



# BRIDGING DIGITAL DIVIDE GAP AMONG TRIBAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH DIGITAL INCLUSION

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## Abstract:

Tribal communities are categorically distinct due to their cultures, way of life, and activities that set them apart from the rest of society. Due to a number of reasons, including the quality of their education, economy, and health—all of which are crucial for their growth and are interconnected in many ways—the tribes have been denying opportunity in India. However, they are somehow unable to compete with the current conditions because of the occupation's transition from tradition to modernity and global developments. Thus, the use of ICT, particularly mobile phone usage by tribal youth, integrates all the aforementioned developmental indicators and improves their quality of life. While Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India frequently suffer hurdles to practically all of the resources needed for socioeconomic development, such as: ICTs, healthcare, and education. The digital divide which describes the gap between accessed people to ICT usage and who do not have accessibility is a product of such inequalities. As a result, social, financial, and political instability exist in societies with high levels of digital divide. Therefore, the current study aims to discuss the impact, progress, to reveal the problems and some remedial measures of digital technology on tribal societies as well as to examine how digital inclusion is being able to bridge the digital inequality gap between the tribes and non-tribes. So digital inclusion is very crucial and which is much more than universal access to the internet or the use of digital technology.

**Keywords:** Tribal communities, Digital Divide, Digital Inclusion.

## Introduction:

The majority of India's native tribal people live in the country's Centre region and some regions of the northeast. The tribal community in India made up 8.6% of the overall population in 2011, according to the census. Nevertheless, after Africa, India is one of the most heavily tribal populated nations in the world. Primitive (vulnerable) tribal groupings (PTGs) and scheduled tribes are the two main categories for tribes (STs). In India, there are over 705 different tribal communities. They vary from one another in terms of language, linguistic characteristics, and ecological environments. They are widespread over the entire nation in states like West Bengal, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Gujarat,

Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. Tribal society distinguished categorically because of their culture, life styles, and occupations for which they alienated from the mainstream. The tribes in India have deprived of opportunities because of many significant factors such as education, economic conditions and health status for their development and all these are interconnected. It acknowledged that education is a crucial tool for achievement of political consciousness, societal awareness of rights and obligations, and developmental goals. Typically, the tribes economic conditions centered on the sea and woodlands. However, they are unable to compete with the current scenario because of the shift in occupation from tradition to modernity and worldwide changes, which give rise to the tribal communities. However, Odisha has taken into account by the researcher among several states because distinct tribal communities have focused in terms of their education, economy, culture, tradition, digital inclusivity, etc. by eradicating digital inequalities among themselves. Today, the use of ICTs, particularly cell phone usage by tribal youth, integrates all of the foregoing developmental indicators and improves their quality of life. Therefore, digital inclusion not only plays a crucial role in improving tribal people on various fronts, such as educationally, economically, socially, culturally, and politically, but it also significantly contributes to expanding their digital literacy and skills, enabling them to become technically advanced and closing the digital divide with nontribal people.

However, many researchers have conducted their studies related to their paper and they found out that in the digital age, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have made a significant impact in all the sections of population. Hence, it has benefited all the subgroups to a remarkable extent. [Arivanandan(2022)]. One of the major challenges in the socio-economic development of the tribes those who excluded from mainstream society. Because of this exclusion lot of tribes, as well as their unique cultures are vanishing. However, digital technology plays a vital role not only in the socio-economic development of tribes but along with that it helps in preserving their unique and rich culture, such as digitally recording their songs, dances, dialects, their folk cultures, documenting and promoting their medicines or medicinal plants, farming, architecture, etc. Some other investigators also found that, the digital divide has to be bridged for the world to get progressed. In a mainstream society or urban areas, we cannot see the gap. The real disparities are opaque in the remote areas and the areas where uneducated an illiterate people are more.[Siefer(2016),Kumar(2018),Debnath & Biswas(2021), Kasi & Saha (2021),Escolar & Canet(2022), Malik & Sarma (2022) Nayak & Alam(2022),Ramya(2022)].

Thus, the article attempts critically evaluate the tribal communities' current circumstances in Odisha, their development in relation to digital technologies, the government's initiatives for them, and the role of local organizations in aiding them in relation to their advancement in the digital age based on the above-related studies. However, it is important to comprehend and identify the phenomena of vulnerable individuals, as well as how digital inclusion may be a benefit for assisting vulnerable people in bridging social disparities. As a result, the contemporary viewpoints on tribal development emphasize empowerment as a crucial tactic for achieving inclusive and comprehensive development.

### **VULNERABLE TRIBAL COMMUNITIES OF ODISHA:**

Odisha is renowned around the world for its rich tribal culture. There are 62 designated tribal communities that dwell there, including the Kondh, Saura, Bonda, Santhal, Gond, Bhumia, Oraon, Koya, Paraja, Omatya, Durua, Gadava, Mirdhas, Kolha, Sabar, Munda, Kissan, Binjhals, etc. The ethnic identity, way of life, culture, and religion of each tribe are distinctive. It is also well known that 13 tribal tribes in Odisha, including the Birhor, Bondo, Chuktia Bhunjia, Didayi, Juang, Kharia, Dongria Khond, Kutia Khond, Lanjia Saora, Lodha, Mankidia, Paudi Bhuyan, Saura, etc., are among the most vulnerable tribal groups. The tribal communities are in various levels of development, with the most vulnerable tribal tribes being the most archaic, impoverished, and backward. The state and the country are very concerned about tribal development since it presents many difficulties. Some human communities, meanwhile, they are categorized as tribal societies all throughout the world based on a few key features. Following independence, a number of constitutional clauses and institutional frameworks created for tribal

development. Numerous plans for tribal development have been developed and put into action, focusing on the social, educational, economic, political, and cultural development from a holistic perspective. Numerous tactics and approaches have tested throughout the years, along with a variety of methods and models that have replicated over time. Thus, the journey so far has yielded successes and failures, inspirations and frustrations, insights and foresights enabling us to understand the paradigms and look ahead for pragmatic programmes to ensure all-around tribal development. The process of tribal development began with a welfare perspective, progressed through solutions based on rights and resources, and is currently leading to empowerment and sustainability. Additionally, Odisha is a forward-thinking state in terms of tribal development quite apart from the vast cultural diversity of its ethnic groups. The state has created and incorporated model projects that offer unique perspectives for tribal development while executing pertinent schemes and programmes from the central and state governments. However, the state has taken the initiative to achieve significant milestones of transformative sustainable tribal development.

### **TRIBAL COMMUNITIES AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY:**

When the appropriate legal provisions governing each tribe delivered to them via smart phones, laptops, and the internet, this is when tribes actually digitally empowered. The fundamental issue is not digital information, but rather digital empowerment—how we currently employ technology to give these populations the right knowledge and resources in an easily understandable style. More focus placed on doing so, as well as integrating the current structure and putting the legislation into action. It has been difficult to approach the tribes because of their isolated locations. We can communicate with them using a variety of tools, including digital technology.

Today, it is necessary to develop networked technology and digital media in accordance with these indigenous cultures' practices and customs. In order to do this, it may be necessary to create digital tools that can aid in exploring how technology is growing in accordance with the objectives and modes of thought of indigenous people. It involves adapting indigenous traditions for use in cutting-edge technology and modern forms of expression in culture, as well as using indigenous traditions' guiding principles to create new technologies. In order to preserve and advance tribal cultures and traditions, digital technology may prove to be the most effective tool.

The ability to fully utilize digital technologies and have accessed to the internet are still very exceptional. As a result, many people continue to exclude from internet involvement. Inequality's primary factor nowadays is digital exclusion, which closely related to other deprived areas. In the current context, Odisha still has a significant level of such digital deprivation.

### **WHAT IS DIGITAL DIVIDE?**

Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India face challenges to almost all of the resources needed for socioeconomic development, such as information and communication technologies, healthcare, and education. Due to this disadvantage, there is a digital divide in the country between the population of STs and Non-STs.

The real apartheid in today's society does not exist between racial or ethnic groups, though. The division that exists, however, is between those who have access to and use new information and communication technology modes and forms and those who do not. The term "digital divide" refers to the gap between those who have access to easily available technology and those who do not. The digital divide is primarily apparent between those who live in rural and urban areas, are educated and uneducated, are literate and illiterate, are digitally proficient and those who are not, etc. As a result, a high digital divide society also has social, financial, political, and cultural instability. In order to ensure that everyone has to access digital technologies and the digital divide has to close.

There are certain factors that cause into digital divide or digital exclusion among tribal population. Such as:

- Gender gap
- Geographical location- physical location is a barrier that exacerbates digital exclusion, e.g. living in both tribal and rural areas, living in developing and poor communities, lack of universal access and skills of internet users, etc.
- Poverty and education- due to low income or limited economic resources, people who are disadvantaged in areas of economic, social, and personal wellbeing are being least engaged with ICTs.
- Age
- Cultural inertia
- Lack of knowledge regarding the use of smart phones, computers and internet
- Unavailability of internet network at remote areas
- Health, nutrition and lack of health care services
- Lack of knowledge regarding awareness programme in tribal remote areas, etc

### **TRIBAL COMMUNITIES AND DIGITAL INCLUSION:**

Native tribal who are at risk for various conditions such as physical, mental, emotional, or social have considered as vulnerable. There are still numerous parts of the population today considered as vulnerable. People deal with a wide range of challenges on a daily basis, such as social justice, social marginalization, and lack of impartiality, which brought on by a variety of factors, such as culture, class, ethnicity, race, ideology, religion, gender, etc. In this situation, digital inclusion is a benefit for disadvantaged tribal communities in eradicating disparities. The term "digital divide" refers to the disparity between those who have access to various information and communication technologies and those who do not. Digital inclusion, however, encompasses much more than just having access to the internet or using digital technologies for everyone.

"Equitable, meaningful, and safe access to use, leads, and design of digital technology, services, and associated possibilities for everyone, everywhere" is the notion of digital inclusion".

The term entails having proper support and the right digital skills to achieve personal and professional success as well as the availability of training for the digital literacy skills required for effective use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Digital inclusion contains the following 5Cs- Connectivity, Capability, Content, Confidence and Continuity [ Bradbrook & Fisher (2004)].

Internet usage and digital inclusion can ensure better accessibility to government initiatives; digital market linkages can enable tribal communities to exhibit their craft and agricultural products to the world. In addition, access to the internet can help in basic features like- telemedicine, e-learning process etc. by telecommunication technologies. Thus, internet access can also help tribal people in their financial inclusion.

### **ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY TO CREATE DIGITAL INCLUSION AMONG TRIBAL:**

The speed and quality of the internet must also be sufficient in order for internet use or technical efficiency to benefit its users. Users must be able to use pertinent digital services, such as those used for online banking, e-commerce, studying, and employment, in a responsible manner. In spite of being these, it is crucial and more effective. We should first determine the problems and concerns of those who face most risk. Then we have to choose the technological innovations that help them to overcome these challenges and develop the digital competencies and necessary skills to use the technology that opposed to developing a technology and then looking for a situation in which can be applied. To enable tribal people to become fully engaged citizens online, it is necessary to nurture the fundamental digital skills and abilities.

Therefore, the following actions likely need to perform for the improvement of the living conditions of indigenous people in Odisha:

- To propagate the idea of digitization among tribal children through computer education in schools
- To make people educated rather than literate
- To arrange frequent awareness programmes in tribal remote locations
- To cover all distant areas with mobile towers
- To eliminate superstition and unscientific practices among tribal people, rigorous policies must be implemented
- To develop digital literacy and skills among tribal students, tribal digital literacy programmes must be introduced and promoted

## CONCLUSION:

From the above discussions, it concludes that, India is the abode of a sizeable proportion of indigenous people, who still live away untouched by the shadows of modern society, and out of which Odisha is one of the progressive states in tribal development. In the present scenario, digital technology became a greatest tool for making digitally and technically advanced and competent the tribal people of Odisha by which they may become independent, informative, communicative and sociable in every aspect of life. In addition, this digital technology leads to digital inclusion, which represents an asset to help vulnerable tribal communities to bridge various inequalities related to their culture, education, society, economy, etc. Because on the other hand, such inequalities among tribal is being able to create digital divide gap due to their mindset, lack of education, lack of proper use and accessibility of ICTs, and also due to their prejudices and superstitions. Hence, for eradicating such gap, awareness among tribal, collaboration between tribal and nontribal, accessibility of ICTs, promotion of their culture through the help of digital technology, etc. are essential.

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