically, such technology



assumes even greater relevance.

The huge divide in education at the primary or secondary level is a matter of great concern. The private schools or public schools are highly damaging and the quality of the institutes is deplorable. But, having said

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this, I would like to add that there is no reason why we can't improve the situation.

All we need to do is to democratize the education process. For this, access to digital content is top priority and teachers have to be equipped for the same.

This takes us back to 1960s, when television brought about a revolution in our lives with its role as a country-wide classroom. It was on Doordarshan that lectures on various subjects were given. This had proved beneficial for schools in various parts of the country, especially those teaching underprivileged children. We can also think of a similar connection with radio. However, for some strange reasons, whenever we talk of ICT, we mean just the internet.

The sad part is that today, I can't even think of even five programmes on radio that people listen to. There are few programmes meant for children that are broadcast on Doordarshan. However, their timings are not suited to the liking of the children. But as far as radio is concerned, I can claim that there are no educational programmes. I am a teacher, but I have myself never been asked to present a programme. In fact, talk to 5 or 10 good teachers if they have been ever approached for

a programme by radio, and the picture will become clear. The content of these programmes, if any, is a separate issue.

I would like to put forward an idea which I believe can do wonders. The radio can be used in combination with the telephone for the purpose of bringing about real development.

For instance, we can have a toll free number which people can make use of to have their issues and problems aired on radio. The radio can serve as a medium to provide solutions to these problems as well as educate the masse. This can prove particularly helpful because many issues would be common for various villages. Radio's reach is very high, it is present in areas where Internet is not.

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Talking about the issue of making the vast reservoir of knowledge and content on internet accessible at the grassroot level, a very effective technique can be adopted. We should provide net access to the teachers, who can download the matter and disseminate the knowledge /information to the students. By paying Rs 4 to Rs 10 rupees to a interactive kiosk, a large number of people will be benefitted. In a developing economy like ours, especially rural India, spending Rs 10 on internet access per day is not very affordable, thus kiosk as public dissemination centre.

But a bigger question related to content which I have is, where is the content for the school dropouts? I don't want to focus only on the schoolgoing children. 60% of the children in our country do not go to school. This is a curse. Knowledge is essential for the society to grow and progress.

Now that we have a community radio act, I would say that the schools at block level should have community radio licence to be able to broadcast the lessons which will be taught by the local teachers in local languages. In this manner, those children who are unable to go to

school for some reason will get some education. Our goal is to remove the tag of being one of the most illiterate countries in the world. Children who want to learn by listening to the programme will benefit.

Cultural Enrichment

The next topic that I would like to touch is creating a market for cultural creativity for the children. We are trying to create a portal of children on sristi.org which will be uploaded with the help of students from NIIT. The idea took birth during our shodhyatras or research trips, where we came across lot of talent in the villages. There were many among the people we met who sing very well, some who paint very well, some who have tremendous craftsman skills. In fact the whole wall that you have seen in the HoneyBee, that painting by a lady from the Madhubani, Now these are artists and we should be able to create a demand for their work among people who love art and culture. All programmes to encourage talent are meant for people in the main-

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stream cities. Where would a street level artist, various other singers or those who sing in the train, or bus stand will get a chance to showcase his/her talent.

So what we are trying to propose is that somebody who is interested, can either videograph or record their performance with the help of a mobile and take down the name and the address of the artist and post it on the portal. This way, anybody who wants to listen to that music or art, irrespective of where he or she is sitting, Munger in Bihar or Champaran will be able to download the performance. If he or she appreciates the art, they download a form by paying 1 rupee for it. This money goes to the account of the person whose song it is.

So what we are trying to do is to use that form for generating an opportunity for the cultural rich Bharat which is not India. In the process, we also contribute to keeping the languages and dialects alive. I am more familiar with Ramayana, and I am sure that in every religion there will be lots of stories and folktales that are just as interesting. And when you make use of local dialect, it touches better upon the sensibilities of the people. These local variations in the cultural bases of societies, are narrated very interestingly by local story tellers with culture folktales. This art is disappearing

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very fast. Time will come when our children will not have time to tell stories and even if they want to, they wouldn't have the repertoire of stories. We need a countrywide campaign for enriching or archiving informal artistes, and then create a market for them.

In this manner, we can use the story telling methodology to capture the local culture, creativity, knowledge and art and bring it to the digital domain so that vanishing culture can be safeguarded and also be converted into e-commerce which can further benefit artists or the culturally creative people.

This is the only way we will be able to avoid a group of people whom we can call Alienated Resident Indians (ARI) as one can call it, a resident agitated Indians.. Resident Alienated Indians (RAI) live in India but not actually belong to India they live in India but are alienated from the roots of the country.

Convert public places into art gallery

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stations can be utilized for the purpose. These places can help the artists generate revenue. Preserving the linguistic diversity of this country is our responsibility. Every language in the country, every culture, every language needs to be preserved, when a language dies, a culture dies.

I want to draw light on the fact that there is tremendous restructuring going on in the manufacturing industry because many large companies are vertically integrated

It is inevitable that there are large number of people who have knowledge resources and talent. Our HoneyBee Network has been trying to help them. But in a country of over one billion people, this effort is not sufficient. It is just like a drop in the ocean given the size of our country and range of richness of culture. However, we have a National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGA) which believes that the poor are supposed to have no such thing as heads. But we try to access digital technology, digital content, digital network, and connect these heads in due course.

Digital market place for traditional food

Culture Can be used for enhancing the economic conditions of the poor as well. It can be used to create a horizontal market for them. Today, the eating habits of people are changing drastically. This is causing a depression in the market as far the food produced by these poor is concerned. Food habits are becoming impoverished. We should have food festivals like the Satvik food festival. We wish such food festivals become the norm in every taluka of this country. We can have food bazaars, where even ordinary people can put up a stall of their own and showcase some of their old recipes. In this country, food diversity is going down drastically. We eat the same Pizzas and the same Burgers. In India, there is rich

diversity in food as well. Moreover, a dish can be prepared in many ways. For example, there may be hundreds of variations of something as simple as moong ki daal . Cooking with variety is the way women reflect their talent and culture. The diversity in the cooking by women must be captured in a manner. There is a whole technology behind cooking, a whole culture and tradition behind it. This brings me to making the point that how can we create a digital market for diverse products food.

Now I come to another point, which is about how to use the supply chain, which you can download from my webpage on integrating vertical and horizontal markets. Let's say you want a particular pickle or want to make a particular variety of pickle. Sitting in Delhi, you want to get the taste of that particular dish from another state. So what you do is you go to the net, find out the whereabouts of the person who makes that dish and place a order on the net. The order will reach the

house, the courier agency will connect with the packaging industry, the packaging industry will coordinate with the courier agency and, and in 36 hours you will get that dish in your house from that village. So you are connected to the supply chain. If you can afford it, you are also creating a market and enriching your life.

Be it 60 bottles of a particular jam made from guavas growing in eastern UP, or juice from Leh , or any such thing from another state, you can simply order it. In turn, the farmer will benefit. If we generate income this way, we can prevent people from leaving their homes and become slum dwellers.

Student's project portal

There are 5 lakhs students of technology in this country. Those 5 lakhs students do 5 lakhs projects, no portal has been made on their work till date. These students can help the small scale industry, which can't hire IIT or IIM professors to work on their problems. This way the students in the technical field will be working on real life problems. So this way you create a pluralistic diverse market of brains. People think that all the brains are concentrated at IITs and IIMs. You should be knowing that two months ago a Indian Space programme took place, where 10 satellites were launched

simultaneously on a single rocket, an extra ordinary feat by Indian Space Research Programme. Those ten satellites makers were neither from IIT, nor from NIIT. Those were engineers from lesser known colleges. So we can conclude that be it the manufacturing sector, Indian Railways or Indian Space Programme, good engineers can prove their worth, irrespective of the college.

Inclusive Human Resources

There is no social capital around students from the lesser known engineering colleges. I would like to ask the employers to go to their colleges. I have nothing against IITs or other big names, but my point is don't take elitist attitude against other colleges. Our thinking should be that I am needed in such colleges where people don't come due to bias. We want to empower those colleges. We want to create new opportunities for those students so that even international companies can go to those colleges to hire people. ICT can play a huge role here by



I have always said that India is crucial for the creativity in the entire world. Our attitude has to be that what we will do for ourselves, we will do for Africa or any other country. The Indian model development can't grow without taking neighbours along. We can provide similar facilities not only in India, but also on the hinterland of South East Asia or wherever.

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enabling this whole thing with the help of portals.

1+1= 11

I want to draw light on the fact that there is tremendous restructuring going on in the manufacturing industry because many large companies are vertically integrated. Outsourcing is now getting to the next level. This is the age of refoundation or restructuring. What I am saying is that if you have 5 machines and I have 4 machines, some have 3, others have 5, a pool can be created for helping industries of the world. You can place an order for that on this portal, place requisition and we will our supply chain, organize them and will give you product, whether we make it from 10 places or one place.

This is decentralizing the process and making use of small workshops. We are trying to give work to lesser known names. This way, instead of few large companies taking care of the needs of the world, we create a large number of hubs which will be networked to the international community through digital technology.

Let us create a pool of villagers who are skilled. We have to network them, decentralize the opportunities.

When I say India, I mean India as an instrument not only for Indians, but for all disadvantaged communities or people of the world. We are now giving them a contracting model which is a very different model from the point of their modus operandi. One model says that Finland will manufacture mobiles, and another says that some other country will manufacture something else. However, this model is not very effective. Now things will be done through distributed models. Local supply chains will be made and global markets will be created. We want to turn the world into a manufacturing hub. We want our skills to be engaged with organizing things on a scale where people will contribute their best. Their creativity will be enhanced.

Here we are talking about grassroots to global, or what I would call G2G. You may even call it gLocalisation.

More in my next article. In the meanwhile, spare some time at www.sristi.org

Prof Anil Gupta, IIMA, is Padamshree and Vice Chairperson of National Innovation Foundation. He can be reached at anilgb@gmail.com