

Synopsis Seminar

Seminar Title	: 'Abua Dishom, Abua Raa' (My Country, My Rule): Tribal Youth, Cultural Citizenship, and Collective Identity Assertion on Social Media.
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Venue	: HS Seminar Room (Room No. MN436)
Date and Time	: 26 Sep 2024 (5.00PM)
Abstract	: Despite digital inequalities in India, it is crucial to acknowledge that social media platforms have played a significant role in revitalizing tribal identity. This thesis aims to understand the wider significance of media as a space for minority communities to negotiate their social and cultural identity. The slogan <i>Abua Dishom, Abua Raa'</i> that translates as 'My Country, My Rule' has surfaced over social media as a new wave of socio-political and cultural protest by tribal youths of Jharkhand, India to establish their identity. It is a study of how a community that was written by outsiders (non-tribals) is re-writing its own narrative. The study uses the theory of Cultural Citizenship to understand social media use among tribal youths to explore how media produced from 'below' by the tribal youth challenges the narrative produced by the media from the 'above'. Kozinet's (2010) method of netnography, defined as 'participant-observational research based in online fieldwork' was used to explore cultures on digital media platforms. Netnography follows ethnography's research approach of data collection methods such as participant-observation, archival data collection, and in-depth interviews. The study was conducted among Santhal, Munda, and Oraon youths of Jharkhand studying in various higher educational institutions all over the country, and who actively shared posts on Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, during the period 2019 to 2022. The study also carried out a case study of a tribal youth organization in Jharkhand named 'Rumbul' to understand how a community-based initiative is operating as one of the leading organizations advocating for sustainability and revitalizing the rich tapestry of tribal culture. Data was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a 'method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meanings [themes] across a dataset' (Braun & Clarke, 2015). By focusing on themes across various social media posts and interview transcripts, shared meanings and experiences were identified. The findings of the study show that social media provides a platform for marginalized youth to contest, question, and demand socio-cultural and political rights. The social media platforms act as safe spaces to correct existing stereotypes and prejudices while reshaping their identity. Additionally, one of the most fundamental ways in which the tribal youth learn about their myths, literature, and rituals is through social media. The digital media platforms act as archives for future generations to gather information on their tribal communities. The findings also suggest that social gatherings and youth organizations are equally indispensable for cultural revival, language preservation, and political activism. They offer immersive experiences, foster direct engagement, and build community bonds that digital platforms alone cannot fully replicate. Through these in-person interactions, communities can sustain and advance their cultural and political goals in ways that are both meaningful and effective.

Keywords: Tribal Identity, Cultural Citizenship, Social Media, Youth, Jharkhand, India