
Albert Einstein’s observation was quite apt that ‘nothing happens until something moves’, but what happens when time-honoured curtains are raised, startling truths are unravelled and new public spheres are erected is dexterously showcased by Pramod K. Nayar in his slim e-book, *Cabling India: WikiLeaks and the Information Wars*. It is a well-researched exposition of ‘information wars’ in the ‘information age’ and the consequences of ‘informed people’ connecting to fill in the ‘oh! not to be filled’ silences and gaps.

The short book is systematically organised, classified into appropriate sections, each unfolding a newer dimension of the phenomenon of the ‘leak culture’ and its impact across the globe with special reference to ‘India Cables’ started in India by the leading national newspaper *The Hindu* in collaboration with WikiLeaks.

At the very outset we ‘connect’ with the author when he pronounces, ‘not since independence have we, the “common” public, been so very “connected” either as we are today’ (6). In the introductory part he traces in brief the historical roots of WikiLeaks, which does the much needed groundwork. We are oriented how Daniel Ellsberg for the first time blew the whistle on America’s Vietnam War politics by releasing the Pentagon papers and their publication in the *New York Times* changed American public opinion on the war forever. Convincing instances which reveal the involvement of journalists, ministers and bureaucrats in dubious dealings, like revelation of information in Afghan war diaries, Iraq War Logos, torture manuals for Guantanamo Bay, Kenyan Human Rights Commission Reports, Radia tapes in India, the author makes us pause for a while and think over the rightness of Ms Hillary Clinton’s view that WikiLeaks’ revelations were ‘an act of theft’ and hinder the ‘American pursuit of justice and human rights’ (7).

The interesting parallel between ancient Greek’s rhetorical system of *parrhesia* or ‘truth telling’ and WikiLeaks not only reminds us of parrhesiasts like Socrates, but also brings to fore the fact that truth has always craved to break open all the enclosures. Though the author does not dwell on the details of who those parrhesiasts were, he induces a sense of the continuity of past as we are instantly reminded of Socrates, who played the role of a parrhesiast at the behest of Oracle of Delphi. As a reward for unmasking the pretence and unethical acts of the political leaders, for ‘truth telling’ Socrates was accused and punished by the ‘owners of terrestrial power’ for ‘the crime of reforming the society’. Bringing together past and present, Nayar states:

> Parrhesia dealt with and ‘outed’ truths about those in power. We are now somewhat in the same position; we discover we are governed by people who cannot be trusted. ‘The India Cables’ reveal corruption, sabotage of the democratic processes, manipulative linkages of the economy, media and politics among the people with enormous power. (8)

The discussion of parrhesia becomes more meaningful when he coins the term ‘Digital Parrhesia’ (27) to refer to WikiLeaks.

The conceptualisation of ‘WikiLeaks as a cultural phenomenon’ is laudatory as mostly it is politicised. The commonly held notion that ‘technocrats’ steer the culture is denounced by the author when he observes ‘it is the culture that drives the technology’ (9). He further argues,
It is not the technology that creates the culture of ‘leaks’, rather it is the emergent culture of leaks, sharing, transparency that uses the technology in particular ways? Culture precedes the technology. (9)

Representation of WikiLeaks as the ‘Culture of Porosity’ brings to light the inextricable link between communication and community and how the culture of porosity is the ‘culture of information-virus’. The author asserts:

WikiLeak communications has brought us together as a community: a community of victims, where we have been lied to, misinformed, deceived, robbed and manipulated by the very people we put in place to speak the truth to us, keep us informed, safeguard our interests and lead us to better lives. (13)

From the ‘culture of porosity’ we are introduced to the concepts of ‘culture of secrecy’ and ‘culture of expert’. The author dwells on the relationship between the ‘secrecy of culture’ and ‘culture of the expert’, which, according to him, bifurcates the society between elites and commoners. It is at this juncture that he very promptly remarks that WikiLeaks open up ‘specialized knowledge domains of converting specialized knowledge into common knowledge’ (18). To avoid any kind of ambiguity which might be misleading, the difference between positive secrecy and negative secrecy is explained. We are convinced when the author observes that ‘in some cases the states or organized bodies have to keep some things secret for the greater good of the people which is positive kind of secrecy’ and we are all the more convinced when he disapproves of the unscrupulous situations when public is deliberately kept in dark, their trust in the government is abused, public secrets are thoroughly misused and ‘fears of the abuse of this public trust are the engines for WikiLeaks’ (15).

Perceiving the inherent link between ‘culture of leaks’ and ‘culture of hacking’, the author rightly considers ‘WikiLeak as an extension of both Hacker subculture and Hacktivism’ (19) and with ease explains the technical intricacies involved in hacking and leaking and also points out some dissimilarities.

As we flip through the pages we realise that the book is not solely about the ‘culture of leaks’ in India but it projects it as ‘global culture’. The author’s apprehension of legal and judicial acceptability of WikiLeak documents does not make him waver as he firmly states ‘we begin to understand ourselves as a society, as a culture, not always through official histories, statistics or Reports but through these fragmented, personalized sometimes dramatic – hysterical stories’ (25).

The analysis of democracy and WikiLeaks towards the end expresses the author’s concern over retaining the democratic ideals and human rights. He compels us to introspect and find answers for some very fundamental questions – can there be democracy without information sharing? Is democracy not about the visibility of power? How does one recognise that somebody has been denied his fundamental rights? How long will we remain politically illiterate? Who will raise the consciousness of the victimised?

The author does not become pedantic and pompous, but instead presents with much clarity and lucidity allowing us to flow with the thought. Ironic tone surfaces at several places, but it suits the temper of the book. Keeping in view the objective of the book, i.e. ‘truth telling’, he seems to have taken utmost care in collecting adequate documents from several sources (newspapers, periodicals, T.V. etc.) for authenticity and to bare the truth.
When I picked up this book, prompted by the sheer desire to read something ‘new’ and ‘different’, I was not away from the clouding apprehensions of encountering heavy political discussions, but to my utter astonishment it only left me delighted in the end. Much has been written, is still being written, about WikiLeaks, but what makes this slim e-book ‘a must read one’ is its new way of perceiving WikiLeaks as a ‘cultural phenomenon’. Its interdisciplinary framework adds to its relevance. Without indulging in any kind of political debate, raising judicial issues, alleging any particular group, it makes us realise our rights as democratic citizens to be ‘informed’, to be honoured for reposing trust in governing bodies, and deep down in our hearts we agree with Nayar and say ‘we ought to be’.

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