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**Meet Mr.Debashish Chakrabarty****"The scope of Indian Computing and Local Content"**

*Debashish Chakrabarty, a Software Consultant based at Pune, is considered to be one of the senior most Blogger from India. He runs many a Blogs which cover Indian Language computing to Java programming. Recently he was in the lime light due to his involvement in Indic Blog activities. He has founded a portal which "showcases the best of the Indian Blogosphere" and awards Indian Language as well as English Blogs authored by Indians and the Indian Diaspora.*

*Debashish is a DMOZ editor, maintains a portal Chittha Vishwa*

*(<http://www.myjavaserver.com/~hindi/>) on Indic Blogging, launched the first desi Blog awards called The Indibloggies ([www.Indibloggies.org](http://www.Indibloggies.org)) and keeps a sharp eye on Indic Blogging. He has also contributed towards localization of software such as Wordpress, Pebble, IndicJoomla, Joomla, Scuttle etc. He has also been instrumental in beginning initiatives like Buno Kahani, a group Blog where various authors literally weave a story and Anugunj - a web event hosted in turn by Hindi Bloggers - where various Bloggers write on a given topic. He also contributes regularly to Wikipedia, Sarvagya, a wiki aimed at Hindi Bloggers and Shunya. Debashish also publishes Nirantar, hyped to be the world's first Hindi Blogzine. Find more about him on Null Pointer (<http://nullpointer.debashish.com>)*



*It was BhashaIndia's pride to interview this multi-talented person on Indic language computing and Blogging. Here are the excerpts from the interview...*

**Hats off!! It is really appreciable achievement that you have individually fostered Indian Blogs for the past 4 years. How do you feel the difference? When did you start concentrating on Indian language Blogs and how do you rate the Blogosphere in India now?**

Thanks a lot for appreciating the Indibloggies. It would be really wrong to say Indibloggies alone fostered the Indic Blogging, though I accept that adding the Indic award categories at the Indibloggies did help bringing Indic Blogging in limelight. People who weren't sure how easy it is now a days to start writing in your mother tongue, who didn't know how much writing is available on the net in the language they adore, did get interested.

Indian language categories were added to the Indibloggies in its second year i.e. 2004, I had started Blogging in Hindi by then and had been in touch with others who Blogged in Bangla and Tamil for example. So I pretty much had the hunch that Indic Blogging would be the future of Indian Blogging.

Today the Indian language Blogging community is much stronger and thriving, thanks to scores of people who created necessary tools, spread the awareness of using Unicode and forged communities around it. Today these communities, apart from Blogging, have helped localize Blogwares, CMSs and other software and made companies like Microsoft, Yahoo and Google conscious about the effort they need to invest in this area.

**How many languages did contest this time? How was the standard of the nominated Blogs? Will you add up all official languages next time?**

Apart from English, Indibloggies has award categories for Indic Blogs written in Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. I depend on the Jurors who know the language and have been Blogging for long to know about the Indic Blogs. This is a difficult process because Blog communities tend to confine themselves to their own areas, this year for example non availability of quality Jurors lead to Bangla and Gujarati Blogs not participating all. Community aggregators like *Desipundit* and *Chittha Charcha* are trying hard however to bring them closer and hopefully this will create the necessary awareness. So the question really not is about me adding new languages in award categories, it's about a good number of people Blogging in the language and few enthusiastic people who could help us as jurors to reach them.

**How do you manage sponsors for Indibloggies awards?**

Every year I write to umpteen companies, websites and publishers to sponsor the awards, some respond, but the bulk of the awards come from generous people who believe in the spirit of community. As and when they hear the buzz, they approach me directly. This year I also issued few press releases and that probably lead to companies like Cynapse (<http://www.cynapse.org>) sponsor awards to the tune of 12 lacs INR. Many Blogger friends get in touch with the sponsors and bring them to Indibloggies, some contribute on their own. I really don't give much importance on the cash value of the award; to me all awards matter a lot because it denotes the feeling of giving back to the community.

**Indian languages Blogs are increasing and as a result, Indian languages are getting benefited. Now many Blog aggregators have come in to existence in languages. What is the scope of Indic Blogging according to you?**

It's not difficult to gauge that Indic Blogging will only grow in future. Most of the language communities have their own Blog aggregators that have raised awareness about them, local newspapers have focused on such Blog authors and many have been pretty supportive. Google, for instance, recently added a sophisticated Hindi transliteration tool to their Blogware at Blogger.com, I am sure other Indian languages are in the offing. Microsoft has their IME embedded Operating Systems which supports typing of Indian languages on to the Blogs.

MSN and Yahoo started their Indian language versions. Now Google has added a Hindi section on their News page, realizing the growth of online news mediums in the language and the need to focus on local content.

**It is only few years since Indian language Blogging has come in to existence. In spite of the legacy, the presence of the Blogs in Indian Media is strong. There are many awards for Indian Blogs like BhashaIndia's**

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**presence of the blogs in Indian media is strong. there are many awards for Indian blogs like BhashaIndia's one. How did you conceive the concept, Indiblogies award?**

There aren't "many" Blog awards for Indian Blogs. As far as I know apart from Indiblogies, BhashaIndia's is the only other one.

The Main Stream Media (MSM) has focused much on Blogging, some even criticized it. They have their own fears of being rooted by this alternate media, the army of irregulars that could write anything without fearing any editorial control. But the MSM had to realize its power; they appreciated the power of collective thoughts and the benefits of instant interactivity. Citizen journalism wasn't a term they had thought of before Blogging became popular.

Today people are writing on a variety of issues, apart from personal Blogs there are scores of Blogs that report and ponder of issues that are too petty for the MSM to write on. Blogs don't thrive on TRP and they can focus on more important issues. There are Blogs written on variety of topics and we all have a limited number of Blogs we read everyday. Indiblogies has in a way helped focus on such people, in bringing to the fore exceptional Blogs that don't get the deserved attention. That's why I always see the final list of nominees as a greater accomplishment of the event because you can be sure of finding some outstanding Blogs in that list that you had never read before. The fact is aptly conveyed by the tagline, we do "showcase the best of Indian Blogosphere" and we also award the very best.

**India offers a huge market for English speaking Media. In the case of Blogging too, the main Bloggers are concentrating on English. But to the contrary, traditional Media is still with Language market. As in the traditional Media front, language market will overtake English Blogging in India?**

It's not a question of overtaking IMHO; the net English content at any given time will always be greater. But the healthy trend that can be seen is the proliferation of Indian language in online media. Probable reason is that the media houses like Danik Bhaskar, who had done great with their Hindi and Gujarati newspapers, also are now eying this Blog medium.

Few months ago people like me use to think why not all these Good sites like Webdunia convert to Unicode, with extensions like Padma and tools like those created by Sarai and Medhas by even fonts are not a problem anymore since any such text can be converted into Unicode on the fly. I am sure this will provoke these sites to switch to Unicode sooner than I thought. Also there are now ample tools available to convert documents from almost all font formats to Unicode.

Another handicap in using Indian language over the net was, "how would I type in my language", if you search you will see that this is still the favorite newbie question. Community wikies like Sarvagya had paved the way; a net savvy person can today start an Indian language Blog in a jiffy. With built-in typing, transliterating tools things would be a breeze in the times to come. Ease of publishing was what made Blogging popular, when this becomes true in Indian language parlance also, there is no stopping Indic Blogging.

**More native languages speakers are coming on to the Net just because of the presence of Blogs. It is been calculated that there are something around thousand active Bloggers in Malayalam and the numbers are more in Tamil. The figure is increasing day by day. Will this scenario urge software companies to localize their products for the language market in India?**

Certainly, I cited the case of Google above. Yahoo started its language portals and provided a wide range of content realizing the demand. Mobile operators had started localizing their applications since quite some time; it's not difficult to find greeting cards now a day in your own language. And these are only trends.

**You were instrumental in localizing many reputed brand names or Blog wares. Presently many software companies are targeting India through their localized products. Microsoft's Operating system and Office suite are available in major Indian languages. How do you see the localization scenario in India? What are the main challenges which Indian localization industry faces?**

I have been involved in Hindi localization of only a few applications but from the experiences of my friends, and mine I can say that localization, especially for Open Source software is a thankless job. Very few organizations like Sarai have strived to remunerate people who spend time and effort for such ventures. Yet many of us do it for the love of the language. I appreciate tools like gettext that have helped localization easier and I hope the industry concentrated on some common open-source technique so that these could be reused.

**As you are aware, Bhashaindia has added more languages in to its portal recently. Being an Indic Blogger and a localizer, how do you rate Bhashaindia's efforts in Indic Language Computing? Is there any suggestions?**

BhashaIndia has been an excellent effort in bringing people closer as a single community who wish to see their language do well on the net. More inclined towards Java technologies, I haven't really participated much, but the forums here seems very vibrant and the content excellent.

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