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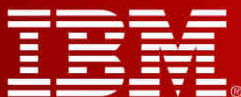
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## Speaking Out

Regional blogging is gaining momentum in India, as a host of online desktop tools are making typing and publishing in Indian regional languages easier

Thursday, May 10, 2007



There are some people who feel strongly about something and yet are not able to find a platform to express it. There are other people who want to complain about happenings in society, but are not finding the means to express. And, there are some other people who are simply one of the creative types who want to find an outlet for their creativity. All of these and more are some of the reasons why blogging became popular in India. But, now there's a new fad gradually catching up with the Indian blogging community-and that is blogging in one's own mother tongue.

### Present Scenario

Blogging in regional languages is being adopted slowly, but in a steady fashion with high quality content. "Freedom of expression is one of the main reasons behind expressing thoughts in one's mother tongue," says Sudhakar Sadasivuni, owner of sodhana.blogspot.com.

This fad has provided the much-needed impetus to the use of Indian languages on the Internet and the promulgation of Unicode. "But these are still early days for regional blogs. To a great extent, it is still limited to people with adequate English knowledge who choose to blog in their own language-not out of necessity, but out of desire, with many bloggers based outside India," differs Seshadri Ganjur, an avid blogger and the owner of majavani.blogspot.com.

The year 2006 was relatively good for Indian blogging, as number of blogs in regional languages including Telugu, Tamil, Hindi and Bengali increased. "According to the current aggregators in various languages, there are around 3,000 blogs being written in various Indian languages," says Sadasivuni.



One of the main reasons behind the growth of regional blogs is the growth of online desktop

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tools that made typing and publishing in Indian language easier. "Most of the Indian languages blogs adopted Unicode from the start, and that had helped search engines index content in these languages, paving way toward searching such content," says Debashish Chakrabarty, an avid blogger and founder of Indibloggies award in 2004.

### Popular Regional Blogs

**Telugu:** Sodhana, Antarangam, Oremuna, Gundechappudu, and Chaduvari, a search

**Kannada:** Kannadave Nitya, Mysore Post, Bogale Ragale, and Majavani

**Hindi:** Avin Tashtari

**Tamil:** Pinathalkal, E-Tamil,

Mugamoodi, Dubukku, Thamizhblogs

**Marathi:** Tulips in Twilight

### Challenges Faced

Setting aside the fact that English language blogs are more popular and will continue to remain so, main challenges for regional language bloggers are mostly technical. "It is simply much easier to write and update an English blog as compared to, say, a Kannada blog. For the most part, to update an English blog, all you need is a PC with an Internet connection. However, doing the same in Kannada requires the same PC to be Unicode capable with support from Kannada fonts, not to mention a Kannada language editor like Baraha," says Ganjur. Things like spell checker, dictionary etc, if at all there, are still in rudimentary stages in most of the regional languages, he adds.

Sadasivuni agrees that the biggest challenge is readability of Unicode in various operating systems like Windows XP and Linux. "This basically means that anyone can read Indian language blogs, but cannot leave comments in the same language until they install specific packages, which are available optionally from OS vendors," he says.

However, some say that these challenges were immense about two to three years back, but now almost all Indian languages have their communities who lend a helping hand to the newbies. There has been an increase in online applications that can allow anyone to write in Indian languages. For the Hindi blogdom, there is a wiki Sarvagya (aksharagram.com/sarvagya) that provides beginners resources to budding Hindi bloggers. Tools like lekhini.org and quillpad.com allow anyone to write in Indian languages by giving phonetic text as put in English. Sensing the growing opportunity, Google recently introduced a Hindi transliteration tool to blogger.com.

Regional language bloggers face another challenge in terms of readership, that is Internet penetration. In spite of Herculean efforts by the government to increase Internet penetration in rural areas, it still is an urban phenomenon.



"The blogs in English fail to reach the real Indian mindset in many cases, regional languages are whereas reaching masses in the right way and in the right spirit"

**-Sudhakar Sadasivuni**, owner of sodhana.blogspot.com



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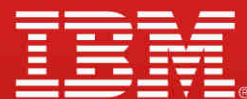
### Popularity Quotient

Most bloggers agreed that when compared to their English blog counterparts, the regional cousins do not stand a chance, as English blogs are popular and will continue to remain so. Even if one looks at the Indibloggies award (given to the most popular blog in regional languages every year), the votes garnered by regional language blogs are only a fraction of their English counterparts. Although events like Indibloggies award and aggregators like desipundit, narad, and blog directories like bangla blogs are contributing toward the rising popularity of Indian blogging.

Kiruba Shankar, an avid blogger, says the reason for the growing popularity of blogs is the Indian diaspora is that "Regional blogs are extremely popular amongst the diaspora, as a lot of people staying in the US and UK long to catch up on the happenings in their city of origin. The readership for Tamil blogs is mostly from outside India," he adds.

All bloggers, however, agree that even though regional blogging is a recent phenomenon, Indian language blogs have got enough maturity and popularity today, and are attracting a

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huge number of people. And, realizing a potential market, many technology firms have now started blog search engines especially for Indian languages.

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