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Preserving the Past, Embracing the Future: The Role of Digital Storytelling in Preserving the Oral Traditions of Tribals' in the AI Era

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Abstract

The main aim of this article is to explores the intersection of digital storytelling, tribal literature in English, and artificial intelligence (AI), highlighting the potential of technology to preserve and promote indigenous oral traditions. By leveraging digital platforms and AI powered tools, indigenous communities can share their stories, myths, and legends with a global audience while maintaining cultural authenticity and ownership. Tribal literature refers to the literary works created by indigenous peoples, often reflecting their unique cultural, social, and historical experiences. These works can include oral traditions, stories, myths, and legends passed down from one generation to other through oral storytelling, poetry, novels short stories that explore indigenous themes and experiences and also works that document indigenous histories, cultures, and experiences. The language and literature of tribals' in the AI era is at stake and undergoing huge change due to advancement of technology and AI and also treated as insignificant due to the dominance of AI and other digital platforms. The preservation of their oral traditions in AI era is the need of the hour by using the digital platforms so their oral traditions can be more accessible to majority of the people and for the extensive research of the scholars and academicians.

Keywords: Tribal literature-artificial intelligence-preservation-oral traditions-stories, myths legends-change

Introduction

India's tribal population is a distinct and essential component of the country's social fabric, deeply ingrained in its cultural and geographical history. The distribution and demography of tribal groups, which span varied terrain from the tall mountains of the Himalayas to the deep woods of central India, provide an intriguing peek into the nations' ethnic and cultural variety. This article investigates the geographical distribution of India's tribal communities, digging into the locations where they are most concentrated, and how their environs, which range from high-altitude hills to isolated forests, influence their way of

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life in the changing scenario and in the digital platform of AI. Change is a crucial component in any field of study as it is inevitable. When change is inevitable, every field of study has to embrace change and accordingly make changes to fit into the situation or else the situation would remain stable and in due course of time it lose its glory and identity. Same is the case with tribal language and literature. Majority of the tribal languages in India have no script due to the backwardness and literacy. Recently, the Union government launched the beta version of Aadi Vaani, India's First AI-powered Translator for Adivasi languages, to strengthen communication and capacity-building in tribal districts. The purpose of this app is tot ranslate speech and text between Hindi, English, and six Adivasi languages namely Bhili, Mundari, Gondi, Santali, Kui, and Garo. AI Model and target use is based on NLLB (No Language Left Behind) and IndicTrans2, adapted for low-resource languages. It is tested through Adi Karmayogi**,** a nationwide capacity-building initiative in tribal districts covering 1 lakh villages and 20 lakh volunteers. This innovation helps to provide the people to explore and preserve the language and culture.

There are many tribal languages in India are on the verge of extinction, including 'Madhika' in Kerala, which has only two fluent speakers, the 'Korwa' dialect in Jharkhand, the Toto language in West Bengal, which is spoken by approximately 1,600 people, Great Andamanese languages in the Andaman Islands, and the 'Asur' language, which has been identified as 'definitely endangered' by UNESCO. Other endangered or fragile tribal languages in India include Khelma and Yimchunger in the Northeast, despite attempts to preserve them. Wadari, Kolhati, Golla, and Gisari are spoken by nomadic tribes in Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Telangana. Tribal languages include Pauri, Korku, Haldi, and Mavchi. Toda is located in Tamil Nadu. Koro is an Arunachal Pradesh-based Tibeto-Burman language. Ruga is an extinct species from Meghalaya. Kharia Thar, a Kharia dialect in Odisha, is nearly extinct. Malto, a Kurukh dialect from Jharkhand, is considered virtually extinct. Several tribal languages of Tamil Nadu's Nilgiris district, including Thoda, Koda, Kuruba, and Koraga, are also under threat.

India is a country with a wide range of customs, ethnicities, civilizations, religions, and castes. The most ethnic group in Indian civilization is comprised of all racial tribes. Even in epic books like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, we may discover tribal clans who aided the heroes in the forest and mountains. According to the 2011 census, tribal people account for 8.6% of India's overall population. Approximately 550 tribes live in various sections of the nation. Most of them reside on mountain slopes or in forests. However, with the progress of knowledge and technology, these individuals are today regarded primitive and obnoxious. Meanwhile, as society evolves, people are susceptible to a variety of challenges and exploitations. Modernization of tribal culture is a current trend, and many people have embraced it. Modernity is a concept based on societal developments such as industrialization, globalization, and consumerisation. Modernity brings about changes that we can see everywhere, and it is an indefinable process. Modernity is generated by

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progressive changes in society in certain areas, while it destroys society in others. It is quite prevalent in India to remove indigenous communities' traditions. For example, modernism has drastically altered the existence of the Paniya Community in Wayanad. Many of their rituals and practices are being altered.

Objectives:

1. Documenting and preserving: To collect, record, and preserve tribal oral traditions, stories, and legends in a digital format.
2. Promoting cultural heritage: To raise awareness about the importance of tribal oral traditions and their cultural significance.
3. Empowering communities: To involve tribal communities in the digital storytelling process, ensuring their voices and stories are represented accurately.

Literature review

According to Shelby-Caffey et al. (2014), digital storytelling in indigenous contexts is defined as the practice of fusing digital materials (such as photographs and audiovisuals) with indigenous narratives. Indigenous ontology's and epistemologies developed (or co created) by (and with) for indigenous populations are reflected in such storytelling (Ryan 2016). In addition to preserving communal values and praxis, this narrative-sharing process legitimizes indigenous worldviews and viewpoints while expressing indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing (Leclir and Warren 2007). Researchers also believe that storytelling helps develop community cohesion, establish collaborative and dialogic spaces, and increase local capacity (Duxbury et al. 2011). As the local/indigenous people own and control the process of storytelling through self-representation, they fundamentally challenge the taken for granted presuppositions and stereotyped misrepresentations in discursive spaces (Iseke and Moore 2011).

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Marginalized populations are frequently viewed as 'objects' or as merely receivers in mainstream research interventions, rendering their voices and presence in decision-making inconspicuous (Schwab-Cartas and Mitchell 2014). Community-based techniques, on the other hand, support organic, participatory, bottom-up research. Scholars advocate for community-academe collaboration in this regard, whereby academics address the obstacles to culturally meaningful knowledge outputs and representations and reflexively comprehend socio-cultural and contextual dynamics (Battiste 2017). Guided by active engagements of indigenous people, such research approaches, on one hand, foster local knowledge, embrace local contributors and their ideas to open up inclusive cultural and creative opportunities for local communities. On the other hand, active inputs and ownership of indigenous communities make the outcomes (e.g., contents, and processes) customized, culturally meaningful and oftentimes counter-hegemonic (Duxbury et al. 2011).

A few tribal languages in India on the verge of extinction or already extinct

Majhi: Primarily spoken in Sikkim, it is considered one of the most threatened languages, with only four speakers identified from the same family.

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Mahali: Spoken in Eastern India, this language is also at risk of extinction. Koro: Found in Arunachal Pradesh, Koro is facing a similar fate.

Sidi: This language in Gujarat is also facing extinction.

Dimasa: Spoken in Assam, Dimasa is another language facing extinction.

Birhor: UNESCO has categorized Birhor as "Critically Endangered", with only 2,000 speakers remaining.

Korwa: This language, spoken by the Korwa tribe, is also classified as endangered by UNESCO.

Asur: Another endangered language on the UNESCO list, with only 7,000-8,000 speakers remaining, concentrated among the PVTGs in Jharkhand.

Tarao: Spoken by only about 850 people in Manipur.

Reasons for language endangerment

Several factors contribute to the decline of these tribal languages

Dominance of Majority Languages: Many tribal communities face pressure to adopt dominant languages like Hindi, English, or regional languages for better social and economic opportunities, leading to the gradual abandonment of their native languages.Lack of Institutional Support: Insufficient support from educational systems, media, and technology further marginalizes tribal languages, limiting their use in contemporary contexts.

Migration and Urbanization: As tribal communities migrate to urban areas for work, they often adopt the dominant language of the city, leading to a decline in their native language transmission to younger generations. Cultural Assimilation: The pressure to integrate into the mainstream society can lead to tribal communities abandoning their traditional languages and cultural practices.

The extinction of tribal languages represents a significant loss of cultural identity, traditional knowledge, and ecological wisdom unique to these communities. Efforts are needed to document, revitalize, and promote these endangered languages to safeguard the rich linguistic and cultural diversity of India.

What is digital storytelling?

Digital storytelling is a practice of using digital tools to share stories, offers a powerful approach to preserving and revitalizing endangered tribal languages in India. It combines elements like visuals (images, videos), audio (narration, music), text, and interactive features to create engaging narratives.

Documentation and archiving: Digital storytelling can be used to capture and preserve the oral traditions, folklore, and cultural practices associated with these languages. This creates a valuable digital archive that ensures their continuity for future generations. Engagement and learning: Digital stories, especially those that are interactive and visually rich, can make language learning more engaging and appealing to younger generations. This is particularly crucial as many tribal communities face a generational disconnect, with older

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speakers struggling with digital tools and younger generations leaning towards dominant languages.

Empowerment and representation: Digital storytelling allows indigenous communities to control how their narratives are told and disseminated, countering misrepresentation and giving voice to marginalized groups.

Accessibility and reach: Digital platforms and tools can help overcome geographical and accessibility barriers, allowing a wider audience to engage with tribal languages and cultures. Digital archives, like the National Digital Tribal Language Archive, are being developed to document and preserve tribal languages.In Nagaland, apps and digital books are being used to teach the Konyak dialect, according to Greater Kashmir.

Pratham Books' Story Weaver platform offers storybooks in various Indian languages, including some tribal languages, to promote reading in the mother tongue.

Oral Traditions of Tribals' in the AI Era

The oral traditions of tribals in the AI era are a vibrant testament to the resilience of indigenous cultures. These traditions, passed down through generations, encompass myths, legends, songs, and stories that encode community values, histories, and environmental knowledge. As anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss noted, oral traditions are a 'science of the concrete,' offering insights into tribal worldviews and ecological wisdom (Lévi-Strauss, 1962). Tribals use storytelling to preserve identity, teach life lessons, and foster community bonding. Oral narratives often revolve around nature, spirituality, and ancestral ties, reflecting a deep connection with the land. For instance, the Gond's of central India share tales of their goddess, Gondi Devi, emphasizing harmony with nature (Elwin, 1947). The AI era presents both challenges and opportunities for these traditions. On one hand, digital platforms can amplify tribal voices, helping preserve languages and stories that risk being lost. Initiatives like the 'Living Archive of Indigenous Voices' showcase oral traditions globally, promoting cultural pride and awareness.

However, there's a risk of cultural dilution or appropriation. Tribal narratives might be misinterpreted or commercialized without proper context or consent. As writer Arundhati Roy warns, "The digital world can be a double-edged sword for indigenous cultures" (Roy, 2020). To bridge the gap, tech-savvy tribal youth are leveraging AI tools like podcasts, apps, and social media to revive interest in their heritage. For example, the 'Santhali Language Movement' uses digital platforms to promote the Santhali language and culture (Soren, 2022). Ultimately, blending oral traditions with AI can ensure their survival and relevance. By respecting tribal narratives' authenticity and empowering communities, technology can help preserve cultural diversity

Challenges and concerns

Digital Divide: Many tribal and rural regions lack access to internet and digital devices, hindering the reach of these initiatives.

Cultural Appropriation: Careful management is needed to prevent the misuse or misrepresentation of cultural narratives through digital platforms.

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Technical Proficiency: Training and support are needed for community members and educators to effectively utilize digital tools for language preservation. By leveraging the power of digital storytelling, coupled with supportive policies and community involvement, India can work towards safeguarding its rich linguistic diversity and ensuring that endangered tribal languages continue to thrive for generations to come.

Preserving the Past, Embracing the Future

Indigenous tribal people groups who have spread across the globe have a great deal of wisdom to share. Their ties with nature, cultural manifestations like songs and epics, and even survival strategies are intricately linked to this knowledge. The roots are found and acquired in the direction by embracing the legacy of tribals' and indigenous. 'Daya' (sympathy) is a key component of this tradition, signifying pride and knowledge. Man imagines and remains important events through nature, and these are subsequently preserved through a variety of cultural mediums, including songs, music, rituals, chants, and epics. Preserving tribal oral traditions and culture is crucial for maintaining cultural heritage and identity. Digital storytelling can help archive and disseminate stories, but it's essential to prioritize community-led initiatives, cultural sensitivity, and authenticity. This approach ensures cultural continuity, community engagement, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. By leveraging technology, communities can safeguard their cultural heritage and promote cultural identity. Effective preservation requires collaborative design, capacity building, and addressing the digital divide. Ultimately, preserving tribal oral traditions and culture is vital for promoting cultural diversity and understanding. It's about preserving the past and embracing the future.

Conclusion

Indigenous folktales and legends must be preserved and shared, and this requires the integration of cultural capital, digitization, and sustainable education. According to this study, digital platforms have a great deal of potential for cultural preservation, but they also need to be handled carefully to avoid cultural appropriation and misrepresentation. In order to ensure that digital narratives remain relevant and to promote a sustainable and culturally sensitive instructional framework, the educational sector plays a crucial role in integrating them into curriculum. The study highlights the revolutionary influence that digital tools can have on conserving cultural legacy for future generations by utilizing both the Diffusion of Innovations Theory and Cultural Capital Theory. Digital storytelling offers a powerful tool for preserving tribal oral traditions in the AI era. By leveraging technology, communities can safeguard their cultural heritage, promote intergenerational knowledge transfer, and foster cultural continuity. However, it is crucial to prioritize community-led initiatives, cultural sensitivity, and authenticity in digital preservation efforts. As AI technologies continue to evolve, it is essential to ensure that they serve to augment, rather than undermine, the cultural significance and ownership of tribal oral traditions.

Preserving tribal oral traditions requires a thoughtful blend of tradition and technology. Digital storytelling can bridge the gap between past and future by documenting

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narratives, empowering community-led initiatives, sharing stories on accessible platforms, preserving endangered languages, and encouraging intergenerational engagement. By leveraging AI-powered tools, we can record and archive stories, songs, and legends in digital formats, ensuring preservation for future generations. Community-led initiatives can maintain cultural context and authenticity, while accessible platforms promote cultural exchange and awareness. Additionally, digital tools can revitalize endangered tribal languages and encourage youth to learn and share oral traditions. By embracing digital storytelling, we can preserve the richness of tribal heritage while fostering cultural pride and community engagement, ultimately ensuring the continuation of these valuable traditions in the AI era, promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation

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