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Digital Storytelling In English & Indian Language Literatures

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Abstract: In the current digital era, storytelling has transitioned from static, print-bound narratives to dynamic, multimodal expressions facilitated by digital media. This paper has investigated the emergence and impact of digital storytelling in both English and Indian language literatures, focusing on how technological capabilities are transforming narrative structures, redefining the concept of authorship, and reshaping reader engagement. In English-speaking environments, digital storytelling takes the form of blogs, spoken word performances, podcasts, micro fiction shared on social media, and interactive literary platforms. Meanwhile, in Indian languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, and Malayalam, digital platforms are revitalizing traditional oral storytelling, boosting literary production, and enabling the articulation of regional cultural identities through mobile-native sites like Pratilipi, Your Quote, and Matrubharti. This research has examined the convergence of digital narratives with orality, collective memory, and identity politics, with a particular emphasis on how these narratives elevate marginalized voices and disrupt established linguistic and literary hierarchies. It has also explored the formal and aesthetic innovations made possible by digital media, including hyper textuality, non-linear sequencing, multimedia layering, and participatory interaction. The paper has paid special attention to the representational strategies of vernacular storytelling, where local histories, folklore, and socio-political contexts are reimagined in the digital space. Through a critical analysis of case studies that span different languages and genres, the argument is made that digital storytelling in India signifies not just a technological shift but a profound cultural transformation. It calls for an interdisciplinary approach to understanding how literary traditions are being redefined in the emerging digital public sphere.

Index Terms - Digital storytelling, Indian language literatures, English literature, Oral tradition & identity, Multimodal narratives.

The swift advancement of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed storytelling practices globally, ushering in a groundbreaking change in how stories are created, shared, and consumed. With the internet, mobile devices, and social media becoming integral to daily life, storytelling has expanded beyond its traditional print confines into diverse, dynamic forms that blend text, sound, images, animation, hypertext, and interactive components. These developments have not only reshaped narrative structures but have also altered how audiences engage with and respond to stories. This research explores the impact of digital innovation on English and Indian language literary traditions, emphasizing the tension between new digital forms and existing oral, indigenous, and vernacular storytelling traditions.

Digital storytelling involves crafting and sharing stories through digital media, typically by integrating various multimedia elements. These narratives can be linear or nonlinear and may be created individually or collaboratively. A significant aspect of digital storytelling is its potential to democratize narrative creation, moving beyond traditional literary gatekeeping. The digital realm has given rise to new literary forms, such as Twitter-based micro fiction, blog narratives, serialized podcast dramas, and interactive web fiction. These genres transcend conventional categories and represent a significant cultural shift in the notions of authorship, narrative authority, and reader involvement. Rather than being mere byproducts of technological progress, these innovations indicate a profound cultural shift towards more inclusive and participatory storytelling models.

In English-language literary environments, digital storytelling has flourished across various platforms and expressive formats. Digital journals and online blogs serve as venues for semi-fictional and autobiographical storytelling, often blurring the line between personal reflection and performative writing. This revival of oral storytelling is evident in podcast series like *The Moth*, *Snap Judgment*, and *Welcome to Night Vale*, which blend listening-based storytelling with dramatic form and immersive soundscapes. Social media platforms also provide fertile ground for experimental narration—Instagram poetry, Twitter prose, and performative fiction on YouTube demonstrate how authors utilize digital tools for literary expression. Writers like Teju Cole have creatively used Twitter as a platform for serialized, formally experimental fiction. Simultaneously, platforms like Wattpad and Medium have disrupted traditional publishing by enabling new and amateur authors to bypass conventional gatekeepers and directly reach large audiences, thereby transforming literary production and distribution.

India's multilingual and diverse literary landscape has been revitalized by digital media. Mobile-first platforms such as Pratilipi, Matrubharti, and Your Quote have become influential spaces for creative writing in regional and local languages. These platforms give a voice to authors from linguistically marginalized communities, allowing them to gain recognition in a publishing environment long dominated by English and Hindi. In such an environment, digital storytelling tends to renew oral traditions; the stories are often heard in audio and visual media, which, according to the performative ways of folk storytellers—providing the function of village bards and traditional oral storytellers—their voices in digital communities prosper more. Koo and Share Chat are examples that promote linguistic diversity through accommodating various Indian scripts and dialects, thereby enhancing regional presence in the digital world. This symbiosis of oral memory with new media not only assures memory's continuation but also leads the way to its re-appropriation in the present day. Both archive and workshop, digital storytelling seals its enduring cultural relevance and versatility in the 21st century.

A notable feature of digital storytelling is its capacity for formal and aesthetic innovation. The multimodal nature of digital media allows for the development of non-linear narrative structures, with hyperlinks enabling readers to navigate stories in non-sequential ways. This disrupts the linear temporality typical of print literature. Furthermore, the integration of multimedia elements—such as voice, images, text, and video—creates a richly immersive, multisensory narrative environment. These capabilities challenge the linearity of narrative and the traditional notion of a single author, which are foundational to conventional literary forms.

A typical digital narrative might begin with a video clip, branch into various textual paths, dynamically alter its direction based on user interaction, and conclude with multiple possible endings. This interactive framework not only enhances user engagement but also mirrors the fragmented, multivocal nature of contemporary identity. Additionally, digital media fosters collaborative authorship. Online writing platforms, fan fiction communities, and co-authored storytelling initiatives encourage participatory creativity, thereby challenging the image of the solitary author and promoting collaborative literary production models.

Digital storytelling has emerged as a crucial means of expressing identity and highlighting voices that have been previously marginalized in mainstream literary spaces. Writers from marginalized communities, such as Dalit writers, queer writers, and women confronting patriarchy, utilize digital media as platforms for relatively freer and decentralized self-expression. Digital media offers more genuine and liberated expressions through anonymity and autonomy in articulation. The emergence of vernacular platforms has significantly disrupted the linguistic dominance of English in the literary publishing arena. Authors writing in local languages have gained increased visibility, impacting both national and international audiences. This democratization of language in literary production fosters cultural diversity and validates various narrative forms. Memory is a recurring theme in many digital narratives, particularly those rooted in oral traditions. These narratives act as

repositories of collective memory and serve as both cultural preservation and resistance. They recount lived experiences, memorialize systemic injustices, and preserve cultural practices often excluded from dominant historical records and literary canons.

The practical use of digital storytelling across different platforms highlights its potential to transform contemporary literary expression:

Pratilipi: This mobile-first platform allows writers to publish serialized fiction, folk tales, and personal essays in regional languages. Its interactive comment sections enable readers to engage with and potentially influence the direction of narratives, promoting participatory storytelling.

Your Quote: A multilingual microblogging platform that supports hybrid textual forms like poetic updates and aphoristic reflections. The platform also encourages audio storytelling, supporting both written and performative literary expressions.

Blog Fiction (English): Authors like Nikesh Shukla and Meena Kandasamy have used blogs to share political fiction and autobiographical narratives that go beyond traditional genre boundaries and intersect with activist discourse.

Podcast Storytelling: Indian podcasters are increasingly utilizing audio platforms like Spotify and Gaana to narrate urban legends, biographies, and shared experiences. These genres breathe new life into oral traditions by adapting them for today's digitally connected audiences.

Despite its forward-thinking potential, digital storytelling faces structural and infrastructural hurdles. Limited digital literacy, unequal access to devices and the internet, and the dominance of digital platforms significantly influence who can engage in the digital literary ecosystem. Moreover, algorithm-driven content visibility often favors mainstream, commercial narratives over those that are marginalized or subversive. Censorship and content moderation further restrict digital storytelling, especially when it tackles sensitive political or social issues such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, or state violence. These constraints can diminish the subversive power of digital narratives and silence dissenting voices. Additionally, the fleeting nature of digital content poses challenges for its long-term preservation. Digital texts are vulnerable to removal, technical obsolescence, and platform shutdowns, raising serious questions about archiving, accessibility, and the future of digital literary heritage.

Digital storytelling within English and Indian language literary ecosystems signifies both a technological advancement and a cultural awakening. It transforms narrative forms, broadens authorship, and democratizes literary expression. By reaffirming the importance of oral traditions, regional languages, and historically marginalized voices, digital platforms expand the range of literary representation and challenge established norms within the literary field. To fully engage with the transformative potential of digital storytelling, scholars must adopt interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate insights from literary theory, media studies, and cultural analysis. Such frameworks will be crucial in understanding the aesthetic, epistemological, and political aspects of digital storytelling as it continues to redefine literature in the 21st century.

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