

# SOCIAL MEDIA AND PROTEST MOBILIZATION: EVIDENCE FROM THE JALLIKATTU MOVEMENT

Dr. Jayaprakash D<sup>1</sup>, Nepul Raj A<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Visual Communication, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies (Deemed to be University), Chennai, India

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Visual Communication, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies (Deemed to be University), Chennai, India

**Abstract:** Advancement in Technological progression has brought rapid changes in the culture of Tamil Nadu. Today social media's advent creates a platform to express freely about any issues happening around us. There is growing concern on how it influences people's life. Even in the remotest areas of the world, people have at least heard or used social media in some way to express their views. During the Jallikattu protest in January 2017, various social media like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp grabbed the attention of people which helped them lead the protest with the huge participation. This research paper aims at understanding the significant impact of social media on the people with respect to raising of protests in Tamil Nadu. The paper especially focuses on Jallikattu protest which had a massive turnout of Tamil Nadu people owing to the social media.

**Key words:** Social Media, Jallikattu Protest, Tamil Nadu People.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Mass Communication through social media has become a youth culture in Tamil Nadu. Today's youth is completely immersed in social media information like videos, pictures, meme and etc. There is growing concern on how it influences youngster's life. Youngsters from the remotest part of the world have at least heard a word about social media and many have used to it. Social Media is being used on a regular basis either to express their views or just to experience the delight of viewing them.

Developments in Information and Technology have made mass communication reach people irrespective of their differences. A recent incident to prove this is the 'Jallikattu Protest' at the Marina beach, Chennai. Many popular newspapers called this Jallikattu protest as social media generated revolution. The social media were used as an effective tool in initiating a sudden revolution by youngsters to save Jallikattu, a sport quite popular in the villages of Tamil Nadu. Many social activists and scholars conclude that if there were no social media, Jallikattu protest wouldn't have become this much popular and successful one.

## II. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

21<sup>st</sup> century is known for protest and movements in all over the world. People are mobilized with liberated ideology that has seeded and sprout by present technology and translated as an expression from every individual without any differences from the virtual to real world. A perspective of this protest canvas as seen through the lens of Baudrillard's ideas of hyper reality offers scope to examine among other things. The Jallikattu protests in Tamil Nadu in 2017, that involved over 1,00,000 people, including several thousand who congregated on the Marina beach, to protest against the ban on the rural sport of Jallikattu or bullfighting. Known in some sections as occupy Marina, protest participants, mostly young digital natives moved between the virtual and the real with equal ease, falling back on the omnipresent medium of Tamil cinema to create and sustain protest memory and propagate protest ideology through easily recognizable images and messages that have and continue to influence politics and power in the state. The imagined community that resided both on- and offline gave the movement the impetus that it needed to garner enough support to turn the news media and conversations (including online) towards itself.

The Hindi Agitation Movement by the Dravidian Party in the 1960s, was against the imposition of Hindi as official language of India, the mass media has influenced and in turn been influenced by ideas and imagery that represent a push-back against neoliberal, cultural and social hegemony. In this present scenario, digital media has bridge a gap of individual minds in understanding the issues which are infesting the society literally and regenerate peoples mind in the passion for protest and has been united to succeed in the Jallikattu protest with inspired actions among people of Tamil Nadu.

This digitally sharing information can initiate, sustain the protest and make it so stronger and longer to succeed, especially the youths with ignite mind could use this digital source to find the solution for their sprits. If there is one thing to be proved in Jallikattu protest at the Marina Beach, it shows the power of social media and the ripples it can create in our daily lives also.

Jallikattu united all youths in to one mind. Search for Tamil identity suddenly upraised among the youngsters in Tamil Nadu. Surprisingly social media filled that gap by sharing information for regenerating the glories of Tamil tradition and values of our culture. Tamil rise with hash tags like "WE DO JALLIKATTU" which was very popular in social media. This hash tags created a momentum for action before Pongal and turned people to protest. Many versions of the hashtag like "I SUPPORT

JALLIKATTU”, “WE DO JALLIKATTU”, AMEND PCA”, JUSTICE FOR JALLIKATTU” started spreading wildly. These hashtags and posts were not just for an expression but to expand and extend support to the cause for Jallikattu. Most of the post not only insisted to lift the ban on Jallikattu but also exposed the foreign interest on wiping out our rural breed cows and bulls for international competition of good milk.

Individuals from all walks of life took part in this protest. The music post from the famous musician Hip Hop Tamizha Adhi and his song TAKKARU TAKKARU become viral. Posts on the protest, resurfaced on everyone’s news feeds with long statuses in the social media about the need to ‘Preserve Our Identity’. And then there was the whooper, the Marina beach protests. After the protestors at Alanganallur were forcibly removed, a few people gathered at Marina to show solidarity. With a solid social media conversation already in place, the initially small protest gathered huge traction on social media, drawing huge numbers to the beach. From then each and every development in this issue was widely shared using all forms of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

From the first day to last day of the protest at Marina, young people in social media shared live posts, pictures and videos. People sleeping at the Marina as a family, the iconic image of youngsters flashing their phone lights to the sky, were constantly shared and made viral thereby making the world to turn and look at the youths of Tamil Nadu. In an uncanny deja-vu moment from the floods, social media pages once again became sources of information for food, blankets and other such amenities. Pages like Chennai Memes, Chennaites, Jallikattuveeravilayatu gathered followers overnight, becoming go-to places for information. The issue has become part of common conversation. Karthikeya Senapathy, PR, Aadi, Balaji, became household names. People were flushed with a new found energy to fight for their identity, to an extent that the identity protest almost overshadowed the economic angle of it.

Many faces took part in the protest. Celebrities tweeted their support and they linked their videos in social media which sprayed the spirit of youths and shared widely in the energetic ways. A video of Tamil actor Vijay, which was posted online during the agitation, attacking PETA was a massive hit on social media. Actor-radio jockey Balaji’s emotional video at the beach became viral in social media next to actor Vijay’s speech. These videos and posts in social media made the people of Tamil Nadu fall under one umbrella. As the glamour is increased, people sensed the real purpose for their fight and took part in this historical gathering without any differences of opinion.

Once the protest came to an unpleasant turn, when mainstream media shielded their faces behind some political forces, all the communication took place through social media only. When the police approached to suppress and control this protest all actors and activists distanced themselves. Balaji, Aadhi, Raghava Lawrence, who stood at first, actively running the protest as a lead for the students and youths where stopped. They expressed their feelings and emotions through their posts, speeches, videos in social media only. The Jallikattu protest by the young people in Tamil Nadu has strongly expressed many things. This is not just a people gathering for a good cause. This movement made an alert note to all political and government bodies on the power of Twitter account and YouTube subscription. That youth can turn Social Media into a powerful weapon and can bring back the hidden things into light.

### III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the present century the globe is shrinking due to science and development. The emerging world is witnessing information revolution. The social media is now blended with every walk of our life. Cell phone is said to be sixth finger of every man. The social media in Tamil Nadu creates many impacts on various dimensions. The impact of social media on availing information, entertainment, business development and public awareness are the matters of great concern. At the same time, these social media should be used for constructive purposes not destructive purposes (Madhavan, Sakthivel and Krishnakumar 2017).

According to Asano (2017) the amount of time people spend on social media is constantly increasing. Teens now spend up to nine hours a day on social platforms, while 30 percent of all time spent online is now allocated to social media interaction. And the majority of that time is on mobile – 60 percent of social media time spent is facilitated by a mobile device.

Thirumoorthi and Kumar (2015) state that the networking sites have made it possible for us to chat with friends who live in distant places as well as share with them pictures and videos of whatever we are up to instantly. Today, it is very hard to find a teenager who doesn’t have a Yahoo, a Gmail, a Facebook, or a Twitter account which help them to keep in touch with their friends, to express or share what they have in mind and to use for school-related purposes. No doubt, these sites are of great help in the youth’s daily life. Also there are many potential benefits in social networking sites.

According to Rashmi and Velayutham (2017) New Media spring has surely made a vast difference in people’s ways of consuming information. It has brought out many innovations to bring equality in the current capitalistic world. Though the digital technologies are being criticized for their big data or other criticisms like virtual virtuousness will not help solving any crisis, in recent times, many youth and students’ protests are actively initiated by the new media. Their present study states that the new media has played a dynamic role in bringing the minority community of the globe, the Tamil Diaspora into limelight during their Jallikattu protest through hash tag activism. An active website for web analysis and statistics states that during the month of January there was around 1.5 percent of the people had used the word Jallikattu in their networking pages. Also the present study has delved into how the cultural identity of the Tamil Diaspora community was seen during the protests through the news articles. Thus it is understood that the new media had actively advocated for the role of educator and defender of human rights and had given a positive representation of the minority.

To throw more light on the usage of social media for activism or movements to create social changes, one can look at the essay Social Media as a Tool for Protest (Pacic and Noonan 2011). “The key to inspire any protest movement is to inspire and

motivate individuals to begin from their comfort zone like homes, to the chaos of the streets and faces off against the government. Social media allows the organizers of the protest to do all the above said in a cost effective manner.

Roberts (2014) states that New Media is a snapshot of modern political and participatory society by the way of political economy- with just a dash of deliberated attempt of democracy thrown in for a goodmeasure. To dig deeper, the word Internet activism itself is found in various names, such as Cyberactivism, Online activism, Digital campaigning, Electronic advocacy, Clicktivism or Hashtag activism. One of the pioneere-campaigns which used hashtag activism as its method to reach out for more people was often associated to 2014 Chibok kidnapping where an Islamic extremists group had kidnapped agroup of school girls in Nigeria. The hash tag used was#bringbackourgirls which received almost 2 million tweets. Vegh (2003) mentions the case of cyber protests against the World Bank, categorizes onlineactivism into different types namely: advocacy/awareness, organization/mobilization and action/reaction.

Karatzogianni (2016) describes how Digital activism is becoming an everyday occurrence where we have even new forms of digital activism emerging. Instead of simply bypassing the political movements, it takes the advantage of new technologies and thus provides an alternative way of organizing the economy. One such example would be livestreaming of videos from wherever and whatever one wants to show the world.

#### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main objectives of this case study with qualitative approach and observation as a tool is to identify and understand the method of people social media activities that helped in organizing the pro-Jallikattu protests that took place in Tamil Nadu in January 2017.

To do this, social media entities created and shared mainly by the people that were active during the Jallikattu protests were identified from mainstream media news reports on the protests. By studying these entities social media activities by the TN people during December 2016 and January 2017, other social media entities were identified.

The period was chosen as the protests were organised, gained strength and finally dispersed during the course of these two months.

A total of five social media entities were thus identified and studied. The entities chosen were popular social media organisations Chennai Memes, Tamizhan Memes, Chennaites, PutChutney and celebrity from film industry like Raghava Lawrence, Hip Hop Tamizha and RJ Balaji and professionals like Karthikeya Sivasenapathy, a managing trustee of Senapathy Kangayam Cattle Research Foundation.

In this analysis the main respondents were social media organization and celebrity's posts in the form of videos, pictures, speech, hashtag and memes in social media like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. These were taken as a primary source to study how people were mobilized by these post to revoke the ban on Jallikattu.

#### V. FINDINGS

The study from the entities shared in social media shows that the message for Jallikattu were disseminated among all people of Tamil Nadu, irrespective of their social positions. People used social media as a vital tool in spreading information and organizing big gatherings.

Major findings of the study are as follows:

- Public got awareness about the protest mostly through social media information.
- Social media was not used just for sharing information. It played a major role in mobilizing people on large scale in Marina beach during the Jallikattu protest.
- Celebrity presence on social media as well as on the ground definitely contribute to making a protest viral thereby making it a larger people movement. Social media helped to connect celebrities and people to work together more extensively than before. Celebrities like R J Balaji, Raghava Lawrence, Silambarasan, Hip Hop Adhi, have been able to pull the crowd utilizing their celebrated status and influenced many youngsters with their speeches and tweets. Their post in social networks has millions of followers.
- The first breakthrough of Jallikattu movements came with the video song "TAKKARU TAKKARU" based on the sport, released by the musician Hip Hop Tamizha in June 2016. Despite the song's far reaching success, no significant reaction was visible. The movement began to pick up pace in the month of December 2016, though the initiator were the public. Actor Silambarasan held a press conference and issued a statement supporting Jallikattu on December 30, 2016, ahead of the curve as far as celebrity involvement goes. Later, the protests saw mega-stars like Kamal Hassan, Rajnikanth and Dhanush utilising social media to be vocal about their thoughts and also celebrated people rooting for a cause. For the most part, their social media posts expressed appreciation for the youngsters behind the Marina movement.
- Social media exposing the success of the Jallikattu movement was in the hands masses gathered in the Marina Beach, especially few celebrity took a main role in it victory. They engaged in day-long protest, even they refused to give a long speech in mainstream media, but when they want to communicate with the young people in Marina they tweet, post their audio bytes and video speeches in Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube and other social media, which were heavily shared by their followers.
- Dance choreographer and actor Raghava Lawrence, with 3 lakh Twitter followers, tweeted a link to his Facebook post on January 17, in which he made an emotional appeal for the government to permit Jallikattu to take place. The tweet garnered 707 retweets, 61 replies and 6,900 likes, numbers that would be impossible to

achieve for most other social media entities. At a time when national TV anchors had difficulty understanding the intricacies of Jallikattu, it was these social media heroes whose voices reached greater audiences.

- Radio presenter Balaji, popularly known as RJ Balaji, with 2.24 million followers on Twitter and 7.5 lakh on Facebook as of Sept. 2017, was active both on social media and on the ground. He used video appeals effectively. Several of his videos, posted on his Twitter and Facebook pages, garnered likes, retweets and shares in the thousands. A video of his speech on Marina beach during the protest, which he shared on Twitter with the comment, “The best day of my life,” garnered 15,000 shares.
- Actor Vijay who is considered as a conservative celebrity, released a video in support of Jallikattu, which won his audience’s attention and brought them on Marina. While celebrities may have been genuinely moved by the cause, it should also be noted that it was a safe cause to get behind, as it supported Tamil culture, and resonated with their target market. Besides, as it was apolitical, the celebrities did not have to be cautious about expressing support.
- Many issues become trending topics each day on social media. The protest was not just dealing about Jallikattu as well as the protests against the Kudankulam nuclear plant and the Oil and Natural Gas pipeline projects (ONGC), and the call for the Centre to intervene to support Tamil Nadu fishermen in their struggle with Sri Lankan authorities over fishing rights in the seas between the two countries. Further, when neighboring state Karnataka did not abide by the Supreme Court order of 2016 to release the waters of River Cauvery to Tamil Nadu, the Centre did not do enough to enforce the ruling. This was compounded by the news of 17 farmer suicides in Tamil Nadu in the two months leading up to the protests. While these different issues failed to reach the national attention, Jallikattu protest become the point at which they converged and exposed.
- The movements were intensively against PETA and central government to cancel the ban on Jallikattu.
- The keywords which were converted into hashtags in order to make it even viral were #saveJallikattu, #justiceforJallikattu, #savetamilpride, #tamizhanda.
- Protesters were mainly youths and they mostly engaged in person in Marina Beach and if they don’t, they were sharing information through online news articles, attaching of several sound notes, videos, photos and memes.
- Social media mainly highlighting from the protest arena, the marching with the placards and performance from the young artists which emphasis the cultural pride of Tamils.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Social media tendency not only makes youth to dwell into technological world but also bring many changes in their perception. They see and create things as they want and share it to the world as they think. Even though the information is short, the depth of content and the level of understating about any issues is almost extraordinary.

A number of factors helped for the success of Jallikattu movements. But the large youth crowd and the social media role is very vital to its victory. Now this movements is called as “MARINA PURATCHI”. This study confirms findings by many researchers showing that, social media and people participation as a stand-alone mechanism might help to achieve the goals of a movement, and it is a vital tool that speeds up organisation and message propagation, making it possible for movements to succeed in a matter of days or even just hours. It is because of incredible role social media only.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Aiyappan, A. 2017. Jallikattu protests: How social media engineered a revolution in Tamil Nadu. Retrieved from <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/230117/jallikattu-protests-how-social-media-engineered-arevolution-in-tamil-nadu.html>
- [2] Asano, Evan. 2017. How much time do people spend on social media? Retrieved on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2017 from <https://www.socialmediatoday.com/marketing/how-much-time-do-people-spend-social-media-infographic>.
- [3] Karatzogianni, A. 2016. Beyond hash tags: how a new wave of digital activists is changing society. The conversation journal, edition: Australia.
- [4] Madhavan, M. 2017. A study on the impact of social media among Tamil Nadu youths. Shanlax International Journal of Economics, Vol.6, No. 01, December 2017.
- [5] Papic, Marko and Sean Noonan, 2011. Social Media as a Tool for Protest. Retrieved on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2018 from <https://sites.google.com/site/protestsandmedia/social-media-as-a-tool-for-protest>.
- [6] Rashmi R, and Velayutham C, 2017. The New Media and Tamil Diaspora Identity: A Case Study of Jallikattu Protests, International Journal of Current Research, Vol. 9, Issue. 09, pp. 57698-57702.
- [7] Roberts, M. J. 2014. New media and public activism: neoliberalism, the state and radical protest in public sphere. Policy press. University of Bristol.
- [8] Ram A. 2017. Behind the bull story: Depoliticisation of campuses. The Times of India. Retrieved on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2018 from <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/behind-the-bull-story-depoliticisation-of-campus/articleshow/56673942.cms>.
- [9] Ramasubramanian R. 2017. Jallikattu protestors battle Tamil Nadu police, but for many, Modi, Centre are main target. Retrieved on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2017 from <https://thewire.in/101989/suppression-of-anti-modi-sentiments-at-marina-beach-undermines-media-credibility/>.

- [10] Thirumoorthi, P and Kumar, Ramesh, C. 2015, "A study on the impact of social sites among the youngsters with special Reference to Vishnu computers in Erode District", International Journal of Applied Research, Vol.1, Issue. 11, pp. 09-12.
- [11] Vegh, Sandor. 2003. Classifying Forms of Online Activism: The Case of Cyberprotests against the World Bank. In M. McCaughey, & M. Ayers (Eds.), Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice, New York: Routledge, pp. 71-95.

