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# **Indian Digital Narratives: A Blowtorch for Uncovering Social Issues in Contemporary India**

**Ms. Rubina Khatoon**

Faculty of English

Department of English, Era University

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In today's era dominated by digital communication, storytelling has evolved beyond traditional platforms to become a powerful catalyst for awareness and social change. This paper explores the rise of Indian digital narratives as effective tools for uncovering and addressing deeply rooted social issues such as caste discrimination, the stigma surrounding mental health, child abuse, and gender inequality. Digital narratives—ranging from web series, social media campaigns, podcasts, interactive novels, to films and online videos—have redefined how stories are told, received, and engaged with in contemporary Indian society. Unlike traditional media, digital platforms offer accessibility and interactivity, along with widespread reach, enabling content to connect with and impact a broad and diverse audience.

Through the analysis of notable examples such as Article 15, Satyamev Jayate, Taare Zameen Par, Dear Zindagi, and content creators like Rahul Sinha on platforms such as Josh Talks, this study examines how digital storytelling amplifies marginalized voices and drives cultural, legal, and political responses. These narratives go beyond emotional impact by grounding themselves in real social realities, providing both representation and education to their viewers.

Furthermore, the paper highlights how Indian digital narratives uniquely blend traditional storytelling techniques with modern technological interfaces, allowing for deeper emotional engagement and broader cultural reach. This fusion makes them particularly effective in challenging stereotypes, initiating dialogue, and mobilizing public support. The participatory nature of digital platforms is also emphasized, where audiences not only consume content but also interact with, share, and contribute to it.

In conclusion, Indian digital narratives serve not only as entertainment but also as tools for advocacy, healing, and reform. By spotlighting social injustices and framing them

through relatable human stories, these narratives play a vital role in reshaping perceptions and fostering a more inclusive and compassionate society. This paper underscores the growing significance of digital storytelling as a transformative force in India's ongoing journey toward social justice.

**Key words: Digital Narratives, Social Well-being, Mental Health Awareness, Social Issues, Healing**

## **Introduction**

In the digital age, media has transcended traditional forms to become an interactive and immersive platform capable of reshaping public discourse. Among these, digital narratives—stories conveyed through various digital formats including video, blogs, web series, podcasts, and more—have emerged as a potent force for highlighting social issues, particularly in a diverse and complex society like India. Unlike conventional formats such as print or television, digital narratives foster engagement, amplify marginalized voices, and challenge long-standing social stigmas by presenting content in a format that is accessible, viral, and emotionally resonant. This paper explores how digital narratives in India, through and interactive formats, spotlight pressing social issues. By blending traditional story telling with modern platforms, these narratives empower marginalized voices and reshape public opinion. From cast injustice to mental health awareness, digital media catalyzes empathy, education and reform. The study underscores digital storytelling as not just art, but a transformative force for societal change.

## **Defining Digital Narratives**

Digital media can be subdivided into various content forms—websites, e-books, podcasts, gaming, and augmented/virtual reality. Among these, digital narratives hold a unique position due to their power of storytelling and audience interactivity. These narratives may take the form of digital storytelling, web series, interactive fiction, or even social media-based campaigns, offering multiple branching storylines based on user choices and creating

Deep emotional investment.

India, in particular, has embraced digital narratives in a way that blends traditional storytelling techniques with modern technology, making them effective tools for social commentary and advocacy.

### **Empowerment Through Narratives**

Digital media encompassing all the forms of media encoded in a digital format further accessed electronically can be sub-categories into several groups based on the type of content, the purpose and the medium used. The sub-groups like Websites/ Blogs, Podcasts, Audio media/ Digital Communication and publication, E-books, Gaming media and virtual reality etc have all their own stewardship on the personal and professional spheres of Indian masses. Amid this, counts, one of the most prominent mode of Digital media which is Digital Narratives, a content in mode of text, images, audio/ video sort of interactive media, narrated through various forms of digital technologies, be it Digital Storytelling, Interactive fiction or games, Web series/ Web comics, Augmented or virtual reality experiences and many more. Similarly, the traditional entertainment forms like- movies/ T.V Serials/ series, when produce, distributed or interacted digitally, also become the part of Digital Narratives, The distinct feature of direct interaction with audiences, creates multiple possible outcomes resulting into the numerous branches of Narrative Courses with different choices leading to different paths. The other aspect of this Digital mode is its sharing and viral nature which helps in reaching and resonating with massive, diverse audience. These very features of Digital Narratives provide it the powerful tools to highlight Social issue of any country. The way it amplifies the voices of marginalized classes, raise awareness and educate masses, challenge stereotype and change perceptions of public, traditional modes of narratives such as Television, Radio and newspapers etc has never done or can never do, because of the slower, more controlled and less inclusive snags in their ways. These platforms were powerful in shaping public opinion but their approach of addressing social issues was often limited by factors such as censorship, narrow coverage and commercial pressures. Whereas the digital narratives has always played a crucial role in raising awareness and mobilizing people into actions, these narratives provide an interactive platform to make social injustices clearly visible, and bring meaningful changes in any country.

Unlike the Digital Narratives of other places, Indian Digital Narratives exclusively has the ability to blend the traditional story telling techniques and the Modern technology, allowing the broader spread of ideas. In recent years a radical change has been witnessed In how the social issues in India are been addressed or discussed. The accessibility, interactivity and inclusivity of Digital narratives helped the marginalized voices to be in fore-front with faster and wide spread. action. The aim of this Research paper is to make an analysis that how this Digital Narratives in respect with the country like India, encompasses a wide range of Social topics such as- Social Inequality, Mental health issue, Disability and Accessibility , Gender inequality, and Human rights justice. All these issues are no less than a challenge faced by the marginalized Communities of India societies.

## **Social Issue**

Social Issue has always been one of the entrenched issues of Indian society. Despite the significant strides in development, the rural and the urban populations are still being affected by this curse. Social Inequality has its root from the centuries-old societal structures where the marginalized groups often live in social exclusion and face discriminatory practices in education, employment and housing etc. when, Digital narratives discussed these issues, they were not only been acknowledged but also provided with the platforms to share their personal experiences. One of such platform was “SATYAMEV JAYATE”, a T.V Show but also a digital narrative, hosted and presented by the famous actor, director, producer Amir Khan. An episode from Season 1 of Satyamev Jayate focused on Child Sexual Abuse and the POCSO Act, highlighting the critical issue of child protection in India. One of the most significant impacts of the show was the increased awareness it generated about the gaps in existing child protection laws. This led to enhanced enforcement of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and other child welfare policies. The show’s powerful storytelling and the public outcry it sparked put pressure on lawmakers to prioritize child rights, resulting in legal reforms and stronger implementation of child protection laws.

## **Article 15**

One of the prominent digital narrative with profound impact on Indian society is the movie "Article 15" addressing caste-based discrimination and social inequality in India through a fictional narrative inspired by real events. The film follows Ayan Ranjan, a young police

officer, who uncovers systemic caste-based violence and corruption while investigating the disappearance of two Dalit girls. It highlights how caste-based oppression is institutionalized, with even law enforcement and political systems complicit in perpetuating inequality. Drawing inspiration from real-life cases, such as the 2014 Badaun gang rape, the film portrays how caste crimes often go unpunished, and marginalized communities are reflecting the deep-rooted nature of caste-based discrimination in India. "Article 15" has sparked a cultural shift by challenging traditional narratives and amplifying marginalized voices. Through its authentic portrayal of caste dynamics and social hierarchies, the film fosters greater cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. Its diverse cast and realistic depiction of regional settings offer a deeper understanding of India's social fabric, helping to break stereotypes and promote empathy across cultural divides. As (Jayshree Shankar, 2023) has quoted the (Nadini Ramnath, 2019, June 28) in context to the movie, which says *The movie's title is inspired by the Constitutional provision prohibiting discrimination. The document itself is dragged in front of the camera. When it appears that its spirit has been forgotten, the police officer in charge of investigating the gang-rape and murder of two Dalit teenage girls and the disappearance of a third prints out the relevant pages and slaps them on the station's notice board.*

"The writing captures a powerful moment in Article 15, where the movie uses the Indian Constitution's provision (Article 15) as both a symbol of justice and a stark reminder of the deep-rooted social inequalities that persist in India. By showcasing the police officer printing and displaying the relevant pages of the Constitution in the police station, the film calls attention to the gap between the law's ideals and its flawed enforcement, particularly when it comes to caste-based discrimination. This act serves as an awakening, not only for the character within the narrative but also for the audience at large. The moment resonates with the Indian masses, triggering a broader awareness of the social inequality that continues to affect marginalized communities, particularly Dalits. The film's portrayal of this discrepancy between constitutional values and real-world practices serves as a call for introspection, urging the public to confront and address the pervasive injustice embedded in the societal system."

### **From Screens to Smiles: Digital Storytelling as Therapy in Contemporary India**

Another issue embedded in the roots of contemporary India is "Mental Illness", a topic, despite having widespread impact, is often stigmatized or overlooked. A range of

conditions such as- Depression, Anxiety and Bipolar disorder etc. is affecting millions of individuals. Where they need sympathy and empathy, people don't even accept their condition. The socio-economic pressure and cultural taboos make their situations even worse. This part of the paper examines the convergence of mental illness and digital narratives, investigating how digital platforms are transforming views on mental health and offering ways to cope and advocate for change.

With the advancement of technology and Accessible health care, we still see the sharp rise in Mental Health disorders. But, the rise and success of Digital narrative has become a powerful tool in re-shaping the public's opinion and understanding for Mental Illness. New forms of storytelling have emerged, giving voices to topics that were once marginalized. "Multiple Indian digital narratives are working very effectively, addressing not only these issues but also making efforts to tackle and resolve them." Instagram, Youtube videos, websites, Web-series, Movies, even the Ed-Tech Platforms, through their content, are also trying to create awareness regarding these issues. In an episode of Josh Talks, an online educational content company that inspires viewers across India to achieve their true potential, through personal storytelling, The invitee, Rahul Sinha, progenitor of the channel "Tethur-Puns" shared his experience with viewers saying—

"Main khush hota hun jab logo ke mere paas messages aate hain ke wo mere videos puri family ke sath baith kar dekhte hain, koi kehte hain apke video meri dadi bohot dekhti hain, koi kehta hai ke meri mother bohot dekhti hain, isse mujhe khushi milti hai.... Abhi recently mere paas ek message aaya kisi doctor ka, unhone mujhe bataya ke unke hospital mein mental health ke liye wo log sessions karwate hain jahan par patients ko humorous videos dikhaye jaate hain aur unhone mujhe bataya literally unke mental health mein isse sudhaar aaya hai ....Ek experience unhone mere sath share kiya ke unke hospital mein ek 17 saal ka bachcha hai jo baat nahi karta, uske parents ki death ho chuki hai aur wo is waqt depression se guzar raha hai, uske sessions mein usne mera 'Big Boss' wala video dekha aur aise last mein wo bol utha 'Malik Aye Malik' aur end mein wo smile kiya. To ye jo khushi mili mujhe, iska koi comparison nahi ho sakta."

"I feel happy when I receive messages from people saying that they watch my videos with their entire family. Some say, 'Your video is watched a lot by my grandmother,' while others say, 'My mother watches your videos a lot.' This brings me joy... Recently, I received a message from a doctor who told me that in their hospital, they conduct sessions for mental

health, where patients are shown humorous videos. He told me that these videos have literally improved the mental health of their patients... He shared an experience with me about a 17-year-old boy in their hospital who doesn't speak, as his parents have passed away, and he is currently going through depression. During his sessions, he watched my 'Big Boss' video, and towards the end, he suddenly said, 'Malik Aye Malik,' and then smiled. The happiness I felt from this experience is incomparable." This is just a minor example on the role of Digital narrative initiative the step in improving mental health issues of contemporary India, countless are there in the queue helping individuals in their own ways.

Indian Digital Narratives in the form of cinema has also taken significant strides in addressing mental health issues, Here are some examples of Indian films that have addressed mental health issues in recent years:

### **Dear Zindagi (2016) as a Digital Narrative: A Catalyst for Mental Health Awareness**

In the landscape of Indian digital narratives, Dear Zindagi stands out as a meaningful cultural text that uses the medium of film and digital platforms to challenge stigma around mental health. Directed by Gauri Shinde, the film extends beyond entertainment — becoming a conversation starter in online spaces about therapy, emotional well-being, and self-care.

Released at a time when discussions on mental health were still emerging in mainstream Indian discourse, the film quickly found resonance across social media, blogs, and video-sharing platforms, where audiences began sharing their own stories, reflections, and experiences with therapy. Clips from the film, particularly the calm and insightful therapy sessions between Kaira (Alia Bhatt) and Dr. Jehangir Khan (Shah Rukh Khan), were widely circulated online, turning the narrative into a powerful tool for digital engagement and awareness.

Through its digital reach, Dear Zindagi normalizes therapy by presenting it as a relatable, non-judgmental process. The film avoids the trope of portraying mental illness as extreme or abnormal, instead focusing on the everyday emotional struggles of a young woman trying to find balance and meaning in her life. This approach resonated strongly with a generation navigating stress, anxiety, and pressure in a hyperconnected world.



As a digital narrative, *Dear Zindagi* also engages with broader societal issues — such as emotional repression, generational trauma, and family dynamics — encouraging viewers to break the silence surrounding mental health. It repositions therapy not as a sign of weakness, but as a pathway to strength and self-awareness.

The film's dialogue-driven structure, metaphor-rich conversations, and relatable characters make it easily adaptable for digital discussion, meme culture, and mental health advocacy campaigns. Its reach and impact were amplified by digital platforms where conversations extended far beyond the cinema halls.

In essence, *Dear Zindagi* is not just a film — it's a digital narrative that has significantly contributed to India's evolving mental health discourse by fostering empathy, encouraging openness, and giving young audiences the language to talk about their inner lives.

### **Taare Zameen Par: A Thoughtful Reflection on Mental Health, Emotional Well-being of Children, and Social Sensitivity**

*Taare Zameen Par* stands as more than just a touching cinematic experience—it emerges as a powerful voice advocating for mental health awareness, particularly among children. The film brings to the forefront the struggles faced by children with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, who are often misjudged as lazy or inattentive. This lack of understanding leads to emotional neglect, unnecessary punishment, and a gradual erosion of the child's confidence, pushing them into feelings of isolation and psychological pain.

At the center of the narrative is Ishaan Awasthi, a bright yet misunderstood child with a vivid imagination and an artistic soul. Ishaan doesn't fit into the traditional mold of academic success, and his difficulties with reading and writing are mistaken for defiance or carelessness. Rather than being supported, he is reprimanded, ridiculed, and eventually sent away to a boarding school. This separation from his family, paired with emotional alienation, causes his world to collapse from within.

The film carefully underscores the consequences of an education system—and a society—that prioritizes results over emotional connection. When the worth of a child is judged solely by their academic output, we risk neglecting their deeper emotional needs. The

mental and emotional well-being of children is not always visible, but it is just as vital as physical health. A child is a developing emotional being, not merely a performer in the classroom.

Everything begins to change when Ram Shankar Nikumbh, a new art teacher, enters Ishaan's life. Nikumbh embodies the rare qualities of a truly empathetic educator—someone who sees past behavior and into the heart of a child. He recognizes that Ishaan's silence and withdrawal are not signs of disobedience, but cries for help. With patience and compassion, Nikumbh diagnoses the issue as dyslexia and begins to gently rebuild Ishaan's crumbling self-esteem.

Using creative methods and a nurturing approach, Nikumbh creates a space where Ishaan can begin to heal and express himself. Through art and affirmation, he helps Ishaan see his learning difference not as a limitation, but as a gift. He reminds us all that every child learns and grows in their own way, and that recognizing this diversity is key to real education. His belief—that “every child is special”—becomes the guiding philosophy of the entire film.

The film does not just narrate a child's transformation—it opens up a conversation around how society deals with learning differences and emotional fragility. It makes a compelling case for timely support, early diagnosis, and emotionally intelligent teaching. By encouraging understanding over judgment, the film reveals how crucial it is to build a child's spirit, not just their grades.

It also urges parents, teachers, and caregivers to look beyond traditional expectations and ask: are we truly listening to our children's inner worlds, or simply shaping them to fit a predefined mold? Without condemning the system outright, the film offers a thoughtful critique, advocating for a shift from rigid instruction to compassionate education.

The film's central argument is that academic metrics should not be the only standard by which a child's abilities are measured. Emotional stability, self-worth, and creativity deserve equal attention. *Taare Zameen Par* moves beyond entertainment—it transforms into a heartfelt message that resonates long after the credits roll, encouraging viewers to rethink how they perceive learning and capability.

Ultimately, *Taare Zameen Par* is a work of art that invites introspection and change. It is a beacon for emotional literacy, showing that with kindness, attention, and support, we can unlock the hidden brilliance in every child. Through its storytelling, it urges us to move toward a society that values empathy as much as excellence, and heart as much as intellect.

## Conclusion

India's digital narrative ecosystem has proven to be a transformative tool in the fight against deep-seated social issues. Whether it is caste oppression, mental illness, child abuse, or disability, digital platforms have allowed for grassroots engagement, viral storytelling, and institutional accountability. Unlike traditional media, digital narratives are accessible, interactive, emotionally engaging, and community-driven, enabling them to drive real change.

As this paper illustrates, the blend of storytelling and technology in Indian digital narratives is not merely artistic—it's activist, educational, and essential for shaping a more inclusive society.

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