



Chapter VI

Understanding the Cultural Roots of India's Technology Development from Homi Bhabha's Post-Colonial Perspective

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Abstract

This chapter introduces Homi K. Bhabha's post-colonial social theory of interstitial perspective and then discusses the application or overlay of the constructs that emanate from that to the roots of India's technology and (subsequent) IT development and its complementary effect in shaping Indian Information Systems professionals. The chapter spotlights various events and persona in India's history, including the current crop of IT professionals emerging from the subcontinent. It then overlays Homi Bhabha's constructs to verify that the constructs do, indeed, apply to India's developments in the IT arena. The chapter thus aims to offer a cultural and social-theory viewpoint with philosophical underpinnings to explain the roots and current happenings in the field of IT in India.

Introduction

Currently, Indian IT companies provide a plethora of services across the value chain to global IT markets. These companies are beneficiaries of various trends, some global and some local. Global trends include the rise and acceptance of globalization and outsourcing (especially IT outsourcing) by companies and governmental agencies in industrialized nations. Local trends include the availability of large numbers of skilled IT professionals in India, their proficiency in the English language, and the generally lower salaries in India. The 2005 McKinsey-Nasscom report indicates that India currently accounts for 65% of the global offshore IT industry and 46% of the global BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) industry. The report further predicts that India IT and BPO industries will continue to grow more than 25% annually and generate revenues ranging from US\$60-80 billion by the year 2010 (Nasscom, 2005). Given this trend, it is not surprising that several recent studies have focused on the strategic and practical aspects of outsourcing to India (and countries like India), the growth of Indian BPO firms, the merits of offshoring to India, and so forth. Studies by Dedrick and Kraemer (2005), Parthasarathy (2003), and Kapur and Ramamurthi (2001) are representative of such research.

The increasing presence of India in the global IT arena has resulted in an increasing number of Indian IT professionals engaged either in providing service at customer locations or in the process of transferring knowledge from the customer's location to Indian locations (so that various business processes can be carried out of India). Further, there has been a steady growth of Indian-led companies, especially in the U.S., that act as *via-media* between U.S. companies offshoring their IS/IT operations and Indian vendor companies located in India. These, in turn, have increased awareness in North America and Europe of India and its large, technically-proficient, inexpensive, English-speaking IT workforce. There is a general acceptance among companies in North America and Europe as well as their customers that customer service most likely would be provided by an Indian IT professional working in India. The Indian IT professional's presence thus is becoming ubiquitous in the global IT arena.

There is general agreement in Western media, echoed by the leaders of the IT industry in the U.S., on the high level of technical and professional capability of Indian IT professionals. It is apparent even to a casual observer that these professionals are globe trotters, successfully engaged in complex IT projects in a variety of problem domains in organizations spread around the globe. What has not received much analysis in popular media or academic literature is the Indian IT professional's psyche—the apparent ease with which he or she is able to straddle different cultures, fit seamlessly into alien corporate cultures, work on international teams, learn new languages, change accents, and generally get along, while maintaining a vigorous personal and cultural agenda.

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