

# Chapter 6

## Digital Economies and Marginalized Communities in North–East India: Labor, Identity, and Resistance in the Digital Age

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter examines how digital economies are transforming the lives of marginalized communities in North-East India, a region characterized by socio-cultural diversity and economic vulnerability. It will focus on how digital platforms like gig work applications, e-commerce, and digital micro-entrepreneurship integrate with or disrupt traditional labor practices, such as artisanal crafts and subsistence economies. The study will highlight ongoing socio-economic challenges, including algorithmic biases, digital illiteracy, and labor commodification, which exacerbate existing inequalities. Simultaneously, it will explore how marginalized groups actively adapt to these challenges by leveraging digital tools to preserve cultural identity and create alternative economies. Through ethnographic fieldwork and case studies in Assam, Manipur, and Meghalaya, the chapter will provide insights into the complex interplay between digital inclusion, cultural resilience, and systemic exclusion.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background and Context**

#### **1.1.1 The Rise of Digital Economies Globally and in India**

Over the past two decades, digital economies have emerged as a transformative force globally, reshaping traditional industries, labor systems, and governance structures. Digital platforms, ranging from e-commerce and fintech to gig work applications, have created new economic opportunities while also deepening existing structural inequalities (Montgomery & Baglioni, 2021; Nathan, Kelkar, & Mehta, 2022). In India, the government's ambitious "Digital India" initiative has driven rapid technological expansion, aiming to connect remote regions, promote digital financial inclusion, and create employment through digital infrastructure. However, this national push often overlooks regional disparities, especially in areas like the North-East, where infrastructural limitations, ethnic diversity, and historic marginalization challenge the seamless implementation of digital

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