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India and Appreciative Inquiry

Generative Connection between Ancient
Wisdom and Today's Endeavours in the Field

Neena Verma
Ronald Fry
Zeb Waturoucha



Inside this issue

Welcome to a new year for AI Practitioner!

Anne Radford, Editor in Chief



We begin the year with an issue, gratefully sponsored by Involve Consulting in France, which focuses on India and AI and continue with issues on AI communities of practice, AI in Asia and the effect of AI within cities.

In this February issue, our articles connect ancient Indian philosophies with AI practices of appreciative engagement and mindset. Through the articles, pictures and poems, our contributors invite us to witness changes with GenY employees, tribal communities and innovation in Indian industry.

In our first Feature Choice article this year, Mo McKenna focuses on the urgent need for climate change in our physical and human world environments, including our organizations and communities.

In Research Notes, we focus on the potential complications which occur when the researcher is also a manager where she is collecting data and has a stake in the project outcome.

In AI Resources, you will find key books, articles and videos connecting AI and India. This column is dedicated to Suresh Srivastva, born in India and an instrumental figure in the creation and development of Appreciative Inquiry.

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Involve Consulting, pioneers of AI in France and specialists in OD and leadership development.

Bernard Tollec, Managing Director



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India and Appreciative Inquiry

A Generative Connection between Ancient Wisdom and Today's Endeavours in the Field

ABSTRACT

This issue of *AI Practitioner* shares philosophies and paradigms that have echoed in Indian wisdom for thousands of years, and finds their generative association with the present day world's impactful articulation of AI principles. Together, Appreciative Inquiry and traditional Indian philosophies can inspire innovations that will transform the way humanity evolves and humankind connects, transcending geo-political, national and cultural differences.

India's proud connection to Appreciative Inquiry is well known because of Suresh Srivastva, David Cooperrider's mentor and research guide in the seminal endeavour that gave us the gift of AI. India's generative connection with AI extends beyond this ground-breaking co-creation of the momentous *guru-shishya* (mentor-protégé) relationship between Suresh and David. This issue shares more with the world, by presenting concepts, application constructs and powerful stories from the land of *Advaita* (non-duality), *lok-sangrah* (inclusive, systemic endeavour), *sattvic* (pure), *karmic* endeavour and *sankalpa* (intention). These philosophies and paradigms have echoed in Indian wisdom for thousands of years, and find their generative association with the present day world's impactful articulation of AI principles. Together they inspire innovations that can transform the way humanity evolves and humankind connects, transcending geo-political, national and cultural differences.

Invocation

An important Indian *sloka* (invocation chant), so relevant to the human life worldwide, says:

Lokasamastha sukino bhavanthu

"May happiness, peace and harmony prevail."

This *sloka* is an expression of the universal spirit of the Vedantic philosophy, an invocation for harmony and blessings for all of creation.

Traditionally, human endeavour in India begins with an invocation, a call to heightened attentiveness that is with, within and beyond the human mind. There

There is only one absolute truth, which is non-dual and acknowledges the polarities with equal respect

is a sacred practice in India of invoking the presence and blessings of Ganesha (Hindu God of knowledge and good beginnings) before starting an auspicious and important new venture. Neena has incorporated this as the opening ritual of “invocation of faith” in her 7-i (invoke, inquire, imagine, innovate, inquire again, implement, impact, imbed and invoke again) adaptation of the AI process, something that she calls 7-i Generative Mandala (SIGMA).

This issue follows the tradition and opens with a poem “Invocation of Faith” by Neena, who, by invoking her heliotropic eye, has creatively woven the AI philosophy of believing and imagining the desired, in her poetic invocation, hymning:

“That Appreciation would be the path of inquiry
That inquiry would unfurl passionate reverie”

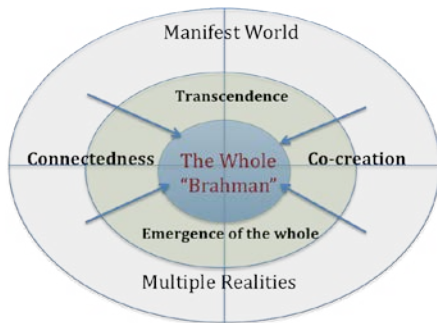
AI's generative connection with Indian philosophies

Building on AI's essential emphasis on social constructionism and the power of human conversation, our first article by Sankar and Wasundhara reveals the generative connection between AI and Advaita, a Vedantic philosophy from 788 BCE that states that there is only one absolute truth, which is non-dual and acknowledges the polarities with equal respect. The authors draw associations between AI principles and Advaita, opining that Appreciative Inquiry is an inclusive philosophy and, like Advaita, enables us to see what we relate to with a non-dual poetic eye, and what we believe in – a call from a deeper place of knowing.

The article by Ashish and Rajen highlights the criticality of *appreciative mindset* for the success of the AI-based organizational development (OD) interventions. Their construct of appreciative mindset weaves in influences from the *Bhagwad Gita* (the sacred Indian scripture), articulating the significance of *karm-yoga* (the action logic) and *lok-sangrah* (systemic concern). According to them, “systemic concern is not only a logical deduction of interconnectedness but experiential connection to the ‘whole’ that naturally results in affective commitment towards the life-enriching objectives of a larger system”. They invite the AI community for a dialogue on a thorough definition and explanation of the nature and role of the construct of appreciative mindset, its connection with *lok-sangrah*, the path of action for self-realization which is integral to Indian traditional wisdom and ways of provoking appreciative mindset.

AI practice in the context of complex systems

Appreciative Inquiry emphasizes “what works”. Yet AI practitioners worldwide would acknowledge the struggle to practise this in systems which are fraught with deficit-based discourse. Yogesh shares his experiments with AI in the complex governance systems in India, while handling the naturally deficit-thinking process of investigation, enforcement and vigilance functions. He explains how he as a public servant has applied his understanding of AI to consciously focus on and amplify “what might be right” even when all evidence and governance systems require him to establish the “wrong-doing” and propose punitive measures. His attempt to understand the core intent of the delinquent/defaulter helps him pursue a possibility proposition of “alliance between offenders and governance mechanisms” despite restrictive space for such work. He believes that infusion of the AI principles in the training and orientation of



The inquiry into *Brahman*, the one, non-dual, absolute truth which respects polarities. Read about *Advaita* on page 17

Yogesh uses AI while handling deficit-thinking investigation, enforcement and vigilance functions to search for ‘what works’ on page 25.



Read about E. Sreedharan and the Delhi Metro page 29.

the officers and staff of the state can help in creating a climate of appreciative governance and enhance the humane face of the state.

This issue is privileged to have a story-based articulation of “Appreciative Intelligence for Innovation in Indian industry” from the acclaimed AI thought leader and the creator of Appreciative Intelligence, Tojo Thatchenkery. Tojo shares the powerful story of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) and its managing director E. Sreedharan, until Dec 31, 2011. This story is a brilliant metaphor for Tojo’s proposition that mindful deployment of Appreciative Intelligence creates conditions that foster an ambient climate for innovation in Indian industry. This article celebrates the extraordinary example of positive deviance as a source of learning for other applications in Indian organizations, and perhaps beyond.

A poetic ode, “AI ... the Indian roots” by T. T. Srinath, eloquently brings out several metaphors and analogies from Indian mythology to affirm that:

“Ancient Indian wisdom says,
How appreciative are life’s ways”

and that

“AI has in India found
its roots, yet its wings abound”

Srinath’s poem is a soul-stirring piece that evokes curiosity to know more about AI’s generative connection with ancient Indian wisdom.

Making it happen

Lalitha shares a poignantly inspiring story: embarking on a mission in memory of her daughter, she and her team reached out to far away tribal areas and created meaning in education in tribal school systems. Echoing her deep resonance with Indian traditions and AI principles, Lalitha talks about how she leveraged the power of AI to address and transform social discrimination in some tribal school systems. She tells the story of Ekalavya (the tribal archer) and Drona (the guru of the Kshatriya princes) contrasting it with today’s practice of marginalizing education for the less privileged. Bringing AI principles and parallel Indian traditions together, Lalitha explains how the identity of a tribal child is being reshaped by modern education. “Deep in the Woods, Over the Hills” is not just a story. Lalitha’s description of the generative approach and methods that she and her team developed to facilitate change in the tribal education systems demonstrates its potential as a model for inclusive education for marginalized communities.

Hardik and Naresh gift us a systematic approach to appreciative engagement by “Reversing the Pyramid and Energizing the Base” for engaging GenY employees. They argue that engaged employees are more Receptive, Involved, Proactive and Energized (RIPE). They share a powerful story of deploying the 4-I process of AI, creatively infused with Gujarati folk wisdom, to appreciatively nurture the roots (GenY employees) at a steel plant in India. The story affirms the power of belief whereby the GenY employees believed in and pursued their own capabilities, when the company management believed in their potential.



Leveraging the power of AI to transform tribal school systems, page 36.



Differently abled people transform the welfare mindset and develop leadership. Read about the founding of the Disability Action Group in Gujarat on page 47.

Archana shares a moving story whereby she was able to transform the welfare mindset which people with disabilities often encounter by creating a self-organized forum to advocate and enable rights for differently abled people. Her story talks about a leadership development exercise that she facilitated to help differently abled people find the good in themselves, speak for themselves and avoid social isolation and discrimination. This endeavour culminated in the formation and registration of the Disability Action Group with a membership of about 400 people in Gujarat State.

That's not all! Meet Sunil and his team with their pride in explaining how they used the power of storytelling to help their organization formally articulate a vision and values that had always been resident in the organization. They facilitated an AI-based design to uncover the collective wisdom and values of the organization that thrived on stories as a natural way of describing its experiences. Through this, the company discovered its mission, vision and values, *Transcending* to give it a form and expression.

The generative coming together

asato ma sadgamaya

tamaso ma jyotirgamaya

mrtyorama amrtam gamaya

“Lead me from the untruth to the truth
Lead me from darkness to light.
Lead me from death to immortality.”
(*Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad* Book I, chapter iii, verse 28)

Working on this issue of *AI Practitioner*, which seeks to explore the generative connection between Appreciative Inquiry and India, has been an opportunity for us to be led from darkness to light in several ways. While on one plane, our path was luminous with the abundant presence of the philosophy and principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Indian scriptures and eastern schools of thought, we also were able to acknowledge and understand the challenge: that the authentic, committed practice of AI is still finding a firm footing on Indian ground. Though the few stories that emerged and found their way in this issue encouraged and fanned our hopes phenomenally, we acknowledge our as-yet-unquenched craving for more breadth and deeper meaning.

This issue sought to explore the generative connection of AI with the traditional Indian wisdom and the current endeavours on Indian soil. Our editorial team manifested this intent metaphorically. The coming together of Ron, a co-originator and on-going developer of Appreciative Inquiry from the West; Neena, a native Indian and a passionate practitioner and application builder of AI; and Zeb, an African native with long experience in and with India, and a committed appreciative inquirer, symbolizes a confluence of Western thought and Eastern wisdom. Together we present you a deeply inspiring way to appreciate, affirm, aspire for and actualize humankind's purpose of “being one” and the potential of co-empowering.

With faith and gratitude, we offer this issue to the appreciative readership of *AI Practitioner*.

Neena Verma, Ron Fry and Zeb Waturuocha
February, 2013



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About the May 2013 Issue

Appreciative Inquiry and Communities of Practice

This issue illustrates how we can strengthen the ways we spread and develop practices based on Appreciative Inquiry. AI has spread into many different practices, yet we are waiting for the full potential of AI to be released in a concerted effort to improve the conditions for the human spirit of community building.



The ways the practices based on Appreciative Inquiry are spreading can be seen in the six situations which illustrate the subject of the issue.

The first illustration presents the dream of a stronger international community of practitioners who can pave the way for the dreams of individual practitioners and practitioner groups. This illustration also shares ideas from organizations that make a difference in creating social impact by supporting local initiatives and the collaboration among these initiatives.

The second illustration presents ways in which the European AI Community was started and how a sense of community can be nurtured by practitioners meeting in the real world following the slogan: Connect – Combine – Co-create.

The third illustration presents ways in which AI can become an integrated part of the educational practices in a university.

The fourth illustration shows that Communities of Practice are an essential part of the learning journey of an individual in a lifelong learning process.

The fifth illustration presents the impact AI-based practices have in an international organization which focuses on creating better lives for people who live with HIV and AIDS.

The sixth illustration shows how digital media can be used to promote international collaboration on how to support local practices. This also shows how to adapt Appreciative Inquiry for a specific setting and how to spread the practices in a way that promotes international impact.

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Purpose of AI Practitioner

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