

Srinivasa, S. (2006) *The Power Law of Information: Life in a Connected World*, Sage Publications, ISBN: 0761935126 Price: Rs250

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“It is not ignorance, but ignorance about ignorance which is the real problem”. So starts Chapter Three of this concisely but precisely written book, and for me this is a guiding admonition. Srinivasa writes persuasively about information and knowledge, learning and unlearning, as well as relearning, about values and positions. The penetration of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) in our societies and institutions, or if you prefer, the access that we, as global cyber citizens, have to those technologies, with all their empowering consequences, is unparalleled as a technological innovation in human history (and presumably pre-history as well). Ideas, dreams, reflections and visions - they all reach out to us, enabled by the power that resides in the all-pervasive networks of the Internet, television, etc. Public space is no longer merely physical (as when it was a place), but is now virtual, as we email, wiki, blog, transact, inform, critique online, leaving virtual footprints everywhere (some of which may of course come back to haunt us).

But these characteristics are not value-free, nor can the way in which they develop necessarily be predicted with much certainty. Governments try on occasion to control them, and the information that they propagate, with more or less success. The wikipedia can be blocked, at least in theory, though wily onliners will find ways around such inconveniences. Computer literacy, Internet literacy, Information literacy, Knowledge about knowledge, as well as knowledge about ignorance - these are the hallmarks of 21<sup>st</sup>-century power.

Power is the theme of the book, and power laws in particular, since it is these laws that will govern how the Internet and ICTs more generally are used and abused. The power law of societal influence is well known, with relatively few people in a society wielding enormous influence, and the vast majority having little or no influence, but no middle ground to speak of.

In this book, Srinivasa “investigates properties of frictionless, non-linear systems ... [and] ... shows how information affects us in a variety of ways”.

We live in interesting times, whether we like it or not. Whether this is a curse or a blessing, we need to make sense of our times, and indeed to steer them in an appropriate direction. This book provides guidance for such steerage.