

The Raman Effect and the scattering of Wi-Fi!

CHITRA NARAYANAN

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Beautiful mind Sir CV Raman

On World Wi-Fi Day, the villages from which two of India's Nobel Laureates hail will get connected

NEW DELHI, JUNE 14: Two tiny villages in Tamil Nadu will get networked to the world on June 20, which will be observed as World Wi-Fi Day.

These are no ordinary villages. Mangudi (also called Agaramangudi) and Purasakkudi, which are about two km apart from each other, are where two of India's Nobel Laureates hailed from.

Indeed, villagers here will show you around the ancestral homes of Sir CV Raman, who got the Nobel Prize in 1930, and his nephew Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar, who got the coveted honour in 1983. These hamlets in Thanjavur district may have produced two of India's top physicists, but they still do not have Internet connectivity.

Chennai-based firm Microsense, an Internet and WiFi solution provider, is now bridging the digital divide at these villages.

"The catalyst is World Wi-Fi Day. We were asked by the Wireless Broadband Alliance to do some activity to connect the unconnected and we picked these two villages," says S Kailasanathan, Managing Director, Microsense.

According to him, Microsense zeroed in on these two villages because they were little-known despite producing two Nobel laureates. He reached out to Sir CV Raman's relatives, who felt it was a great idea and were supportive. "Connecting up villages, whether Mangudi or any other, is a step in the right direction," says Radhika Ramnath, the Nobel Laureate's grand niece, who confesses that she has not been to the village.

The Wireless Broadband Alliance is a global organisation that is championing the adoption of wireless broadband all over the world. Its members include leading telcos, companies like Google and Intel and tech companies such as Cisco and Microsoft. "They work with cities, governments, and service providers like us," says Kailasanathan, an IIT Madras and IIM Calcutta alumnus.

Microsense, founded by Kailasanathan and his IIM Calcutta peer Rajiv Talwar, has been providing communication services in premium hotels since 1987.

Challenging task

Since as early as 2000, Microsense has been providing Wi-Fi (the technology took off globally in 1999 with Apple as market champion) and broadband services to hotels, and is now expanding into residential colonies and enterprises.

But equipping these tiny villages with Wi-Fi has not been without challenges. For starters, there was no broadband connection from where Microsense could provide Wi-Fi.

"We started out by contacting BSNL," says Kailasanathan. Then they thought of lifting it off Airtel's mobile towers. "But even that tower had no capacity," he says.

Finally, Microsense had to set up point-to-point wireless links. Now, practically the whole of the village has been sewn up.

So how will the villages, where the primary occupation is agriculture, use the Wi-Fi facility? "Certainly the children will benefit from the Internet as an educational tool and that's the primary focus now," responds Kailasanathan. "But as we go forward, we intend to focus on the needs that the villagers themselves come up with," he says. Kiosks with computers will be set up for the villagers to use.

The story goes that when Sir CV Raman got his Nobel Prize in 1930, he wept because his country did not even have its own flag and it was the Union Jack that was being waved. Similarly, his native village remains pretty much unacknowledged. Will Wi-Fi succeed in putting Mangudi on the global map?

(This article was published on June 14, 2016)

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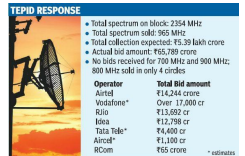
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