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The Impact of Social Media, Digital Platforms, and E-Governance on Tribal Empowerment/Digital Storytelling: Preserving Tribal History and Folklore

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The Tribal communities in India have historically experienced marginalization access of resources, representation and cultural recognition, which Birsa Munda has fought against. He was a tribal freedom fighter and reformer who through his efforts tried to shape the fate of tribal people in 19th century. The legacy and vision of that great tribal hero for identity and justice of Adivasis still remains a guiding force in contemporary struggles. In twenty first century, with the era of globalization and digitalization, Social media, Digital Platforms such as YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, etc and E- governance is playing major role in empowering and preserving tribal history, culture, art, folklores, folk dance, traditions and their cultural heritage, strengthening the intergenerational transmission of endangered tribal knowledge. This paper critically analyses the impact of the social media, digital platform and e-governance initiatives for enhanced access to welfare schemes, education and healthcare programmes, along with the challenges they have to face.

Keywords: Tribal Communities, Birsa Munda, Digital Storytelling, Social Media, E-Governance, Indigenous Knowledge, Cultural Preservation, Digital Empowerment

Introduction

According to the 2011 Census report, the tribal communities in India are one of the most marginalized groups; they comprise of only 8.6% (104,545,716) of India's total population (1,210,854,977)¹. The tribal communities in India have historically faced systematic discrimination regarding access to resources, land, healthcare, education, and political representation. Their cultural traditions, history, and rights were always ignored and misrepresented to achieve the Majority's selfish objectives. The Dalit Adivasi hero Birsa Munda was the 19th century tribal activist who was born in the heart of the Chotanagpur plateau, emerged as the Leader who not only challenged the Colonial rule, but also sought to protect the land, culture, and identity of the tribal community. His leadership during the Ulgulan (The Great Rebellion) against the Britishers, Feudal Dikus (Landlords) and Missionaries. To this day inspire tribal communities to fight for social justice, indigenous rights, and self-governance in India.

In recent years the emergence of globalization and digitalization have transformer the communication, governance and knowledge retention methods. Now with the development of Internet social media platforms like YouTube, X (Twitter), Instagram, Facebook along with digital archives and various government sites have generated

numerous opportunities for welfare and mainstreaming of tribal communities. It helps them in raising their voices, gaining masses recognition, raising awareness about their tribal culture and traditions and preserving their endangered languages, oral traditions, techniques, folklores and practices.

This paper aims to thoroughly examine the influence of social media platform and e-governance in welfare and empowerment of tribal communities, particularly highlighting its role in preserving Adivasi hero Birsa Munda's legacy and the tribal culture and traditions. It also critically analyses their impact in enhanced access to welfare schemes, education and healthcare programmes, along with the challenges they have to face.

Research Objectives

The primary aim of this paper is to critically examine the impact of social media, digital platforms, and e-governance on tribal empowerment, preserving tribal history and folklore. These are the specific objectives of my paper:

1. To examine how social media and digital platforms contribute in preservation and promotion of tribal history, culture and tradition.
2. To evaluate the role of E-governance in empowering tribal communities and enhancing access to welfare schemes, education and healthcare services
3. To identify the challenges and barriers which tribal communities faces in adopting and utilizing social media, digital platforms and e-governance tools.

Social Media and Tribal Empowerment

1. Visibility and Representation

The digitalization and introduction of social media platform have transformed how world sees the tribal communities. Where mainstream media have created a negative, uncivilized and barbarian image of tribal community in front of world, the social media platform has provided a mean for tribals to express their real self to world at large by creating documentaries, shorts, reels and digital story telling. Especially tribal youths have played major role in it by posting their festivals, dances, songs and rituals online reaching global audience without any outer manipulation. For example In Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh: Tribal collectives have created YouTube channels showcasing traditional festivals and debates on land rights.

2. Digital movement

In current digital world hashtags and online campaigns have become tolls for spreading awareness and digital mobilizations. Such has campaigns against Kushi hydel projects in Assam, Hasdeo deforestation in Chhattisgarh and Kalahandi in Odisha have attracted large amount of attention form all over India and globe. These immediate digital communications have amplified the tribal voices which were ignored earlier due to geographical limitations.

Case Illustration

A notable example of the pan tribal movement is #HasdeoAranya, #savehasdeo and #Tribalrights these hashtags were used in recent Hasdeo movement in Chhattisgarh ²which attracted a lot of attention helped in making it successful.

Digital Platforms and Cultural Preservation

1. Oral Traditions and Folklore

The Indigenous tribal cultures often rely on oral traditions (Dantkata) of storytelling, myths and folksongs which are being passed down from generation to generations. These oral tails are now being recorded, stored and uploaded on online platform like

YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and digital archives. Which stored them in form of data preserving them from vanishing tribal history.

2.Folk Dances, Art, and Rituals

The digital platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram etc provide tribal an opportunity to showcase their cultural arts form like Warli, Gond, Madhubani, Bhil and Saura paintings as well as the tribal dances and rituals like Karma, Bardo, Lahoo, Thang-ta etc. Resulting is preserving their rich cultural inheritance, long with providing them opportunity to connect with potential buyers for their art, thereby integrating cultural preservation with livelihood generation.

3.Intergenerational Transmission

For seeking better opportunities, the younger generations are often migrating to urban areas, weakening their connection with their heritage. But the digital platforms and archives helps in preserving these oral tails, and rich cultural heritage ensuring the smooth intergenerational Transmission of these practices. For example, the digitized Santhali folk songs are available on streaming platforms allow tribal youths in urban areas to connect with their tribal roots despite geographical distances. Or in North East India, the initiatives for digital preservation Danta kata, folklores, folkdance were taken.

E-Governance and Tribal Access

The E-Governance have played a major role in tribal empowerment and preserving their rich cultural inheritance.

1. Expanding Welfare Access

The government through e-Governance have initiated programmes such as Aadhar, Digital India, Aadi Mahotsav, Tribes India E-marketplace, Van Dhan yojana etc for welfare of marginalized tribal communities in India. These initiatives have made it easier for tribal citizens to access to welfare scheme, scholarships, pension and subsidies. Even the online platforms for healthcare like E-Sanjeevani and education platforms like SWAYAM have also reached to tribal people.

2. Democratic Participation

The E-Governance have strengthened the democratic participation of tribal population through digital grievance redressal systems, online public hearings platforms, portals for tribal al right infringement etc. These sure that tribals will get direct access to welfare scheme, say in policy framing, and have adequate political representation. These initiatives reduce bureaucratic mediation and create more direct channels between the state and citizens.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite rapid spread of globalization and digitalization the tribal areas are not fully connected to urban areas therefore facings the following Limitations in access to social media and digital platforms.

1. Digital Divide:

Due to their geographical isolation from mainland the tribals Lack access to internet and do not have adequate infrastructure to support it, therefore due to limited access to technology and electricity it creates digital Divide isolating them from rest of world.

2. Language and Representation:

Even if the tribals able to gain access to internet due to lack of appropriate education they are unable to properly utilize it. The internet is majorly filed with English, Hindi or other regional languages ignoring the indigenous languages and even automated

translation tools fails to bridge this gap, resulting in even more rigid language barriers.

3. Exploitation and Appropriation:

Due to lack of awareness about digital property and copyrights the tribal arts and folklores which are shared online were risked of being misused or commercially exploited without giving fare share or credit to the community, resulted in exploitation and appropriation of tribals.

4. Misinformation and Surveillance:

The tribal activist who was fighting for their rights and justice often face the risked for being misinterpreted by the people either unintentionally or due to forceful intervention of profit seekers, resulted in turning their pure intentional campaigned into Anti Nationalist or Naxalite movement.

5. Sustainability:

While digital projects may begin with enthusiasm, lack of resources and institutional support often limits their long-term viability.

6. Cultural Hesitation:

Despite many government initiatives and awareness programmes the tribal communities who have traditionally lived isolated, specially elders who are accustom to old traditions hesitate in accept new evolving technology within tribes.

Steps to counter challenges

For countering the above limitations and challenges we can take the following steps;

1. Inclusive Infrastructure:

We can expand the internet connectivity and mobile penetrations into tribals areas therefore connecting them with digital world.

2. Digital Literacy Programs:

The government have taken the initiatives like Eklavya Model residential School, Common Service Centres, Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojna etc to educate and train tribal youths about digital skills ensuring tribal empowerment and sustainable participation nation building.

3. Language Preservation Tools:

The steps should be taken to develop technology along with indigenous tribal languages so that even tribals can utilize them with any kind of language barrier.

4. Community Ownership:

The government should strictly enforce the copyrights and geographical indication tags so that even after the cultural digitalization the tribals can avoid exploitation.

5. Collaborative Governance:

There should be collective and collaborative steps taken by collaboration between government, companies and NGOs so that responsivity can be distribute and they can create a holistic model for tribal digital development and empowerment.

Conclusion

The paper clearly established that social Media, digital platforms and e-governance have emerged as a reformative tool for tribal empowerment in India. It has helped them to get direct access to welfare schemes, shaping how world perceive them. The internet has helped them to break the negative prejudice that tribals are only uncivilized and barbarian. The social media and digital platforms have helped tribals to express their real self, spread their culture, art and traditions. The digital archives have helped tribals in preserving their oral fails, folklores and songs through

intergenerational transmission.

The initiatives such as TRIFED e-marketplace and Eklavya model residence school demonstrate how government-controlled interventions can reduce the tribal exploitation and open a new pathway for tribal education, development, healthcare and empowerment. Along with tribal welfare the digital movement such as #savehasdeo #tribalrights etc have mobilize large support though use of digital platforms successfully resisting exploitation. Ensuring the legacy of Adivasi Bira Munda always remain a driving force for tribal development.

Yet, the challenges like digital divide, language barriers, cultural hesitation, exploitation and misinformation cannot be ignored, they continue to limit the transformative potential of digitalization. Thus, to counter them it requires inclusive infrastructure, tailored digital literacy programmes, and community ownership of cultural content and most importantly collaboration of government, companies and NGOs for tribal empowerment and reform.

Ultimately, the digital technology should not be viewed as a replacement for tradition system but as a complementary medium which will safeguard the tribal rights and help in amplifying their voices and preserve their rich inheritance and legacies as Birsa Munda once viewed. If approached inclusively then digitalization could assist in truly ensuring social justice, democratic participation and cultural preservation.

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