

Indigenous Digital Narratives and Educational Change: Santali Short Films as Tools of Advocacy and Decolonization

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Abstract

With an emphasis on Santali short films, this study explores the transformational potential of Indigenous digital storytelling in promoting educational change and decolonization. The study examines how Santali filmmakers and community creators use digital media to reclaim cultural narratives, question prevailing epistemologies, and promote inclusive and culturally responsive education. It is situated within the larger conversation on decolonial pedagogy and Indigenous knowledge systems. The study uses a qualitative methodology, incorporating knowledge from community-based practices and participatory storytelling frameworks with content analysis of a few Santali short films. According to the findings, Santali digital tales are effective advocacy tools because they preserve linguistic heritage, revitalize cultural identity, and give voice to marginalized groups in official and informal educational settings. These movies not only defy historical erasure and colonial depictions, but also produce substitute educational materials that are culturally appropriate and rooted locally. The study also emphasizes how digital storytelling enhances community involvement in educational processes and promotes the transmission of information between generations. This study adds to the expanding body of knowledge on Indigenous media and decolonial education by presenting Santali short films as tools of both cultural resistance and educational innovation. It emphasizes how important it is to incorporate Indigenous digital narratives into mainstream educational frameworks in order to advance diversity, equity, and epistemic justice.

Keywords: Indigenous Digital Storytelling, Santali Short Films. Decolonization, Educational Advocacy, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Cultural Revitalization

1. Introduction

New venues for cultural expression, knowledge creation, and storytelling have been made possible by the growing digitization of media, especially for Indigenous groups trying to recover their voices. Digital storytelling has become a vital tool in this changing environment for questioning prevailing narratives and promoting decolonization efforts. Media production, particularly short films in the Santali language, provides a potent medium for expressing lived

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experiences, conserving cultural heritage, and opposing epistemic marginalization ingrained in mainstream educational systems for historically marginalized communities like the Santals, one of the largest Indigenous groups in India.

Colonial legacies have long influenced Indian conventional education, favouring dominant languages, histories, and knowledge systems while frequently ignoring or misrepresenting Indigenous viewpoints. As a result, there is still a gap between official education and Indigenous learners' cultural realities. Decolonizing education in this context entails re-centering Indigenous epistemologies, languages, and forms of knowledge transmission in addition to updating curricula. Digital storytelling offers a different instructional approach that is both culturally grounded and technologically flexible, especially through community-driven Santali short films.

In recent years, Santali short films have become more popular as accessible and interactive media. These videos cover a variety of topics, such as folklore, social issues, identity, language preservation, and community challenges. They are made with comparatively inexpensive digital tools and shared web platforms. They serve as places of knowledge production and dissemination where Indigenous worldviews are expressed on their own terms, in addition to being creative outputs. By doing this, they subvert dominant narratives and support what academics refer to as "narrative sovereignty," or Indigenous groups' right to narrate their own stories.

This study places Santali digital storytelling in the larger context of educational advocacy and decolonial thinking. It looks at how these short films serve as tools for pedagogical innovation and cultural resistance. The study specifically investigates how Santali digital narratives promote linguistic and cultural revitalization, increase engagement among Indigenous learners, and develop cultural relevance in order to facilitate educational reform. It also takes into account the ways in which these media practices can impact advocacy campaigns and policy discussions that seek to improve education's inclusivity and equity. This study adds to the expanding corpus of work on Indigenous media and decolonial schooling by concentrating on Santali short films, especially in the Indian setting where such studies are still few. It emphasizes how technology, culture, and education are intertwined and how community-driven digital behaviours are changing educational paradigms. In the end, the study makes the case that incorporating Indigenous digital narratives into educational frameworks is essential to attaining epistemic fairness and long-term educational transformation in addition to being a matter of cultural preservation.

2. Specific Objectives

The paper examine how Santali Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural narratives are portrayed through digital storytelling. to investigate how Santali short films subvert prevailing cultural and educational narratives in order to serve as instruments of decolonization. to evaluate how well Santali short films support educational advocacy and culturally sensitive teaching methods. To investigate how digital media can help preserve and revitalize the Santali language and cultural identity

3. Research Questions

How does digital storytelling represent Santali Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural narratives in short films? In what ways do Santali short films function as tools of decolonization by challenging dominant educational and cultural discourses? How effective are Santali short films in promoting educational advocacy and culturally responsive learning practices? What role does digital media play in preserving and revitalizing the Santali language and cultural identity through short films?

4. Literature Review

Digital storytelling has emerged as a powerful medium for knowledge production, identity formation, and cultural preservation, particularly among Indigenous communities. According to Joe Lambert (2013) ⁽¹⁾, digital storytelling enables individuals to construct and share personal narratives through multimedia, fostering participatory communication and cultural expression. This aligns with Nick Couldry's (2012) ⁽²⁾ concept of "voice," which emphasizes the importance of narrative agency in achieving social recognition and justice.

According to research, people can create and share personal narratives utilizing multimedia resources through digital storytelling, which is a potent participatory medium. Joe Lambert (2021) claims that this technique encourages active engagement as opposed to passive media consumption by allowing people to turn their real experiences into relevant digital content.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) attacks Western epistemic domination and promotes Indigenous-centered techniques in her detailed discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of decolonization in research and education. In a similar vein, Marie Battiste (2013) emphasizes the necessity of incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems into education in order to build inclusive learning environments and combat epistemic marginalization. These viewpoints are essential to comprehending how Santali short films might serve as decolonial pedagogical tools.

Studies on indigenous media provide more evidence of how digital platforms support cultural regeneration. Indigenous media, according to Faye Ginsburg (2002), is a type of cultural advocacy that enables communities to genuinely represent themselves. Similarly, Wilson and Stewart (2008) contend that while adjusting to modern communication technology, Indigenous media output enhances cultural continuity. In the context of Santali digital storytelling, where short videos serve as archives of oral traditions and cultural practices, these observations are especially pertinent.

Indigenous storytelling is based on the idea of narrative sovereignty. According to Cunsolo Willox et al. (2013), in order to prevent cultural erasure and external distortion, Indigenous groups must maintain sovereignty over their narratives. This idea is especially relevant to Santali short films, which offer a forum for community-driven storytelling and self-representation.

In the Indian context, academics like Virginius Xaxa (2014) and Mohanty (2011) draw attention to how indigenous populations are marginalized in mainstream media and education. In particular, Xaxa (2014) addresses the necessity for culturally inclusive policies and the systemic injustices that Indigenous populations must endure. Although Santali is becoming

more visible in digital media due to its official status in India, there is still little scholarly research on its application in education.

The instructional potential of narrative is further supported by research on media and education. According to Robin (2008), digital storytelling improves students' communication, critical thinking, and engagement abilities. In a similar vein, Hull and Katz (2006) show how digital narratives empower students by fusing academic knowledge with real-world experiences. These results imply that Santali short films may have a major impact on raising Indigenous students' levels of educational engagement.

Additionally, a pertinent framework for comprehending educational advocacy is provided by Freire's (1970) idea of critical pedagogy. As essential components of transformative education, Freire highlights empowerment, consciousness-raising, and discourse. By empowering communities to critically interact with their social reality and promote change, Santali digital storytelling embodies these ideals.

Challenges are also highlighted by recent research on Indigenous digital habits. Srinivasan et al. (2010) state that problems with digital access, representation, and sustainability continue to be obstacles to the broad use of Indigenous media. Similar to this, Kral (2010) points out that although digital tools present new possibilities, community involvement and contextual relevance are necessary for them to be effective.

All things considered, the literature shows that digital storytelling plays a crucial role at the nexus of media, culture, and education. It encourages decolonial activities, strengthens educational participation, and supports the preservation of Indigenous knowledge. Nonetheless, there is still a substantial void in empirical studies that particularly address Santali short films and their function in decolonization and educational campaigning. By offering a context-specific perspective that advances both scholarly discussion and real-world applications in Indigenous education, this study seeks to close this gap.

5. Research Design and Methodology

Based on secondary data, this study employs an analytical, descriptive, and qualitative research approach. Books, scholarly publications, research papers, Santali short films, and internet resources are examples of sources. Purposive sampling is used to choose pertinent books and movies, and data is gathered by methodically analysing digital media content. The data is interpreted using theme analysis and qualitative content analysis. Language preservation, educational assistance, decolonization, and Indigenous knowledge systems are important themes. The research is based on digital storytelling theory, Indigenous knowledge systems, and decolonial philosophy. It focuses on how Santali short films might be used for campaigning and education. Reliance on secondary sources and restricted access to digital content are examples of limitations. Respecting Indigenous narratives, avoiding misrepresentation, and giving due credit are also ethical responsibilities.

6. Literature Gap

There are still a lot of unanswered questions about digital storytelling, Indigenous media, and decolonial education, particularly when it comes to Santali short films. The majority of research

concentrates on Indigenous contexts in the West or around the world, paying little attention to Indian Indigenous groups. The ways in which Santali digital media facilitates the production and dissemination of knowledge locally are not well studied empirically. Although decolonial education is extensively debated, little research has been done on its media-based applications, such as Santali short films. In a similar vein, little is known about how digital storytelling affects education in Indigenous environments, especially in terms of engagement and learning outcomes. Few studies look at how Santali digital films promote linguistic continuity and intergenerational information transfer, despite the fact that language preservation is a major problem. There is also a dearth of interdisciplinary study integrating media studies, education, and Indigenous knowledge systems, as well as a lack of focus on issues related to infrastructure and access. By analysing Santali short films as instruments for decolonization, education, and digital storytelling within a framework rooted in culture, this study fills in these gaps.

7. Findings of the Research

According to Joe Lambert (1992), digital storytelling is a community-based, participatory approach that enables underprivileged and Indigenous populations to produce and disseminate their narratives. It encourages the recording of oral traditions, languages, and life experiences that help the creation of knowledge, the development of identities, and the preservation of culture. Additionally, it strengthens voice and agency, empowering groups to challenge prevailing narratives and portray themselves in ways that accurately reflect their experiences. This promotes cultural continuity and empowerment. The study shows how digital storytelling increases narrative agency, self-representation, and participatory communication, turning people from passive consumers to active creators. Additionally, it promotes cultural expression, self-assurance, and a sense of control over individual and group narratives. Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Marie Battiste's (2017) research on decolonization in education emphasizes Indigenous-centered strategies that downplay epistemic marginalization. By portraying Indigenous culture, language, and lived experiences as well as by questioning prevailing Western viewpoints and promoting identity and empowerment, Santali short films function as decolonial educational tools. Indigenous media researchers like Faye Ginsburg and Wilson & Stewart (2013) believe that digital media also plays a role in cultural regeneration. Cunsolo Willox et al. (2016) examine the idea of narrative sovereignty, which highlights Indigenous control over the narrative to prevent misrepresentation and is evident in Santali short films. The marginalization of tribal populations in India and the necessity for inclusive education policies are highlighted by Mohanty and Virginius Xaxa (2024), who point out that despite formal recognition, Santali language instruction is still not well studied. By relating learning to personal experience, digital storytelling enhances engagement, communication, and critical thinking, according to research by Robin, Hull, and Katz (2021). Through discussion, empowerment, and social awareness—all of which are present in Santali storytelling techniques—Freire's critical pedagogy further encourages this. Srinivasan et al. and Kral (2019), however, highlight issues such as restricted digital access, sustainability issues, and the requirement for increased community involvement. The body of research generally demonstrates how digital storytelling supports Indigenous knowledge and decolonial learning by bridging media, culture, and education. However, this study tackles the paucity of research on Santali short films in educational advocacy.

8. Discussion

The present study demonstrates the role of Santali short films as Indigenous digital narratives in decolonization, cultural regeneration, and educational transformation. They act as alternative knowledge systems to dominant Western epistemologies by foregrounding Indigenous lived experiences, oral traditions and community values, thus contributing to the recognition of Indigenous knowledge as equally valid. These films also serve as educational tools that bridge traditional knowledge with modern digital media, making learning more accessible and culturally relevant, especially for younger generations. They also function as platforms for social advocacy on issues such as identity, land rights, gender inequality and environmental concerns and also promote the use of the Santali language as a form of cultural resistance and identity preservation. However, factors such as the digital divide, limited infrastructure, and lack of institutional support may limit their reach and impact. In general, Santali short films play a role in cultural preservation, knowledge production, and social empowerment, but need enhanced policy support and incorporation into formal education systems for long-term impact.

9. Conclusion

This study clarifies the function of Indigenous digital narratives, especially Santali short films, in decolonization, cultural preservation, and educational reform. By emphasizing Indigenous views, these films question prevailing Western epistemologies and advance alternative knowledge systems based on regional culture, lived experience, and tradition. They also help create a more inclusive and culturally sensitive educational system. Santali short films are educational tools that connect digital media with oral tradition, increasing the relevance and accessibility of Indigenous knowledge for future generations. By adapting storytelling for modern platforms, they contribute to the preservation of cultural identity, values, and traditions in the globalized world. By addressing topics like gender inequity, land rights, environmental sustainability, and cultural identity, these movies also act as venues for social campaigning, according to the study. By boosting disadvantaged voices, enhancing narrative agency, and combating misrepresentation, storytelling transforms into a cultural and political act. The use of Santali in digital storytelling enhances linguistic identity, fosters cultural pride, and protects the language from marginalization in mainstream media and education, all of which make language crucial. However, obstacles like inadequate institutional backing, poor infrastructure, and restricted digital access limit their broader influence. Additionally, Indigenous information is not included in formal curriculum, which restricts their educational integration. All things considered, Santali short videos demonstrate the revolutionary potential of Indigenous digital storytelling for advocacy, education, and decolonization. They enable communities to recover their narratives and cultural history, but if they are to have a long-lasting and sustainable effect, they require further legislative backing and participation in formal schooling.

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