

# Balaji Parthasarathy

The most important thing for me is curiosity about the world.

Balaji Parthasarathy is a regular guest professor with the theme [Social Innovation](#). He works at the [International Institute of Information Technology in Bangalore](#), and has a keen research interest in technological change and innovation policy, information and communication technologies for development, and regional economic development.



## **What is your research background?**

I originally trained as an architect and have an MA in urban planning. However, as I started work on my PhD at the University of California, Berkeley, I found myself becoming increasingly interested in the shaping and use of technology. I switched research areas and did my PhD on the geography of innovation and technology. I specifically examined how Bangalore came to be the technological and innovation hub it is today.

Today, I work at the International Institute of Information Technology in Bangalore – a small transdisciplinary institute with about 1000 students. I teach three courses a year on subjects such as innovation and development in the digital age, and the economic and social impacts of information technology.

## **What research have you been recently been doing?**

Upon my return to India in 2000 after my PhD, I started to pursue another research interest from 2004 i.e., how people who live in socially disadvantaged and poor areas use information technology produced and designed in the West, and whether this technology could be used to improve their living conditions. How can people who barely have any food and adequate housing still gain from the new technologies being developed?

At the same time, I was interested in how new partnerships were forming, and could be formed, between NGO:s, multinational companies and local governments. Many of these organisations have tried to solve poverty, but have rarely worked together before.

This led me to start up a research project with my colleague, which eventually turned into a book, [The Rise of the Hybrid Domain: Collaborative Governance for Social Innovation](#). The aim was to explore and map out how these new partnerships were used to improve the lives of the poor with the help of technology. In this work, we came across many examples of social innovation in education, health and finance.

### **What do you hope to bring to the theme work?**

During my time here, I have tried to help the theme to identify research questions which they can use as a frame, or basis for their continued work. Since the theme is specifically about social innovation at Lund University, my role is to be a sounding board. I will also try to Skype in from India once I leave Sweden.

### **What are your research interest?**

I would like to expand the scope of the research we undertook for our book. We want to do a similar mapping of how technology is used and partnerships are formed in Africa and South East Asia. How are these communities and organisations responding to challenges, and what is happening in those regions to alleviate social exclusion? And how does this differ from India?

### **What drives you?**

The most important thing for me is curiosity about the world. As a geographer, you cannot be satisfied with just your own little world – it is fascinating to find out how people live and survive in other areas. The answers lie in connecting with the broader society – and to use your academic skill to join the dots, ideas. As an academic you have to be both curious about the world and be willing to live in a world of ideas.

If you want to solve the problems facing us today you need multiple perspectives; that is why I also remain in close contact with the international community.

Finally, I enjoy teaching, since the meetings with students force you to reevaluate your own ideas. Young minds are very sharp. They are a source of pleasure, and a constant reminder that you cannot take anything for granted.

### **Have you been to Lund before?**

Yes, I have been here many times, and my most recent trip was in June. Every time I have been here I have been busy, but this time I have had a chance to see some of the surroundings. I think this is a very intellectually stimulating environment.