Role Of social media In Addressing Tribal Issues and Countering Public Misconceptions

Shobin Mathew[1], Josena K Joseph[2]

[1]*Assistant Professor, Dept of Journalism & Mass Communication, Pazhassiraja College, Pulpally, Wayanad*

[2]*Assistant Professor, Dept of English, Pazhassiraja College, Pulpally, Wayanad*

Abstract—**Mainstream media often neglects or inadequately represents the real issues faced by tribal communities, prompting those with access to social media to use digital platforms as alternative spaces for expression. Social media enables tribal people to articulate their concerns, build fraternity within their communities, counter misinformation, and respond to anti-tribal narratives. It also functions as a medium to showcase tribal culture, traditions, and lifestyle, thereby challenging common misconceptions and reviving indigenous cultural practices and art forms. Although overall social media usage among tribal populations remains limited, a section of the community actively uses these platforms to highlight serious social and political issues. The public nature of social media allows these concerns to reach non-tribal audiences, facilitating awareness and, to some extent, timely intervention. This study adopts a quantitative research approach using a questionnaire survey conducted among the general public in Wayanad district of Kerala through simple random sampling to examine perceptions regarding the role of social media in addressing tribal issues.**

Index Terms—social media, **tribal communities, digital platform, community.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Wayanad is the birthplace of different tribal populations. With the history of Wayanad, every element of the tribal culture is closely intertwined. Tribes are carriers of a rich agricultural heritage. Along the outskirts of civilization, the tribal population of Wayanad became mere refugees, as the political and socio-cultural colonial and postcolonial climate forced them aside to the margins. Schemes and policies enforced by the political institutions and bureaucracy have not been of much benefit. The tribes

in Wayanad include Paniyas, Adiyas, Kattunayakans, Kurichiyans, Kurumas, Ooralis, Uralikurumas, etc.

In Kerala, the vast majority of tribes come from the Paniya tribal sect. As bond laborer's, the landlords once sold them along with the plantations. They were also hired by the higher castes as skilled coffee workers. The word 'Paniya' means 'worker'. They were treated as the servants of non-tribes. They believed that their occupation in the past was agriculture and related activities. They lived in the farmlands of the landlords and worked continuously without adequate food and basic necessities. They moved to different places after completing work in farmlands. When compared to Kurichia and Kuruma, the pace towards modernity among Paniyas is quite slow.

They depended on others for their livelihood which led to exploitation. Mainly they did paddy cultivation. But the conversion of paddy fields for cultivation of other crops led to reduction of employment opportunities for them. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme has helped them to get job. But its restriction in number of days created acute shortage in income. Even though the usage of social media by the tribes is less, some members are actively using these platforms. They bring out serious issues that the community faces historically. As the main stream media focus on the issues of the non tribal people, the tribal issues are sidelined. But some tribes using social media find it as a platform to share the issues specifically. The tribes who have access to social media use it as a platform to bring out their issues. Through social media, they try to establish a fraternity with other tribal members of their community, defend the fake news about them and they react against anti-tribal remarks of non tribes. Social media helps them to make the public aware of

the new initiatives taken by them. It acts as a medium to display their culture and lifestyle. Since Facebook, WhatsApp etc. are public platforms; their posts are noticed by non tribes. This helps in taking action on right time to a certain extent.

The objectives of the research are the following:

- To evaluate the effect of social media in bringing out a change of attitude among public about the tribes
- To analyze the use of social media by tribal people in order to project their problems and issues
- To analyze the role of social media in defending the misconceptions and prejudice about the tribal people

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A.N Sharma and P.D Tiwari studied about *Tribal Ecosystem and Malnutrition in India* (1989). The word 'tribe' means a member of a collective organization, primarily amongst primitive people but existing in some present societies, consisting of a community of people claiming a common heritage, typically contributing to a common way of life, and originally living together under the head-man chief. Critics claim that the 'original inhabitant' case is based on the fact that they have no property and are therefore demanding land reform. The Adivasis claim that the 'superior community' has exploited them and that they need and demand compensation, specifically land reform. Adivasi problems are not linked to land reforms, but to the historical rights of the forests that were alienated during the colonial era, and India finally made a law dedicated to the Adivasis to 'undo the historical injustice.' (Tiwari and Sharma 1989).

P. Beck and B.K. Mishra researched on *Socio-Economic Profile and Quality of Life of Selected Oraon Tribal Living in and Around Sambalpur Town, Orissa* (2010). They acknowledged that their economic, social and psychological poverty, displaced from their natural forest habitats, is increasingly growing. In this sense, the standard of life led by the various tribal communities must be looked at (Beck and Mishra, 2010).

K.C. Baiju researched about *Incidence of Deprivation among Tribal Households in Kerala, India: A Non-Income Dimension Approach* (2009). Tribal communities are the indigenous people of India, according to Baiju (2009), who have lived a life based on the natural environment and have cultural traditions that are congenial to their physical and social environment. The concerted efforts of the Central and State Governments to improve these communities have had only a limited effect on their socio-economic conditions, despite the numerous welfare and constitutional security initiatives. In improving their living standards, the marginalized communities, scheduled tribes, are expected to benefit from development and service delivery management. Via Oorukoottams, the participatory development process will improve the consistency with which they can supply services to this outlier population. The impact of decentralization and empowerment of Oorukoottams depends largely on their ability to deliver services to individuals on time, at the same time in a people-friendly manner, at the standard level of quality and with prudence.

S.C. Verma studied on *The Struggling Tharu Youth*. According to him, all tribal populations, especially the younger generation, deserve more and more special treatment. It is impossible to think of the true and steady development of tribes if young people do not have higher education and communication (Verma 2011).

The study conducted by B. Saraswati on *Tribal Thoughts and Culture* (1991) explained the alteration of the way of life of tribes. The tribal communities' worldview in India is not a typical scenario of their universe or a closed system; it incorporates the world that, in turn, directs their everyday lives and culture, so that the shifting views and tastes of the people in the tribal regions transform the atmosphere around them (Saraswati 1991).

M. Fordham studied on *The Politics of Language and the Survival of Indigenous Culture: From Suppression to Reintroduction in the Formal Classroom* (1998). He implies that since language is a container of culture, if it is continued, its loss will be detrimental to the cultural heritage. The lack of language undermines tribal singularity and supremacy. In addition, their cultural heritage and culture are often removed from their children, preventing them from interacting and engaging in their language group with elderly people.

(Rashmi, 2008) explains that the tribes have diverse lifestyle and culture. They have several common features which include various customs and rituals. Their physical characteristics are also closely related to the Negroes of Africa. They give much importance for traditional dances and songs. The non tribal people need to value the cultural aspects of the tribes. The tribes were believed to be either migrated from other regions or could be the earliest settlers of the land. The tribes are about 18 % of the total population of Wayanad. There are debates regarding the name 'Wayanad' being given to the district. One argument is that its name is derived from 'the land of fields' and 'the land in high area'. It is argued that in Kannada, there is a term called 'Bayalunad'. In Sanskrit a term known as 'Mayakshetra' which means 'temple of Maya' is also referred. The tribals are changing from the traditions to modernity and civilizations. But still their life is in misery. Even though various financial initiatives are put forward by the government and the NGOs, the tribals remain in poverty and distress. The Paniyas are found in Wayanad, Malappuram, Kannur, Kozhikode and Palakkad districts of Kerala. They are also found in Gudalur and Nilgiris in Tamilnadu.

Tribes are marginalized and could not express their voices in the public or take power over their own situation. About one third of the scheduled tribes in Kerala reside in Wayanad. Relatively low literacy rate in Wayanad is partly due to the low literacy of the tribes. The agriculture is the main occupation of the people. The fall in price of products for climatic variations and disasters like flood affect the living conditions of the tribes. Colonies of the tribes is a cluster of many houses in a small geographical area. They interact more with the people within the colony than outside. The transportation difficulties and flood affect their life diversely. A major portion of the income is spent on alcohol and tobacco. The hygienic practices are not properly adopted by the tribes even though it is common in Kerala. The usage of common toilets or water resources creates hygienic problems. They do not trust the non-tribal community as they were ill treated in the past. The schedule tribe promoters attend the issues of the tribes at the ground level. Training them with technological skills and providing them with leadership training are some of the suggestions put forward by the author to improve their conditions (Paul, 2020).

Jobin Joy and M. Srihari researched on the topic *A Case study on the school dropout Scheduled Tribal students of Wayanad District, Kerala* (2014). Among the tribes, most of the dropped-out children remain with their families. The majority of their parents is not educated properly and is early dropouts. The reason they dropped out was because of poverty and unemployment. But now the scenarios have changed a lot. The parents of the dropped-out argue that poverty and finance are no longer the problems of dropping out of their children. The parents are aware that the project plans for the benefit of tribal uplift are being implemented. As far as parents are concerned, the reasons for dropping out are purely linked to the educational attitude of the individual. The majority of drop-outs have a positive outlook towards education. Education is seen by them as a boring process. They are still not convinced that education is required for their livelihoods. They are conscious of the government's allowances for their education. But the negative attitude towards education makes them stay in their colonial environment instead of going back to school. Many of the dropouts and their parents admitted that their decision to leave schooling was due to the influence of the peer group. Their friends who quit education were influenced by them. So, they created a complete stop, too. Some stop education because they would have discontinued education because any of their siblings (Srihari 2014).

III. METHODOLOGY

The population for the study includes the people in Wayanad district of Kerala. The Directorate of Census Operations in Kerala has released the official Census 2011. According to this data, the total population was 817,420 of which male and female were 401,684 and 415,736 respectively. A total of 250 people (samples) is covered during this study in Wayanad using simple random sampling. Mixed methodology is used which involves survey and interviews. Quantitative aspects is used which involves survey among 250 samples. Interviews with a tribal activist and a tribal folklorist are also included.

In quantitative data collection, the methodology followed was a questionnaire-based survey. The questionnaire consisted of various aspects evaluating the attitude of non tribes. The various aspects of social media affecting the tribal customs and traditions, about

their involvement with their communities, their views etc. are discussed. The tribal promoters can provide data in the whole process.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the effect of social media in creating an attitudinal change among public about the tribes. The research was conducted among samples of 250 respondents who live in Wayanad district of Kerala. The data collected from the survey has been graphically represented below. Results can be summarized in terms of answers to the questions. In order to find out the research answer of the study, data gathered using the research tool developed for the study for all research questions is fed into Microsoft Excel. The frequency and percentage corresponding to the number of respondents is tabulated and plotted graphically.

TABLE NO. 1: TRIBAL ISSUES

Tribal issues	Frequency	Percentage
Basic facilities	146	58.4
Addiction to Drugs	122	48.8
Exploitation	130	52
Acculturation	64	25.6
Others	21	8.4

From Table No. 1, the tribal issues projected by the respondents are the lack of basic facilities (146), addiction to drugs (122), exploitation (130), acculturation (64) etc. This corresponds to 58.4%, 48.8%, 52% and 25.6% respectively. The respondents agree that the main issue faced by the tribes is the lack of basic facilities. The addiction to drugs and exploitation are significant issues raised by the respondents. Acculturation is another major issue which destroys the tribal culture.

TABLE NO. 2: INFLUENCE OF POSTS

Influence of Posts	Frequency	Percentage
Always	30	12
Often	87	34.8
Sometimes	86	34.4
Rarely	32	12.8
Never	15	6
Total	250	100

From Table No. 2, considering whether the social media posts about the tribes influence them, 30 respondents (12%) are always influenced by the posts.87 respondents (34.8%) are often influenced by the posts. 86 respondents (34.4%) are sometimes influenced by the posts.32 respondents (12.8%) are rarely influenced by the posts.15 respondents (6%) are never influenced by the posts. Most of the respondents are often or sometimes influenced by the social media posts. Very less number of respondents are never influenced by the social media posts.

TABLE NO. 3: DIRECT INTERVENTION

Direct intervention	Frequency	Percentage
Always	13	5.2
Often	37	14.8
Sometimes	31	12.4
Rarely	52	20.8
Never	117	46.8
Total	250	100

From Table No. 3, considering whether the respondents made any direct intervention to solve the tribal problems based on posts in social media, 13 respondents (5.2%) always did it. 37 respondents (14.8%) often did it. 31 respondents (12.4%) sometimes did it. 52 respondents (20.8%) rarely did it. 117 respondents (46.8%) are never did it. Near to half of the respondents never made any direct intervention to solve the tribal problems based on posts in social media. Very less respondents always made any direct intervention to solve the tribal problems based on posts in social media.

TABLE NO. 4: INTIMATING AUTHORITIES

Intimating Authorities	Frequency	Percentage
Always	15	6
Often	41	16.4
Sometimes	37	14.8
Rarely	55	22
Never	102	40.8
Total	250	100

From Table No. 4, it is analyzed whether any initiatives are taken in intimating the authorities the real issues of the tribes. 15 respondents (6%) always took initiatives. 41 respondents (16.4%) often took initiatives. 37 respondents (14.8%) sometimes took

initiatives. 102 respondents (40.8%) rarely took initiatives. 102 respondents (40.8%) are never taking initiatives. The initiatives taken in intimating the authorities the real issues of the tribes are very less. A significant number of respondents never took initiatives in intimating the authorities the real issues of the tribes.

V. CONCLUSION

Social networking is the most efficient communication system to be used anywhere. Yet the over-exploration of social media often takes away the meaning of other media. Social media is used to project the problems of tribes. A lot of myths and stereotypes about tribes remain even now. There are fewer individuals who investigate the validity of social media posts about the tribes. There is a lot of false news being propagated about tribes. Social media is used to initiate social movements even though the response is comparatively less. The development envisaged by mainstream society does not go hand in hand with the tribal groups' developmental concept.

In the present situation, there are social media posts made by the tribal activists or tribes to help people to understand the challenges faced by tribes. Social media has a negative rather than positive effect, since it is difficult to filter the posts. The acceptance of social media posts made by tribes and non-tribes is different. There is comparatively less presence of tribes in debates on social media. Social media is becoming a medium to prevent indigenous people from being socially inhibited. In promoting tribal arts, literature and language, social media has a specialized role. With the assistance of this forum, the cultural ethnicity and customs of tribes can be preserved when people forget the rich traditional culture as they progress towards modernity.

VI. LIMITATIONS

The study is concentrated in Wayanad district of Kerala and cannot be generalized for other such areas as the socio-economic conditions could be different for other areas. The literary world of the tribal community is very few and the availability of documented sources is less. The characteristics of the tribes in the present scenario are constantly changing due to the impact of the modern technologies. The impact of social media on tribes of Wayanad district of Kerala is less known. Educational backwardness, economic instability etc are serious issues for the tribes. It is also difficult to communicate with the tribes as they mainly use tribal dialects to communicate within them instead of Malayalam. The research is limited to the effect of social media in creating an attitudinal change among the public. It is very difficult to find out the difference between the attitudinal change among people in rural area and urban area because the samples are collected from Wayanad district which is mainly a rural area. So only a smaller number of respondents from urban area took part in the survey.

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