This study owes its origins to a coincidence. In June 1997 on my return to India from South Africa after completing a UN assignment, I was in charge of the operations of the STC at Kandla in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat.

I had served in Kandla as a much junior officer earlier in 1982. It normally does not happen that you are posted there twice in your career Kandla being a fairly remote region, but if it does happen as a matter of coincidence, one is in a position to assess the improvement, if any, in the operations over the years. So when I started work there in 1997, I was pleasantly surprised by the great improvement in the quality and efficiency of our operations since I was there last.

The systems in use were the same and the people much the same. What had made all the difference was the vast increase in the use of telecommunications and information technology based operations. This struck me as one of the major answers to growth impediments in countries such as ours. I have been a keen observer of this area ever since in all the various responsibilities that were given to me over the years at home and overseas.

I had been trying to complete a PhD ever since I was offered a part scholarship at the University of Wales, UK, in 1974 after completing my Masters degree in Management there. I did not accept the offer as I was keen to start work in the industry. But interest in academic work remained. In 1979 when I was at the Trade Centre in Brussels, I tried to start work at the University of Leuven. Work pressures and family came in the way.

Again by a coincidence in January 2000 I was talking to my classmate from my IIT days, who now a teacher at IIT Delhi. He felt I could perhaps pursue my long cherished desire either with IIT or JNU. He was excited by the idea of a study based on actual industry data that examined the effects of the use of information-based systems for efficiency improvement. I eventually took up this work later in 2000 with the School of International Studies at JNU under my esteemed supervisor, Professor Indra Nath Mukherji.
Credit for the completion of this work goes to my colleagues and well wishers at STC (Kandla, Ahmedabad, Kochi, Kolkata and Delhi), HPC group of companies at Kolkata and Kochi and to my associates at Dhaka, who assisted me when I was there and who followed up all my surveys.

I am also indebted to the many officials in the automobile, steel, paper, jute and export sectors in India and Bangladesh, who willingly shared valuable information and insights with me. I had been associated with these sectors during my career and had detailed knowledge about them and it was perhaps in order that these sectors were chosen by me to conduct this work.

In the Ministry of Science and Information & Communication Technology, Government of Bangladesh, I received valuable information and support from Mr. Mesbah ul Alam, Joint Secretary, when I visited him. He was very helpful and gave me a copy of the IT Act of Bangladesh in the original Bengali version.

But I reserve the maximum credit for Prof Mukherji, who has been my source of inspiration, support and guidance. His patience is to be emulated. I had at times practically given up during the years 2003-4, because of the pressures of work as Director of HPC Ltd and CMD of Nepa Mills Ltd and the incessant traveling I had to undertake during that period. Although much of the information and data had been collected, I could neither get the time nor peace of mind to put down my thoughts on paper or reflect on issues.

Opportunity came when I completed my term with HPC and received an offer in early 2005 to advise the Government of Botswana in Gaborone in Africa. It is here that I could manage to have the time to work on my findings and undertake the bulk of my writing in late 2005. Prof Mukherji, despite his preoccupation with other scholarly pursuits, always agreed to spare time for me even outside university hours as I used to be in Delhi for a day or two at the most every time. During our discussions he channeled my thoughts and helped me focus on the relevant issues.

In September 2006 I visited Bangladesh to follow up on the surveys that I had done and to have detailed discussions with jute and automobile industries there. It was a rewarding
experience. The support and cooperation I received from these industries there were heartening. Like in India it was also possible to interact with the personnel on the shop floor and at the departmental levels at these enterprises to get a first hand understanding of operations.

In October 2006 I assumed charge as the Commonwealth Secretariat Adviser in the Office of the Chief Minister, British Virgin Islands in the Caribbean. The writing work that had been started in Botswana was completed there.

One does not get the kind of typing assistance in Africa and the Caribbean as one gets in India. As a result I typed out the entire document on my computer. However credit goes to my secretaries in Botswana and the Virgin Islands for their help in overcoming my shortcomings with the computer.

My wife Anuradha has been a constant source of support and encouragement to me in pursuing this work. Our sons Arjun and Anand have observed with keen interest how I became a student again at the end of my career and took up the challenge. I was heartened when one day Arjun remarked quite innocently that he too will do his PhD one day. I hope he and many others like him do.

2 Slaney Hill
Road Town
Tortola
British Virgin Islands
August 13, 2007

Amitava Chaudhuri