

Chapter 13

Digital Mainstreaming of Tribals in India: Gap Identification and Suggestive Measures

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ABSTRACT

India has the presence of about 635 tribal groups and sub-groups, including 73 so-called primitive tribes. Together they comprise nearly 8.2 per cent of the country's population. Tribals are often known by national terms such as native people, aboriginals, first nations, adivasi, janajati, hunter-gatherers, etc. Digital inclusion has the potential to uplift their status and bring them into the mainstream society. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) is responsible for planning, making policies, and coordinating program for the development and empowerment of India's Scheduled Tribe communities. Identifying the challenges and mapping out the potentialities are the key drivers for digital empowerment of the tribal communities in India. This paper is an attempt to trace out the issues, understand the potentialities, and provide suggestive measures for inclusion of tribals in the wave of digital revolution.

INTRODUCTION

India has the presence of about 635 tribal groups and sub-groups, including 73 so-called primitive tribes. Together they comprise nearly 8.2 per cent of the country's population. Tribals are often known by national terms such as native people,

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aboriginals, first nations, adivasi, janajati, hunter-gatherers etc. Since early ages, these communities have been dependant on forests for their survival and livelihood. Even though it has been their traditional occupation, in the contemporary times, they are confronted with the challenge of livelihood insecurity, the main cause being massive degradation of their habitat. Climatic changes have further intensified the degradation of the natural resource that had been diligently saved by the local communities. Not only are the natural resources degrading, but even the rich traditional knowledge of managing natural ecosystems is hastily vanishing. Being a colossal loss, relentless and unplanned development has pushed many tribal communities to the peripheries, struggling for survival.

Digital inclusion has the potential to uplift their status and bring them into the mainstream society. Supreme Court Advocate Sanjay Upadhyay pushed for digitally empowering India's tribal population and said advocated for serious brainstorming for inclusion of tribals in the decision-making process. As most of the tribal habitats are located in geographically inaccessible areas with maximum remoteness, reaching them has been a grave challenge. Digital technology is one of the devices through the tribals not only can be reached out but also can get information about the world outside and stay updated. Such technology can actually make a difference. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) is responsible for planning, policy and coordination of program for the development and empowerment of India's Scheduled Tribe communities. It has designed an interactive, dynamic, and comprehensive online Performance Dashboard that provides updated and real-time data and status of 16 different tribal development initiatives from 31 Indian States and Union Territories and the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) data from 38 ministries. This was achieved by revamping existing portals and the development of new scheme-specific portals with the objective that the data generated is useful, not only in the course of their program implementation, but also in the data exchange across ministries. MoTA was an early adopter among ministries in the move to realize Digital India goals as it moved toward a data-driven governance model to achieve digital inclusion, financial inclusion, productivity improvement, and social impact.

Digital Technology: The Connotation

Digital technologies are electronic tools, systems, devices and resources that generate, store or process data. Well known examples include social media, online games, multimedia and mobile phones. Digital learning is any type of learning that uses technology. Digital technology means that devices can be more compact, faster, lighter, and more versatile. Huge amounts of knowledge can be stored locally or remotely and moved around virtually immediately. The distinction between analog and digital technology is that in analog tech, data is transformed into various amplitude

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