

BOOK REVIEW

Atanu Garai & B. Shadrach (2006). *Taking ICT to every Indian village: Opportunities and challenges*. New Delhi, India: One World South Asia; 133 pages.

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Information and communication technology (ICT) activities can easily be seen as a sort of technocracy, which is not surprising because the focus of attention is often dominated by issues such as the bandwidth, new devices, or the fierce competition between technological companies and their innovative products. In short, the discussion often is restricted to Habermasian technical interest of knowledge. At the end of the day, however, everything in ICT is about people and, more specifically, about the emancipatory application of knowledge for and by the people. This latter perspective on ICT development comes to the fore in a very interesting and thought-provoking way in a book by Garai and Shadrach, titled *Taking ICT to Every Indian Village*.

The book discusses ICT developments in hundreds of thousands Indian villages, presented through four somewhat independent texts that shed light on various practical and research aspects of the status of ICT in India. The book opens with an analysis of Martha Nussbaum's ideas about central human functional capacities, and how these ideas relate to the vision of technological benefit in India. Nussbaum's important humanistic goals—such as bodily integrity, cognitive faculties, emotions, affiliation and control over one's own environment—need to serve as an essential beacon for how technology should benefit human development on both sides of the digital divide. One simply needs to search the Web for any of Nussbaum's humanistic themes to discover how far some technological uses have strayed from obvious benefit to human cognitive and emotional development.

In the balance of the book, the authors develop their themes through assisting the reader to understand the challenges and opportunities for ICTs in India, and through good factual argumentation. They raise important people-centered themes for technological use, such as education, health, governance, community, and business. Garai and Shadrach provide a snapshot of the ICT diffusion in a country of more than a billion people, where ICT access is

challenged by the geography, economy, literacy rate, multilingualism, rural poverty, and so on. The abundance of rural villages that are quite socially, economically, politically and culturally diverse underscores the need for tailored solutions to unique situations. Thus the text presents a concrete picture about the relationship between research and practice, and it discusses with strong expertise the vital issues regarding how technology is applied in rural—sometimes remote—settings. As a result, this book presents a good guide to the ICT development in India—with possible implications for other rural and developing environments—encompassing both the reality and the opportunities.

The realities of rural life in India, and the implications for technology implementation, require solutions to technological needs that, while perhaps quite different from highly technological societies, are obviously very practical for India. For example, information kiosks are commonplace in rural areas, offering calling and Internet services to the public, an effective solution to make limited ICT facilities accessible to many. The lesson provided, of course, is the need for technologies—and, more specifically, technological solutions—to conform to the realities of the people in a particular setting and with particular needs. This book serves well technology designers and strategists who envision technology that is adaptable to and in harmony with the great variation in human need and circumstances throughout the world.

Garai and Shadrach do not limit their discussion to the social aspects of ICT: They raise issues and concerns about technology infrastructure and ICT functionality, which have equal implications for the implementation and use of any technology. In this way, the authors provide an important insider's view to all who are interested in the opportunities and challenges for ICTs in the developing world. On the whole, this small book offers valuable insight on the multidimensional human element of ICTs, and specifically on the unique needs and solutions required for rural communities in developing countries.