

“Digital Ethnography Of Folk Songs On Women’s Success In Andhra Pradesh And Telangana (2019–2024): A Youtube-Based Analysis”

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Abstract

Employing digital ethnography, this study explores the portrayal of women’s achievements in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana through digital folk songs uploaded to YouTube between 2019 and 2024. It explores the oral traditional genres and their digital manifestations, as well as the local cultural codes that shape women’s empowerment rhetoric in the digital space.

The 15 selected, regionally and thematically spaced Telugu folk songs, eight from Telangana and seven from Andhra Pradesh, reveal different thematic emphases. Digital folk songs in Telangana, for instance, focus on ritual and symbolic empowerment, particularly empowerment celebrated during Bathukamma festivals and in statehood protest songs. Women are glorified as cultural leaders and heroines, participating in community dances adorned with floral regalia. In sharp contrast, Andhra Pradesh’s folk songs emphasize pragmatic domination through participation in self-help groups, as well as rural credit, disaster resilience, and even migration. Women in these narratives become economic and familial stabilisers as they engage with government programs DWCRA and YSR Cheyutha.

In addition to comment threads, the study itself employs content and visual criticism, metadata analysis, and analysis of affective publics, institutional uptake, and narrative sovereignty. In both states, digital folk songs are performative artefacts of empowerment that encode identity, agency, and resilience primarily through the music, lyrics, visual framing, and reception. The analysis also identifies social platform-specific issues of algorithmic bias concerning community representation and other ethical issues.

This paper extends area studies through an interdisciplinary approach to the digital storytelling cultures of folk media and the ethnography of gender in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. It demonstrates that YouTube folk songs are archival records that actively and dynamically transform, shape, and intervene in the discourse of gendered aspiration, recognition, and policy, well beyond the entertainment or cultural memory paradigm.

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I. Introduction

What the internet age has done with expression and contestation is value and examine it through screens and separate it from the community. The advent of YouTube has allowed local folk singers to break cultural barriers and reach an international public (Choudhary, 2024; Pink et al., 2016). In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, folk songs that were connected with agriculture and ritual celebrations are now gaining newfound meaning in the digital world and the community engagement that comes with it (Jassal, 2020). This study concentrates on the last five years and analyzes uploads on YouTube that focus on folk songs by women, and the way they define women's success, agency, and identity in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (Chillara, 2025). The main aim of this paper is to recreate the digital ethnography of folk songs and the folk-song artefacts and the cultural distinctions of the audiences forming those digital artifacts (Pink et al., 2016).

¹ A pragma acts as a special instruction for the compiler, commonly used to handle features tied to a particular machine or operating system.

This study analyzes Andhra Pradesh and Telangana separately, recognizing that the two states, which were once a single entity, have diverged in their histories, cultures, and political economies after the split (Nath, 2024; Choudhary, 2024). Identity politics in Telangana, particularly since statehood was attained in 2014, has supported the sponsorship of certain folk revival movements and the active participation of women in ritual activities like the Bathukamma (Times of India, 2023). Andhra, in turn, has a distinct socio-economic structure with its own patterns of agrarian change, migration, and institutional arrangements (self-help groups, micro-finance) (Kumar, 2023; Das, 2023). The digital folk songs produced in and about both states emerged from self and expressive culture and are thus enabled and embody distinctive inflections of achievement, self, and agency that warrant specific qualitative comparative study (Tewari Jassal, 2012).

These ethnographies by Cleland (2022) and Pink et al. (2016) look at ethnographic methodologies and why they have been updated to accommodate emerging cultures, communities, and social interactions that they describe as capable of being mediated and emerging through various digital platforms.

As such, digital ‘YouTube ethnographies’ have come to treat an entire folk song video as video ‘artefacts/’ cultural artefacts and paying attention to recorded viewers’ comments and socio-culturally relevant data commentary as well as viewers’ engagements (Parikh et al., 2010). As such, socio-culturally relevant comments that can situate the folk singers, singers’ texts, and their lifeworld systems of regions envision socio-culturally relevant commentaries that help situate the singers, singers’ texts and their lifeworld systems (Papacharissi, 2015).

In this case, the digital folk artefacts as video and the socio-culturally relevant recorded comments of the folk song viewers and folk song video Google viewers constitute comment commentaries that situate the socio historically relevant structures of commentaries and engaging folk singers and systems (Joshi et al., 2023). As such, this folk ‘field’ for the folk texts as technologies is relevant to the networked world only as folk genre and genre neither relevant (Spivak, 1988).

The objectives of this paper are threefold:

- To examine prominent Telugu folk songs uploaded in the past five years that highlight women’s achievements and or empowerment, and do so for both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (Jassal, 2020; Chillara, 2025; Tamang, 2025).
- To study how success is configured within these songs, such as through economic self-sufficiency, social respect, ritual empowerment, or visibility within the internet space (Kabeer, 1999; Batliwala, 2010; Patience, 2023).
- To examine and elucidate how the aforementioned themes are presented and understood within the folk song ecologies of the two states, and what this says about their regional imaginings of gender in the digital world (Pink et al., 2016; Cleland, 2022; Choudhary, 2024).

In so doing, this study adds to the scholarship on gender by illuminating how women’s achievements are culturally performed and digitally mediated in regional folk traditions (Spivak, 1988; Greco, 2025). More broadly, the study is useful to practitioners in community media, digital archiving, and empowerment programmes in illustrating how folk-digital convergence may function as a site of women’s narrative sovereignty (Parikh et al., 2010; Joshi et al., 2023).

The upcoming sections of the paper shall review relevant literature on folk media, women’s empowerment and digital ethnography; describe the research design and methods; report findings from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh respectively; and then engage in cross-state discussion and conclude discussing policy and practice implications. Ethically, the research is limited to publicly accessible YouTube videos and does not involve human subjects interviews, hence the central ethical issue is the anonymity of the commenters and the honest reporting of the data. The period for the selection of the songs is 2019-2024 in order to capture the more recent digital folk patterns. The paper attempts to trace the digital footprints of folk songs as sites of women’s successful stories in Andhra and Telangana.

II. Literature Review

In the Indian context, the analytical approach regarding folk songs has ethnographic scholarship roots. Smita Tewari Jassal finely examines the Bhojpuri folk songs and the women’s voices in them, where “women sing what they often cannot talk about” (Jassal, 2020; Tewari Jassal, 2012). These songs become “counter-archives” of emotion, power, and agency. Jassal (2020) recounts other studies of folk songs in Indian villages as emotional expressions of identity, labour, migration, and socio-cultural transformation. The available literature in the Telugu context is scant, but the studies of regional folk customs and culture revival have linked folk traditions of women’s folk media with women’s agency and identity (Rao, 1991; Jassal, 2020).

On the single scholarship side, there is a substantial amount of work on the underpinning social change and empowerment of women in the region. Kabeer (1999) on empowerment succinctly remarks that it is also the ability to make significant choices, and not just access and assets. Community media, oral traditions, and cultural

expression have been noted as significant sites of women’s agency (Batliwala, 2010). Within rural Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, case studies of women’s collectives and self-help groups illustrate how non-formal domains (markets, fields, rituals) become empowerment sites (Nath, 2024). Nevertheless, women’s success narratives have yet to be studied digitally in folk forms (Choudhary, 2024).

The digital footprint of ethnography is a form of digital anthropology which explores cultures and societies through the use of documentation and ethnographic techniques, digital artefacts, and platforms (Pink et al., 2016; Cleland, 2022). Sarah Pink et al. (2016) describe these digital spaces as new fields of cultural production, which integrate new forms of media, community, and intertwined meanings. In the Indian context, studies like that of Tapan Parikh et al. (2010) have shown the interface of new media with folk music communities in rural India, illustrating that the new digital dissemination transforms folk music production, audience, authorship, and monetary compensation. Also, research on digital folk culture, as in Poonia (2025), illustrates the online folk narrating of states like Haryana and integrating the local with the global. Therefore, emphasis on digital ethnography of YouTube folk song artefacts is also found in the existing literature.

The connection between folk songs and women’s empowerment may be rich, but it is still under-documented. For example, the folk songs incorporated in the Himachal Mela demonstrate women’s labour and resilience in Gaddi communities, illustrating the ways in which cultural performance influences gendered dynamics (Sandhu, 2022). Similarly, the folk songs associated with rural education and notions of digital literacy, such as Arora’s work on karaoke folk songs for girls in India, underscore the folk-digital nexus and its implications for education and gender (Das, 2023). In the case of Telugu speaking regions, the festival of Bathukamma, celebrated in Telangana, has been noted for the assertion of women’s collective cultural identity (Times of India, 2023). Recent reports explain how the festival’s songs are being shared on social media and other video platforms, enhancing women’s cultural expression and visibility and in turn, social agency (Choudhary, 2024).

Folk song/agency, and women’s empowerment in connection with the digital world are the three core aspects in which this study is situated. This ethnography is focused on a gap in the existing scholarship. It attempts to address the fact that while folk song scholarship prioritizes oral women’s archives (Jassal, 2020; Portelli, 1991), and digital ethnography discusses the media online (Pink et al., 2016; Cleland, 2022), digital folk songs celebrating women’s accomplishments in the Telugu states is an area that has not been well researched. This paper is an intensive study that focuses on the 5 most relevant years to the uploads on YouTube in the regions of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, in an attempt to contribute to broader discourses (Kruttiventi, 2025; Greco, 2025).

In a nutshell,

- Folk songs are cultural archival records of voicing, remembering, and self-defining (Jassal, 2020; Rao, 1991).
- Women’s empowerment is more than access; it includes control over the narrative and the performance of the culture (Kabeer, 1999; Batliwala, 2010; Patience, 2023).
- Folk media are unrecognizably changed by digital platforms, which reconfigure audience relationships, authorship, and mediation (Pink et al., 2016; Parikh et al., 2010; Joshi et al., 2023).

This study therefore analyzes YouTube folk songs as cultural and digital texts through which the success narratives of women in Andhra and Telangana are publicly performed, consumed, and contested (Tamang, 2025; Choudhary, 2024). This is an intervention both in gender studies of South India and in digital ethnography and folk media scholarship (Spivak, 1988; Greco, 2025).

III. Methodology

This research utilizes the qualitative method of digital ethnography, which consists of observation and study of social phenomena within the Internet environment. Unlike ethnography, which considers the physical presence of the researcher in the culture being studied, digital ethnography concentrates on the researcher’s presence within the virtual culture, digital interaction, and identity as culture, communication, and self are online (Pink et al., 2016; Cleland, 2022). In this instance, the field site is YouTube, and the YouTube Telugu folk songs are the cultural artefacts being studied. The research concentrates on folk songs uploaded onto YouTube in the period January 2019 to August 2021, which thematically celebrate or document women’s achievements in relation to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (Kruttiventi, 2025; Jassal, 2020).

Research Design

The process under consideration deals with the identification, classification, and in-depth analysis of YouTube folk songs that directly incorporate women’s empowerment, agency, or accomplishments. A purposive sampling method was utilised in the identification of songs by using such keywords in Telugu and English as “women empowerment folk song,” “Bathukamma songs,” “failure and success story of women in Andhra,” and “Telangana folk songs women” (Tamang, 2025; Patience, 2023). Only those videos were selected that had the following features:

- Thematic relevance (lyrics dwell upon the social success, strength and agency of women or general social empowerment) (Batliwala, 2010; Kabeer, 1999).
- Time relevance (uploaded from 2019 to 2024) (Choudhary, 2024).
- Geographic relevance (publicly accessible) (Greco, 2025).
- Minimum engagement (participation in the song of >5,000 active comments or views) (Papacharissi, 2015).

The total number of songs was 18: 8 from Telangana and 7 from Andhra Pradesh, which were then subjected to intense scrutiny. More than half of the songs in the compilation were omitted from our analysis. Three songs were omitted during the second stage of analysis due to the lack of or disconnected uplifting themes symbolic content (Kruttiventi, 2025).

Data Sources

Each song video was treated as a digital art and was analyzed in the following ways:

- Lyric content analysis (When necessary, directly translated from Telugu (Jassal, 2020).
- Visual elements: costumes, settings and symbols, as well as movement and postures of female figures (Pink et al., 2016).
- Audience Engagement: Comments (especially those highly upvoted), Ratio of Likes to Dislikes and the Pinned Comments (Papacharissi, 2015; Cleland, 2022).
- Metadata: Title, description, the name of the account, and the tags assigned (Parikh et al., 2010).

Examples include:

- Telangana song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9Tw8FJb9LE>
This popular 2022 song portrays Bathukamma celebrations and praises women as carriers of culture, strength, and dignity (Times of India, 2023).
- Andhra song: “Mahila Sankshema Geetham – Women Empowerment Song 2021”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrh4kxRyzY>
This song narrates the journey of a woman from rural entrepreneurship to SHG leadership, citing schemes like DWCRA and YSR Cheyutha (Nath, 2024).

Each song was documented in a spreadsheet with its link, state origin, singer, date of upload, summary of lyrics, and thematic code.

Analytical Approach

Echoing the concept developed by grounded theory, emergent themes were discovered with no imposition of categories (Pink et al., 2016). Lyrics and images were interpreted through thematic content analysis. Terms such as “ritual identity,” “economic self-reliance,” “digital pride,” “collective resilience,” “state schemes,” and “cultural motherhood” were coined (Kruttiventi, 2025; Choudhary, 2024). A comparative coding matrix was constructed in an effort to identify differences and similarities in patterns observed in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh (Greco, 2025).

Comment sections were used to study the ‘takeaways’ of the content from the audiences’ perspective. A number of comments, particularly from females, indicated emotions such as pride, nostalgia, and inspiration. These emotional reactions served as data points on the circulation of women’s narratives within digital public spheres (Papacharissi, 2015).

Ethics and Responsibility in Research

As the materials used in this study were public, there was no primary data collection involving people. However, in this research, ethical practices of digital ethnography were observed (Cleland, 2022; Pink et al., 2016).

- There was no reporting with regard to usernames within the comment sections (Papacharissi, 2015).
- All translations from Telugu to English were done with attention to the appreciation of contextual meaning (Jassal, 2020).
- In cases where the lyrics named particular groups (for example, SC/ST women, SHGs) genteel and unifying terms were used (Batliwala, 2010).

Limitations

The limitations of the study include the following:

- Difficulties in interpreting some dialectal lyrics and accessing the primary material (Jassal, 2020).
- Algorithmic queries from the site have the potential to “ignore” pertinent but less accessed material (Greco, 2025).
- The absence of the creator’s direct input to the material which could have enhanced its interpretation (Kruttiventi, 2025).

Still, the digital ethnography method provided a utilitarian perspective to understand the performance, reception and the story structure of folk songs as digital implements of signifying women’s achievement in the state of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (Pink et al., 2016; Choudhary, 2024).

IV. Findings: Telangana – Cultural Identity, Ritual Power, And Digital Pride

The customs and everyday life of the people of Telangana are illustrated through their rituals and seasonal celebrations, and through the historical disputes of the people (Tewari Jassal, 2012; Srinivas, 1997). Along with the cultural revival and the reclaiming of regional identity that came with the state of Telangana being formed in 2014, women, in particular, came to prominence as the powerful symbolic identity of the region (Kruttiventi, 2025). This pride, as seen in folk songs that portray women as not only nurturers but a fundamental part of the political and cultural life of the region, is especially evident in digital media like YouTube (Batiwala, 2010; Choudhary, 2024). Such songs can typically be found during the Bathukamma festival, but their significance expands well beyond the religious to include themes of struggle, transformation, and leadership (Times of India, 2023).

1. Bathukamma Songs as Symbols of Collective Dignity

A striking instance is:

Song 1: “Bathukamma Song 2023 – Puvvula Puvvulatho”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9Tw8FJb9LE>

Singer: Mangli | Views: 12.4 million | Uploaded: September 2023

The lyrics celebrate the blooming of women by drawing a parallel between them and flowers. “Amma chethulatho aakasam cheripinchina Bathukamma” means “The mother who with her hands touches the sky”(Jassal, 2020). Such lines elevate the everyday feminine activities of cooking, decorating, and praying to the positions of grandeur, dignity and honor (Papacharissi, 2015). Accompanying the audio is a video showing thousands of women dressed in traditional sarees, who, while carrying beautiful and painted floral stacks, dance in concentrated circles and sing as one (Greco, 2025). This message turns feminine domesticity into civic celebration and illustrates how cultural pride empowers the people (Kruttiventi, 2025).

Users, mostly women, in commentaries on “Listening to this song as one feels like one is holding one’s head high” reflect on comments like this which captures touchstone of affective public theory (Papacharissi, 2015). Digital public spheres where emotions rally in ways that empower (Sandhu, 2022).

2. The Protest Songs and Role of Women in the Formation of the State

At the Festival Songs, there are also uploads on youtube which narrate the role of women in the statehood movement in telangana: here is one which stands out .

Song 2: “Telangana Mahila Geetham – Aatmakur Women’s Fight Song”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vN5y9BiW-M>

Uploaded: Oct 2020 | Local NGO | 67k Views

The song captures the singing of dalit women farmers who were part of the 2009-2013 protests (Patience, 2023). This digital artefact (let’s name it like this for the moment still ‘collage’ does convey something important but artefact also captures the work that has gone to create this all) combines archival footage with studio recordings constructed from these (Portelli, 1991). It is imperative to recognize that the women in this instance also politically inscribe culture rather than simply reproducing it (Chillara, 2025). The visual framing that stands out is that of older women with sunburnt faces and arms, sickles and commanding stances which are representative of defiance and not submission (Narayan, 1993).

The powerful lyrics, “Ee ammalaki Jai Telangana cheppandi” (Salute these women, say Jai Telangana), included in one of the comments illustrates the way folk songs serve as means of preserving and recognizing political events (Kruttiventi, 2025).

3. Aspirational Narratives and Entrepreneurial Pride

The latest digital folk songs from Telangana also showcase the entrepreneurship and leadership of rural women (Tamang, 2025).

Song 3: “Mahila Atma Gourava Geetham – SHG Mahila Song 2021”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZ7HnGIRk_0

Artist: Warangal Mahila Kala Sangham

Notable lines “Ration ki queue lo nilabadu vaddu, rashtramlo sanchalana cheyyi” (Don’t stand in the ration queues, shake the state with your power) portrays a marked leap from passive dependence to active leadership (Kruttiventi, 2025). The visuals show women engaged in community radio, banking, and on the tailoring machines (Joshi et al., 2023).

This change illuminates the convertibility of stories (Kruttiventi 2025) — their oral expressions to models of action (e.g., for SHGs or microcredit groups). In Telangana, stories with such a narrative prefer dignity to charity and dignity to access (Batliwala, 2010).

4. Gendered Cultural Heroism

Women having a symbolic heroic status in Telangana’s digital folkscape is unique. Such status does not come from the mimicry of masculinity, but from the true feminine strength (Kabeer, 1999). The songs often speak of ‘Talli Telangana’ (‘Mother Telangana’), which associates womanhood with the landscape (Kruttiventi, 2025). The fusion of the mythical with the real allows women to be represented as powerful and as goddesses, ‘grassroots’ warriors, both of which are often lacking in the formal political conversations (Jassal, 2020).

Summary of the Themes from Telangana:

- Cultural Performance (Bathukamma) as Resistance and Pride (Tewari Jassal, 2012; Choudhary, 2024).
- Digital Artifacts as Archives of Memory, Protest, and Aspiration (Portelli, 1991; Kruttiventi, 2025).
- Lyrics stressing dignity, authorship, leadership (Kabeer, 1999; Batliwala, 2010).
- Women redefined as agents of change, not victims (Nath, 2024; Patience, 2023).

The digital folk songs assert a visionary notion of success anchored in collective recognition, ritual pride, and transformed civic life which constitutes the unique feminist folk of Telangana (Papacharissi, 2015; Greco, 2025).

V. Findings: Andhra Pradesh – Institutional Pragmatism And Survival Narratives

Unlike the folk songs emerging from Telangana which tend to be culturally patriotic, primers found on the YouTube ecosystem in Andhra Pradesh seem to be more practical, centring on themes of education, livelihood, financial independence, disaster resilience, and the success of self-help groups (Kumar, 2023; Das, 2023). In these songs, women are more than cultural bearers; they are portrayed as participants in the DWCRA, YSR Cheyutha, and disaster relief institutional schemes (Kruttiventi, 2025). Women’s success is not only symbolic but is also associated with tangible social mobility (Nath, 2024).

1. Self-Help Groups and Economic Empowerment

One prominent example is:

Song 1: “DWCRA Mahila Song – AP Women Power”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrh4kxbRyzY>

Uploaded: Oct 2021 | Views: 311k | Singer: Jayamma Satyavathi

This folk song captures the experience of village women who, with the help of DWCRA, evolve from homemakers to businesspersons (Tamang, 2025). Phrases like “Gruhastam lo cherina aatalu ipudu bazaar lo dandalai” epitomize this evolution. The footage of real women-led Self Help Group (SHG) meetings, weaving centers, and even sheds is a captivating and authentic representation (Batliwala, 2010).

The focus on teamwork and organization is also new in these folk songs. In contrast to popular songs in Telangana, which often indulge in celebratory nationalism, folk and folk-inspired songs in Andhra Pradesh emphasize the rapid growth of the region attributable to government policies, market expansion, and cooperative efforts (Patience, 2023; Das, 2023). Commenters often tag specific SHG groups, and motivational comments like “Mana Atmakur Mahila Group ku gurthimpu dorikindi!” (Our Atmakur women’s group has received recognition!) are common (Kruttiventi, 2025).

This exemplifies what Kruttiventi (2025) terms “institutional uptake,” which refers to the integration of personal and communal narratives into NGO training sessions, credit meetings, and government publicity films (Jassal, 2020). These songs are also performative memory and serve as conductive educational mediums (Pink et al., 2016).

2. Migration and Urban Survival

Also prominent is the migration-motivated monopole female agency, especially in coastal Andhra (Nath, 2024). In the folk songs, women who migrate with their husbands to the city, take up low-paying jobs, and then slowly, level with the informal domestic economy and climbing the socio-economic ladder, start to construct migrant support networks (Choudhary, 2024)

Song 2: “Amma Hyderabad Velindi” – Telugu Folk women Migration Song

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teA5EoMIJ88>

Uploaded: March 2020 | Channel: Mana Janapadam

The longing in the lyrics speaks of a quietly desperate hope:

“Thalli thandri pakkana pettaka, phone tho panchuko lemo”

The text captures the double-edged sword of migration and the subsequent responsibility. The holder of the family ties becomes the primary emotional and financial provider of the family and the person who upholds the family culture (Papacharissi, 2015). The song illustrates one-of-a-kind success with over 160,000 views, and a plethora of comments reminiscing about their family members, with many Telugu speakers residing in the big Indian cities of Hyderabad and Mumbai as well as Dubai (Joshi et al., 2023).

Such folk digital artefacts serve as emotional connectors to the diaspora, like the Telugu family, bound together, shattered by their narratives (Greco, 2025). Moreover, the artefacts redefine women success discourse, portraying success as resilience not only in women leadership but also in women's adaptive socio-economic strategic change (Kumar, 2023)

3. Climatic Calamity and Coping Mechanisms

Due to the long coastline of Andhra, several folk songs relate to cyclones and surviving and recovering from them (Dahiya, 2024). These songs are often made by school children and women’s groups and other NGOs working on the coast (Sandhu, 2022).

Song 3: “Hudhud Tarvata - Mahila Pragathi Paatalu”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MIKUuHxi48>

Date uploaded: 2019 | Context: Resilience of Visakhapatnam people post-Hudhud cyclone

Women in this case are guardians of the community and caregivers who assist in the reconstruction process after the destruction (Patience, 2023).

“Neellu theesina varsham kanna, memu ekkuva egiremu”

(The rains took away water, but we rose higher than floods)

The footage shows women’s hygiene supporters, ration line organizers, and ASHA workers (Batliwala, 2010). The triumph in this case, unlike triumphant opposition, is unassuming, cooperative, and pragmatic — traits that are often absent in popular gender narratives (Tamang, 2025).

Summary of Andhra Pradesh Themes:

- SHGs and schemes (DWCRA, YSR Cheyutha) as development frameworks (Kumar, 2023; Das, 2023).
- Folk songs as motivational and instructional digital resources (Pink et al., 2016).
- Migration stories that emphasize sacrifice, survival, and independence (Choudhary, 2024).
- Women as active institutional participants, not merely symbolic ones (Nath, 2024; Joshi et al., 2023).

The empowerment folk songs in Andhra Pradesh demonstrate that success is not about the self-assertion of cultural identity but about strategizing and accessing bureaucratic institutions (Kruttiventi, 2025). The impact of YouTube is not only to archive but also to circulate templates of empowerment (Papacharissi, 2015).

Comparative Discussion: Divergent Grammars of Digital Empowerment

The dialectical examination of folk songs in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh depicts two overlapping and contrasting cultural constructions of women’s success. Both regions tap into folk songs to celebrate and propagate women’s agency, albeit with significant differences in the methods, metaphors, and meanings of empowerment, influenced by their respective histories, political climates, and media environments (Kruttiventi, 2025; Choudhary, 2024).

1. Institutional vs Ritual Narratives of Success

In Telangana, folk songs celebrate cultural tenacity and ritual identity. The Bathukamma festival songs, for example, depict women as the bearers of traditions and shifts in customs, albeit not in a passive manner (Batliwala, 2010; Times of India, 2023). These women emerge as part of the active agents of political memory and collective celebration, as evidenced in the songs that recount women’s contributions to the struggle for statehood (Kruttiventi, 2025). The motif of ‘Talli Telangana ’(Mother Telangana) further eliminates the distinctions between woman and state, and between ritual and resistance (Greco, 2025). Success here is framed through symbolic assertion, where pride translates to empowerment (Papacharissi, 2015).

On the other hand, folk songs from Andhra Pradesh deal with institutional pragmatism — SHGs, credit schemes, disaster resilience, and migration survival (Kumar, 2023; Das, 2023). For example, songs depicting benefits of DWCRA or YSR Cheyutha portray women as active participants within formal frameworks, stressing financial literacy, cooperatives, and the state (Tamang, 2025; Nath, 2024). The aspirational tone is not mythic: the heroine of the songs is a woman who repays a loan, leads a successful savings group, or migrates profitably to support her children’s education (Parikh et al., 2010).

Hence, while in the case of Telangana the digital folk success is symbolic–ritual, for Andhra it is pragmatic–institutional (Kruttiventi, 2025).

2. Community Aesthetics vs Individual Testimony

Aesthetic approaches also differ. In Telangana, videos commonly show large group participatory activities — circular dance, large costume performances, mass women’s gatherings, and other formalized and ritualized activities (Batliwala, 2010). The figure of the whole is primary, reflecting the emotive strength of the collective (Choudhary, 2024).

Example: Viewers of Bathukamma songs on YouTube often write such as “Intlo andaru kalisi chesina panduga ee roju” (This festival celebrated together in the house feels revived through the screen).

In contrast, some Andhra songs are written in the first-person perspective of a woman speaking to her village, children, or the government (Das, 2023; Kumar, 2023). As with real SHG meetings or documentary-style imaging of rebuilding post-cyclone, the visuals also include testimonials to the face of empowerment. The audience reacts with awe: “Mana Aavida chethullo phone, passbook, power unnaayi” (Our woman now holds the phone, the passbook, and power) (Patience, 2023). Both reflect similar instances of women empowerment. So while Telangana focuses on the ownership of physical bodies, Andhra prefers autobiographical dominance (Jassal, 2020).

3. Performance of Empowerment: Cultural vs Civic Lens

The agency with which women are constructed as drivers of change is, however, diverging in the two states:

- Telangana: Empowerment is claimed through cultural performance, to the extent that singing and flower-making is regarded as political activities (Times of India, 2023).
- Andhra: Empowerment is claimed through civic engagement and is demonstrated when a woman signs a loan as the summit or organizes a health workshop (Kruttiventi, 2025; Kumar, 2023).

This divergence resonates with the notion of narrative sovereignty (Kruttiventi, 2025). In Telangana, the women assert their power to reinterpret narrative traditions. In Andhra, women assert their power to negotiate bureaucratic structures (Nath, 2024).

Both instances highlight the durability of recognition: women’s successes are not framed around individual feats of heroism, but rather around colleagues’ affirmation and audience resonance as well as replicability (Pink et al., 2016). Songs that garner hundreds of comments, spawn regional remixes, or are reused in NGO workshops testify to the lives of these narratives that extend far beyond their upload moment (Joshi et al., 2023).

4. Risks and Platform Dynamics

One of the shared concerns in both areas is the platformization of empowerment. How does the medium of YouTube as a platform contour what visibility is afforded? Songs that have eye-catching hooks and/or cinematic editing are preferentially selected by algorithms, to the misplaced exclusion of authentic, grassroots narratives (Papacharissi, 2015; Greco, 2025).

While NGO-sponsored songs are of good-quality production, they often reduce complicated, messy realities into palatable narratives for the state (Kruttiventi, 2025). It is this kind of work that intersectional, ethical, digital ethnography addresses: the work to reflexively interrogate the levels of power, access, and representation that are taken for granted in these online cultural repositories (Pink et al., 2016; Cleland, 2022).

In these two cases, we see the two feminist geographies of folk-digital expression in Telangana and in Andhra.

- One is anchored in cultural-symbolic assertion (Telangana) (Krishnaiah, 2018)
- One is anchored in civic-institutional engagement (Andhra) (Ippili, 2024)

Both are important. Their complementarity also demonstrates the depth of gendered imaginings across the regions of India and the transformation of digital folk songs into repositories of grief, pride, resistance, and hope, rather than just a source of entertainment (Kruttiventi, 2025; Choudhary, 2024).

VI. Conclusion

The five years of researching YouTube folk songs suggest that in the digital age, the women’s stories of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are not just surviving, but flourishing and transforming more than ever (Greco, 2025; Choudhary, 2024). Oral folk songs, sung and performed throughout the community, have now become digital relics of celebration. The digital ethnography transformation actively demonstrates women’s achievements in which success is sung and shared throughout rural and semi-urban India (Papacharissi, 2015). Each representation is a personal song that claims their voice (Pink et al., 2016).

Summary of Key Insights

The research demonstrated distinct differences between thematic elements of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Folk songs in Telangana emphasized collective identity through ritualistic performance, particularly in

association with the Bathukamma festival and the expression of culture in post-statehood Telangana (Times of India, 2023). Women, in the songs, are portrayed as empathic civic symbols interlacing domestic femininity with political activism and unfathomable strength (Batliwala, 2010).

In Andhra Pradesh, the digital folk narratives focused on the folk songs of other regions and emphasized the institution of the region. Success stories centered around government schemes such as DWCRA, YSR Cheyutha, the leadership of social help groups, and even the struggle through migration and natural disasters (Das, 2023; Kumar, 2023; Tamang, 2025). Success was framed as more than just navigating formal systems, but accessing social mobility and dignity through the processes.

Even with the differences both states revealed commonalities:

- Provides the opportunity to narrate one’s own stories in one’s own voice (Desai, 2022).
- YouTube functions both as an archive and an amplifier, allowing stories to be consumed on local, regional, and even global scales (Singh, 2020).
- Participants in the public sphere actively engage in the construction and validation of narratives and meaning as evidenced by comments, shares, and feelings (Madhavapeddy, 2024).
- Achievement is framed as collective and not as individualistic heroism, in relation to the community, the audience, and institutional stakeholders (Duggal, 2023).

Therefore, the digitized versions of folk songs testify to the narratives of survival, leadership, and transformation, and create new avenues for feminist cultural documentation in the Indian context (Choudhary, 2024; Patience, 2023).

VII. Policy And Practice Implications

Integrate Digital Folk Media into Government Awareness Campaigns

Many of the songs tell success stories of Self Help Groups. Government funding folk songs for policy communication helps weave community voices into the policy, rather than instrumentalizing them (Das, 2023; Kumar, 2023). This improves outreach in rural areas where folk communication works better than modernized sloganism.

From Folk Traditions Support Women Digital Creators

Despite being incredibly powerful, social media like YouTube is often distorted by a stream of algorithms. Grants structured ethnographically and being partnered with ethically monetized platforms should be available to rural women folk artists recording and uploading their work (Greco, 2025; Pink et al., 2016). Such democratic approaches would enable content production and resource benefit.

Develop Digital Archives of Regional Feminist Oral Histories

In collaboration with scholars and universities, folk songs can be archived thematically to serve activists. These projects can be very influential and valuable to women’s rights development research. Feminist NGOs can work with them to construct and modify archives based on their needs and defined goals.

Guarantee Community Consent and Ethical Representation

It is becoming increasingly common to see songs repurposed by NGOs and state campaigns, but new approaches are needed. Problems in social movements where emotions are politically instrumentalized without reciprocity are ignored. These movements can include profit-sharing and attribution, but only if co-ownership is applied (Cleland, 2022; Kruttiventi, 2025). This is especially relevant to campaigns where songs are used in training programs.

Help Cultural Groups and SHGs Build Critical Media Literacy

Women can be silenced and misrepresented, which is prevalent, not only in mainstream media. This Hybrid Storytelling technique can provide more agency and control to women regarding their communities and even transform social narratives (Pink et al., 2016; Papacharissi, 2015). This technique will enable women to claim their misrepresentation and advocate narrative change.

Fostering Partnerships Between Academia and Communities

In addition to researching these songs, universities and other research institutions should work with singers and groups to co-author articles, curate exhibitions, or even organize festivals (Choudhary, 2024; Joshi et al., 2023). This replaces an extractive model of research with one based on mutual knowledge co-production.

In summary, research proves that folk songs are not mere remnants of culture, but dynamic scripts of gendered change for the contemporary world (Kruttiventi, 2025; Batliwala, 2010). When sung on digital mediums, these songs become tools for collective empowerment, magnifying and archiving mundane voices (Pink

et al., 2016; Patience, 2023). From the Bathukamma celebrations of Telangana to the narrative of an SHG woman in Andhra Pradesh, these songs remind us that the success of women certainly is not something that is only shouted; more often than not, it is something that is sung (Choudhary, 2024; Times of India, 2023).

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