

Amplifying Arunachal Pradesh's Folklore through Socialmedia: A Digital Revival

Ms. Zenny Kamsi¹

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English, JN College Pasighat, Affiliated under Rajiv Gandhi University Rono Hills, Doimukh

Abstract:

Arunachal Pradesh is home to 26 major tribes with numerous sub tribes as well. Each tribe has a glorious heritage of rich folklore in the form of enchanting folksongs, folktales, legends, myths, arts and crafts. Traditionally, this form of knowledge has been passed down to the next generation orally as for most of the tribes there is an absence of script. With the passing of time and with the progress in technology slowly Radio and Television made its way to the households of Arunachal Pradesh where occasionally some of these folklores were showcased or aired through these modes of communication. But not every household could afford these small luxuries of the time and also with the setting up of the formal institutions of knowledge the orally rich traditions faced a setback as the younger generation focused more on formal schooling. As a result, the younger generation now is often unaware of the rich traditions practiced by their ancestors. They struggle to understand and decode the meanings of the folklores, lagging behind in appreciating their cultural heritage in the present times. Here social media steps in as crucial tool for preserving and educating the younger generation in understanding and appreciating their aged old oral traditions. Hence, the paper will attempt to showcase how social media plays a crucial role to revitalize and preserve the cultural heritage, ensuring that the wisdom and values of the past are passed down to future generations in an accessible and engaging way. Also suggesting a way forward on how further efforts can be enhanced to preserve these rich oral traditions.

Keywords: folklores, heritage, oral tradition, social media.

In the olden days when there were no formal institutions of learning, the elders of the family generally transmitted the moral lessons through oral traditions. Also, they transmitted rich cultural heritage to younger generations through oral folklores, ensuring that the next generation was well versed in their cultural history and these oral traditions served as a form of schooling in the absence of formal institutions. But on the contrary, in the present times the younger generation is often

unaware of the rich traditions practiced by their ancestors due to the focus on formal schooling, migrations for better livelihood to towns and cities far away from the native villages etc. Hence, they tussle to understand and decode the meanings of folklores, lagging behind in appreciating their cultural heritage. So, here the social media steps in as a crucial tool for preservation and educating the younger generation. It helps in bridging the generational gap and preserving cultural heritage, particularly for those who may not speak their mother tongue. Many social media platforms like Facebook, You Tube and Instagram are used to showcase and perform folksongs and stories targeting the younger audiences. These performances are designed to be engaging and interesting, making the traditions more accessible. These digital narratives share the folklores through engaging multimedia formats such as videos, animations and podcasts. Many of these folksongs and folktales now come with English subtitles, enabling the younger generation to easily comprehend and connect with their rich oral traditions. Also, by leveraging the viral nature of social media, folktales, myths and traditions can reach the younger generations, fostering a connection to their cultural roots even in the absence of language proficiency.

In the context of Arunachal Pradesh, several social media tools are popular and effective in spreading awareness about the rich tradition of folklores of the state. Here are some of the key platforms and how they are being used:

1) YouTube:

It hosts numerous channels that focus on the cultural heritage of Arunachal Pradesh which includes traditional music, dance and folktales from the state. Also individual artists' channels share engaging video content showcasing its rich folklores. e.g.) Arunachal Tourism Official is itself a popular YouTube channel which is officially handled by the Tourism Department of the state which has subscribers around 2.37 K and 218 videos (at the time of research at 01.03 pm on 05/08/2024). The channel showcases the rich tradition of folklore of the state along with areas of natural and anthropological heritage.

2) Facebook:

Dedicated pages and groups for cultural preservation and promotion, such as those run by cultural organizations and community groups, share a wealth of information and media. Also live events in Facebook live frequently are used for streaming cultural events, workshops and storytelling sessions. E.g.) Arunachal Pradesh Tourism page that often shares cultural stories, traditional practices and events highlighting the rich heritage of the state.

My Arunachal Pradesh page is a community driven page that showcases local traditions, folk tales and cultural insights from various tribes.

3) TikTok:

Its short form video content is ideal for sharing snippets of folk music, dance performances and traditional crafts. Hashtags like #Arunachal Culture help in discovering related content.

4) Spotify and Sound Cloud:

Platforms like Spotify and Sound Cloud hosts playlists and albums of traditional folk music from Arunachal Pradesh, making it accessible to a wide audience.

Podcasts: It features stories, interviews with cultural experts and discusses about folklore. Eg) "Folktales of Arunachal Pradesh by Jamuna Bini" is a series of video podcasts that take the viewers on a captivating journey into rich tapestry of folklore from the mystical land of Arunachal Pradesh. It is currently a hit and has a good number of viewers.

5) Instagram:

Artists and cultural organizations use IGTV for longer videos and Reels for short, captivating clips showcasing folk music, dance and cultural anecdotes.

6) Blogs and Websites:

Cultural blogs that focus on Indian Culture and heritage often feature articles on Arunachal Pradesh's folklores, providing in-depth narratives and analysis. Also, Educational websites dedicated to cultural heritage websites offer extensive resources, including folk tales, folk music and historical context.

7) WhatsApp and Messaging Apps:

Folklore content, videos and audio recordings can be shared with community groups and broadcast lists that covers a larger audience.

Preserving Oral Traditions in Digital Format:

Preserving oral traditions in the digital world are being achieved through the above cited several creative and effective strategies. The folklores of Arunachal Pradesh have gained considerable attention though their remains somewhat niche compared to mainstream content. Initiatives like digitization of Wancho folktales by Tara Douglas, a UK based researcher in collaboration with the local community, highlight efforts to preserve these stories. This project involves documenting and translating oral narratives, some of which have been stored in digital archives like Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC), a digital record of some of the small cultures and languages of the world. It is a consortium of three universities namely the university of Sydney, the university of Melbourne and the Australian National University. Some of the community archived include Folktale of the story of the Gourd I & II version, Cultural Memory of the Death and Soul, Folktale of Tiger man Cicada, Folktale of the story of the Stone and Memories of traditional rituals of the Wancho tribe . The main objective of the project is to record, document and translate a collection of the oral narratives from indigenous communities of North East India. Also, Douglas had created the animated short film named "Abotani" which is believed to be story of the mythical ancestor of the Tani tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. He is a central figure in the folklore of various tribes like Adi, Galo, Apatani, Nyishi, Tagin etc. It was a significant cultural project that aims to bring rich oral narratives of the region to a broader audience through animation, a medium that can engage both young and old audience viewers. The short movie has been well received in cultural and academic circles for its role in preserving and promoting the folklore of Arunachal Pradesh. By converting oral stories into animated films, Douglas has helped ensure that these narratives are not lost to future generations. The movie's screening at various film festivals have helped raise awareness about the rich cultural heritage of Arunachal Pradesh. Also it has been praised for overcoming the challenges it faced during the making of the movie and at the same working closely with the community elders and cultural custodians to ensure authenticity and respect for the traditions depicted. It had also drawn attention to the need for preserving oral traditions and the potential of animation as a medium for cultural storytelling.

Folk Music and Cultural Fusion through various Folk Artists and Collectives utilize music streaming platforms to share their art. These artists blend traditional folk sounds with contemporary music, creating a fusion that appeals to both local and international audiences. Their work not only preserves the old melodies but also introduces them to a broader listener base. Few examples of these Artists that are popular amongst the present era audience are namely:

1) Dobom Doji Collective:

It is a folk fusion band from Arunachal Pradesh blending traditional Galo folk songs with modern musical elements. Their music not only preserves the rich heritage of the Galo tribe but also makes it accessible to younger audiences. They use platforms like YouTube to share music videos along with English subtitles attracting a wider audience without any language barrier and fostering an appreciation for traditional music among the youth. His popular number “Melo Jajine” narrates the history and culture of the Galo tribe, attracting a wide audience and fostering an appreciation for traditional music among the youth.

2) David Angu’s “Tribe”:

Angu and his band Tribe have gained attention for their performances of Galo folk music. Through social media, they share their traditional songs and cultural narratives, reaching audiences who might not otherwise have exposure to these traditions. Their music often reflects the oral histories and customs of the Galo community, providing a digital archive of cultural heritage.

3) Delong Padung’s Folk Music:

Delong Padung is a prominent figure in Arunachal Pradesh’s folk music scene who is known for his efforts to preserve and promote the Adi tribe’s musical traditions. He organizes cultural events like the ‘Unying Aran Folk Music Festival’ and participates in national programs, using these platforms to showcase Adi folk songs. His involvement in social media and cultural festivals helps spread awareness and appreciation for traditional music among younger generations.

4) Omak Komut Collective:

The Omak Komut Collective combines traditional tribal music with contemporary genres, creating a unique sound that resonates with both older and younger audiences. They perform at various cultural festivals and events, and their presence on social media helps them reach a broader audience. By blending modern and traditional elements, they make folk music relevant to the present generation listeners and encourage a deeper connection to cultural roots.

These artists and collectives play a crucial role in preserving and promoting the rich musical heritage of Arunachal Pradesh. Through social media, they are able to reach wider audiences, ensuring that traditional music and cultural practices are appreciated and carried forward by future generations. Hence, social media is playing a significant role in helping the younger generation learn about their folklores and rich old aged traditions in several ways:

- 1) **Accessibility:** Social media platforms provide easy access to cultural content from anywhere in the world. This means that young people can learn about their heritage without needing to attend physical events or visit cultural sites, which might be difficult or impossible due to geographical or logistical constraints.
- 2) **Engaging formats:** The use of videos, animations, podcasts and interactive content makes learning about traditions more engaging. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram and Tiktok allow creators to present folklores and traditions in visually appealing and easily digitalized formats, capturing the attention of younger audiences.
- 3) **Interaction:** Social media fosters a sense of community among users. Young people can engage with cultural content through comments, shares and likes and even participate in live discussions with cultural experts and performers. This interactive aspect deepens their understanding and appreciation of their heritage.
- 4) **Preservation and Documentation:** Digital archiving on social media ensures that cultural content is preserved for future generations. Folksongs, dances, and stories that might have been

forgotten can be recorded, shared and stored online making them available for anyone interested in learning about them.

- 5) Educational Initiatives: Many educational institutions and cultural organizations use social media to share informative content about traditions and folklore. These include historical context, significance, and detailed explanations of cultural practices making it valuable educational resource.

Also, presenting folklores through social media requires careful consideration to ensure that the content is respectful and accurate in order to avoid cultural misappropriation. These can be achieved through keeping in mind the following points:

- 1) Authenticity and accuracy: One should ensure that the folklore is presented accurately and authentically. This involves thorough research and if possible, collaboration with cultural experts or members of the community from which the folklore belongs.
- 2) Respect for Cultural Significance: One should recognize and respect the cultural significance of the folklore. Avoid trivializing or sensationalizing the stories, and be mindful of the context in which they are shared.
- 3) Permission and Consent: One should obtain permission from the community or individuals who are the custodians of that particular folklore that is being showcased. This shows respect for their ownership of the cultural material and helps avoid potential conflicts.
- 4) Attribution and acknowledgement: One should give proper credit to the source of the folklore. Acknowledging the community, individuals or sources from which the story originates. This helps in recognizing and honouring their contributions.
- 5) Sensitive Content: One should be aware and avoid sharing the sensitive content that might be scary or private to the community. Some aspects of folklore might not be meant for public sharing or could be considered inappropriate to share widely.
- 6) Cultural Representation: One should ensure that the portrayal of the folklore is respectful and do not reinforce stereotypes. One should avoid using cultural elements in a way that misrepresents or oversimplifies the culture.
- 7) Community involvement: One should involve the community in the creation and presentation process. This can include collaboration with storytellers, artists, and cultural leaders to ensure the representation is accurate and respectful.
- 8) Language and Terminology: One should use appropriate and respectful language while discussing cultural elements. Avoid derogatory terms or language that could be seen as disrespectful.

Hence, by adhering to these guidelines, one can help ensure that the presentation of folklores on social media is respectful, accurate and culturally sensitive, fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of the traditions.

Further, as a way forward, storing original folksongs, folktales and other folklores digitally and spreading them to younger generations can be achieved through several modern methods and strategies such as:

For audio and video recordings, one should use a high quality audio and video recording equipment to capture performance of folksongs, storytelling sessions and traditional dances. Also one should use portable recorders for the on the go documentation of folk traditions. Multimedia files on cloud services like Google Drive, Drop box or One Drive for easy access and sharing. Digital archives through institutions or platforms can be established. Transcription of oral stories and songs into text including translations can be made to make it accessible to a wider audience. Also publishing

collections of folktales and folksongs in e-book formats can be done and distributed through platforms like Amazon Kindle, Google Books etc.

The Way forward:

As the younger generation becomes more engaged with their heritage through these digital platforms, a deeper connection with their roots is fostered. The digital culture not only preserves the rich traditions of Arunachal Pradesh but also enriches the global cultural tapestry. Through continued efforts in education, community involvement and respectful presentation, the folklores of Arunachal Pradesh will continue to thrive, both at home and beyond.

References:

1. ArunachalTourismOfficial (19th September 2019) youtube link www.youtube.com/@arunachaltourism4102
2. David Angu and The Tribe (29th April 2020) YouTube link www.youtube.com/channel/UCnB_bn8LFF1iIO8tM93mDag
3. Delong Padung voice of Eastern Himalayas (8 Dec, 2015) YouTube Link www.youtube.com/@delongpadungvoiceofeastern9654
4. Dobom Doji Collective (25th July 2015) YouTube Link www.youtube.com/@dobomdoji9407
5. Newsfy.(2024, 7 April). *Welcome to the Folktales of Arunachal Pradesh with Jamuna Bini*. Youtube www.youtube.com/watch?v=YynQJcFbOlg
6. Omak Komut Collective – Baari at Ziro Music Festival (9th October 2013) YouTube link www.youtube.com/@WildFilmsIndia
7. PTI, Published 21.08.22, 04.21PM Arunachal Pradesh’s Wancho Community sets out to digitise ancient folktales. *The Telegraph*.
8. Posy Lui, Published 18th April 2023, 03:32PM, Evolution in Arunachal’s Music Scene: Then and Now. *Thecriticalscript.com*
9. PTI, Published 28.02.2024, Arunachal: State Folk Music and Dance Festival Inagurated. *Arunachal24.in*
10. Published 13.08.2014, Popular Arunachal Folktale of “Abotani” will be animated soon. *AnimationXpressTeam*
11. Arunachal Pradesh Foklore and Tradition.(n.d). In Facebook. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/ArunachalPradeshFokloreAndTradition>
12. Northeast India Folktales and Traditions.(n.d). In Facebook. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/NortheastIndiaFolktalesAndTraditions>
13. Arunachal Pradesh Tourism.(n.d). In Facebook. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/ArunachalPradeshTourism>
14. Blank, T.J. (2013). *Folk culture in the digital age: The dynamics of human interaction*. Utah State University Press.
15. Blank, T.J (2014). *Toward a Conceptual Framework for the Study of Folklore and the Internet*. Utah University Press.
16. Degh,L. (1994) *American Folklore and the Mass Media*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis.
17. De Surmont, J. (2008) From Oral Tradition to Commercial Industry: The Misunderstood Path of Popular Song, *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*39(01): 73-92

18. Dundes, A. (1980). *Interpreting Folklore*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Press University
19. P Peck, A & Blank T.J (2010). *Folklore and Social Media*. Utah University Press.
20. Dundes, A. (1989) *Folklore Matters*, The University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville.
21. Koven M.J . (2003) *Film, Folklore and Urban Legends*, The Scarecrow Press Inc.
22. Staemmler, B. (2005) Virtual Kmaikakushi: An Element of Folk Belief in Changing Times and Media, *Japanese Journal Of Religious Studies*. 32(02): 341-352.
23. Sparks, M. (2020). *How Social Media Can Be an Asset for the Preservation for the Preservation of Intangible Heritage*. Retrieved on August 01, 2024 from <https://medium.com/thoughts-on-world-heritage/how-social-media-can-be-an-asset-for-the-preservation-of-intangible-heritage-666a7e3d7546>
24. Srinivasan, R.(2012, December 14).*How Culture and Technology Create One Another: Ramesh Srinivasan at TEDxUCLA*.