

Chapter 7

Digital Divide Among the Tribals of Kerala: A Comparative Study of Kannavam and Thavinjhal Village

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ABSTRACT

In the present society, the real apartheid is not between the racial or ethnic groups but between the ability to access and use the new modes and forms of information and communication technology. The gap between the ready availability of technology and those who do not have access to the computers and internet is called the digital divide. The society with high digital divide has social, financial, and political instability. The role of libraries as community information centers in rural and tribal regions will help to reduce the digital divide. The study identifies capacity building of rural people to make use of ICTs is crucial to solve the problem. This chapter focuses on the digital divide in the two tribal regions in Kerala, namely Kannavam and Thavainjal Panchayath, India. The quantitative comparative data of the factors affecting the digital divide, barriers for ICT access, the role of social media usage in reducing the digital divide in both the villages are quantitatively compared in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

In the prevalent society, the real apartheid is not between the racial or ethnic groups. The actual segregation is between the ability to access and use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) from those who have not. The gulf between the ability to access computers and the internet is called the digital divide. Before the 20th Century, this gap is between those who have telephone access and those who have not. In the 1990s, the focus changed to internet access. The Digital divide is mainly visible, urban and rural people, educated and uneducated, technologically savor and those who are not, developed and developing nations, etc. Certain people could not afford or access computers or the internet.

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In addition, some people do not have the informative or practical knowledge to understand the value of information and information literacy in the Information Age. People who regularly use the internet are open to a variety of topics, news, and tools. This imbalance is the driving force behind developing countries, underachieving students, and a workforce having poor outputs. The digital divide has to be bridged for the world to get progressed. In a mainstream society or urban areas, we cannot see the gap. The real disparities are opaque in the remote areas and the areas where uneducated and illiterate people are more. Tribal regions in Kerala mirror the digital divide prevalent in the country.

The digital divide trend has emerged in society with the advent of Information and Communication Technology. The gulf between those who can access digital information and those who could not access digital information is called the digital divide. The concept has widespread popularity in Western countries before coming to other regions. Disparities in internet speed in their societies created social injustice. It is the social injustice of those who have access to the internet and those who have not. The digital divide is not limited to developing countries. Developed countries are also facing such dilemmas to handle this problem.

United States National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA) states that the digital divide is “the gap between those who do not and those who do have access to computers and the internet. During the progress the notion of a digital divide and its logical implications, social problems have to be addressed through provisions of computers and internet accounts have seemed increasingly problematic.” (“Digital divide”, 2001)

Merriam Webster’s dictionary refers digital divide as “the economic, educational, and social inequalities between those who have computers and online access and those who do not.” (“Digital divide”, 2021) It is the gulf between the ability to exploit Information and Communication Technologies and those who have not. In this digital age, knowledge in working with computers and internet usage is vital.

Initially, the digital divide is limited to the ownership of computers. Later it is changed to access of internet. Nowadays, it encompasses the societal inequality in accessing the internet. Here comes the relevance of the study. Different segments of societies were not in a position to use the ICT infrastructures justifiably. There is a usage gap seen everywhere. It is the so-called digital divide. It may be due to the poverty rate seen everywhere in society. Such poor people cannot afford to purchase computers and avail high-cost internet connections. Even though, if one could afford all these things, there may lack of speed or bandwidth for accessing the internet.

In the Information Technology age, those who could not access digital information may be segregated or out thrown from mainstream society. So bridging this gap may be considered as a problematic criterion of the. This social inequality is very evident in tribal regions. States with socio-economic-political disparities could not attain their development in any way. High speed and high-quality internet connection is a must for bridging the gap in the digital divide. Quality and speed are lacking when moving from urban areas to rural as well as tribal areas. The prolific use of digital resources resembles the growth of society hastily. The glimpses of developments were apparent in a well-informed society where people are engaged to the internet, the virtual library. A low-speed broadband connection is the reflection of backward or poor community development. In a world where the digital divide is widening, there is social-financial-political uncertainty.

ICT is advancing at a breakneck pace so that the time it takes to upgrade becomes short. A new digital divide emerges while the old one persists. Another factor causing the digital divide is the income disparity. It is the result of wealth disparity. ICT becomes a new source of fortune from an economic

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