The Phatic Function and the Socializing Element of Personal Blogs

Emelia Noronha, Milind Malshe

Abstract—The phatic function of communication is a vital element of any conversation. This research paper looks into this function with respect to personal blogs maintained by Indian bloggers. This paper is a study into the phenomenon of phatic communication maintained by bloggers through their blogs. Based on a linguistic analysis of the posts of twenty eight Indian bloggers, writing in English, studied over a period of three years, the study indicates that though the blogging phenomenon is not conversational in the same manner as face-to-face communication, it does make ample provision for feedback that is conversational in nature. Ordinary day to day offline conversations use conventionalized phatic utterances; those on the social media are in a perpetual mode of innovation and experimentation in order to sustain contact with its readers. These innovative methods and means are the focus of this study. Though the personal blogger aims to chronicle his/her personal life through the blog, the socializing function is crucial to these bloggers. In comparison to the western personal blogs which focus on the presentation of the 'bounded individual self', we find Indian personal bloggers engage in the presentation of their 'social selves'. These bloggers yearn to reach out to the readers on the internet and the phatic function serves to initiate, sustain and renew social ties on the blogosphere thereby consolidating the social network of readers and bloggers.

Keywords—Personal blogs, phatic, social-selves, blog readers.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE word 'weblog' a conflation of the two words: Web and log and the word is loosely defined as a log of thoughts and writing posted publicly on the World Wide Web [1]. Logs, Pamphlets, Dairies/Journals, Commonplace books and Notebooks, and the Web Page share certain characteristics with blogs, making each of them partial antecedents of blogs. The personal blog to a large extent is used by many as the technological medium that diarists used to keep their personal accounts in the yesteryears. From wax tablets to parchments, from paper bound neat notebooks to the digital cyberspace, the content remains the same, only the medium has changed. What Mallon [2] (1984) says of dairies is applicable to weblogs of today:

Some are chroniclers of the everyday. Others have kept their books only in special times—over the course of a trip, or during a crisis. Some have used them to record journeys of the soul, plan the art of the future, confess the sins of the flesh, and lecture the world from beyond the grave. And some of them, prisoners and invalids have used them not so much to record lives as create them, their diaries being the only world in which they could fully live [2].

Personal blogs are about the bloggers lives, as in the old-style paper diaries. But they are rendered different due to the very medium through which they are disseminated. The medium brings with it a large number of variations which were totally absent in the paper diary thereby complicating issues of privacy. Strangers are able to lurk and share the intimate details of people's lives with permission. This problematizes the nature of these personal blogs.

Andrew Sullivan [1] notes that a diary is 'almost always a private matter'. It is a terrestrial log which is usually not meant for the eyes of others.

If so only posthumously to compile facts for a more considered autobiographical rendering. But a blog, unlike a diary, is instantly public. It transforms this most personal and retrospective of forms into a painfully public and immediate one. It combines the confessional genre with the log form and exposes the author in a manner no author has ever been exposed before [1].

The Indian personal blogs that were studied are not diary-like but akin to the personal essay. Lopate [3] notes 'intimacy' as the hallmark of the personal essay; the same is of the personal blogs; self-revelation, elaboration on individual tastes and experiences, a rambling stream-of-consciousness-like structure, informal and intimate style of writing, and use of conversational tone of writing are some other elements that the personal blog abounds in. The personal blog concentrates on individual experience that may transcend into universal experience depending on the blogger's expertise in self-expression and writing skills. Not all personal blogs can emulate the personal essay, though the medium is ideal for reflecting upon the complexities of life that the blogger faces every day.

Personal weblogs give expression to the private world of the bloggers. Unlike the paper diary form that is intended solely for the eyes of the diarist, or a select few, the weblog is a medium wherein the posts are published with the intention of making it public. The weblogs thus exist in the 'liminal zone' between the public and the private. This raises a number of questions: For whom are the blogs written? Are they meant for the blogger or for the readers?

In the context of the question, "For whom do you blog?" the popular refrain is "I blog for me". This statement is statistically backed by the findings of [4] wherein 52% of US bloggers say that they blog mostly for themselves, not for an

Emelia Noronha is an Assistant Professor working with Prahladrai Dalmia Lions College of Commerce and Economics, University of Mumbai, India and a Research Scholar at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, India (e-mail: emelia.n@rediffmail.com).

Milind Malshe is a Professor in the Department of Humanities (English) with Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, India.

audience and only 32% say that they blog mostly for their audience.

On the *Online Diary History Project* when Carolyn Burke, one of the pioneers of the personal blog, was asked the question, 'How did you start writing an online journal?' [6] She answered:

1995: I needed an outlet to talk about myself, privately and with someone listening. My 10 year relationship was ending, and I couldn't talk to him any more about life and me and everything in between [sic] . . . I need to talk to someone about that. There just didn't seem to be someone. So I wrote [6].

The weblog for Burke is a place that exposes the 'private mental spaces to everyone's scrutiny' giving 'a snapshot of what a person is like on the inside'. Burke is vociferous in her assertion:

. . . we have nothing to hide from each other. I still feel this strongly. As a species, we need clear communication between and amongst individuals. As individuals, we need to become more and more fully engaged in the understanding of what it is to be human, sentient, and free, some aspects of our birthright, and generally to learn from and successfully communicate these discoveries. [7]

For Burke, writing freely about oneself is 'like a social obligation'. This is one way in which she feels she can 'give back to society something important: a snapshot of what a person is like on the inside. This is something that we don't get access to in face to face, social society.'[5] Complete honesty in self-reflection was the underlying principle upon which the weblog of Carolyn Burke was based. She wanted others too to do the same – 'expose their inner lives to everyone else. Complete open honest people. What a great and ideal world would result.' [5] The blog of Justin Hall, another pioneer of the genre, is almost a 'life log'.

Indian bloggers who maintained personal blogs in English write with a different perspective. The present paper is an attempt to explore and analyze the personal blogs written by Indians in English from the perspective of communicative functions of language exemplified by [8].

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a qualitative study that is being carried out for the past three years. A total of twenty-eight personal blogs were studied, fourteen personal blogs by male writers and fourteen blogs by female personal bloggers, their posts (along with the comment section) were read and scrutinized. The criteria upon which these blogs were selected for the study was as follows:

Firstly, the blog should be a personal blog. The defining characteristic of the personal blog being the personal musings of the blogger, wherein one chronicles one's life through regular posts.

Secondly, as in the old-style paper diaries, these blogs should have an extended life value or longevity. The blogger should post consistently at least for the past two years. Blogs that have been active at least for the past two years and alive with regular posts were shortlisted.

Thirdly, interactivity is a crucial component of a weblog. Thus the amount of significant responses and the discussions that ensued was the criteria for selecting the blog.

The last criterion was that the personal bloggers should be Indian. The 'About me' section often mentions the place bloggers blogged from but the nationality of the blogger was confirmed on the basis of the posts –the details of their lives as they were presented on their blogs. The presence of the bloggers on two Indian blogging forums– *Blogadda* and *Indiblogger* also confirmed this.

The study indicated that for the Indian blogger their blog is not merely a transcript of their lives meant for passive readership. The readers are very crucial to the blogger. And all efforts are made by the blogger to make connections with the readers.

III. PHATIC COMMUNICATION DEFINED

The phatic function of communication is a vital element of any conversation. The messages that basically serve to establish or prolong or to discontinue communication, to check whether the channel works, to attract the attention of the interlocutors, or to confirm their continued attention is termed as the phatic function of language by [8]. The conversational element that makes the blogging phenomenon more akin to speech than the written form constantly endeavors to sustain the communication in various ways. The term 'phatic communion' was coined by anthropologist [8] Malinowski [9]. The term was used for that kind of speech that catered to the social function of creating an atmosphere of sociability and establishing bonds of personal union between people brought together by the need of companionship. It refers to the conventional formulaic expressions that are used in order to start and continue with a conversation, maintain a distance from the other interlocutor or express our attitude toward the other.

Conventional phatic expressions like greeting, leave-taking, thanking and apologizing may be universal in nature but the discourse within which the conversation takes place, the context (social and cultural) and the interlocutors' relationship with each other play a very important role in deciding the form of phatic expressions. In computer-mediated discourse such as the blogs the posts are not conversational in the same manner as the comment section of the post. But both are essential for the blog. When compared to the other forms of computer-mediated discourse such as IM exchanges, multi-participant chat, email, asynchronous discussion forums and Voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) blogs are less conversational in nature.

Jakobson's notion of 'phatic' focuses on the channel of communication. Let us analyze communicative acts on blogs that exhibit the phatic function. It is the context and the relationship of the interlocutors that decide the 'phaticness' of the utterance. Žegarac [10] uses the relevance theory to drive home the point that phatic communication does not 'identify a natural class of utterances but a pattern of interacting factors' [10]. Žegarac distinctly puts forth his view that when the

interlocutor makes use of phatic utterances either or both the following assumptions can be made: the speaker is genuinely showing an interest in the listener or the speaker is merely following the norm. In the case of blogging whenever the blogger makes use of phatic utterances it is clear that he/she is following no norm because there are no conventionalized or standardized norms or utterances that are used in the typical computer-mediated discourse. The new media thus necessitates newer forms of phatic utterances which over a period of time may get conventionalized. But as of now the phatic utterances are genuine attempts to 'connect' to the readers. The constant updates that the blogger provides his/her readers are definitely informational in nature but the objective of the update is not merely informational; to give the reader a glimpse of what is happening in his/her private world is akin to the socializing function of small talk wherein the contents of the talk are not important but it is the process of talking that is of prime importance.

IV. PHATIC FUNCTIONS: NEW MEDIA, NEW METHODS

Jakobson used the term 'phatic' with reference to the attempt to maintain communication. For him phatic communication involves messages 'primarily serving to establish . . . to check whether the channel works ('Hello, do you hear me?'), to attract attention of the interlocutor, or to confirm his continued attention' [8]. A new media like the blog would thereby not have any conventional phatic forms of communication to fall back upon. Thus bloggers are constantly innovating and inventing newer forms of phatic expressions that would serve the purpose.

Blogs belong to the world of social media which yearn to reach out to the readers on the internet. Depending upon the goal to be achieved, phatic communication on the personal blog serves to attain a combination of the following functions:
- Check communication lines
- Initiate conversation
- Renew connectedness
- Keep readers updated
- Indicate the bloggers state of mind
- Strengthen relationship
- Increase camaraderie

In the following sections we make an attempt to illustrate with examples the phatic communication on personal blogs.

A. Check Communication Lines

We find bloggers transferring phatic utterances from face-to-face offline communication situations onto the online world. The blog post titled: 'Guess what?' posted by Ashwathy on 20th September, 2012, the post titled: 'Any guesses on what this is?' of 28th September, 2010, urges the readers to figure out the photograph that is posted on the blog. This is an attempt by the blogger to check the channel of communication as one would do on a telephone or a microphone asking the audience: 'Hello! Do you hear me?' The blogger, like the speaker checking the microphone wants an assurance that there are people out there are reading their posts proactively. Why would a person interested in chronicling one's life story engage in such activities? The blog space is thereby used by the Indian bloggers to engage the readers and initiate a social process.

B. Initiate Conversation

The blog post in itself is comparatively a static kind of computer mediated communication unlike Internet Relay Chat. Vinita Khednekar of *Lazy Pineapple* used to run a Caption Contest on her blog wherein every Wednesday she posted a photograph and asked the readers to give it a funny caption. The winners received a 'Golden Trophy' which they proudly displayed on their website. These posts are 'teasers' that instigate and catapult the silent, passive readers (lurkers) into action and motivate them to comment and thereby initiate conversation. Vibha of *Little Dose of chaos* uses different strategies to make the readers react to her posts.

C. Renew Connectedness

The fact that the media has no conventionalized and standardized methods that the bloggers can fall back on for maintaining phatic communication necessitates individual innovation. If the goal is to revive contacts and check if the communication channel still works (garners readership), then after a brief hiatus in blogging we find posts by Aswathy beginning with greetings like:

Alright folks! I'm baaaaaaaaaaaack! 😄
'Howdy people! How have you all been?

A slight break in the daily post can be detrimental to the readership. When the intention of the blogger is to reinstate the long lost friendly ties then phatic expressions like the following are found:
- Sorry folks! I know it's been awhile! Been working on something. (*C'est la vie, mon ami!)*
- Well! Well! Look who is out of hibernation. I know all of you must be shaking your head and tch tching at my sudden appearance. Not believing one bit that I will stick around for long. Believe me, this time I intend to do so. (*Lazy Pineapple*)
- Hi my sweet friends, I had been away for just few days, but thinking always about this place and you all. This gap was with a reason of expectations, though here nothing happens as I expect. (*Jeevan's World*)

D. Keep Readers Updated

By its very nature the blog is to be constantly updated. The daily posts keep the readers updated on the lives and thoughts of the blogger. Some blog posts provide the reader with details like:
- Went to the Fete de la Musique in Hauz Khas Village yesterday. Traffic jam from the beginning of the road, all the way up to the parking lot. As we ditched our car in the earliest open spot and walked in the sweat dodging cars and hipsters, it gave me some time to ruminate on this-…(*Compulsive Confessions*)
- I was at HAL Aerospace Museum in Bangalore recently checking the amazing old and renovated aircrafts at (sic) display and at the end of our walkabout (sic) inside the museum; we enter (sic) the main building to find out

something and got to know about this remote control helicopter. (*Jeevan's World*)

- It's raining folks. No, it can't get any better. Monsoons have struck my part of the country and my happiness knows no bounds. Water, grey sky, that season when mothers forbid their daughters to wear white before going out, those nights when you want to keep the air conditioner to the minimum temperature and stuff yourself with a fur blanket, Oh man, I'm lovin' it all. I stand in my gallery until that last drop of rain leaves the sky and reaches earth. (*Little Moments of Bliss*)

The above excerpts can be substituted for Twitter updates that are basically phatic in nature. The phatic function of communication becomes the sole premise for communication with the onslaught of the micro-blogging phenomenon. The urge to tell the world about what you are doing, in an attempt to keep in touch with them, is the basis on which Twitter survives. This reiterates Wittel's [11] argument that the goal of communication has now become the active construction or a reconstruction of a 'social network'. One needs to 'consistently renew, refresh, and revalue the existing contacts' [11].

The post titled 'Metro Diaries....!' by Ashna Banga recounts the happenings of the day from 8.20 a.m. to 8.40 a.m.; while post No. 580 –'News from my house' by Chriz of *Chronicwriter* posted on 3rd July, 2013 gives the readers an update on the happenings of the blogger's personal life– his daughter's haircut, her eating of *neem* leaves, the fact that she has now started to walk, her ears being pierced, etc. the post reads like excerpts from a Twitter account. The lexical meaning is of little importance. These posts foreground the desire to establish and maintain a form of connectedness through which the readers are given an peek into the life of the blogger, one such post is Meenakshi Madhavan's postdated 28th March 2013 – 'Live blogging: a day in the life of a Coup'.

E. Indicate the Bloggers' State of Mind

Instead of using conventionalized greetings bloggers come up with creative forms of salutations that indicate their mood and expectations from the readers. Parab of *Parab Says* addresses the readers as 'Hello Drifters'. The phatic communication that one engages in is often suggestive of the state of mind the interlocutor is in. When the stranger standing on a bus stop exclaims to his neighbor 'It is very hot today!4, one understands his need to start a conversation. On the basis of the kind of greeting or initial interlocution by a speaker one can suspect the intention or mental make-up of the interlocutor. The posts of Abhinav Raj of *Cigarettes for the soul!* (from the first post, dated 13th April, 2010, until the postdated 27th October, 2011) begin with the greeting 'Hello random reader' and end with 'So till I write again…ciao ciao'. The postdated 27th October, 2011 begins with the words: 'I am a bag'. The sudden change in the greeting is striking. The lines that follow explain the reason for the change in the form of greeting. The change in the greeting also reflects upon the change in the interlocutor's state of mind and the relationship he expected from the interaction. The intense negativity

almost bordering on animosity that the blogger feels towards the readers is evident in the leave taking:

And to those of you who expected some logic or purpose or sense in this post, first search for it your life. Also, I am a fucking bag. What's your excuse?

The intense emotional turmoil, the stress and strain that the blogger is undergoing is evident through the greeting used by him. In face-to-face communication such conversation would call for empathy on the part of the listener. The listener normally would not be a stranger but a friend who cares and empathizes. The fact that Abhinav Raj uses the blog space to voice his angst is indicative of his expectations from his readers. The blog space is for Abhinav Raj similar to his social world where he can look for warmth and understanding.

F. Strengthen Relationships

Relationships are crucial for Indian bloggers. The existing bonds forged in the blogosphere are consolidated in a variety of ways. A post of Meenakshi Madhavan titled: 'Ladies and gentlemen...' begins:

... Romance has left the building.

Meh.

I knew I was having too much fun.

The question is NOW what do I do with my time?

This post does not merely intend to give the readers an informative update on the single status of the blogger. The urge to connect, to speak out in an attempt to strike a conversation is evident. The post is low on the informative function and higher on the phatic function. In the comment section Meenakshi's response to the endearing comments by readers indicate that she appreciated their constructive suggestions.

On another occasion Meenakshi Madhavan ends the post ('A Manifesto for Readers & Writers' posted on 10th February 2013) with the question:

What are your thoughts? Is social media the best thing that's happened to writers or the worst? Is it awesome that readers can interact directly with authors, or is this killing the Mystique of the Artist? Let me know in the comments! *

We find other bloggers too trying to engage the readers in a similar fashion. Vibha of *Daily dose of chaos...*urges the readers to respond time and again by prompts at the end of the posts:

- Would love to hear from you guys what you think is a waste of time.
- I don't love one child more than the other, in fact there are times I would say each is a nuisance and sweetheart in the same breath. So, that's my realization as on this Saturday. Have you ever felt like this?
- Today I saw some word highlighted in my post (not by me) and when you click on the word it takes you to some random unsavory ad. Have you experienced this too? I just broke the word free to free. Any suggestions how to avoid this?

This function of assuaging the non-initiating reader to break their silence and interact is achieved through the use of phatic

communication especially in the leave taking stages of communication. The consolidation of a positive relationship is the essential function of phatic communication. In face-to-face communication tokens such as 'See you soon', 'See you on Monday', 'Give my regards to all at home,' consolidate the existing relationship and work towards the continuation of the relationship. In the above examples we see bloggers making similar attempts at consolidation and continuation of the social bond between the reader and the blogger.

G. Increase Camaraderie

The blogger often playfully engages with the reader and has fun at the reader's cost. Chriz of *Chronicwriter* titles Post no. 555: 'Topless picture of Tamanna' which begins:

For all those who came to this page searching for a topless picture of Tamanna, I wanna first welcome you to my page and wish you a happy valentine's day.

Today I wore a green shirt and green trousers to work.

The next 157 words, interspersed with two photographs, are merely meant to engage the readers in idle talk. It is only after the reader has patiently read 157 words that the blogger retorts:

So those who have read till this part are the lucky ones who will get to see the topless picture of Tamanna. Click this [link] to see the topless picture of Tamanna.

The link takes the curious reader to a picture wherein the topmost part of the photograph is missing thereby leaving the reader fretting with a feeling that he has proved himself a fool by being carried away by the trickster. The reader who enjoys the humor on *Chronicwriter* will definitely appreciate the humor that arises from this post at his cost. This also consolidates the readership of the blogger who come to the blog to be entertained. A trick in good humor is never played upon strangers. The readers who comment as follows:

- reminds me of one of my top posts in my blog.. the nude pic f katrina kaif,
- LOL! I thought you'll wear superman costume to office today :) It might have gone viral than topless tamanna ... anyways she sucks dude.... Try Anushka next time
- You rock man:-) wht a way of atteacting (sic) audience..n ya amazing tint of humir (sic) u add to yr posts..nice to read you..!!!

Such comments can never be expected from strangers. Humour when practiced upon strangers irks them and ignites their ire. But this is not evident in the case discussed. Thus one can assert that the readers are friends' of the blogger. This corroborates with the proposition put forth by Lyons in Laver [12] about face-to-face communication that 'phatic communion serves to establish and maintain a feeling of social solidarity and well-being'. On the blog too, phatic utterances perform a similar function. Over a period of time the readers develop a sense of understanding and communion with the blogger's world.

The comment section of the blog post is the site for conversation among readers. Readers often select few sentences and phrases from the blog post and start their conversation by admiring these lines. This repetition on the

part of the readers does not impart any factual information, it is used to reiterate the reader's admiration or objection to certain points or thoughts put forward by the blogger. The repetition helps the reader to connect positively to the blogger. The following are the comments to the blog post titled 'Happiness is an elusive bitch' posted on 14th September, 2012 on *A-Musing*:

- Bang on!
  loved this line - 'The truth is, there is no ideal man, love or life –it's what we make of what we get.'
- Your last sentence before the quote summed it up absolutely. There is no end to human desires. Happy is the one who does have dreams but feels blessed with what he or she has.
- Loved every line of it. Esp the one..'We cling, we claw..' true..we do all of it and yet don't realize what we are making to ourselves..Happiness is indeed a state of mind. absolutely loved it. Want to read again
- beautifully etched ! I will hold on to these lines-happiness is not a milestone to be covered, it is rather savoring the moments we are blessed with. How true ! good one purba
- Enjoyed it reading to the core..so true each and every word is..love this line- 'The hunt is always more exciting than the kill'..we are really never satisfied of our present..

Reiteration of the conversation is achieved through repetition of bits and pieces of conversation in affirmation; comments like these serve the purpose of building a positive relationship between the blogger and the reader.

Blog posts by Indian personal bloggers are essay like in nature and often incorporate works of fiction and fantasy having no reference to any autobiographical element. Such posts that are either in the fictional mode or works of poetic fantasy receive comments that are direct and cryptic in nature:

- Oh, this is perfect 😃
- Very nice!
- excellent!
- Liked it.
- Oh this is so nice…Yes each mood is an enigma !!! totally agree.

The above short comments are in response to a haiku post by Leo of *I Rhyme without reason*. The comments are usually devoid of any salutations or small talk in such situations. This is usually with blog posts that are general in nature. Posts that are emotional outbursts of the blogger's feelings towards certain issues and problems result in elaborate comments.

Readers who often comment respond directly without much ado. Readers who have been lurking around and have never commented before often make use of salutations to begin the conversation as in the following case:

- Hey eM!
  First time comment poster on your post... quite like Sana... follow this regularly but nvr got ovr the inertia of putting dwn a word... Great work though.. up the great work!! . . .
- Dear Sana and eM,

This is my first comment on this blog...and Sana you are really brave. Dont know which words to type to console or encourage you....but I know this will.....A big warm hug from me to you...

- Hey eM!

 Like Sana, i love and read ur blog and have never once commented.

- Hi eM,

 One of the many readers who never commented, but this post necessitates a reaction.

Thus the voice of the silent reader when made audible through comments adds dynamism to the conversational nature of the genre that was hitherto a static one. The conversation, eventually, builds social ties between the blogger and the reader.

V. BUILDING SOCIAL SELVES

The personal blog maintained by the likes of Carolyn Burke and Justin Hall [13] was more like a repository of the self, the blog being a space wherein the dreams and aspirations of one's self can be recounted and stored. The social element was not entirely ruled out but it was not the sole purpose. Indian personal bloggers, on the contrary, blog solely for a social cause, that is, to connect to like-minded people, forge new relationships, sustain the existing ones and incorporate the online relationships with the offline ones and vice-versa.

The self that emerges through the personal blog is thus the 'social self' explicated by the likes of William James, Cooley, Baldwin and George Herbert Mead. The modern Western world has had a history of individualism wherein the attempt has always been to introspect and look inwards in an attempt to understand ones 'self', as Burkitt [14] puts it 'to examine our thoughts and feelings, as if our self-identity is a treasure locked inside, like a pearl in its shell.' Prime importance is laid upon the individual creativity and independence, the society that plays a role in building the 'identity' of the person, the milieu which it provides to harness the creativity and the cultural ambience that it permeates the individual self with is often ignored. On the contrary the 'social self' is outward looking and makes use of the process of interaction in order to sustain itself.

The terms 'social selves' go back William James [15] who put forth the notion of the plural selves. William James in his seminal paper on 'Consciousness of Self' introduced the 'social self' while enumerating the 'constituents of the self', namely the material self, the social self, the spiritual self and the pure self which he calls 'ego'. For James the social self is 'the recognition' that one gets from ones 'mates'. The plurality of these social selves is ascertained by James as he says 'there are as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him'. The impulse for social self-seeking, according to James, is what directs individuals towards cordiality and friendliness. The individuals desire to 'please and attract notice and admiration,' the presence of 'emulation and jealousy' and the 'love of glory, influence and power' [15] are directed, according to James, by social self-seeking impulses. The concept of the 'looking-glass' introduced by

Adam Smith was made popular by Charles- Horton Cooley [16]. This idea of taking the role of the 'other' also set the stage for the notion of the 'social self' put forth by George Herbert Mead [17]. James Mark Baldwin [18] came up with his proposition of the 'socious' – the social self. Mead [17] asserts that the language process is essential for the development of the 'self'. The development of self is not an 'a priori', but a process that is the result of 'social experience and activity.' It develops as a 'result' of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process. The process of communication is therefore essential as it provides a form of behavior for the individual wherein they become objects to themselves. For Mead 'the self, as that which can be the object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience.' The self for Mead is not something that exists first and then enters into relationship with others, but it is an

 eddy in the social current and so a still a part of the current. It is the process in which the individual is continually adjusting himself in advance to the situation to which he belongs and reacting back on it. [17]

Thus the self in this sense is in a continuous dialogic process making in turn a highly organized society possible. The social self is realized in relationship to others. It must be recognized by others to have the very values to which we want to belong to. Phatic communication plays a crucial role in initiating the socializing process and sustaining social bonds. The comment section on the personal blog is used by Indian bloggers to achieve this goal. For the Indian personal bloggers the relationship between the self and the 'other' is very essential. The readers are the 'significant others' [17] upon which the blogging process is mutually dependent and serves as a continual point of reference. This leads us further to explore the notion that Indian bloggers by giving importance to the 'significant others' thereby engage in the development of 'relational selves' rather than the 'bounded self'. Rather than being constructed by the constrictions that the individual self imposes upon itself we have the Indian bloggers securing their ties with 'significant others', thereby engaging in a dynamic relationship that in turn constructs the formation of a self that is 'fluid' and in a constant state of 'becoming'.

APPENDIX

List of blogs that were studied

- Aditya Bhasin. (2010) I Speak-Aditya Bhasin. Available at: http://ispeakab.wordpress.com/.
- Ashna Banga (2010) Pages from a Young Diary. Available at: http://pages-ashna.blogspot.in/.
- Antarik Anwesan (2008) On Second Thoughts. Available at: http://antarik.blogspot.in/
- Aswathy's (Not available) *C'est la vie, mon ami!* Available at http://thatslifemyfriend.wordpress.com is now a protected blog.
- Ayushi (2011) Little Moments of Bliss. Available at: http://littlemomentsofbliss.blogspot.in/.

- Bikram Singh Mann (2009) Me and My Random Thoughts. Available at: http://mannbikram.wordpress.com/
- Blogwati Gee / Vinita Bahl (2012) BlogwatiG. Available at: http://blogwatig.com/.
- Chriz (2007) Chronicwriter. Available at: http://www.chronicwriter.com/.
- Gaurav Parab (2006) Gaurav Parab Says. Available at: http://gaurav-parab.blogspot.in/.
- Hitchy (2008) My attempt to write. Available at: http://hitchwriter.wordpress.com/.
- Indian Home Maker (2008) The Life and Times of an Indian Homemaker. Available at: http://indianhomemaker.wordpress.com/.
- Jeevan (2005) Jeevan's World. Available at: http://jeevansworld.blogspot.in/
- Vinay aka Leo (2006) I Rhyme without reason. Available at: http://artofleo.wordpress.com/
- Meenakshi Madhavan (2004) Compulsive Confessions. Available at: http://www.compulsiveconfessions.com/
- Purbha Ray (2010) A-Musing. Available at: http://www.purba-ray.com/
- Rachna Parmar (2008) Rachna Says. Available at: http://www.rachnaparmar.com/
- Rajesh K. (2008) Destination Infinity. Available at: http://www.destinationinfinity.org/
- Red Handed (2011) The Red Handed Blog. Available at: http://anuglyhead.blogspot.in/
- Ritu Lalit (2008) Phoenixritu. Available at: http://phoenixritu.com/
- R's Mom (2009) R's Mom. Available at: http://readingthroughrsmind.wordpress.com/
- Rolled Monk (2010) Cigarettes for the soul! Available at: http://abhinavj.wordpress.com/
- Santulan (2007) And I write. Available at: http://andiwrite.com/
- Subhorup Dasgupta (2006) Subho's Jejune Diet. Available at: http://subhorup.blogspot.in/
- Shail (2008) Shail's Nest: Where Fingers Tap Dance. Available at: http://shailsnest.com/
- Shilpa Garg (2009) A Rose is a Rose is a Rose. Available at: http://shilpaagarg.com/
- Tullika Singh (2006) ObssessiveMom. Available at: http://obsessivemom.blogspot.in/
- The Fool (2008) Lucifer House Inc. Available at: http://luciferhouseinc.blogspot.in/
- Vibha (2007) Daily dose of chaos...Available at: http://wrenwarbles.blogspot.in/

Please Note: The dates refer to the year in which the blogger started blogging. These blogs were last accessed on 11th August 2014. (Leo posted two posts in 2006, four in 2007 and 2008 onwards started posting regularly. The data related to Aswathy's blog was accessed in June 2013, then, it was not password protected)

REFERENCES

[1] A. Sullivan, "Why I Blog", Atlantic Monthly (Internet) November, 302(4), 2008. Available from:< http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/11/why-i-blog/7060/> (Accessed 15 June 2012).
[2] Mallon in J.L. Johnson, *Personal Stories Go Worldwide: The Ritual of Storytelling through Weblogs*. Unpublished thesis. Denton, Texas. UNT Digital Library, 2004. Available from: <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc4601/>. (Accessed June 12, 2012).
[3] P. Lopate, "Introduction". In *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present*. USA: Anchor Books. 1995.
[4] A. Lenhart and S. Fox, *Bloggers: A Portrait of the Internet's New Storytellers*. Report by Pew Internet & American Life Project. Washington, D.C. 2006.
[5] C. Burke, *My Diary*. Available at <http://diary.carolyn.org/>. (Accessed 12 March 2015).
[6] Burke, C. (2000) *Personal Recollections: Carolyn Burke* (Internet). The Online Diary History Project. Available from: < http://www.diaryhistoryproject.com/index.html>. (Accessed 12 May 2012).
[7] A letter from Carolyn, Sun May 30 09:16 2004, *Carolyn's Diary Republished* Available at <http://diary.carolyn.org/>.(Accessed 12 March 2015).
[8] R. Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics". In: Sebeok, T. (ed.) *Style in Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 1960, p. 350-377.
[9] B. Malinowski, "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages". In: Ogden C. K. and Richards. I. A. (eds.) *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of Influence of Language Upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1923.p. 296-336.
[10] V. Žegarac, "What Is Phatic Communication?" In: Rouchota, V. and Jucker A. (eds.) *Current Issues in Relevance Theory*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1998. p. 327-361.
[11] A. Wittel, "Toward a Network Sociality". In *Theory, Culture & Society*. 18 (6), 2001. p. 51-76.
[12] J. Laver, "Communicative Functions of Phatic Communication". In: Kendon, A., Harris, R.M. & Key M. R. (eds.) *Organization of Behavior in Face-to-Face Interaction*. The Hague: De Gruyter Mouton.1975. p. 215
[13] J. Hall, *Justin links*. Available at http://www.links.net/.
[14] I. Burkitt, *Social Selves: Theories of the Social Formation of Personality*. London: Sage Publications, 1991.
[15] W. James, "Consciousness of Self". In *Principles of Psychology*, 1890. (Internet Archive). Available at <https://archive.org/details/theprinciplesofp01jameuoft />. (Accessed 1 September 2014).
[16] C.H. Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York, Scribner's. 1902.
[17] G. H. Mead, *Mind Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Edited by Charles W. Morris). Chicago: University of Chicago, 1934.
[18] J. M. Baldwin, "The Genesis of the Ethical Self" *Philosophical Review*, Vol.6 (1897): P.225-241.