

From bullock carts to cyber marts

India's Communication Revolution; from
Bullock Carts to Cyber Marts
by Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers
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New Delhi 110048.

Review: Aditha Dissanayake

The bullock cart symbolizes the past. It represents the traditional, the rural, the disadvantaged and the slow. The cyber mart on the other hand symbolizes the future, the modern, the elite and the fast. According to Arvind Singhal and Everett M Rogers, the co-authors of *India's Communication Revolution*, the society in India, at the turn of the century is caught between these two dialectical forces.

Though the book is mainly targeted for scholars and students of India, who seek to understand the rapid social changes that are under way in the sub-continent it would be of use to those engaged in mass communication, information technology and development studies as well as entrepreneurs, industrialists and even the general reader.

This is so because India with its huge problems in development is the best country to be taken as a study of the communication revolution in South Asia. For instance, no other nation has such a grave population problem, has tried longer through government planning programmes to control it, and become more frustrated in its attempts to achieve its demographic goals.

Thus the authors analyze the various facets of the unfolding communication revolution in India, including the proliferation of public call offices, internet cafes, and software technology parks; the growth of entrepreneurship, venture capital, and supportive government policies and the very successful networking between Indian entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley and their India-based counterparts. The book includes personal narratives of successful Indian entrepreneurs and case illustrations of participatory communication approaches.



The book presents a balanced view of the Indian information society. "Informatization is powerful, but everything about it may not be beneficial" says its authors" especially for the disadvantaged sections of Indian society". Thus the photo of the farmer in a bullock cart holding a cell-phone to his ear could yet, be only a dream.

"India's Communication Revolution; from Bullock Carts to Cyber Marts" is timely, relevant and appropriate.

It brings together different aspects of the information revolution in ways that have not been done before. As Dr. Sheena Malhotra, Assistant Professor, California State University says the book is sure to become "the authoritative text on India's informatization path".

to exert "pressures" on the print media persons in their own constructive way.

A commendable point that one notices in this chapter is the clues and hints which could be followed for giving new directions to the print media in India. But, unfortunately these have not been dealt with in detail. Perhaps these could further be taken up by the new chairman Justice Jayachandra Reddy and his newly constituted council. As stated earlier, a flurry of haphazard and unevidenced projections about the print media are made. That is perhaps why the two PCI's members differed with the recommendations (Annexure B) and gave note of dissent. But it should be said that the book's main strength lies in covering a virgin field. It should be useful to the students of journalism/ mass communication, teachers and researchers.

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INDIA'S COMMUNICATION REVOLUTION FROM BULLOCK CARTS TO CYBER MARTS

Arvind Singhal and Everett M Rogers, (2001),
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During the closing decades of the twentieth century, India has witnessed an exponential growth in media and communication industry and processes taking the shape of an on going revolution. At a time when the revolution was beginning to take shape, the authors of the present book, came out with an earlier publication – *India's Information Revolution* in 1989. That publication looked closely at the beginning of television, video, telecommunication and computer revolutions and policies in these sectors that were being put in place. Those were still the early days and the media and communication scholars were trying to understand as to how the new communication technologies could be harnessed to the task of national development. The cable television, internet and the new liberal economic policy had not set in.

The present book largely takes over from the earlier publication. It however breaks fresh ground and tries to capture the fast paced developments in the new economic and technological environment and the factors that have fuelled the communication revolution. New information and communication technologies (NICTs) have revolutionized the nature and pace of human interaction across a world which is increasingly assuming the contours of a "global village." India is still far from becoming an "Information society", but with a significant number of its workers employed in the information sector, it pro-

vides fertile ground for analyzing the impact of the new technologies on its society, including their crucial role in the development process.

The book also describes how the new technologies and their various applications in radio, television, cable, telecommunications, computers, and internet are rapidly leading India towards becoming an information society. The authors also analyze various aspects of communication revolution in India including the proliferation of PCOs, internet cafes, technology parks, venture capital and government policies.

At a time when the expansion of internet has not registered as phenomenal expansion as earlier expected and some of the large states in the country including Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have yet to see any meaningful progress in this direction, the reader gets the feeling that the assessment of the authors about information society taking shape in the country seems to be a little unrealistic. The present author was amazed to find that, in several instances, students studying in a University for their post-graduation in journalism had yet to make use of devices such as STD and fax even in university towns. To that extent it appears it would take a long time when large tracts of areas and population in the country even become aware of NICTs.

In the overall context of the contents presented in the book one observation is due: whereas electronic media, telecommunication and Internet issues have been discussed in detail, very little has been written about the print media. The way print media is rapidly refashioning itself and making use of NICTs in printing, with the *India Today* group coming out with the first e-newspaper of the country – (it was launched on 1 January 2001, but the conceptualization had begun much earlier) should have been discussed in the book. The discussion on the contribution of print media towards communication revolution, and particularly how the print media is increasingly using NICTs in newsgathering has been rather limited.

Written in lucid style, the book, along with the earlier publication brings the updates about the issues and developments in different areas of communication, informatization, e-governance and other emerging concepts. Particularly precious is the concluding chapter which offers summary of the main concepts and lessons learned. Glossary of concepts adds value to the book.

Going through the book, as a reader and a reviewer, has been quite rewarding, and more than that a sheer pleasure. For student the book should be an essential reading, for teachers it serves as an update and for a general reader of contemporary affairs it will certainly add to his knowledge.

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