

Atmanirbhar Bharat and Media

On the Road to Success

Dr Manash Pratim Goswami

Dr Radha Bathran

Dr Nikhil Kumar Gouda



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The Scope and Possibilities of Envisioning an Indian Chapter of Indigenous Visual Media

Anilkumar E R¹ and Sudheer S Salam²

Abstract

It is quite evident from everyday examples that the visual representations of indigenous life are very much alienated from the real life of tribal people. This happens primarily because the above said stereotyped images are always conceived by an outsider from an outsider's perspective. What if the indigenous images could be conceived by indigenous community members and visualised internally by the mselves? The purpose of the study is to delineate the scope and envision the possibilities of creating an 'indigenous visual media', which has already found success stories in a few countries like New Zealand, Canada, Australia, Indonesia, and Nepal. The contemporary Indian situation has the second largest populated country holding 8% of its entirety in the tribal population (People's Archive of Rural India 2019). The "alienated self" of tribal representations in India, largely put forward by the cinema medium, has the nature of an ideological influence in its basic form itself. In his 1974 article, *Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus*, Jean Louis Baudry maintains that 'the conditions under which cinematic effects are produced influence the spectator more than the individual film itself'. This also remains the famous prototype of indigenous life in the social discourse. The unravelling of their original aesthetics, world view, and ideals to be exhibited to the outer world will be what tribal people need to recreate more healthy images about themselves. In this research looking for chances to create an indigenous visual media, the methodology will be largely qualitative, with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions used to collect common opinions about the said initiatives. The findings of the study chronicle the need for such a media as felt by most of our discussants, who also point out the practical difficulties.

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The study's practical implications will be more realistic discussions and applications for setting up indigenous visual media.

Keywords: Media representation, Indigenous people, Indigenous media, Stereotyping

Introduction

It is indeed no wonder that India, a country that has the biggest diversified population in the world, holds around 8% of its people in tribal communities. In the case of media representation, these communities remain 'ultra-subaltern' (Sawhni, 2009). Rekhari (2010) elaborates on the same concept "Adivasis are constructed within popular Hindi cinema as the subaltern, to an already existing subaltern mass, making Adivasi cultures 'ultra-subaltern' in all ways". They were seldom represented realistically and able to share in the decision-making or other related faculties of the country in which they were raised.

The traditional as well as new media, which are supposed to mirror the subtleties of the society, hardly give a proper and rightful representation of the tribal communities in India. They still persist in the colonialist representation of Adivasis as inferior or as de-notified criminals (Criminal Tribes of India Act, 1871). Even in this age of liberalisation, the stigma of giving the proper representation to tribes remains prevalent in the case of mainstream media, including cinema. This also will add to the disgraceful social development and associated welfare activities extended by the various governments to the tribal population. Henceforth they find very little of their history or wisdom recorded or proliferated through popular media.

The freedom of expression guaranteed by our much-lauded constitution is also found short in execution when it comes to tribal communities in India. Most of our depictions of tribal life largely follow the trails of the tourist gaze (Urry, J.1992) by a curious onlooker who tries to present the alien or the other to his fellow people. This prevents every possibility of a proper representation for a healthy Adivasi picture to so-called 'developed' society outside who also likes to see this other as the lesser population in culture and wisdom.

A similar thought line in other developed countries like New Zealand, Canada, and Australia has prompted the social scientists of this country to look forward to the indigenous media in their respective countries. As a result of their research, many countries have successfully launched state-funded television channels and community radio stations to balance the gap in representations of their tribal people (list of Indigenous visual media Table

1.1). Studies have proved that the above initiative has worked well in lessening the gap in the representation of indigenous communities. The present study is an attempt to look forward to the chances and possibilities of initiating an indigenous visual media and associated development in visual culture in the Indian context, which hosts around 12 crores of its population in this underrepresented tribal community.

The researcher in this study tries to decipher the possibilities of indigenous visual media where the tribal population can define and represent their truthful images, culture, and wisdom, which could help boost their morale and position themselves better to the on-looking others from the mainstream outside. The researcher also proposes that in the Indian context, the emergence of a powerful indigenous media will, in turn, become the end of the 'lettered city,' as imagined by Schiwy (2008) based on the concept put forward by Rama (1984).

List of Indigenous Visual Media in the World

Table 1.1 List of indigenous visual media in the world

No	Country	Media title
1	New Zealand	The fourth eye (Maori Television)
2	Australia	1. Aboriginal Broadcasting Australia 2. Imparja Television 3. NITV
3	Canada	APTN (National news)
4	Nepal	Indigenous Television
5	Indonesia	Ruai Television

Review of Literature

Indigenous media has been in the talking points for quite some time, and few pieces of research on the aim and scope have garnered interest among academics. Gramsci (1988) and Mercer (1989) termed indigenous media as the management of cultural resources. Ginsberg (1991), a major proponent of the idea, terms indigenous media production as a hybrid process. O Regan (1993) considers it as a multifaceted and layered, assorted mix of strategies, technologies, and procedures to be followed in integrating with the policy-related issues of the particular region/ country. But Meadows (1994) rejects the notion which aligns indigenous media with concepts such as original or primitive. He voices it for an active engagement

with technology, creating a new find in cultural frontiers.

Ginsburg (1994), later in his essay *Embedded Aesthetics: Creating a Discursive Space for Indigenous Media*, concludes that "Social relations built out of indigenous media practices are helping to develop support and sensibilities for indigenous actions for self-determination. Self-representation in the media is seen as a crucial part of this process. Activities centred around indigenous media render indigenous cultural and historical realities visible to themselves and the broader societies that have stereotyped or denied them. The transnational social relations built out of these media practices create new local, national, international cooperation areas."

The diversity of the nuances of topics discussed and the geographic inclusiveness of the collection of articles in *'Global indigenous media: culture poetics and politics (2008)* 'indicates the global academic interest in Indigenous media and related discourses.

Salazar's (2009) article *'Self-determination in practice: the critical making of indigenous media'* examines the notion of Development as self-determination in the context of the current politicisation of indigenous peoples' affairs. It looks at the links between development studies, indigenous social movements, and community media practices, specifically between specific views on Development, self-determination, and identity, and how these terms become embodied in specific media-making (video) practices. The article summarises two case studies of indigenous media production in a transnational context: the UNESCO-funded project Information and Communications Technologies for Intercultural Dialogue: Developing Communication Capacities of Indigenous People (ICT4ID), and the emergence and consolidation of CLACPI, a network of indigenous media producers in Latin America.

Villarreal, GZ's (2017) use of the terms 'indigenous communication' as a site of politics draws attention to the possibilities of filmmaking in producing or transforming social relations. Lempert (2018), in his collection of essays, analyses the ways through which indigenous media can be expanded and reimaged with a focus on the future. At a time when more creative indigenous assertions of sovereign futures are found more than ever before, their political implications are expected to act as the groundswell of native activism. This is projected to work as a creative arm of indigenous futurist movements, helping them towards better futures.

Research Objective

To analyse the scope and possibilities of indigenous visual media in

India, where indigenous people define and represent their images, dreams, culture, language, and the difficulties they face.

Methodology

The topic of this social science research demanded the researcher to opt for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and they were initiated for the successful completion of the study. The focus group selected consisted of 10 persons from different tribal communities in Kerala who have achieved meritorious successes as approval in their communities (public news-based data). This included the first civil engineer from the largest tribal community of Kerala named 'Paniya', the first lady film director from the tribal community, the first film music composer in mainstream film from the tribal population, the first Ph.D. holder, the first MBA holder, the first veterinary Doctor and state leaders of various tribal associations. They being the primary beneficiaries of such initiatives, were expected to give the best of the valid points about the needs and scope of the said media outlets. The set of 12 points was discussed among the focus group, which yielded the necessary information for the research questions raised.

Discussions

All the participants in the focus group discussion were unanimous in the opinion that tribal representations were poor and disgraceful. The tribal leader CK Janu maintained that they are often not even considered humans in media representations. While Manikandan, the first MBA holder, was of the opinion that apart from cinema, other media forms give comparatively more truthful images of the tribes. Suresh C, the civil engineer from the 'Paniya' community, found this a selling element of mainstream media. Meanwhile, Vinu Kidachoolan, the first film music composer from the tribal community, opines that though many kinds of similar research for the upliftment of the tribal community are happening, their results and findings are seldom given importance while making welfare planning aimed at the tribal population.

Kerala's first Ph.D. holder from tribal communities, Dr. Nitheeshkumar, opines that common people assimilate the media representations as information, and so improper media representations will lead to form wrong concepts in society. According to Manglu Shreedhar, the tribal activist from Wayanad, there are considerable developments in tribal lives, and many of the communities have come forward and are trying to stand with the mainstream society. But the media representations did not identify/address any such developments present in tribal lives. The first

lady film director from the tribal community Leela Santhosh says mainstream media representations have an influential impact on mass society and its generalised social concepts.

As mentioned above, all the participants of the focus group were like-minded in the case of media representations and their impacts on society. At the same time, there were different sounds while discussing the current nature of the mainstream media. Some participants like Suresh C, Leela Santhosh, and C K Janu blindly opposed all the media representations and maintained that representations of Adivasis through all the media are inferior and away from reality. Dr. Nitheesh Kumar and Manikandan maintained that, to an extent, international cinema and journalistic media try to maintain minimum genuinity and attachment to reality in their representations. Along with the above opinions, the tribal activist Chithra Nilambur who is a member of the Kattunaikka Community, observed some exaggerated cinematic representations of tribal life, which portray them as totally unaware of modern life situations are somehow unrealistic in many cases. She added, citing some experiences from her life.

Almost all the focus group participants were united in responses toward the idealistic concept of representations, where the connection between reality and the representation was central to the discussion. According to Suresh. C's opinion, generalisation among tribal communities is impossible. Indeed, there is still backwardness in some communities, but that must not be a reason for the generalisation. So, representations must be as realistic as possible.

All the focus group members were excited to speak about the proposed indigenous media initiative. The concept was totally new to them and was met with excitement and fervour. *It seems to be one of the most wanted elements in the upliftment of alienated, silenced, and marginalised communities like Adivasis* - added Manikandan. *Road to the accomplishment of the same will be politically and economically difficult to execute* -said CK Janu. She added that the proposed indigenous visual media could help bring the tribal community a step forward.

Each and every participant of the focus group vigorously noted the possibilities of such an indigenous visual media if it comes true in India. All of them commented on the theme according to their own experience and vision. CK Janu opined that such media could lift the community equal to the mainstream society through which the community can be integrated nationally, and the members will get more confidence in themselves. Mrs. Manglu Shredhar points out that the welfare activities formed by the

government aimed at tribal upliftment can reach the communities directly, and the problem within the communities could be effectively communicated with outside society and the government as well. People like Daxin Bhajrangi, Leela Santhosh, and Vinu Kidachulan can come forward to express the possibilities of artistic experiments if they get such space and exposure through the visual media. Numerous indigenous languages could be protected from extinction by documenting them through the media. By connecting the media with indigenous enterprises, it is possible to enter the international market as a national trademark, and the scope of indigenous tourism can also be explored. Leadership from all the communities could also be formed. Tribal people are basically nature worshipers; they live less harmful lives mingling with nature in the outer society; all their rituals, lifestyle, food habits, medicine, and entire culture are deeply rooted in nature and its nuances. On that basis, the focus group discussants claim that they can put forward new values and lifestyles based on nature for the entire world to follow.

Plans for Performative Aesthetics of Indigenous Media

The indigenous people had been physically absent from decision-making forums on Development (Tauli-Corpuz, 1993) or in portraying themselves wisely and skillfully till 1990, even in the international arena. Hence, a politically conscious strategic use of national enthusiasm and governance is needed to initiate such a media outlet, especially in conditions existing in the Indian context. Regulatory frameworks must also be initiated for legal recognition of such media and their outputs. The national government is expected to aid and support them in a tactical and financial way as the latter must realise it as a way of adopting and affirming Development among the tribes. After proper and detailed participatory communication initiatives, the indigenous communicators must be provided with training in digital technology to tap into and formulate pan-indigenous forms of knowledge into watchable and digestible forms of production, representation, property, and exchange in the indigenous societies and mainstream media outlets. It is only with time and sustained efforts that indigenous film/video can be systematised by dominant/related media as new forms of aesthetically political production for aesthetic and developmental innovations. This is expected to lead every indigenous community in India to further development and suitable representation of themselves, evaluation, and mediation of their culture and wisdom in unexpected and promising ways.

Conclusion

The in-depth interview and focus group discussion definitely portray

the fervour and vigour of opting for indigenous visual media that could showcase tribal life in real light. Denying the effects of the tourist gaze (Urry, J. 1992) and exposing the misrepresentations that have become part and parcel of the media output, the indigenous visual media in India is opined to be the heel of the hour in the speedy uplifting and liberation of tribal souls from 'colonialist' portrayals. This kind of media output, if adequately funded and supported by the official machinery, will also heap ripe dividends on the empowerment and prosperity of nature's best human friends. The researcher would like to work more on the various aspects of its practicality and will like to dedicate more time to get it done by making the right proposals and plans for the execution of the same.

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