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## Research Article

### Cultural Changes and Identity Transformation among the Santhal Tribe of Jharkhand in the Age of Social Media

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#### ABSTRACT

A tribe is simply a community of people who have lived in their own traditional ways for a number of generations, often different from the current mainstream society. Many such tribal communities are to be found not only in the different parts of India but also in different parts of the world as well. Jharkhand being one of the foremost predominant tribal dominated states. The state has high proportion of tribal communities as compared to the national average. Based on Majumdar, D. N. a tribe is a socially cohesive and endogamous group, having one common language or dialect, having its own leadership system, and having a distinct social distance from other tribes or castes.

During the early years of the 20th century, there was considerable increase in Santhal population in these districts. They kept on asserting their resounding cultural identity in their songs, music, art, and traditional worship practices. The paper applies theories of Media Ecology and Cultural Hybridization to explore this dual impact on social media. The main object of the paper is to emphasize on the condition of Indian tribal communities with special reference to the Santhal of Santhal Pargana (SP). It delves into their rich cultural traditions - such as their oral traditions as told through stories, music, dance, rituals to take place, and their unique linguistic history expressed through their unique Santhali language, written in the Ol Chiki script (OCS) created by Pandit Raghunath Murmu in the 20th century. Social change has a significant role to play in the development of the community, developing and adjusting the way of surviving. As mentioned by Lewis L. M. tribal societies are typically small and bounded in geographical as well as social terms. Because of this, they have social, legal and political systems that function at a much smaller level. Their beliefs and religious traditions and worldview also embody this led close knit self contained way of life.

**Keywords:** *Santhal tribe, Cultural identity, social change, Digital preservation, social media*

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#### Introduction

Indigenous communities in India retain rich and different cultural traditions based on shared memory, ecological knowledge, oral

heritage and social structures based on community. Among them, the Santhal tribe is one of the Adivasi groups with a large population in eastern India especially in the Santhal Pargana

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(SP) division of Jharkhand. The Santhals have their own cultural identity which is reflected in their language, festivals, music, dance, rituals and visual arts. The Santali language with support from the Ol Chiki script (OCS), festivals like Sohrai, Baha and Karam play an important role in retaining social values and inter-generational continuity. Traditionally these cultural practices have been shared through the oral and participatory cultural modes of the community.

In recent times, however, rapid technological growth and digital connectivity have started to alter the patterns of communication even in rural and tribal areas. The increased accessibility of smartphones and low-cost internet connection has brought social media like WhatsApp, you tube or Facebook and Instagram into people's daily life. These platforms are increasingly being used by Santhal youth for communication, entertainment, and self-expression and are creating new spaces where culture and identity can be represented and negotiated.

The effect of social media in tribal communities is a complex and dual process. On the one hand, cultural visibility, documentation and preservation are rendered possible through digital platforms for the online sharing of song, festivals, language content and folk performances. On the other side, constant exposure to mainstream digital culture might have the potential to change value systems, the use of language, and lifestyle aspirations that contribute to cultural adaptation and identity changes. Identity in the digital age is more performative and mediated versus inherited.

Against this background, the present study focuses on the role that social media plays in the cultural change and transformations of identities of the Santhal tribe of Jharkhand, where the focus is on the region of Santhal Pargana (SP), both the media and cultural theory are employed to understand this ongoing cultural change.

### **Review of Literature**

Females in a tribal Community play a vital role in their social, cultural, economic and spiritual ways of life and are considered as economic asset in their society. Then they are still

lagging far behind in the various walks of life like learning, employment, good health and economic empowerment etc. Empowering may be identified as enabling weaker sections like poor women, especially tribal women to acquire and to possess power and resources (Puttaraja and O. D. Heggade 2012)

Breathing and social media may as well go hand in hand for a modern youth and not using it is like missing a big shot. Social media has no restriction on the ages and people from different age groups take part in it with an average Indian spending almost two and a half hours a day on it. Social media users between the ages of 13 to 19 years comprise 31% of the overall social media users in India (Statista, 2021). As well as the other social networking sites, Facebook and Instagram is mostly used by Indian youths as well students aged 18 to 24. We take the social media usages among the youngsters within the scope of negative and positive in this research. (Dar et al. 10,11)

Social media with its interactive interface has made a difference in the way people interact with each other in a discussion that can impact public attitudes and policy debates. Such platforms allow for a multiplicity of opinion, but contribute in many instances to the growing division in society. Social Media's ubiquity of use by individuals, organizations and public figures provide a valuable lens into societal trends and changing behaviours. However, easy-access and connectivity can also lead the users into others who share similar views, leading to less exposure to different views, and further polarization. Moreover, the speed of sharing content, even misinformation, as well as the voices of influencers and celebrities play a role in shaping public discourse and, related to this, influencing collective behaviour, especially among youth. (Sarwar 10,11)

Cultural differences affect communication, behaviour and values. There are differences in cultures and these differences influence how people communicate in the social networking sites. The reason why the cultural differences can be understood is because of the five cultural dimensions by Hofstede and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. (Rosen, Stefanne, and Lackaff 2010)

In relation to social media, for example, individualistic and collectivistic cultures can be seen in the difference in communication and behavioural style of users. People from individualistic cultures focus on meeting new people and being visible to many people and do not maintain their already existing relations in social network sites. In comparison, people from collectivistic culture use social network websites to preserve relationships with close relatives or friends as opposed to building new relationships through others. (Rosen, Stefanone, and Lackaff 2010)

Social media are online places that allow people to interact and communicate. Presently, some of the popular social networks are Blog, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Path, and Wikipedia. Van Dijk describes social media as user centered platforms that make it possible to easily interact and collaborate with other individuals. Consequently, social media can be considered as an online enabler that facilitates the connection between the users and social bond (Imani & Rad & Banaeian, 2023).

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This study is guided by **Cultural Hybridization Theory (CHT)** theoretical framework - in order to examine the impact of social media worlds on cultural practices and identity transformation among the Santhal tribe of Jharkhand.

It facilitates explain how traditional and modern cultural elements blend to create new identities and practices. Instead of viewing cultural change as simple loss or replacement, the theory highlights by what means persons adapt, negotiate, and artistically mix different influences.

For Santhal youth, digital media becomes a space where this mixing is very visible. They combine mainstream visuals, languages, and performance styles with their own indigenous traditions. Their online creations - like digitally made folk songs, festival videos, or stories about identity - show how tradition and modern media come together to form hybrid cultural representations.

Using new media brings challenges. Questions about authenticity, representation, and who controls cultural content become more

complicated. Digital platforms can commercialize indigenous culture, sometimes leading to misrepresentation or exploitation. Not everyone in the community has equal digital access either - especially elders or those living far from urban centers - which widens gaps in digital literacy and cultural knowledge. Weak legal protections also make it easier for outsiders to appropriate or misuse indigenous cultural materials online.

CHT also connects to broader discussions about how cultures mix and reshape identities in postcolonial, migrant, and everyday settings. Scholars like Homi Bhabha and Néstor García Canclini are key voices in this field. Bhabha's ideas - such as the third space, mimicry, and in-betweenness - are widely used to study how hybrid identities emerge in real-life cultural encounters.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study intends to critically study the processes of cultural transformation and identity transformation of the Santhal tribe of Santhal Pargana (SP) division of Jharkhand. By producing extant shows of work, empirical observations and associated theoretical viewpoints, the research tries to build a greater comprehension of how contemporary socio-cultural transitions are influencing indigenous identity, traditions and lifestyle in the community. It studies the interplay between traditional cultural systems and emerging influences contributing to the changes in values, practices and ways of self-representation.

The study likewise aims to draw attention to methods which are practical, and sensitive to cultural differences, for strengthening cultural continuity and supporting the preservation of indigenous identities. By chronicling the process of ongoing transformations and adaptive strategies, the research contributes to the academic discourse on tribal studies, cultural identity, and social change and also helps provide insights useful for policymakers, educationalists and communal stakeholders occupied towards sustainable cultural development.

## Objective of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To examine cultural changes among the Santhal tribe of Jharkhand.
- To study the impact of social media on Santhal cultural practices and identity.
- To analyze changes in language, rituals, and cultural expression in the digital environment.
- To explore the role of social media in cultural preservation and transformation.
- To interpret identity change using Cultural Hybridization frameworks.

## Methodology

This research utilizes the method of qualitative research design focuses on secondary data analysis. This study examines the cultural shift within the santhal tribe in Jharkhand. The methodology is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital connectivity influences traditional systems.

## Data collection and sources selection

The research data was compiled from a systematic review of existing literature and digital archives. The selection of sources was guided by their relevance to cultural change, identity transformation, and digital sociology. Specifically, the data includes:

- **Academic Literature:** Peer-reviewed journals and empirical studies regarding tribal development, the Santhali language, and social media's impact on Indian youth.
- **Digital Cultural Artifacts:** Analysis of content from social media platforms - including YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram - where Santhal identity and creativity are actively produced.
- **Linguistic Data:** Examination of the usage of the Ol Chiki script (OCS) versus Romanized scripts in digital communication and educational settings.

**Analytical framework:** The collected qualitative data is processed through **thematic interpretation**. This involves identifying and categorizing patterns in how social media facilitates cultural integration, documentation, and transformation. The analysis is specifically

viewed through the lens of **Cultural Hybridization Theory (CHT)**.

**Application of the theory:** By the CHT, this study moves beyond viewing cultural change as a simple loss or replacement. Instead, the analysis evaluates how Santhal youth negotiate and artistically mix traditional elements - such as folk songs and rituals - with modern digital influences to create hybrid cultural representations. This framework ensures a well-grounded and credible interpretation of the dual role social media plays as both a tool for preservation and an agent of change.

This research implements a **qualitative research design**, specifically utilizing a **secondary data analysis** approach. the methodology is structured as follows:

**Data Analysis Process:** The collected qualitative data is processed through **thematic interpretation**. This involves identifying patterns in how social media affects cultural integration and cultural education.

**Objective Alignment:** The analysis aims to interpret identity change and language erosion by examining the dual role of social media as both a means of cultural preservation and an agent of cultural transformation.

## Discussion and Analysis

Social media as a Cultural Space social media has evolved from early online communities like GeoCities and Friendster into complex systems that support community resiliency. Today, platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram are not merely tools for communication but serve as cultural spaces where the Santhal community's identity, creativity, and activism are produced and circulated.

Through qualitative approach and use of relevant data, it's hoped that we provide a deeper understanding of how social media affects cultural integration and their role in cultural education, as well as the challenges that need to be covered in this regard remains significant. Ultimately, the hope is that this research will be able to provide some meaningful insight for an increasingly connected world through social media. (Agustianti et al., 2022).

## **Social Media**

Social media is an observing feature of an interaction within the present digital age, where users can then create, share, and interact with contents using networked platforms in real-time. Social networking took form early in the era starting with GeoCities (1994), followed by Classmates (1995), Six Degrees (1997), Open Diary (1998) and LiveJournal (1999). These platforms came with the idea of online communities and user profiles. The early 2000s, of course saw rapid increase with Ryze (2001), Friendster (2002), LinkedIn (2003), hi5 (2003) and MySpace (2003), which popularised social networking all around the world. This growth is carried on with Orkut (2004), Facebook (2004), Yahoo! 360o (2005), Bebo (2005), Twitter (2006), Tumblr (2007), and Google+ (2011).

In the next decade the social media moved to mobile first, multimedia and short video. Major newer platforms include Instagram (2010), Snapchat (2011), WhatsApp (2009, but extended after 2014), Telegram (2013), TikTok (internationally launched in 2017) and Discord (2015). More advanced developments like Clubhouse (2020), Threads (2023) and decentralized or community-based networks have added further diversity to the social media ecosystem. Today, social media platforms are not only used as tools of communication but also as cultural spaces where identity, creativity, activism, and community story line are produced and circulated - and among indigenous and tribal groups.

## **Impact of social media on santhal culture practices**

Social media has been a notable force in the Santhal cultural practices in how traditions, language, and practices have been expressed and transmitted. Digital platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook facilitate the recording and sharing of Santhali songs, festivals, dances, and lore to support cultural visibility and preservation. At the same time, constant exposure to the mainstream matter stimulates lifestyle changes, language mixing and new value orientations, especially among the youth. This generates the process of cultural hybridization, in which traditional

practices are transformed into digital formats. Thus, social media acts as both a means of cultural preservation and the agent of cultural transformation in the Santhal society.

## **Cultural Identity of the indigenous people**

Cultural identity of indigenous people refers to the sense of belonging together based on their traditional knowledge systems, language, customs, rituals, beliefs, and the relationship they have with land and community. It is formed in the collective memory, oral tradition, artistic expression and social practices transmitted from generation to generation. Particularly for indigenous communities, identity is not only individual it is highly collective, with an emphasis on ancestry and territory. It is expressed in festivals, dress, music and in daily activities. In the present-day context, cultural identity is also affected by modernization and exposure through mass media with adaptation and hybrid forms while communities retain the core heritage values.

## **Social Media as a Tool of Cultural Preservation**

Digital platforms have increasingly become key tools for preservation of cultural heritage, strengthening of community and fostering economic empowerment among indigenous people. These platforms, especially video sharing platforms, are modern-day digital archives where traditional songs, dances, oral histories and ritual practices are systematically being recorded, disseminated and protected for the next generations. Such digitization makes it easier to propagate between generations and to counter the threat of cultural erosion.

At the community level, messaging applications are being used as organizational mechanisms to aid the coordination of events at the community level, revitalization of traditional arts and games, and circulation of cultural knowledge through voice recordings and narratives transmitted in indigenous languages. This adds substantially to the strengthening of social ties and the continuity of oral traditions.

Furthermore, developments in digital literacy and greater engagement with online platforms have provided greater opportunities

for indigenous women and artisans. Enhanced visibility, increased market access and growing public recognition have enabled these groups to take increased part in the cultural and economic spheres. Using e-commerce platforms and social commerce channels, tribal artisans can begin to market their traditional crafts and cultural products directly to broader audiences, helping to strengthen both their economic livelihoods and the long-term sustainability of cultural practices.

Collectively, digital communication technologies are now operating as not just a medium of interpersonal interaction, but more as complex systems that support cultural documentation processes, community resiliency, and grassroots socio-economic development.

### **The Impact of Social Media on Language Erosion in the Santhal Tribal Community**

Social media is often blamed for causing language loss among the Santhal community and the reality is more complex than this. Instead of just giving up on Santhali, many young people mix up Santhali, Hindi and English according to who they're speaking to and what platform they're using. This generates a sort of practical multilingualism with different languages existing together.

This shift presents with challenges. Due to the tendency of Santhali being typed or replaced by Roman script or more dominant languages, the use of Ol Chiki script (OCS) is in a declining stage. Teachers also note that the impact of digital habits of students, such as slang and mixed-language typing, makes its way into the student's formal writing skills. This demonstrates the need for digital literacy programs to promote proper usage of the Santhali language and its script.

Social media supports Santhals in creating online cultural spaces. Music groups, festival pages and cultural communities build shared forms of writing and identity. But these spaces may sometimes exclude elders or people who don't use the internet, driving a wedge deep into cultural differences.

Fast-paced digital communication promotes short messages, which may lead to less depth of language, but on the other hand, that promotes creativity. Overall, social media is

changing the way the Santhali language is used - a mix of old and new. The real challenge is striking a compromise between the embrace of digital tools and the retention of linguistic and cultural traditions.

### **Conclusion**

This study undertakes to comprehend the process of cultural transformations and identity transformation amongst the Santhal tribe of Jharkhand with a special reference to Santhal Pargana (SP) division in the perspective of increasing use of social media. The analysis across literature, theory and field-oriented qualitative insights suggests that digital platforms are not simply communication tools, but active cultural environments which are changing the way Santhal identity is expressed, negotiated and transmitted. The findings lend credence to the central propositions of Cultural Hybridization Theory in that it demonstrates the restructuring of cultural contact through media environments in the process of creating blended and adaptive forms of identity.

The research shows that there is a dual and dynamic impact. On one side, social media, which contributes to the changes in the use of language, the symbolic practices, the aspirations of lifestyles, and the forms of self-representation, especially among youth. Cultural expressions that were formerly locally bounded and orally mediated are, more and more, mediated, performative and platform oriented. This gives rise to the problems of simplification, commodification and gradual weakening of some ritual and linguistic traditions. Intergenerational differences in media adoption can also enhance differences in cultural interpretation and participation.

On the other side, the research establishes also that digital platforms are becoming significant instruments of cultural documentation, revival and visibility. The circulation and documentation of Santhali songs, festivals, narratives and crafts in digital platforms serves as informal archives and teaching aids. Community messaging networks create stronger internal coordination and sharing of knowledge, while digital marketplaces and visibility tools support artisan livelihoods and cultural pride. Rather than a linear narrative of cultural loss,

therefore, the evidence points to the goal of negotiated transformation and hybrid continuity. The future of Santhal cultural identity in the digital era is concluded through a balanced engagement, backed by culturally sensitive media literacies, community-led content-creating processes and communication policies, so that the technological participation is strengthened, rather than displaced from the foundation of indigenous culture.

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