

Samvaad in February-March 2020:

Theme of "Work and Technology"

IIIT Bangalore

Samvaad Talks in R103, IIITB, 2-3:30p on Mondays

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Profs. Vinod Vyasulu and Janaki Srinivasan, on February 24, 2020 (Monday)

Soumyo Das and Rajesh Hanbal, on March 02, 2020 (Monday)

Abhayraj Naik, on March 09, 2020 (Monday)

Prof. Balaji Parthasarathy and Pradyumna Taduri, on March 16, 2020 (Monday)

Special talk by Dr. Winifred Poster, on March 18, 2020 (Wednesday)

<b>Date:</b> February 24, 2020 <b>Speaker:</b> Prof. Vinod Vyasulu (Retired) and Prof. Janaki Srinivasan, IIIT Bangalore <b>Title:</b> Reflections on Work, Technology and the Economy	<b>Date:</b> March 02, 2020 <b>Speaker:</b> Soumyo Das and Rajesh Hanbal, IIIT Bangalore <b>Title:</b> Everyday Work Practices in Retail Banking and E-governance
<b>Date:</b> March 09, 2020 <b>Speaker:</b> Abhayraj Naik, Azim Premji University <b>Title:</b> Governing Artificial Intelligence: Re- framing the Discourse on the Future of Work in India	<b>Date:</b> March 16, 2020 <b>Speaker:</b> Prof. Balaji Parthasarathy, Pradyumna Taduri, IIIT Bangalore <b>Title:</b> Opportunity and oppression in the burgeoning platform economy
<b>Date:</b> March 18, 2020 (Wednesday – special talk) <b>Speaker:</b> Dr. Winifred Poster, Washington University, St. Louis <b>Title:</b> [To be updated]	

**Theme: Work and Technology****Date:** February 24, 2020**Venue:** R103**Time:** 2-3:30 pm**Speaker: Prof. Vinod Vyasulu (Retired) and Prof. Janaki Srinivasan, IIT Bangalore****Title: Reflections on Work, Technology and the Economy****Abstract:**

In light of recent conversations on the role of digital technologies in the "Future of Work", our talk will go back to basics and examine the idea of work itself. How have different disciplines conceptualised and grappled with the idea of work? In particular, we will trace how work has been conceptualised in economics. We will look at some of the concepts and metrics through which work has been approached, such as factor of production and labour. We will then examine what about work gets highlighted and what remains obscure when it is framed in these terms: for instance, what about unsalaried work, or work undertaken for fulfilment? Further, how about concepts such as skills, alienation and control that are often associated with the doing of work, and the role of technology in it? Following this exploration of the implications of dominant representations of work, we will turn to alternative ways of understanding work, including a work practice approach. Throughout, our goal will be to understand how different conceptions of work can help us understand the role of technology in undertaking this work. We will bring the discussion back to highlight various dimensions of work that merit attention in current Future of Work conversations.

**Speaker Biography:**

**Vinod Vyasulu**, now a senior citizen living in Bangalore earned a Ph.D. from the School of Business Administration in the University of Florida. He has taught in the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, and XLRI, Jamshedpur. He was Director of the Institute of Public Enterprise, Hyderabad, and held the RBI Chair in the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore. He also had a stint as Economic Adviser for Small Scale Industries in the National Small Industries Corporation, Delhi. He was Director of the Centre for Budget and Policy Studies in Bangalore. Till recently he was Professor and Vice Dean at Jindal School of Government and Policy in Sonapat, from where he returned as the air pollution did not suit his lungs.

**Janaki Srinivasan** is Assistant Professor, International Institute of Information Technology Bangalore (IIITB), and an affiliate of the Institute's Centre for Information Technology and Public Policy (CITAPP). Her research examines the politics of information technology-based development. Her work has shown how gender, class and caste shape Indian digital inclusion initiatives focussed on community computer centres, mobile phones, identity systems and open information systems. Currently, she is exploring privacy, the future of workers, algorithmic control and the role of intermediaries in digital transactions. Janaki earned her PhD in Information Management and Systems from the University of California Berkeley.

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**Theme: Work and Technology****Date:** March 02, 2020**Venue:** R103**Time:** 2-3:30 pm**Speaker:** Soumyo Das and Rajesh Hanbal, IIT Bangalore**Title:** Everyday Work Practices in Retail Banking and E-governance**Abstract:**

This talk has two parts: the first on retail banking by Soumyo Das, and the second on e-governance by Rajesh.

**ICTs, Everyday Work Practices and the Skill Question in Retail Banking in India: An Ethnographic Case Study** -- According to a recent McKinsey report (2018), 45% of activities individuals are paid to perform in present times can be automated by adapting currently demonstrated technologies. Major concerns around this current phase of automation include the implications of AI-based automation on human skills and employability, understanding the process of deskilling and reskilling, and the process of redesigning occupations around such automation processes. Barely thirty years ago, similar concerns were raised about information technology (IT), which was considered to be the final answer to "the labour question" (Zuboff 1988). However, historical studies of automation have pointed out that in practice, notions of skill are not shaped by the introduction of new technologies alone, but rather by a complex relationship between technology, work and organisations (Spenner 1983, Adler 1988). In this talk, I will explore this complex relationship within the organisational context of a Public Sector retail bank in India.

In recent years, Public Sector Banks in India have increasingly started using ICTs to deliver financial services, and are proactively pushing for the adoption of digital banking technologies in service delivery. These digital technologies, in essence, enable two types of automated systems: in-house systems, which are designed to be used by employees, and self-service systems, which are designed to be used directly by the customers. Drawing on about 5 months of ethnographic observations in two different bank branches, semi-structured qualitative interviews with multiple stakeholders, and archival research, I aim to address two questions on technology and work practices within the organisational setup of retail banking:

- How is the adoption of digital technologies in retail banking lead to a restructuring of work practices of front-desk employees?
- How does the adoption of ICT-mediated work in retail banking contribute to reskilling/deskilling exercises required for financial service delivery by front-desk executives?

I aim to situate my findings in relation to the larger concerns around skill and employability during newer waves of automation.

**EGovernance and everyday work practices at the last mile - the case of India's Employment**

**Guarantee Act:** Good governance rests on not just what the government intends to do, but also on what it does. Thus, any analysis of governance requires understanding the daily work practices of government functionaries. The last decade has seen an increased use of digital technologies within governments with the objective of increasing the efficiency and accountability of the officials. However, it is yet unclear what the implications of the use of these technologies are for work practices.

In my talk, I will discuss some of these implications using the case of India's employment guarantee program, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) where varied technologies such as Management Information System(MIS), biometric, Geographic Information System(GIS) and WhatsApp groups are being used pervasively. The findings are based on my ethnography in the government offices of the Chikkaballapur district of Karnataka.

**Speaker biography:**

**Soumyo Das** is a Research Scholar at the Centre for Information Technology and Public Policy at IIIT Bangalore. His research interest lies in ICTs and Work, and ICT4D. In particular, Soumyo is interested in studying how the adoption of digital technologies lead to a restructuring of the nature and scope of organizational work practices in institutions that contribute actively to development goals. He has previously contributed to research on the behavioural aspects of ICT-mediated work, and the implications of the use of digital identities on social welfare programs.

**Rajesh Hanbal** is a Research Scholar at the Center for Information Technology and Public Policy at IIIT Bangalore.

**[To be updated.]**

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**Theme: Work and Technology**

**Date:** March 09, 2020

**Venue:** R103

**Time:** 2-3:30 pm

**Speaker: Abhayraj Naik, Azim Premji University**

**Title: Governing Artificial Intelligence: Re-framing the Discourse on the Future of Work in India**

**Abstract:**

The proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in modern societies has generated considerable recent writing on the future of work in an automated and algorithmic era. While AI and other disruptive technologies such as robotics, nanotechnology, sensors, synthetic biology, blockchains, the Internet of Things, etc. unproblematically herald the dawn of the “fourth industrial revolution” or “4IR” in some narratives, other accounts draw attention to the complex new social, environmental and health risks that arise from the current meteoric rise of technological innovation.

The standard meta-narrative from writing on the future of work in an AI world includes three inter-linked constitutive elements: a) AI innovation promises opportunities for incredible economic growth; b) AI-based automation will lead to the loss of some human jobs and will affect other kinds of human jobs in different ways; and c) it will be important to re-skill workers and oversee a smooth transition to new kinds of human jobs in an AI-dominated future. Such accounts, however, usually have an impoverished and inadequate treatment of essential philosophical and political concepts of power, knowledge, identity, agency, violence, ethics, democracy, rights, context and culture, to name just a few. As such, most such accounts are incomplete and spurious. Governance theory, and the heuristic of “governing AI”, allow us to identify, situate and re-frame these silences in the dominant current discourses on the future of work in India. Such an effort contributes to a better understanding of exactly what is at stake in the context of discussions and debates on the future of work in India in an era of algorithms and automation.

**Speaker biography:**

**Abhayraj Naik** is a researcher, consultant and advisor based in Bengaluru, India. His consultancy and advisory work bring together innovation, research, strategy, design, communication, and implementation. He is currently a Visiting Faculty at the Azim Premji University and the National Law School of India University where he teaches courses relating to law, justice and the environment. He has earlier taught courses on environment, development, law, public policy, and research methods at the OP Jindal Global University and the Minnesota Studies in International Development: India Program. Abhayraj is a graduate of the National Law School of India University and the Yale Law School.

Abhayraj has been carrying out interdisciplinary studies of informational privacy, surveillance, international intellectual property law, environmental regulation of high-risk technologies, and ethical technology policy for over a decade now. He has presented on these and related topics at a number of venues including Osgoode Hall Law School (Toronto), the London School of Economics & Political Science (London), the West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences (Kolkata), the OP Jindal Global University (Sonipat), the Centre for Internet & Society (Bengaluru), the Centre for Budget & Policy Studies (Bengaluru), St. Joseph’s College of Law (Bengaluru), and the National Law School of India University (Bengaluru). Abhayraj’s approach to technology studies focuses on

excavating the justice and normative dimensions of particular technologies through deeply contextual, interdisciplinary, and comparative analysis.

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**Theme: Work and Technology****Date:** March 16, 2020**Venue:** R103**Time:** 2-3:30 pm**Speaker: Prof. Balaji Parthasarathy and Pradyumna Taduri, IIT Bangalore****Title: Opportunity and oppression in the burgeoning platform economy****Abstract:**

Across the globe, work mediated on digital platforms is increasingly being relied upon as a source of livelihood. Such platforms may either offer location-based work, requiring workers to be situated in a particular place and time - ridehailing, for instance - while others facilitate the provision of remote services. Platform work has generated polarized views. To some, it presents an opportunity to overcome the persistent challenges of unemployment and poverty. To others, the algorithmic basis of platforms, and the models of work they offer, only serves to deepen, rather than ameliorate, social inequities. This presentation will examine why, amidst this controversy, digital platform mediated employment is growing, especially in India. The presentation will then draw on worker experiences in a food-delivery platform which, like many others, attracts workers facing a precarious existence with promises of a relatively high income and flexible hours. However, the unlocking of these promises is influenced by various design features of the platform which only transform one form of worker precarity to another. Against this backdrop, the presentation will end with a discussion of the role for the state in addressing worker concerns in digitally mediated work.

**Speaker biography:**

**Balaji Parthasarathy** is Professor at the International Institute of Information Technology Bangalore, and a co-founder of the Institute's Center for Information Technology and Public Policy (CITAPP). His research and teaching interests broadly focuses on the relationship between technological change, economic globalization, and social transformation. Within this broad focus, his work follows two threads. One thread examines the impacts of public policy and firm strategies on the organization of production and innovation in the ICT (information and communications technology) industry. Another thread deals with ICTD (ICTs for Development). Here, his interests lie in understanding how ICTs are deployed in various domains of activity to transform social relationships, especially in underprivileged contexts. Topics which he has pursued in his research include the political-economy of late-industrialization, e-governance, e-waste, digital platforms and gig work, social innovation, and smart cities.

Balaji has published in various fora and his work has been supported by national and international agencies, including the Department of Information Technology (Government of India), the Azim Premji Foundation, the US National Science Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the European Union. He earned his undergraduate degree from the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, and his PhD from the University of California Berkeley.

**Pradyumna Taduri** is a researcher at the International Institute of Information Technology Bangalore where he works on the Fairwork Foundation project. His current research interests revolve around ICTs and their role in societal change, specifically their role in education and employment. In the space of education technologies, he has studied how ICT interventions are deployed and used in rural public schools. His current work as a researcher at the Fairwork

Foundation involves studying digital labour platforms, specifically understanding worker experiences on such platforms. He is keen to participate in efforts to bring platform workers under the ambit of labour law.

Previously, Pradyumna has worked as a web developer with a keen interest in 360° virtual tools, 3D reconstruction and WebGL libraries such as Three.js. He has helped create workflows to digitize indoor spaces and deploy them online with interactive functionalities. His workflow has been used in a forthcoming research paper on image processing techniques titled "Vector Based Object Identification in Spherical Images". He holds a Masters degree (Digital Society) from IIITB.

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**Theme: Work and Technology**

**Date:** March 18, 2020 (Wednesday, a special talk)

**Venue:** R103

**Time:** 2-3:30 pm

**Speaker:** Dr. Winifred Poster, Washington University, St. Louis

[To be updated.]

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