

Chapter 5.7

Technology and Culture: Indian Experiences

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the deployment of e-learning technologies in the context of how they are helping towards preserving and disseminating knowledge on Indian cultural heritage. An analysis has also been offered as regards how the technologies like e-learning initiatives have their impact on sociocultural settings within Indian context. This chapter attempts to understand and frame Indian culture and experiences through ICT and e-learning practices, and how the differentiated learning needs of multicultural society can be addressed.

INTRODUCTION

Culture has been important, perhaps one of the most important concepts, of anthropology. A surviving culture is always dynamic in nature;

it evolves over time and, at the same time, maintains its identity. Matsumoto (1996, p. 16) defined culture as, “the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next.” It is these values and beliefs which make a culture that can survive against all odds.

Indian civilization is one of the oldest civilizations of the world (dates back to more than 5,000 years). In spite of various foreign invasions and dominations, visits by scholars in search of knowledge, India’s cultural own identity has been maintained. It has adopted the good from them while rejecting those that might have destroyed its unique unity in diversity feature. This nation has witnessed many social, economic, political, and technological changes. Here, science and spirituality both exist. Indian architecture, festivals, dance forms, painting, sculptures, cuisine, literature, and teacher-taught relations, all have

different dimensions of extraordinary variety. This cultural heritage has been passed on from generation to generation by appropriately preserving, promoting, and disseminating modes be it oral, written, or now electronic.

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN INDIA

The government of India has accorded high priority to the deployment of ICT for social and community development. Since early 1970s, India has witnessed constant growth in the area of telephone density, Internet penetration, establishment of radio and television stations, broadband connections, and affordable computers and peripherals. These have become within easy reach of the educational institutions, businesses, and individuals and so forth.

Starting with nearly a thousand Internet users in 1992, over 5 million users were enjoying Internet in 2000 (GOI, 2003). TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2005) reported that there were 105,000 Internet cafes in India; telephone density was 0.6 % in 1991, which increased to 11.7% in 2006.

Telephone, radio, and television has been widely used in educational settings in India (Sharma, 2002; Vyas, Sharma, & Kumar, 2002a, 2002b). One-way-video two-way-audio teleconferencing is quite effective for content presentation, learner-expert interactions, and learner-supported activities (Mishra, 1999). In addition satellites have also been considered to be useful in catering to the educational needs of the society. For example, EDUSAT is the first Indian satellite designed and developed exclusively to meet the demand for an interactive satellite-based distance education system for the country (Sharma, 2006). All these different instruments of ICT, like radio, television, teleconference, satellite, Internet, have contributed to the community development under various schemes of the government.

ICT FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE

Different measures for the preservation, transmission, and advancement of languages and culture have been adopted by the communities. With the physical expansion of the world, different cultures and languages have realized the increasing importance of having dynamic and vibrant mechanisms that can help them maintain their identity and foster progress in a multicultural learning environment. Odasz (n.d.) states, "The world's diverse cultures jointly represent the full cultural genome of humankind's search for individual and group identity and meaning" and exert pressure to record this important "shared story of humankind." The sooner actions are taken to save the cultural knowledge of our ancestors, the better will be, as it is feared that nearly half of the world's 6,000 languages may disappear in one lifetime. Odasz (n.d.) recommends, "The vast cultural knowledge of our elders must be recorded via multimedia storytelling for preservation while they (our elders) are still with us."

The use of ICT to the cause of culture has been best exemplified through different kinds of technological tools (radio, television, Internet, etc.) being heavily used by Indian communities to maintain or to create new relations. The social networking tools, like MySpace (<http://www.myspace.com>); Ning (<http://www.ning.com>); Second Life (<http://www.secondlife.com>) or Orkut, are connecting people across different cultural and social backgrounds. Cellular phones have become an integral part of common people, due to slashing of rates prompted by the entry of many players and due to the Government of India's intention to reach to the masses through telephone network. SMS poll is nowadays a common phenomenon in case of any national event where the viewpoint of masses has a say. This is becoming a cultural bonding technology even in some cultural events when the contestants request the people to vote for them through SMS like reality shows on television. Cole and Crawford (2007) consider ICT tools as

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