

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SHOULD BE MORE BROAD - BASED

Information Technology for Participatory Development;
Edited by R. Raman Nair; pp 523; price Rs 800/-; Concept
Publishing Company, New Delhi.

Professor Raman Nair, former Librarian, Kerala Agricultural University who claims to be an information technology expert is credited with designing the Multimedia Library Automation System in 1993. He has streamlined the information technology in his particular way as has tremendous experience of the functioning of rural and urban libraries in various parts of the country.

The book is based on the opinions and views of scholars, academicians and other experts who have a thorough knowledge of the subject. About 34 prominent people have been selected by Mr Nair so as to obtain a good sprinkling of the problem and its solution.

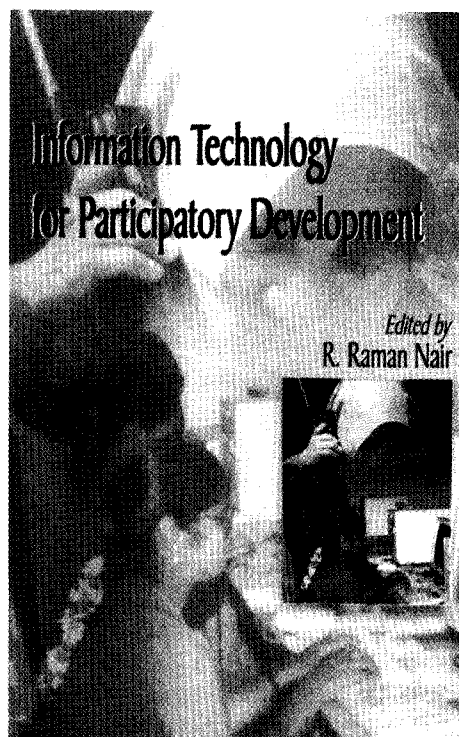
It is a well known cliché that Information is the kind of wealth which can neither be stolen nor reduced by distributing it to others. On the other hand if knowledge is made available to a large number of people in rural as well as urban areas by starting libraries and reading rooms it is of tremendous benefit to the giver and the taker.

It is true that in India there are very few libraries which cater to the common people — there are fewer such institutions in villages and small towns. Apart from other reasons, this is also due to the fact that the country suffers from a low

percentage of education. Moreover, municipal and state Government funds are far from adequate to fulfil the needs of fast growing level of education. In the last half a century Independent India has made great progress as far as the spread of primary and secondary education is concerned. But libraries have not kept pace with it.

There are, however, other alternatives for acquiring knowledge and information. Mr. Hainan Kair seems to have completely ignored the existence of newspapers, radio and television, telecommunication (including mobile services) to mention the main sources. Television today is the most powerful medium of information and it is said to have its presence even in the remotest villages. If individuals do not own it the panchayats and other centres do keep it for information and knowledge. Moreover, there has been a near revolution in the newspaper world. Although English newspapers are not very common in the country side, Hindi and other vernacular papers have come out in large numbers in order to disseminate information in various corners of democratic India.

Although much water has flowed down the bridge since Mr Kair conceived editing the book on information technology, it is still true



that even today it would not be very wrong to say that Indian society at large remains biased in favour of main cities and towns and there has been a grave imbalance in the distribution of funds and infrastructure between rural and urban regions.

One of the methods to solve this imbalance is to encourage private sector, NGOs and other voluntary bodies to organise centres of information in every town and village.

Another foolproof system is to organise seminars, conferences and debates on various aspects of life and the people should be made aware of the latest development in

science, technology and on the art of living commensurate with the conditions that prevail in a particular environment. Senior citizens should be encouraged to come forward and share their experiences of life.

If we take a broad view of things, it can be easily seen that there is hardly any aspect of life which is outside the scope of information technology. It is therefore of paramount importance that the Municipal corporations, State Governments (Union Territories), Panchayats and even the Central Government should thoroughly consider the problem of information and knowledge and plan out their strategies in relation to the quality of people staying in various parts of the country. For instance, the metro towns will require a different approach to areas which are less developed. Attempt should be made to maximize the facilities and improve the infrastructure in areas which are

inhabited by say tribals and areas which have scant facilities for acquiring knowledge. If this is not possible by authorities alone, people's participation is necessary or what is known as the "Bhagidari" system.

The book is useful as there are views of more than thirty "EXPERTS" in order of importance of the facilities that exist and the ones that are needed on a war footing.

Rama Nair first thought of eliciting the views of different specialists in 1993 though there has been a sea change in the infrastructure in both towns and villages. The book gives the impression that the Editor has contacted well known people primarily from one part of the country. It would have been appropriate if scholars of north, East and West would also have been included so that the volume would have been more authentic and balanced.

Out of five hundred and odd pages, almost half the book—more than two hundred pages—have been devoted to appendices detailing the Report of the Working Group on Right to Information and promotion of Open and Transparent Government.

The price of the book is on the higher side—not many libraries in the country would be able to afford it, let alone individuals. There is no doubt that the hard-bound edition is attractive and boasts of nice printing with few errors. The index is quite helpful.

Before it hits the rural libraries and reading rooms, it has to ensure its presence in big urban libraries, especially in metros.

(Reviewed by Dev Prakash)

IT & IT Enabled Services Sector to Earn US \$ 50 Billion

Shri Dayanidhi Maran, Minister of Communications & Information Technology has emphasised the need for a close-Government and IT Industry partnership to ensure the IT industry's competitiveness and increase its access to foreign markets. He said that the Electronics and Information Technology sectors have maintained sustained growth over the last few years. India's exports in electronics and computer software during 2003-04 were to the tune of US\$ 14.28 billion, out of which software & services touched US\$ 12.60 billion. The latest studies reveal that the IT and IT-enabled services sector would be able to earn nearly US\$ 50 billion of exports by the year 2008.

India has been recognised as a preferred hub for setting up of Hardware Design Centres. Thus the country has the potential to become producer of designs, embedded software, etc.

IT enabled Services and BPO play a significant role in solving the unemployment problem. They not only provide employment opportunities to the women but bridge the gender inequality also. The Minister reminded that the IT industry is aware of the emerging competition from various other developing countries and in that scenario it would be India's constant endeavour to promote innovation and improvement in the IT infrastructure.