



Preserving Tribal Identity through Collective Memory and Media Representation: Pathways to Viksit Bharat in Arunachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the intricate relationship between tribal identity, collective memory, and media representation in Arunachal Pradesh, contextualizing these dynamics within the framework of Viksit Bharat (Developed India) 2047. Drawing upon oral tradition theory, collective memory frameworks, and media representation studies, this research explores how the 26 major tribes and over 100 sub-tribes of Arunachal Pradesh preserve their cultural heritage through memory systems while navigating challenges of media misrepresentation and digital transformation. Through analysis of contemporary developments and existing literature, this study reveals that oral traditions serve as repositories of tribal knowledge and identity, yet face unprecedented threats from modernization, digital divides, and stereotypical media portrayals. The paper argues that achieving inclusive development under Viksit Bharat requires recognizing tribal communities as knowledge custodians rather than development recipients, leveraging digital technologies to amplify authentic tribal narratives, and ensuring media platforms facilitate cultural preservation alongside economic progress. The findings suggest that sustainable development in



Arunachal Pradesh necessitates a paradigm shift from assimilative modernization to culturally-rooted transformation that honors indigenous knowledge systems while embracing technological advancement.

Introduction

Arunachal Pradesh, the "Land of the Rising Sun," represents one of India's most culturally diverse regions, home to 26 major tribes and more than 100 sub-tribes, each with distinct languages, customs, and knowledge systems (Britannica, n.d.). This northeastern state, with a population of approximately 1.4 million spread across 84,000 square kilometers, presents a unique anthropological landscape where ancient oral traditions coexist with rapid modernization pressures (Demographics of Arunachal Pradesh, 2025). As India advances toward its vision of Viksit Bharat—a developed nation by 2047—Arunachal Pradesh's tribal communities stand at a critical juncture where preservation of cultural identity intersects with aspirations for economic development and technological integration.

The significance of this research lies in addressing a fundamental paradox: how can tribal communities participate meaningfully in national development while maintaining their distinctive identities rooted in oral traditions and collective memory? The indigenous tribes of the region—such as the Adi, Nyishi, Apatani, Monpa, and Wancho—have relied on storytelling, folklore, songs, and rituals to preserve their history (Oral History as a Source of Ancient History, 2024). However, the national mainstream media platforms have represented the people of the northeastern part of India and their ethnic and religious clashes in ways that create stereotypes (Ethnic Conflicts in National News Media, 2024).

This paper integrates two critical themes from the national seminar on "Oral Culture and Tribal Knowledge System": (1) tribal identity, media representation, and the framework of Viksit Bharat, and (2) tribal knowledge and the role of memory. Through a comprehensive literature review and analysis of recent developments, this study examines how collective memory functions as the foundation of tribal identity, how media representation influences external perceptions and internal self-understanding, and how these dynamics shape tribal participation in India's development trajectory.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Oral Tradition and Collective Memory



Oral traditions form the foundation of Aboriginal societies, connecting speaker and listener in communal experience and uniting past and present in memory (Oral Traditions, n.d.). The theoretical understanding of oral tradition extends beyond simple verbal transmission to encompass complex systems of knowledge preservation, identity formation, and cultural continuity. Oral tradition refers to the practice of passing down cultural legacies, history, and knowledge through spoken word, encompassing various forms such as stories, myths, songs, and poetry (Oral Tradition, n.d.).

Collective memory theory, as developed by scholars like Jan Assmann and Maurice Halbwachs, provides a crucial lens for understanding how tribal communities maintain continuity across generations. Stories function as collective identity, something core to the reclamation and formation of Native identity, and the act of remembering erases temporal distinctions, making now and then seem more similar than different (Stories of History and Memory, n.d.). This temporal erasure is particularly significant in tribal contexts where past, present, and future exist in dynamic relationship rather than linear progression.

Oral tradition is a collective enterprise where a narrator does not generally hold singular authority over a story, and narrators will document the histories they tell by citing the source of their knowledge, such as a great grandparent or an elder, in what is sometimes referred to as oral footnoting (Oral Traditions, n.d.). This collective validation mechanism ensures accuracy and authenticity of transmitted knowledge, distinguishing oral traditions from individual narrative accounts.

Oral Traditions in Arunachal Pradesh Context

The tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh have developed sophisticated oral tradition systems that serve multiple functions: historical documentation, moral instruction, environmental knowledge transmission, and identity formation. Storytelling, elders narrating tales of origin, migration, and warfare, often imbued with moral lessons, form crucial repositories of historical knowledge in the absence of extensive written records (Oral History as a Source of Ancient History, 2024).

Oral tradition is an integral part of Galo culture, with everything they do or believe rooted in their oral tradition, ranging from folklore to ritual incantation stored in the collected memory of the people of the community (Oral Tradition and Genealogy of Galo Tribe, n.d.). The Galo tribe's genealogical system exemplifies the complexity of oral knowledge structures, where naming conventions encode lineage information and tribal affiliations, making personal identity inseparable from collective memory.

Tribal genealogies often trace the descent of chiefs and influential families, legitimizing their authority within the community, and provide a framework for understanding the sequence of significant events,



such as migrations, conflicts, and alliances (Oral History as Source for Medieval History, 2024). These genealogical narratives reveal the hierarchical organization of tribes and emphasize cultural continuity through preservation of traditions across generations.

Tribal Identity Formation and Challenges

For many tribes, traditions, customs, rituals, and shared histories serve as the backbone of their collective identity, with tribal identity being more than an individual experience—it is communal and rooted in collective memory (Defining Tribal Identity, 2025). This communal nature of identity creates both resilience and vulnerability; while shared memory strengthens group cohesion, external pressures can threaten the entire identity system.

Most tribal languages don't have scripts, with oral tradition ruling for centuries, though language survival is a real worry as more young people speak Hindi or English (History of Arunachal Pradesh, 2024). The linguistic dimension of identity loss represents perhaps the most critical threat, as language extinction typically precedes cultural erosion.

Contemporary challenges facing tribal identity formation include generational divides between elders who maintain traditional practices and youth exposed to urban lifestyles and global media. Many of these languages face the challenge of maintaining relevance among younger generations, with Hindi and English being the languages of education and administration, leading to concerns about language endangerment with some dialects being spoken by only a few hundred people (Arunachal Pradesh's Ethnic Mosaic, 2025).

Media Representation of Indigenous Communities

The representation of indigenous communities in mainstream media significantly influences both external perceptions and internal identity formation. Mainstream media often falls short in its representation of Indigenous cultures, prioritizing sensationalized narratives and simplistic portrayals over nuanced and authentic storytelling, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and contributing to the marginalization of Indigenous voices in media discourse (Indigenous Knowledge, Culture and Media, n.d.).

Considerable social exclusion and prejudice have resulted from widespread misconceptions about North East India, with people from the Northeast often experiencing discrimination and racial profiling, particularly in mainland India's cities, frequently experiencing physical abuse, verbal abuse, and social exclusion (Stereotypes vs. Human Rights, 2024). The use of derogatory terms and stereotypical



representations in media contributes to systemic discrimination affecting housing, employment, education, and social integration.

When Native Americans are included in media depictions, they are usually shown as a particular type, and this narrow representation does not reflect the wide diversity among the hundreds of tribal cultures that exist (Native Americans: Negative Impacts, 2022). This pattern parallels the representation of Arunachal Pradesh tribes, where media often homogenizes diverse communities or focuses on exotic elements rather than contemporary realities.

Research demonstrates tangible impacts of media misrepresentation. Exposure to narratives about Native people that included factual information about present-day Native life, more accurate history, positive examples of resilience, and information about systemic oppression showed 16-24 percent more people supported the position of tribes on key issues (Research Reveals Media Role, n.d.). This finding underscores the power of accurate representation to shift public opinion and policy support.

Viksit Bharat Framework and Tribal Development

The Viksit Bharat 2047 vision represents India's commitment to becoming a developed nation by its centennial of independence. The Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra has a special focus on the development and progress of tribal communities, with the yatra reaching every corner of the state to ensure that targeted people avail benefits from state and central government schemes and programmes (Arunachal Governor Launches Viksit Bharat, 2023; Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, 2023).

The Prime Minister launched the UNNATI scheme worth about Rs 10,000 crores and inaugurated multiple development projects worth about Rs 55,600 crores addressing education, road, railways, infrastructure, hospitals, and tourism (PM Addresses Viksit Bharat, n.d.). These investments represent significant commitment to northeastern development, yet questions remain about how such development incorporates tribal knowledge systems and cultural preservation.

Tribal development is prioritised by providing more than three crore rural poor with affordable homes with basic amenities, with zero poverty in Viksit Bharat 2047 achievable through a multi-dimensional approach towards empowering the underprivileged and promoting inclusive development (Viksit Bharat 2047, 2025). However, the definition of "development" itself requires critical examination—whether it imposes external standards or emerges from tribal aspirations and values.



Digital Divide and Technological Access

The government has deployed 254 network towers to provide 4G mobile telephony connectivity to approximately 336 villages in border areas of Arunachal Pradesh, with 2,605 4G mobile towers approved for providing connectivity to more than 3,721 villages (India's Efforts to Bridge Digital Divide, 2023). While this infrastructure development is significant, connectivity alone does not ensure meaningful digital inclusion.

Arunachal Pradesh is a critical border state with 2,223 out of 3,035 villages lacking internet connectivity, which is over 73% of its villages (Internet Access and Connectivity, n.d.). This digital divide has profound implications for education, economic opportunities, and cultural preservation, as digital platforms increasingly mediate knowledge transmission and identity expression.

The digital divide remains a major concern for tribal communities, with lack of internet connectivity, absence of digital literacy programs in tribal languages, and resistance to technology adoption hindering the progress of digital initiatives (MEDIA SCHOLAR, 2024). The challenge extends beyond infrastructure to encompass digital literacy, content availability in tribal languages, and cultural appropriateness of technological solutions.

Methodology

This study employs a comprehensive literature review approach, analyzing recent scholarly publications, government reports, and media sources to examine the intersection of tribal identity, memory systems, and media representation in Arunachal Pradesh. The research draws upon multiple disciplinary perspectives including anthropology, communication studies, memory studies, and development economics to provide a holistic understanding of the subject.

Data sources include:

1. Academic publications on oral traditions and indigenous knowledge systems
2. Government policy documents related to Viksit Bharat and tribal development
3. Media analyses examining representation of northeastern tribal communities
4. Digital infrastructure reports documenting connectivity in Arunachal Pradesh
5. Cultural documentation projects by Arunachal Pradesh Department of Cultural Affairs

The analytical framework integrates:

- Oral tradition theory to understand knowledge transmission mechanisms



- Collective memory frameworks to examine identity formation processes
- Media representation analysis to assess stereotyping and authenticity
- Development studies perspectives to evaluate inclusive growth models

Limitations of this study include reliance on English-language sources, which may not capture the full richness of indigenous perspectives, and the rapidly evolving nature of digital infrastructure and policy initiatives that may render some data quickly outdated.

Analysis and Discussion

The Role of Memory in Tribal Identity Preservation

Memory functions as the cornerstone of tribal identity in Arunachal Pradesh, operating through complex oral tradition systems that encode historical, cultural, ecological, and spiritual knowledge. Myths and folklore explain natural phenomena, serve as moral and ethical guides, and function as repositories of cultural heritage, preserving history, traditions, and beliefs of the tribes (Mythological Origins and Oral Traditions, 2024).

The transmission of memory occurs through multiple channels: formal storytelling sessions led by tribal elders, ritual performances during festivals, informal family narratives, and community gatherings. Each tribe has developed specialized roles for memory custodians—whether called priests, shamans, or elders—who bear responsibility for maintaining accuracy and completeness of oral traditions.

Ancestor worship forms the cornerstone of many tribal practices across all three cultural groups, with communities believing that deceased family members continue to influence the lives of the living, offering protection and guidance (Cultural Diversity of Arunachal Pradesh, 2025). This belief system creates powerful incentives for memory preservation, as forgetting ancestors equates to severing spiritual connections and losing protective forces.

The content of collective memory encompasses several domains:

Historical Memory: Origin narratives, migration stories, territorial boundaries, inter-tribal relations, and significant events. The Apatani tribe's legends describe their migration from northern regions and settlement in Ziro Valley, with medieval conflicts over agricultural land and water resources being recurring themes (Oral History as Source for Medieval History, 2024).



Ecological Memory: Traditional ecological knowledge embedded in stories about plant properties, animal behaviors, seasonal patterns, and resource management. This knowledge has enabled sustainable livelihoods for millennia and represents invaluable wisdom for contemporary environmental challenges.

Social Memory: Kinship systems, marriage rules, conflict resolution mechanisms, leadership succession, and social hierarchies. These memories maintain social order and provide frameworks for governance.

Spiritual Memory: Cosmological beliefs, ritual practices, sacred sites, and relationships with supernatural entities. Spirits are everywhere—mountains, rivers, trees, rocks, with the Adi tribe having rich oral traditions about these spirits, making offerings before hunting or planting, with sacred groves left untouched as homes for spirits (History of Arunachal Pradesh, 2024).

The cognitive mechanisms supporting oral memory transmission include narrative structures (plot, character, conflict), mnemonic devices (rhythm, repetition, formulaic expressions), emotional engagement (drama, humor, suspense), and performance elements (gesture, voice modulation, audience participation). These techniques ensure memorable encoding and facilitate accurate recall across generations.

However, multiple threats challenge memory preservation systems:

Linguistic Erosion: As younger generations shift to dominant languages (Hindi, English) for education and economic opportunities, the linguistic medium carrying traditional memory weakens. Many tribal languages lack written scripts, making them vulnerable to rapid extinction.

Urbanization and Migration: Economic pressures drive youth migration to cities, disrupting intergenerational knowledge transmission that traditionally occurred through daily interactions between elders and children. Urban environments provide fewer opportunities for formal storytelling sessions and ritual performances.

Educational Systems: Modern curricula prioritize written literacy and standardized knowledge, often devaluing oral traditions as "unscientific" or "primitive." Schools and colleges are incorporating local cultural studies into curricula, ensuring traditional knowledge is passed to future generations (Arunachal Pradesh's Ethnic Mosaic, 2025), though implementation remains inconsistent.

Technological Mediation: While digital technologies offer preservation opportunities through audio-video recording, they also transform the nature of oral traditions. Recorded narratives lose the dynamic,



interactive quality of live performance, and technological dependence may reduce motivation for traditional memorization practices.

Mortality of Knowledge Holders: As elderly knowledge custodians pass away without adequate training of successors, irreplaceable cultural knowledge disappears. This "extinction by forgetting" represents perhaps the most irreversible loss.

Media Representation and External Perceptions

The representation of Arunachal Pradesh tribal communities in mainstream media significantly shapes both external perceptions and internal identity dynamics. Analysis reveals several problematic patterns:

Stereotyping and Exoticization: Media coverage often emphasizes the "exotic" or "primitive" aspects of tribal life—unique costumes, unusual customs, remote locations—while ignoring contemporary realities, aspirations, and contributions. Indigenous peoples are frequently depicted through a narrow lens, focusing on outdated and inaccurate stereotypes rather than showcasing the richness and diversity of their cultures, portrayed as primitive or exotic, living in remote areas untouched by modernity (Indigenous Knowledge, Culture and Media, n.d.).

Homogenization: Media frequently treats "northeastern tribes" or "Arunachal tribes" as monolithic categories, erasing the profound diversity among 26 major tribes and over 100 sub-tribes with distinct languages, customs, and histories. This representational homogenization contributes to public ignorance about specific tribal identities and needs.

Conflict-Centric Framing: When northeastern India receives national media attention, coverage disproportionately focuses on violence, insurgency, ethnic conflicts, and border tensions. The national mainstream media platforms have represented ethnic and religious clashes in their news reports in ways that create stereotypes (Ethnic Conflicts in National News Media, 2024). This framing perpetuates perceptions of the region as dangerous, backward, and problematic rather than culturally rich and economically vibrant.

Absence and Invisibility: Perhaps most damaging is the general absence of northeastern tribal voices and stories from mainstream media. When real Native people are invisible in the media, false narratives and toxic stereotypes are the average American's only exposure to Native realities (Using Narrative to Shift Culture, 2021). This pattern applies equally to Indian media's treatment of northeastern communities, creating information vacuums filled by stereotypes.



Linguistic Marginalization: Media content in tribal languages remains extremely limited. Dominance of Hindi and English in broadcast, print, and digital media effectively silences tribal voices and perspectives, requiring tribal peoples to adopt external linguistic frameworks to participate in public discourse.

The consequences of misrepresentation extend beyond mere image problems to tangible material impacts:

Policy Implications: Policymakers' understanding of tribal communities significantly shapes development programs, resource allocations, and legal protections. Stereotypical representations can lead to inappropriate or culturally insensitive policies.

Economic Impacts: Negative stereotypes affect employment opportunities, business partnerships, tourism development, and investment flows into the region. Discrimination in housing and education further perpetuates economic marginalization.

Psychological Effects: Internalized stereotypes can damage self-esteem, particularly among youth exposed to negative media portrayals. This psychological burden affects academic performance, mental health, and identity formation.

Social Relations: Misrepresentation fuels prejudice and discrimination when tribal people migrate to other parts of India for education or employment, creating hostile social environments and limiting integration opportunities.

Positive developments in media representation include emergence of indigenous media initiatives, where tribal communities create content platforms to share authentic narratives. Indigenous media outlets serve as vital channels for representing the rich tapestry of cultures, languages and traditions found within the region's diverse Indigenous communities (Indigenous Knowledge, Culture and Media, n.d.). Social media platforms have enabled some tribal content creators to reach wider audiences, challenging stereotypes through direct storytelling. Mukbang creators in northeast India fight stereotypes with food, with YouTuber Apollos Kent from Nagaland using mukbang to challenge culinary stereotypes and highlight traditional Northeast Indian dishes (Mukbang Creators Fight Stereotypes, 2024).

However, these grassroots initiatives face significant challenges including limited resources, digital infrastructure constraints, language barriers, and difficulty competing with established media organizations for audience attention.



Viksit Bharat and Inclusive Development Paradigms

The Viksit Bharat framework presents both opportunities and challenges for Arunachal Pradesh tribal communities. The vision promises inclusive development reaching all citizens, yet the conceptualization of "development" itself requires critical examination.

Infrastructure Development: Massive investments in roads, bridges, mobile towers, electricity grids, schools, and health facilities undoubtedly improve material conditions. 35,000 families of Arunachal Pradesh got pucca houses, piped water connections for thousands of families of Arunachal and connectivity-related projects benefit many states in the region (PM Addresses Viksit Bharat, n.d.). These developments expand access to services, markets, and opportunities previously unavailable to remote communities.

However, infrastructure projects also carry risks:

- Displacement of communities from traditional lands
- Disruption of sacred sites and cultural landmarks
- Environmental degradation affecting traditional livelihoods
- Increased external migration altering demographic composition
- Cultural homogenization as connectivity facilitates dominant culture penetration

Economic Integration: Viksit Bharat emphasizes economic growth, job creation, and entrepreneurship. For tribal communities, this presents dilemmas: Should youth pursue traditional livelihoods (agriculture, handicrafts, forestry) or seek modern sector employment? How can traditional economic systems incorporate market integration without losing sustainability principles? Can tribal enterprises compete in globalized markets while maintaining cultural authenticity?

The themes are Sundar Arunachal, Samridh Arunachal, Shikshit Arunachal, Swasth Arunachal, Surakshit Arunachal and Swachch Arunachal (Pema Khandu Empowers Officials, 2025), representing comprehensive development across aesthetics, prosperity, education, health, security, and cleanliness. While comprehensive, this framework risks imposing external development metrics rather than recognizing indigenous conceptions of wellbeing.

Digital Transformation: The digital dimension of Viksit Bharat holds particular significance for tribal communities. Over 3,500 villages across the state now enjoy 4G mobile connectivity, significantly narrowing the digital divide that once separated rural areas from the rest of the nation (Arunachal Making Strides in Digital Connectivity, 2025).



Digital technologies offer transformative possibilities:

- Documentation and archiving of oral traditions through audio-video recording
- Digital platforms for tribal language content creation and sharing
- E-commerce opportunities for tribal handicrafts and products
- Telemedicine and online education expanding service access
- Digital governance improving administrative efficiency
- Social media enabling tribal voice amplification and network building

Yet digital inclusion faces substantial barriers beyond infrastructure. Lack of internet connectivity, absence of digital literacy programs in tribal languages, and resistance to technology adoption hinder progress of digital initiatives (MEDIA SCHOLAR, 2024). Digital literacy requires not merely technical training but culturally appropriate pedagogy considering tribal worldviews, educational backgrounds, and practical needs.

Cultural Preservation in Development: The most critical question for Viksit Bharat concerns whether development can be culturally rooted rather than culturally destructive. Tribal communities are not backward—they are forward in values, rich in wisdom, and strong in spirit, with development of India not to be built on displacement of tribal communities, but with their participation, pride, and leadership (Role of Tribal Communities in Viksit Bharat, n.d.).

Genuine inclusion requires:

1. Recognition of tribal knowledge systems as valid and valuable
2. Free, prior, and informed consent for development projects affecting tribal lands
3. Equitable benefit-sharing from resource extraction and development
4. Protection of intellectual property rights over traditional knowledge
5. Representation in decision-making bodies at all levels
6. Cultural sensitivity training for government officials and service providers
7. Integration of traditional governance systems with formal administration

Development efforts need to be more inclusive and participatory if they're going to work for everyone, with challenges in giving young people opportunities while helping them stay connected to their roots (Arunachal Pradesh's Ethnic Mosaic, 2025).



Synergies Between Memory Systems and Digital Technologies

Rather than viewing oral traditions and digital technologies as antagonistic, productive synergies can be cultivated:

Digital Documentation: Audio-video recording preserves oral traditions for posterity while making them accessible to dispersed community members and future generations. The Directorate of Research conducts research on folk life and culture of people, with monographic studies on minor tribes, revision of old monographics, oral literature, brochure of districts, and specialized studies on different aspects (Department of Cultural Affairs, n.d.). Systematic documentation efforts can create comprehensive archives of tribal knowledge.

Interactive Digital Platforms: Mobile applications and websites can facilitate interactive learning of tribal languages, stories, and cultural practices. Gamification elements may engage youth in cultural content they might otherwise ignore. Virtual reality technologies could recreate ritual performances and cultural landscapes for educational purposes.

Community Media: Digital technologies democratize media production, enabling tribal communities to create and share authentic narratives. Community radio, YouTube channels, podcasts, and social media platforms provide alternatives to mainstream media representation.

Genealogical Databases: Digital tools can help maintain and visualize complex kinship networks, supporting traditional genealogical knowledge systems while making them more accessible.

Collaborative Knowledge Platforms: Online platforms can connect tribal knowledge holders across dispersed locations, facilitating knowledge exchange, collaborative problem-solving, and collective advocacy.

Digital Cultural Mapping: Geographic information systems (GIS) can document sacred sites, traditional territories, ecological knowledge, and cultural landmarks, supporting land rights claims and environmental protection.

Critical considerations for digital integration include:

- Data sovereignty: Who owns and controls digital tribal content?
- Privacy protections: How to prevent exploitation of sensitive cultural knowledge?
- Technological sustainability: Ensuring long-term maintenance and access
- Digital literacy: Building capacity for meaningful engagement



- Intergenerational balance: Complementing rather than replacing traditional transmission

Findings and Implications

This research reveals several key findings with significant implications for policy and practice:

Finding 1: Memory Systems as Living Heritage

Collective memory in Arunachal Pradesh tribal communities is not static tradition but dynamic, living heritage continuously reinterpreted to address contemporary challenges. Memory preservation requires not museum-like conservation but active engagement ensuring relevance for each generation.

Implication: Development programs must recognize oral traditions as ongoing cultural practices deserving institutional support comparable to written literature and formal education systems. This requires funding for cultural practitioners, integration into educational curricula, and protection of conditions enabling traditional knowledge transmission.

Finding 2: Media Misrepresentation as Structural Barrier

Stereotypical media representation creates tangible barriers to tribal participation in national development through perpetuating prejudice, limiting opportunities, and shaping unfavorable policies.

Implication: Media reform requires both corrective measures (fact-checking, sensitivity training, diversity guidelines) and constructive alternatives (supporting indigenous media, amplifying tribal voices, creating platforms for authentic storytelling). Regulatory frameworks should mandate inclusive representation in mainstream media.

Finding 3: Digital Divide as Cultural Divide

Infrastructure gaps in digital connectivity are not merely technical problems but cultural divides separating tribal communities from contemporary knowledge ecosystems and participation opportunities.

Implication: Digital infrastructure development must be coupled with digital literacy programs, tribal language content creation, and culturally appropriate interface design. Connectivity alone is insufficient; meaningful digital inclusion requires comprehensive ecosystem development.

Finding 4: Development Paradigm Misalignment



Current development frameworks often impose external metrics of progress without adequately incorporating tribal values, knowledge systems, and aspirations, creating tensions between modernization and cultural preservation.

Implication: Viksit Bharat implementation in tribal areas requires participatory development models where communities define success indicators, co-design interventions, and maintain decision-making authority. Development should emerge from tribal aspirations rather than being externally imposed.

Finding 5: Generational Knowledge Transfer Crisis

Disruptions to traditional intergenerational knowledge transmission mechanisms threaten irreversible cultural loss as elderly knowledge holders pass away without adequate successor training.

Implication: Urgent prioritization of systematic documentation efforts, mentorship programs pairing youth with elders, and institutional mechanisms supporting knowledge holder roles is essential. Educational systems must create spaces for traditional knowledge transmission alongside formal learning.

Finding 6: Synergistic Potential of Traditional and Digital Systems

Oral traditions and digital technologies are not inherently antagonistic; strategic integration can amplify traditional knowledge transmission while expanding accessibility and impact.

Implication: Investment in hybrid knowledge systems leveraging digital tools to support oral traditions can create sustainable models for cultural preservation. This requires culturally sensitive technology design and community-led digital initiatives.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

For Government and Policymakers

1. **Establish Tribal Knowledge Centers:** Create well-funded regional centers dedicated to documenting, preserving, and transmitting oral traditions through both traditional methods and digital technologies.
2. **Integrate Tribal Knowledge in Education:** Mandate inclusion of local tribal history, languages, and cultural practices in school curricula, with tribal elders as recognized educators.



3. **Media Accountability Frameworks:** Develop guidelines and accountability mechanisms ensuring accurate, non-stereotypical representation of tribal communities in mainstream media.
4. **Participatory Development Protocols:** Implement free, prior, and informed consent frameworks requiring tribal community approval for development projects affecting their territories.
5. **Digital Inclusion Programs:** Expand beyond infrastructure to comprehensive digital literacy initiatives in tribal languages with culturally appropriate content.
6. **Intellectual Property Protections:** Strengthen legal frameworks protecting traditional knowledge from exploitation and ensuring equitable benefit-sharing.

For Media Organizations

1. **Diversify Newsrooms:** Hire journalists from tribal backgrounds and provide cultural competency training for all staff covering tribal issues.
2. **Amplify Tribal Voices:** Create platforms specifically for tribal storytellers, reporters, and content creators to share authentic narratives.
3. **Challenge Stereotypes:** Actively counter stereotypical representations through nuanced, multi-dimensional portrayals of tribal communities.
4. **Collaborative Reporting:** Partner with tribal communities on coverage decisions, ensuring accurate and respectful representation.

For Tribal Communities

1. **Document Oral Traditions:** Initiate community-led documentation projects recording stories, songs, rituals, and knowledge from elders.
2. **Create Community Media:** Establish community radio stations, YouTube channels, and social media platforms sharing authentic tribal narratives.
3. **Youth Engagement Programs:** Develop initiatives attracting youth interest in traditional knowledge through contemporary formats.
4. **Inter-Tribal Networks:** Build coalitions across tribes for collective advocacy, knowledge sharing, and mutual support.



For Academic and Research Institutions

1. **Collaborative Research:** Conduct research in genuine partnership with tribal communities, ensuring benefit-sharing and respecting cultural protocols.
2. **Methodological Innovation:** Develop research methodologies appropriate for oral tradition contexts, recognizing diverse epistemologies.
3. **Capacity Building:** Support tribal scholars and researchers through scholarships, mentorship, and institutional resources.
4. **Knowledge Translation:** Make research accessible to communities through translations, community presentations, and practical applications.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that tribal identity in Arunachal Pradesh is fundamentally rooted in collective memory systems transmitted through oral traditions. These memory systems face unprecedented challenges from linguistic erosion, modernization pressures, media misrepresentation, and digital divides. Yet they also represent invaluable repositories of cultural, ecological, and spiritual knowledge essential for both tribal community wellbeing and broader societal sustainability.

The framework of Viksit Bharat presents both opportunities and risks for Arunachal Pradesh tribal communities. Development initiatives promise improved infrastructure, economic opportunities, and expanded access to services. However, without fundamental respect for tribal knowledge systems, participatory decision-making, and culturally rooted development models, such initiatives risk perpetuating colonial patterns of assimilation and cultural destruction.

Achieving genuinely inclusive development requires paradigm shifts in how mainstream society perceives and engages with tribal communities—from viewing them as development recipients to recognizing them as knowledge custodians; from imposing external development metrics to supporting community-defined aspirations; from homogenizing representations to celebrating diversity; from extractive research to collaborative knowledge co-creation.

The role of media representation emerges as particularly critical. Stereotypical portrayals not only damage external perceptions but also influence internal identity formation, particularly among youth navigating between traditional and modern worlds. Authentic tribal narratives must replace externally



imposed representations, requiring both reform of mainstream media and support for indigenous media initiatives. Digital technologies, when deployed with cultural sensitivity and community control, offer powerful tools for amplifying tribal voices and preserving oral traditions.

Memory serves as the foundation upon which tribal identity rests. The loss of oral traditions represents not merely cultural impoverishment but the severing of connections binding communities to ancestors, lands, and spiritual worlds. Protecting memory systems requires more than nostalgic preservation; it demands creating conditions where oral traditions remain living, relevant practices for each generation. This necessitates institutional support, educational integration, and recognition of knowledge holders as essential cultural practitioners.

The path toward Viksit Bharat in Arunachal Pradesh must be paved with respect for tribal sovereignty, knowledge, and aspirations. Development that displaces, marginalizes, or assimilates tribal communities is not true development but rather a continuation of colonial patterns. Conversely, development that emerges from tribal values, incorporates traditional knowledge, and enhances rather than erodes cultural identity can create sustainable, equitable prosperity.

As India advances toward its centennial as an independent nation, the question is not whether tribal communities will participate in development, but how. Will they be forced to abandon their identities to access opportunities, or will Viksit Bharat create space for multiple pathways to prosperity rooted in diverse cultural traditions? The answer to this question will determine not only the fate of Arunachal Pradesh's 26 tribes but also the character of India's democracy and the authenticity of its inclusive development commitments.

This research concludes that preserving tribal identity through collective memory and ensuring authentic media representation are not peripheral concerns but central imperatives for achieving genuinely inclusive development under Viksit Bharat. The rich oral traditions of Arunachal Pradesh represent national treasures deserving protection, support, and celebration. Only by honoring the past can India build a future that includes all its citizens, in all their magnificent diversity.

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