

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE AND HOW?

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Abstract:

The paper casts a glance into the time future, questioning the ICT- readiness, and asking what might be the fields of inquiry that could build the capacity of the selected indigenous communities in the state of Odisha. What issues the indigenous communities are facing today and why? We discuss every now and then. Where do we go from here and how? 'When' is a big factor? Who are the change makers of today and tomorrow? Obviously, 'You' and 'I' influencing the answers to all these questions will most assuredly involve change. The aim is to ensure that indigenous peoples' voices are in front-and-centre in the ongoing national dialogues, and to design a model for the peoples 'pro-indigenous', with the peoples 'para-indigenous' and by the peoples 'per-indigenous' (Borrero, 2013) for digital inclusion which could be a sound foundation for the way forward and innovation. Adaptation of a technology that can be functional and meaningful to the communities is the need of the time while at the same time not missing out what's on the real. Communities have not had the infrastructure or resources to access internet and technology which complements the traditional way of knowing. The paper will address issues, concerns, and initiatives specific to digital inclusion for sustaining and advancing indigenous work of art. The endeavour is to present a participatory design to engage the people in developing action plans that will help ensure productive and unified approaches to building support for indigenous work of art, identifying viable and needed initiatives, and developing methodologies for advancing through ICT.

Key Words: *ICT, indigenous, capacity, initiative, digital, inclusion*

1. INTRODUCTION

Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards – Soren Kierkegaard

This beautiful line reminds of Steve Jobs' remarks, you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards (2005). We also recollect the significant line, time past and time present are both present in time future (Eliot, 1943) which inspires us to look to the future. Let's see with this inspiration where do we go from here and how.

The paper embraces the concept of inclusiveness and tries to reach out to many ‘indigenous voices’, especially the voices of Potters & Saura Painters of Koraput and Gajapati districts of Odisha to understand and address current issues and challenges. The paper will evolve in three phases, and eventually develop a conceptual framework for digital inclusion.

- Listening to the narrativising voices of potters and artists
- Understanding their real needs and challenges
- Designing digital inclusion framework for the indigenous communities

These are the questions that really matter and are at the heart of discussion in the paper:

Have we ever tried to understand the real need or interest of the peoples?

What are the meaningful impacts of digitization that matter the most to indigenous communities?

Do they have proper physical environments that will foster digital learning?

Why the digital inclusion efforts have not been very successful?

How can we support a community?

2. INDIGENEITY IS CONNECTING WITH THE ROOTS

Koraput and Gajapati districts are rich with cultural assemblage. The terracotta designs narrativise indigeneity - indigenous and identity. The depiction here is not only a source of life, but a way of life. Through centuries, the people have preserved the rich cultural heritage of the land and retained their identity. Here, one can see the merging of human dimensions to yield the finest effect of a potter’s life. The skilled art of surface orientation, gives their vessels, objects and figures – horses, elephants, fishes, flower vases, human faces and innumerable other pieces. They make earthen pots to be used in various religious and festive occasions. Horses and elephants in terracotta are made during religious occasions to be offered to village Goddess (Gram-Devati) to ward off all evils and diseases. The terracotta designs in Figure 1, 2, and 3 have an underlying symbolism and beauty inspired by the values of locale culture and tradition.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

(Source: Parab, Koraput 2019)

Saura tribal paintings also called 'idital' in their local language are mostly found on exterior walls. These paintings reflect their life style. The ikons are worshipped during religious ceremonies and cultural occasions such child-birth, harvest, marriage and construction of a house. People, trees, horses, elephants, the sun and the moon, dance are recurring motifs in wall mural paintings. The paintings are dedicated to Idital, the deity of Sauras. The human faces drawn without facial features are unique and symbolic. The characters tell their stories. These paintings have gained increased popularity in recent times. Idital Saura paintings today are used to decorate stolls, t-shirts, kurtas and kurtis, handkerchiefs, greeting cards.

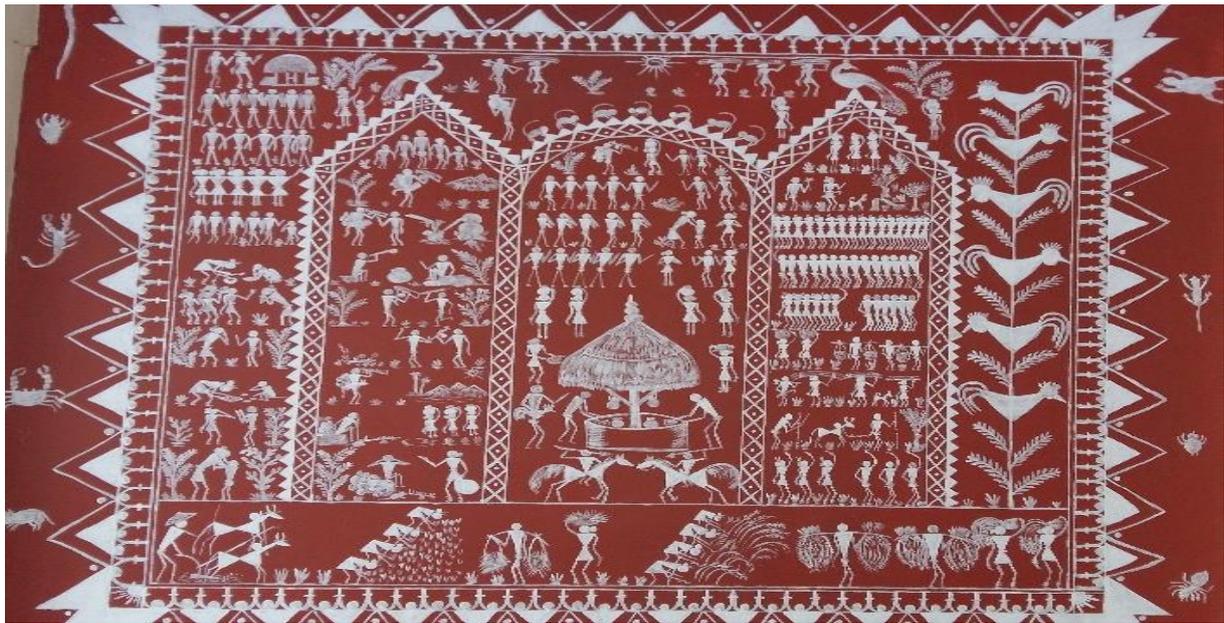


Figure 4: Saura Painting by Srini, Santu

Art is one of the best methods of storytelling and a way of sharing and preserving our history. To preserve this art, the paper goes into archiving the narrativising voice. Let's hear the voice of Gomango, a Saura painter who narrates the above painting: There lived a family with six sons. Five of the sons were normal and grew as usual. But, the sixth one, named Zemra was very sick. People including of his own disliked him, derided him and scorned him at the very sight of him. He was almost excommunicated. The villagers wanted to kill him. But, Zemra's eldest sister-in-law was very affectionate towards him. When it became too difficult he decided to leave home and hearth for good. He requested his eldest sister-in-law to provide a thrasher ('Dhinki' in local language) and a handful seed from his home and left with them. Workless and aimless he sat forlorn in a desolate place. By happenstance, there appeared a girl and asked why he was crying. After hearing his owe, she asked him to go to her home and stay with them since she had no brother. Zemra followed her to her home. Everybody was loving and affable here in this alien place. The reason was a miracle. He became handsome and quite appealing. He found life in a happy place. The girl's family wanted to marry her with this boy. The boy expresses inability as he has accepted her as a sister. But the village wisecres opined that since

they are not related by blood they can marry. They said that a handful of grain that he brought with him should be thrown towards the place where he had come from. And so, it was done. But the place where the grain would fall will make the land barren. There would be drought. Exactly the same thing happened. As a result his own family starved and hearing about the abundance in the nearing village they came for help. The boy was happy to see his brothers. But they could not recognise him for he had grown into a handsome man. His brothers wanted to know whether he would again help if they come. The answer was positive. But there was a condition. If they bring the eldest sister-in-law he may be obliged. But the family never returned. This time for another reason. Zemra had a liking for her. She too liked him when nobody did. It was (is) prevalent in society to marry the elder brother's wife. A sort of fear gripped them. But they could not starve longer, and came with the elder sister-in-law. There was a family reunion. Zemra's elder sister-in-law cried and requested him to return with them. Zemra refused to return. With the passage of time, people started worshipping Zemra for his goodness, and Zemra came to be known as Zemrakitum, God of the villagers.

3. VOICES TAPPED DURING FIELD VISIT

This paper endeavours to present an Indigenous perspective to digital inclusion. The voices for inclusion have been tapped at 'Parab', a state level Tribal festival of Koraput. Koraput region is said to be the mosaic of tribal life and culture and the heritage of the nation. The cultural extravaganza of Koraput district 'Parab' showcases the tribal art and culture by providing the local tribals and folks across the nation excellent platform to showcase their talents.



Figure 5



Figure 6

Source: Parab, Koraput (2019)

4. INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE TO DIGITAL INCLUSION

ICT is now an integral aspect of most people's lives. But at the same time, we must not forget that access to digital technology and internet in these communities is still a problem. The questions at the heart of the discussion seek to identify the needs of the people: Do you know

what is internet? Have you used ICT Tools? Is it empowering you? Is there any center/space for free computer access/ internet access? How has ICT affected your lives? According to you, ICT is a threat or opportunity for development. How can we use ICT for sustainability and development? Are you ready to adapt ICT for inclusive development activities? Are there any digital awareness campaigns in the last two years in your community? The answers to most of the questions is a resounding NO. Thus, a new type of poverty, i.e., information and knowledge poverty looms large, and the paper expresses a profound concern in this field.

Field visits, direct interaction, and internet figures show a very slow progression towards inclusion. Internet use, mobile use and attitude were measured, wherein 5% to 10% of the people said to have knowledge about internet, while the rest mentioned that lack of knowledge and skills, and economic condition were the main reasons of slow progression and non-participation. Users of internet who were interviewed during Parab 2016 reported that they were not knowing much about it and its potential benefits. Considerable proportions of the people have mobile phones, but they use it for talking.

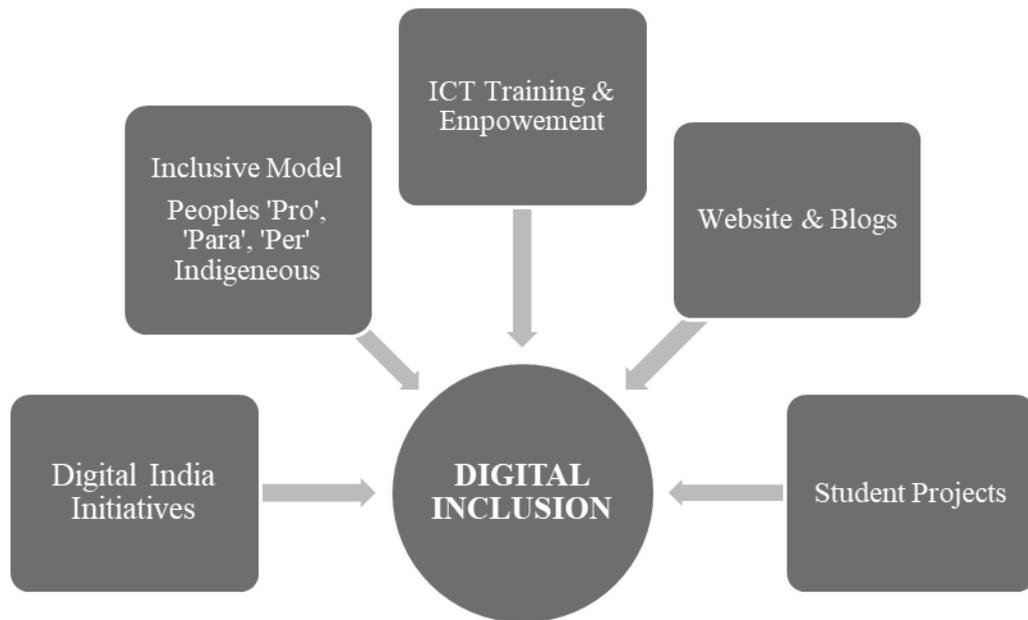
The paper outlines the authentic indigenous voice.

- Terracotta work today remains untouched by the influence of digital age.
- Need training from expert artisans
- There are no internet centres or space where they can have access to internet
- Training on internet is needed to showcase the products to the outer world, and make designs more contemporary
- Want to log onto digital technology to market the products.
- Desire to move beyond the boundaries

From the findings, it is concluded that an overwhelming majority of the population lack access to ICT infrastructure and facilities. The hopes are optimistic, and the interactions have led to high expectations.

The paper revisits the engagement plan to action route and proposes a model for capacity building to deliver digital inclusion and digital skills for the peoples, by the peoples and with the peoples. The Indigenous communities can use various digital tools and technology to preserve and share traditional knowledge. Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use can be followed to motivate people to embrace technology. Bill Gates in 2006 said that we must - go beyond helping the billion people who use technology today and bring [the benefits of digital life] to the other five billion. With technology moving so quickly, this is within our reach. [But] we have to plan for it...we have to think about their infrastructure and training (Maria et al).

5. INCLUSIVE MODEL FOR DIGITAL LITERACY



5.1. Internet and Web Portals

Public services are becoming digital, and use of new information, new opportunities require basic IT Skills, and at least an email address. Technologies such as internet can provide extensive opportunities for digital inclusion and expanding 'how' of digital inclusion. Under Digital India, a flagship initiative of the government of India, government services are made available to all people including public internet access and e-education for delivery of internet-based services and e-education such as digital literacy programs. But, learning how to use computers and internet can be very challenging for people. There is also a need to develop the local databases and local webpages that address the daily needs, their culture and their languages.

5.2. Engagement

The aim is to ensure that indigenous peoples' voices are in front-and-centre in the ongoing national dialogues, and to design a model for the peoples 'pro-indigenous', with the peoples 'para-indigenous' and by the peoples 'per-indigenous' for digital inclusion which could be a sound foundation for the way forward and innovation. Adaptation of a technology that can be functional and meaningful to the communities is the need of the time while at the same time not missing out what's on the real.

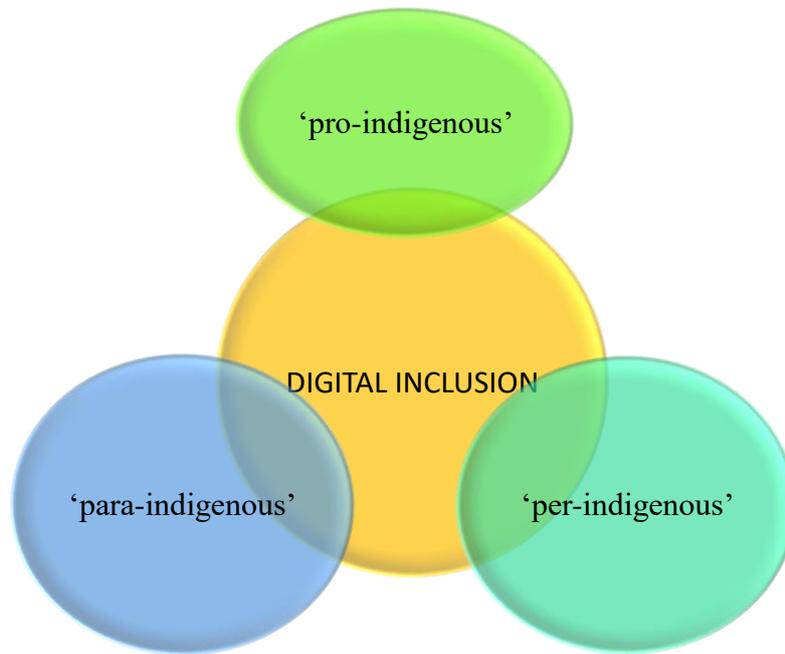


Figure 8: Participatory Model for Digital Inclusion

5.3. Internet, Mobiles and Apps

Mobile internet is a great medium for reaching out indigenous communities at all places untouched. In this digital age being an internet user means being a smart phone user. India is a country with more than 160 million smartphone users where 50% of the population is under 25 (WeAreSocial Reports, 2015). Thus, we can see the possibility of growth in internet populations to come on mobile or smartphone. People not willing to go online can access what's needed or other essential services by alternative means such as phones, mobile apps without learning to use computer. For instance, mobile apps like DISHA can be used to promote digital literacy among the indigenous people (Digital Saksharta Abhiyan launched in 2014 to aid digital literacy in Bihar. The app mainly envisages offering digital literacy to Tribal and Dalit women. People learn about computers and Internet digitally, through self-learning modules in rural and semi-urban areas of the state). The self-learning modules include introduction to digital devices, operating system, introduction to the internet, communications using the internet and use of internet. The lessons will help people to learn about computers and internet available in the form of videos, download materials, and take test modules of different levels.

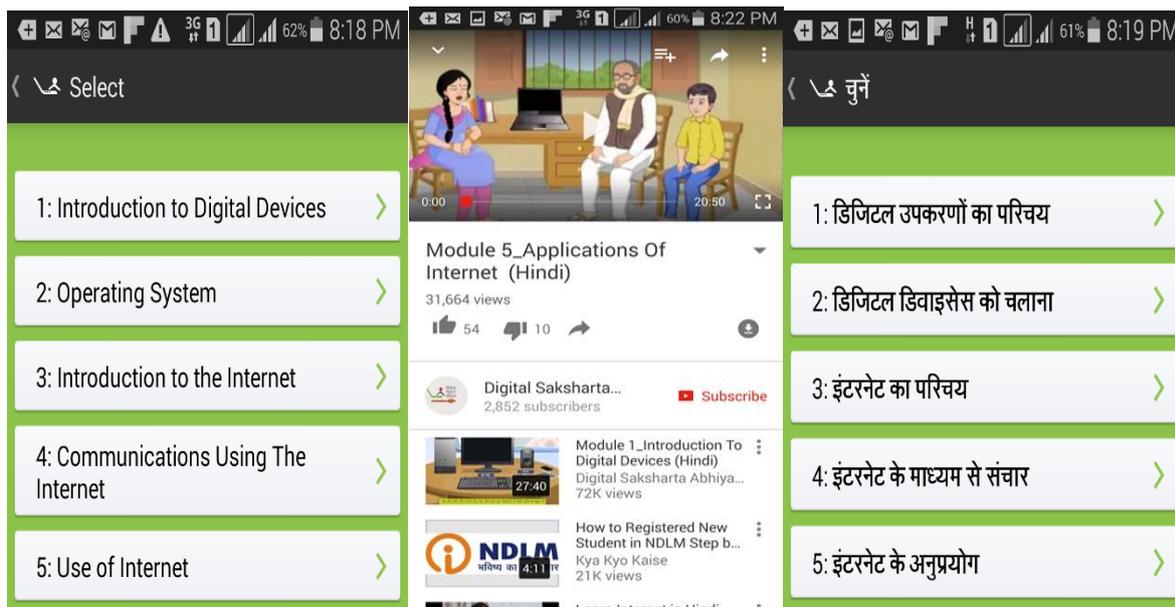


Figure 9: Print screens of Mobile App 'DISHA'

5.4. Blogs

The focus is on the use of online space for enabling Indigenous communities to tell their own stories, in their local languages, from their own perspectives. The voice of the people reflects on the possible impacts on the needs, experiences and engagement with technology. For this purpose, a blogsite can be designed to communicate and share knowledge in meaningful contexts. This involves finding and selecting the work of art from the districts of Odisha viz., Terracotta and Idital Saura Paintings.

5.5. Student Projects

This paper is a comprehensive 'how to' map which provides a rationale, some possible strategies and suggestive action route for educators, universities, institutions and higher education bodies to draw on. It advocates for a flexible framework where one can respond to real life issues. Engagement with internet looks possible if handholding support is provided at the localised level and delivered within their surroundings. Youth is our inspiration. The beginning can be with literacy drives in the local areas. This plan looks possible through student projects.

6. CONCLUSION

The paper ends to begin again by looking at issues related to continuing research, training programs for the indigenous peoples, and the ways it can support this small but meaningful initiative. Those who receive trainings are more likely to use the internet to preserve traditional knowledge and market the products. It is important to make people to feel like they are a meaningful part of the value creation process, especially, when the value they are creating is for themselves, achieved with this proposed inclusive model.

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