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## Tribal Identity and its Survival in the Digital Era

Social Media and Digital Technologies are being used all over the world extensively including India. Adivasi youth even in the villages have picked up the new technologies very fast due to the affordable android phones that they possess. The people especially the young Adivasi men and women knowingly or unknowingly have been promoting their culture, language literature etc. by uploading videos showcasing Adivasi culture on the digital media. They share pictures and videos on digital platforms such as twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, telegram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Tumblr etc. Today there are numerous such videos on tribal cuisine, dance and song albums, on tribal rituals, celebration of tribal festivals or videos teaching tribal languages.

Cultural identity and knowledge of the tribal community have been included in other social media platforms that show positive potential in the lives of young Adivasis. They share tribal way of life and knowledge ideas virtually that gives a lot of information. They are utilizing digital media and web-based platforms for academic purposes that can be accessed from the computer and mobile technologies. The numerous viewerships of these videos prove that the mainstream viewers are curious and like the information shared. We see the impact of digital technologies on indigenous cultural sustainability. It enables to maintain and revitalize the tribal cultures.

Majority of the people today afford digital technology that can disseminate cultural information and knowledge globally. These knowledge and information dispersed by them spread very easily and quickly around the world.

Digital media had become a significant platform for the Indigenous community to document and protect their cultural identities, one can raise one's voice and 'challenge the hegemonic misrepresentations' (Rodreguez, 2001) locally and globally, easily.

The Adivasi community can assert themselves with the digital platforms by making themselves heard by making their history, culture, customs, traditions and literature visible. Earlier due to lack of Adivasi journalists or the ones who could speak the local language, the plights of this Adivasi community have very little coverage in the media, or the coverage was distorted or the journalists were distorted. With the coming of the digital media, knowledge and information dispersed by the adivasis have spread very easily and quickly around the globe. Therefore, the digital media plays a crucial and a significant role in challenging hegemonic stereotypes.

The education system in India, for example, is based on the privileged culture. History and other textbooks hardly ever mention the contribution of the tribals taking part in revolts, insurrection and freedom struggle. This causes a negative self-image among these Adivasis and a negative attitude to their own culture which, in turn, contributes to their disadvantaged status.

There is the need of the hour to legitimize indigenous discourses and to create awareness about the issues of Adivasis. One of the ways is by educating the mainstream about the history, culture, worldviews and literature of the Adivasis by introducing academic programmes on the digital platforms. Adivasis have a rich culture, varied languages and literature that is worth knowing. It would also remove biases if any.

Academic courses on tribal language, literature and tribal studies are also picking up pace. The two central tribal Universities in Amarkantak and Andhra Pradesh aim to provide avenues of education especially higher

education and research facilities for all students and inclusion of tribal students and bring them to the mainstream.

Ranchi University also has Department of Tribal and Regional Language offering nine tribal languages Nagpuri, Mundari, Kurukh, Kurmali, Santhali, Khortha, Panchpargania and Ho. Central University of Jharkhand also has a Department of Tribal Studies and Department of Contemporary and Tribal Customary Law.

North Eastern Hill University has a Garo Department that broadens the concept of literature beyond the mainstream. The course includes research activities of the written and oral literature, culture, language and dialects of the Garos. The Khasi department is making tremendous efforts to develop and enrich Khasi language and literature.

The other universities offering tribal courses are Nagaland University that has a centre for Naga Tribal language studies and offers PG Diploma, M Phil, PhD programmes. Manipur University also offers MA and PhD programmes in Manipuri Language and Literature. Mizoram University includes Mizo language and literature for the MA and PhD programmes. Sidhu Kanhu Murmu University Dumka has a BA and MA programme in Santhali language and literature. Kolhan University Chaibasa offers Masters of Arts in Ho, Kurmali and Santhali languages. Nilamber-Pitamber University, Palamau also offers a course in Santhali languages.

These academic programmes and courses are localized. Because of which these courses are exclusively accessible to the local students. To make these courses available to a wider population we need to make efforts to switch over to online mode of teaching in order to make it more accessible. And to reach out to many more interested to learn these languages or having interest to gain knowledge about the tribal culture art, literature and worldview. We need to take such urgent action if we want these courses to be inclusive and get recognized by the mainstream.

IGNOU has taken the initiative to produce some tribal academic programmes on the digital platform. Certificate in Tribal Studies (CTRBS) is an online programme launched by IGNOU last year. It is a six-month duration course and can be completed in the maximum period of 2 years. The Certificate in tribal studies aims to provide basic knowledge and information to the learners regarding the Tribes/Tribals in India and to help the learners understand the tribal ways of life in India. The course deals with the evolution of the tribals, Tribal Perspectives, Tribal Discourse, Tribal Policies and legislators and development of tribals. The Courses provides an insight into the tribals of India, about which many mainstream people are still not aware. This course addresses the wider issues of tribal development. The programme aims to support individuals working in the social and welfare service sector for the tribals to be trained and educated to understand their culture and remove biases if any formed during the course of their work.

### **Flexibility of this course**

One can study according to one's own pace and convenience and study at one's own chosen place using of modern and appropriate educational and communication technology. Multi-media programme package is available. Print material is uploaded on the IGNOU Portal egyankosh supported with audio and video programmes.

The University follows a multi-media approach for instruction. It comprises: self-instructional print material available on IGNOU's web portal egyankosh, Audio and video-component, audio-video programmes transmitted through Doordarshan/Gyan Darshan and Radio/IGNOU FM channels, teleconferencing in Gyan Darshan channel and face-to-face counselling at Study Centres by academic counselors.

This online course will be on the SWAYAMPRAKASH portal soon. It will have video lectures for each lesson. The videos will be linked to sites relevant to gain further knowledge and for further studies. Assessments and exams will also be online and certificates would be given after completing the programme.

IGNOU has another course that is part of the M.A. English programme; Writings from the Margins MEG -13 one of the optional courses of the Master's Degree Programme. It is already offered to 10,000 M.A. students on the digital platform. The course familiarizes the students with Tribal literature. It discusses the history, worldview and culture of the tribals. It includes different genres; oral narratives, folktales, folksongs, short stories, fictions, autobiographies, and essays. We have taken texts from Kurukh tribe, Santhali, Lepcha tribe, DE notified tribe of Bengal tribes from Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Kerala.

These texts discuss the significant presence of the forest in the lives of the Adivasis. They deal with issues such as representation, land, environment, gender, social and cultural practices, inter-community relationship. The texts also deal with displacement, alienation exploitation, and resistance movements. The course is unique as many texts that were not available in English have been translated by the tribal experts and then discussed in the course. We have tried to include the texts of the major tribes of India though many have been left out because of the limitations of the size of the course.

For example, we have included the folk tales of Lepchas, the folksongs of the Kurukhs. The short fiction of Temsula Ao from Nagaland and Lummer Dai from Arunachal Pradesh have been included in the course.

The Ancestor's story of Santhalis has also been included. *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C. K. Janu* and *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman* has been included in Autobiography and fiction. This text emphasizes that there is a significant presence of the forest in the lives of the Adivasis. The novel *Kocherethi* deals with issues such as representation, land, environment, gender, social and cultural practices, and inter-community relationship. This course has already gained popularity among our students and academicians.

The poems of Santhali writers Marshal Hembrom and Nirmala Putul have been included. The poem of the Kurukh Tribes composed by them while protesting against the Netarhat field firing project that had become a threat to their displacement and a force of development is discussed in detail.

The play Budhan was written by the Chhara tribe a denotified tribe of India. The Denotified tribes are often tortured and killed in police custody. It is the story of Budhan belonging to the Sabar community of the Purulia District of West Bengal who was falsely accused of murder and given third degree torture in police custody that led to his death.

Sambalpur University HRDC is the nodal centre for tribal studies for the SWAYAM platform. They conducted a course on Tribal Studies as part of the faculty Development Programme for Higher Education Institutions on the Swayam platform. This course is of four months duration. 1570 Learners had enrolled for it. It was total of 40 hours duration where 20 hours is video lecture and 20 hours is allocated for the reading of study material. The course on the digital platforms has more students enrolling because of the flexibility and easy access. The course focuses on diverse aspects of the tribal communities of India. The course focuses on different problems encountered by the tribals such as health, education, land, climate, economic problems, naxalism etc. Different Government policies and programmes for the tribals have been included.

It covers tribal communities, folktales, myths, legends, customs, traditions, rituals, tribal art and aesthetics, life cycle rituals as well customary law.

Vinoba Bhave University Hazaribagh has introduced certificate courses in Kurukh, Santhali, Mundari, Kurmali and Khortha languages for the last 4 years. It is a face-to-face course of six months duration. Very few students are enrolled hence the university is struggling to run the language courses. Reason of its low enrollment is that the course is localized.

Tribal language courses if taught through digital platforms would have more takers from different geographical locations. To protect the tribal languages from the risk from disappearing, they need to be taught through the digital media. As Kancha Illiah (1981) suggests, we need to make every possible effort to empower the languages of the underprivileged and tribal and endangered languages. Affirmative action is called for in this

domain (NCERT 2005). Taking the cue from him we need to think out of the box to preserve and protect Adivasi culture and identity.

Digital media is an easy way to preserve indigenous culture, knowledge, art and literature. In the contemporary era, community generated constricted identities, legitimizing narratives, and building communities both in local and global contexts (Appadurai, 1990; Gusburg, Abu-Lughod & Larkin 2002)

Digital learning frees the learners from the constraints of time and space. Another advantage is that the mobile device and computers have become common household items. With the help of digital media the barriers such as negligence and alienation of the tribals and their issues, geographical isolation, 'communication gaps such as linguistics and literacy barriers' can be overcome.' (Dutta, 2)

## References

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