आदिवासी
DIGITAL SAFARNAMA



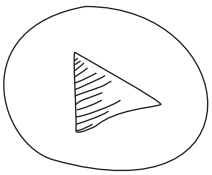
An intimate note from the field by

SHARADA KERKAR

DEF
DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT foundation

आदिवासी

DIGITAL SAFARNAMA



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Adivasi Digital Safarnama is a personalised note by Sharada Kerkar observed through the journey of various trainings that were conducted by DEF for tribal youth across Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jharkhand. The note analysis socio behavioural aspects as how first time exposure with digital tools by tribal youth give diverse learnings.

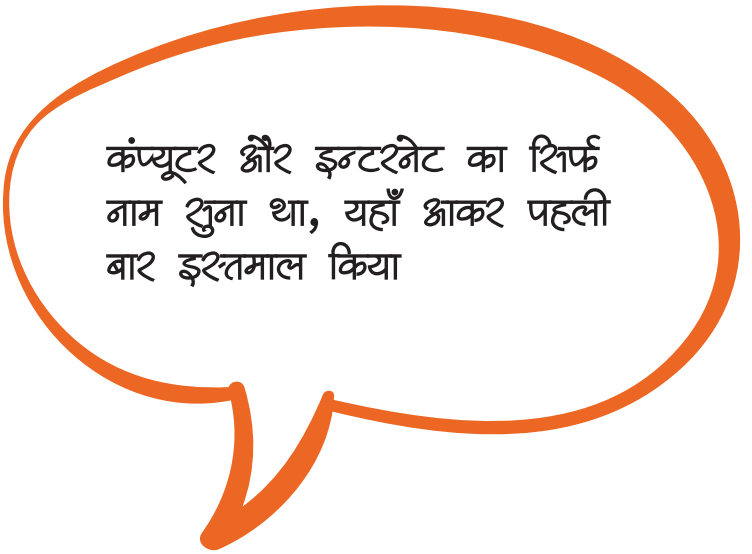
Beside, there is a learning how first time interaction with digital tools is not about only education and learning but it is about a holistic impact on life as a whole.

Hope you enjoy reading the insights and let us know if you want to learn more about the grassroots through such notes.

with love



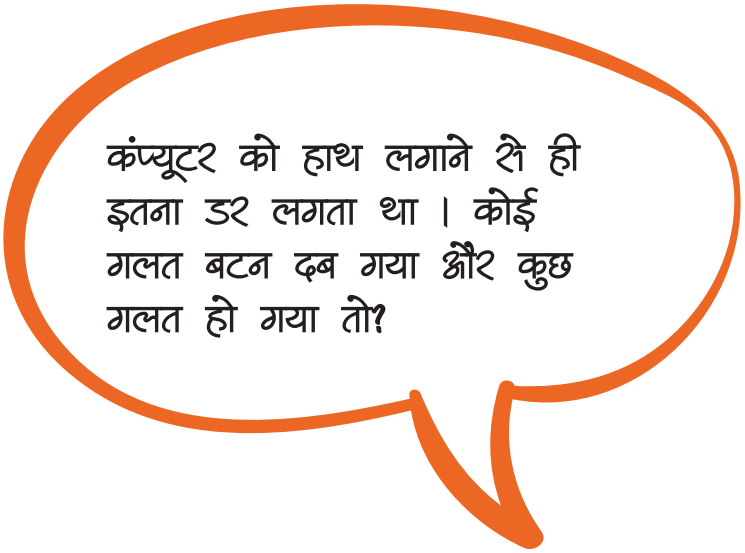
Osama Manzar



* "I had only heard about computers and internet, I learnt to use it only after I came here"

said Shobaram Senani, one of the 31 tribals participating in a digital literacy training organised by Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) in Netrang town, Gujarat.

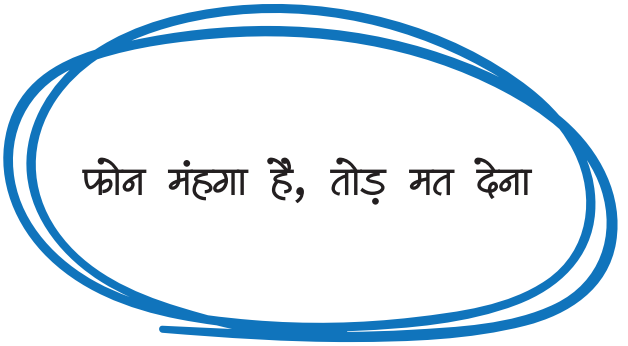
A first-time learner of digital tools and technology, Shobaram had never interacted with technology before but expressed how he always wanted to learn computer though he could never find an opportunity. Now that he was exposed to a computer, he felt scared that he might break something.



" Touching a computer was the scariest thing to do. What if I pressed the wrong button and something went wrong!?"

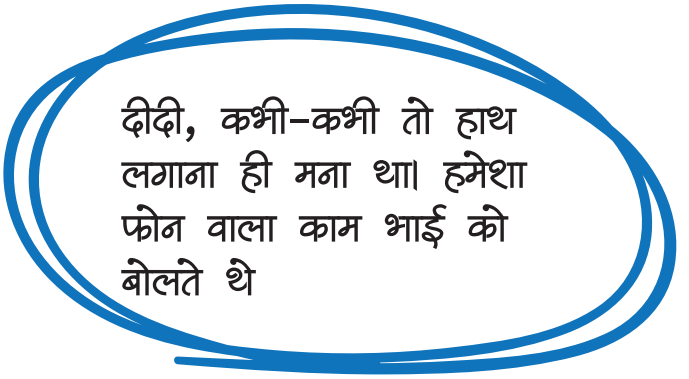
he said, apprehensively.

Niramati Bhoi, another young student attending DEF's digital literacy training in Ranchi, described how she could never learn to use a smartphone in her house because her father always told her that she would break it.



* "The phone is expensive, don't you dare break it"

she would say. A few other girls nodded in agreement with Niramati.



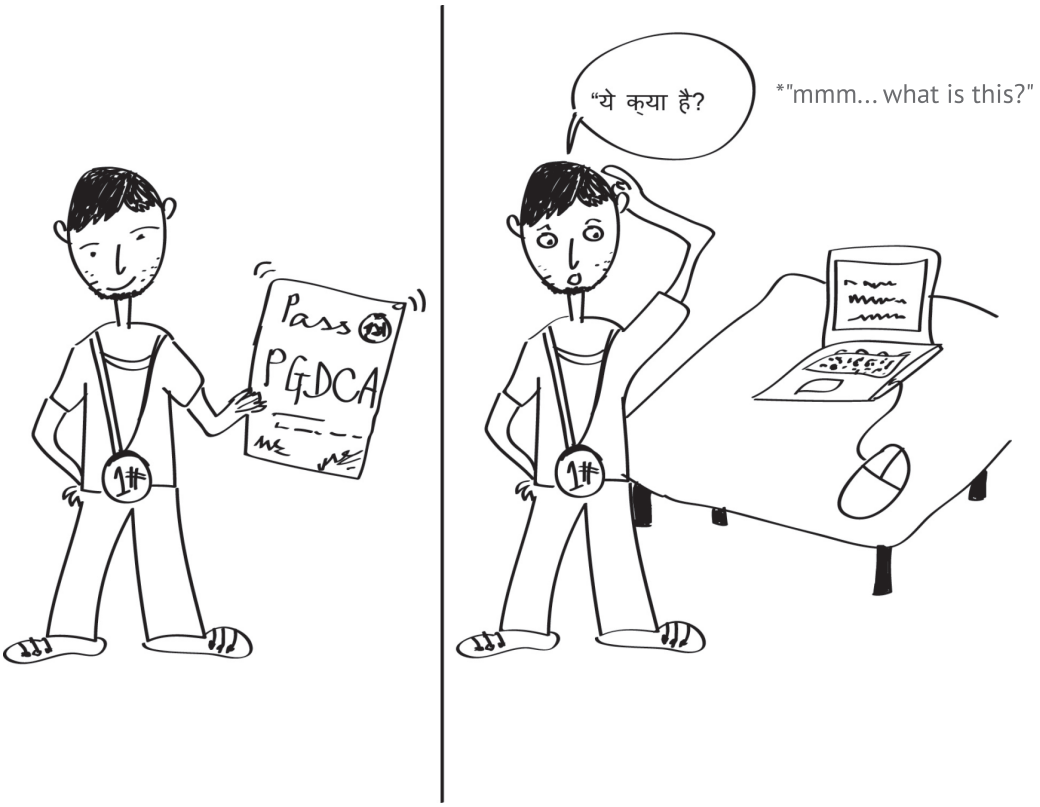
*"Sometimes, we were not even allowed to touch the phone. Any phone related work would be immediately assigned to our brother."

said one trainee.

हमारे यहाँ बडे समझते है की लडकीया फोन, कंप्यूटर चलाना सीखेंगी तो कोई लड़के के साथ भाग जाएगी

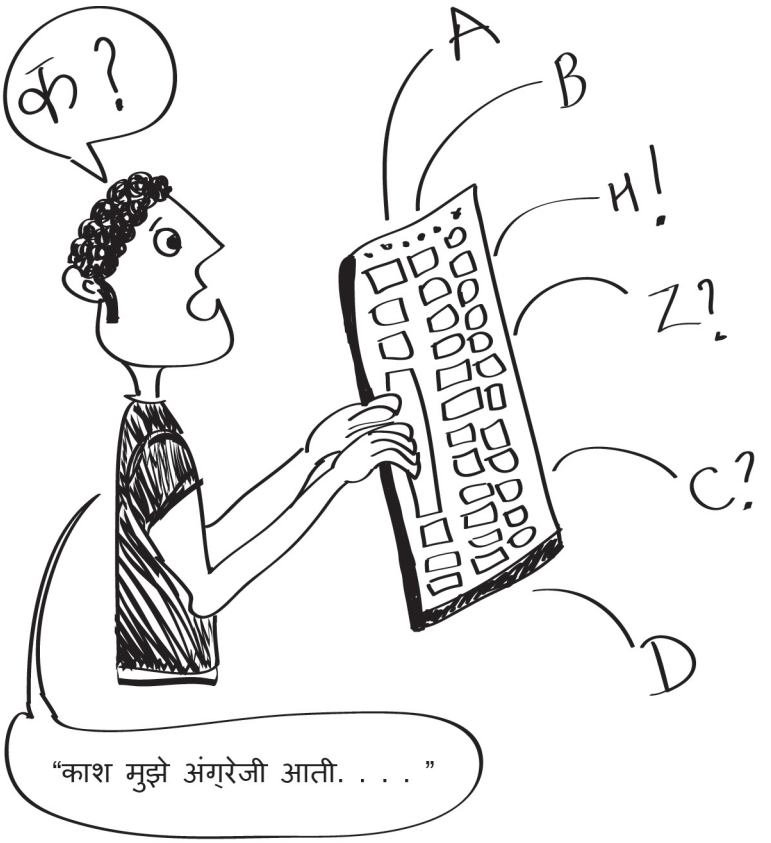
* "In our village it is believed that if girls learn how to use a phone or computer, they would misuse it to abscond with boys."

said another, echoing the feeling of others in the group



Ravi Senani, who hails from a tribal village in Madhya Pradesh, was one of the few students in the digital literacy training batch who had prior exposure to computers. He had completed his Post-Graduate Diploma in Computer Applications (PGDCA). When he was pursuing this course, he had to travel miles to reach his college for lessons to take his exams. Yet, when Ravi arrived for DEF's training, he realised he lacked even the basics of computer education.

Niwas Adiwasi typed the slowest in the training, and often raised his hand to ask for help or request his fellow batchmates to assist him in searching for letters on the keyboard.

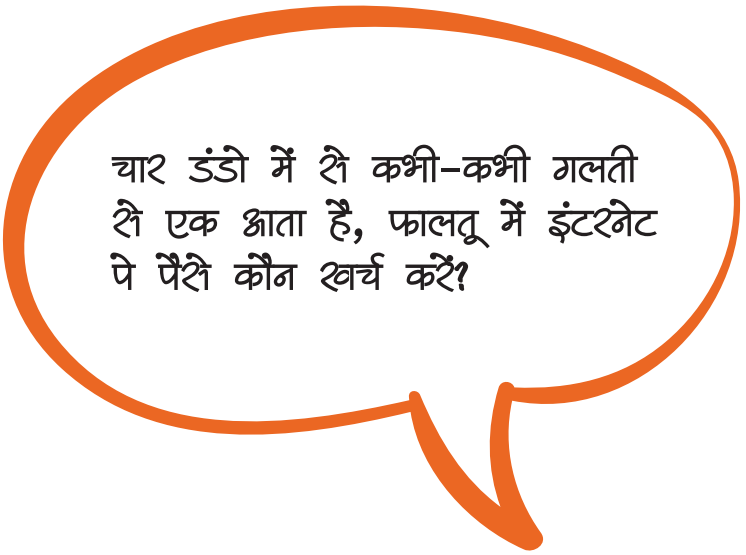


*"I wish.. I knew English"



The oldest student in the batch, 50-year-old Ravi Solanki, confessed that he always thought "digital" is for youngsters. Never in his dreams did he think that he, too, could learn to operate a smartphone or a laptop.

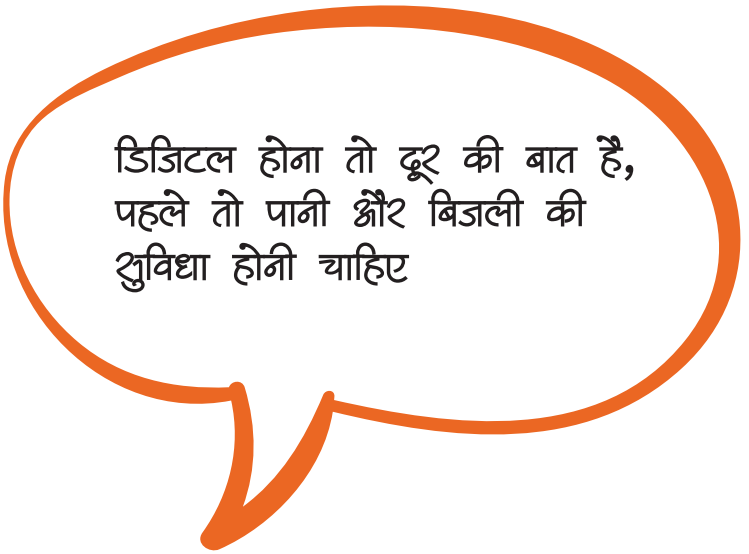
Chida, the quietest but the most attentive in training, shared how he could never enjoy the benefits of the Internet because of poor mobile network and no Internet connectivity in his village.



* "who would waste money on buying an internet pack, when you hardly received any network?"

he asked, rhetorically.

Monica Dodray seconded him and said,“



* "Digitalisation is a far fetched dream for us, what we need first are basic necessities of water and electricity! "

Shobaram, Monika, Chida, Niwas were among the 60 individuals selected for a Certificate Course in Development Management — organised by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) and the Bharat Rural Livelihood Foundation (BRLF) — to educate and capacitate tribal youth in various skills and knowledge base that would make them better community leaders. The 60 students represented seven states of India. While the largest share of students were from Gujarat, there were also students from Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. For both the trainings — in Netrang and Ranchi — DEF was involved in creating and executing a functional digital literacy module, especially designed to equip students in functional IT skills. DEF works in marginalised communities and information-dark areas to empower people in using ICT tools and digital interventions.

DEF's interaction with these 60 students over a short span of two weeks exposed the trainers and the trainees to various reasons that contribute to the digital divide in the country, including lack of access to digital infrastructure and connectivity, socio-cultural barriers, economical constraints, gender differences, lack of training, low literacy levels, lack of content in regional languages, lack of exposure, and geographical constraints.

Notes from the trainer's diary

On our way to the first training in Gujarat, we were unsure about the levels of digital literacy among students and were wondering what to introduce first. We were unaware of the background of the students, and assumed that we would have to start with the basics. We decided that it might be a good idea to skip certain advanced topics and stick to the essentials. We also feared that we might not be able to complete the entire course curriculum in the given amount of time. We were excited about the interaction but not fully aware of what we were yet to experience.

On Day 1 of the training, we played an ice-breaking game called Digital Cards with the trainees. Every trainee was given a card with either an application's name or its logo printed on it. The trainees had to find their partner by pairing the application's name with the application's logo or icon. The first few minutes of the class turned out be quite chaotic but fun, with people shouting out “YouTube”, “Gmail” or “Downloads” and others walking around the room, flashing their cards, eager to find their pair. Eventually, with some support from the trainers, everyone found their partners and a discussion on their digital applications was initiated. This ice-breaking game also helped us gain an understanding of their literacy levels and map their knowledge of digital tools and technology.

More than half the students had never used a computer before. Only 13 students had some basic knowledge about computers. For many, words like Instal, PlayStore, Paytm, Google Maps and Whatsappwere new. Most of them had heard the words MS Word and Excel but very few actually knew how to operate it.

Over the course of the training, we conducted various activities and organised several interactive games to facilitate hands-on learning and bridge the learning-gaps within different groups in the class. We divided the class into groups of six. Each group had one or two students with

comparatively higher levels of digital literacy. This encouraged peer-learning and increased the efficiency of the class to a large extent. The positive response from the students led us to stick to an activity-based pedagogy with time-to-time lectures and theory-lessons. The training maintained an interactive two-way communication mechanism, letting everyone raise questions, control the pace, clarify doubts, indicate what they wanted to learn and even whisper feedback to the trainers.

Growing up in traditional set ups, it is often difficult for us to see our teacher as a friend; and a student as a potential teacher. We, thus, tried to move towards creating an interdependent student-teacher learning bond. The approach of the training was simple; focus on practical activities and connect abstract concepts to everyday life experiences.
To recall previous day's training, we played the 'memory game' to share what each one of the students had learnt about the functioning of digital applications. A deck of cards was laid face down on the floor; each students had to flip one card and try to find its matching pair. As children, we had played this game in our schools and tried to match names of animals with their photographs. Here, at the digital literacy training, we had modified the to pair logos/icons with their functions. For example, the card with 'Save' printed on it had to be matched with another that read 'Ctrl + S' or a card with a pendrive printed on it had to matched with one that read 'secondary memory'. This activity tested their theoretical understanding through an interactive assessment, which kept the trainees engrossed and attentive.

At the training, more than 80 per cent of the class was exposed to the Internet for the first time. During the session on the Internet and its functions, we played a game called 'Global Connection', where every person in the room was connected with each other through a thread — symbolically representing a Web network where every person is connected to each other, thus allowing exchange of information. This activity focused on introducing the concept of networking, information dissemination and exchange of

ideas through the Internet. As part of this activity, the students also shared what would they want to look up first on Google Search once they learnt to use the Internet. Birsa Munda, Salman Khan songs and Shah Rukh Khan's Deewana film were among the favourite. When we showed a 3D view of the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort to the students on Google Maps, they exclaimed in awe and excitement — it was a first for them. They then jumped from their seats and threw names of other places — like Dilli, Gwalior Fort, lakes in and around their villages, cultural sites in the country and even the Eiffel Tower — that they wanted to view on Google Maps. At the training in Ranchi, none of the 28 students had heard about hashtags. To demonstrate the meaning and purpose of the hashtag in today's time, the trainees were showed a broom and asked to shout out words that they could associate with it. Swachh Bharat, Narendra Modi, Jhadoo, Kejriwal, Gandhi were a few words that came up in the discussion; and we placed the # symbol ahead of all the words to explain how a hashtag works.

Using a similar interactive methodology, trainees were assisted in creating their CVs, visiting cards and recipe booklets on MS Word. They calculated the distance travelled in the last three months and their daily expenses on MS Excel; and made Powerpoint presentation on social issues within their communities, complete with photos downloaded from Google Images. They were also assisted in creating their Gmail ID, sending and receiving emails, and sharing attachments. One of the most overwhelming memories from the training was when we received emails from all of them by the end of the day, after several attempts and rounds of trials. It was so fascinating to watch all of them navigate their cursor on the screen or hit one key after another, manoeuvring their way through their assignments. Often, even after seven-hour trainings, the students could be seen hanging around in the computer lab, practicing MS Word, Excel, Powerpoint and Internet Explorer. With each passing day, their understanding of the applications got better and better.

Learning experiences

Besides improving their IT skills, there was positive change in their behaviour as well. In the beginning, the students were very shy, quiet and would rarely respond to a question. They just simply nodded and agreed to whatever was said. Since both the trainers were women, the girls were able to break the ice with us faster than the male students, who often asked their group leader or the women in their groups to clarify doubts on their behalf. However, as days progressed, the students become more expressive and less scared — of us as trainers and the computers. Further, the students who grasped faster were very supportive of others, and would often sit with the weaker students to help them understand the tools.

The result was: students who were initially too scared to touch a computer, lest they break it were now more confident to explore and see what would happen if they clicked on any particular application.

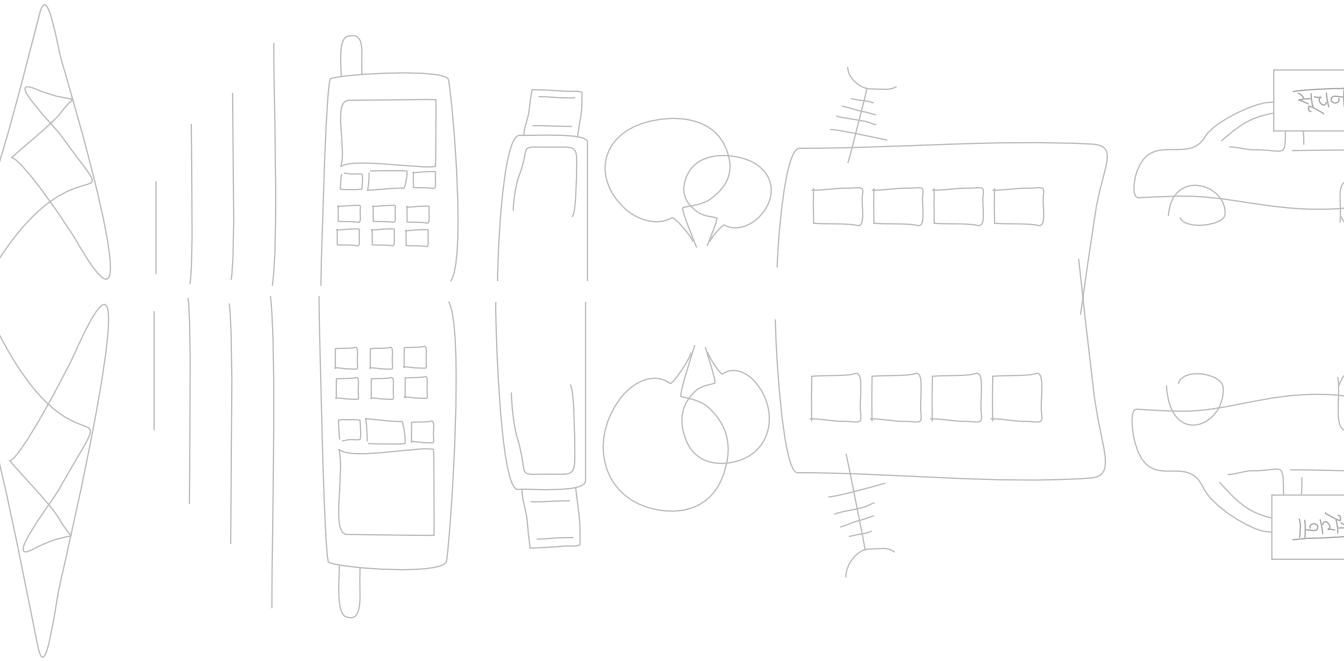
Both the trainings not only built on the students' digital knowledge but also led to positive changes in their confidence, attitude and behaviour. The mix of tools and participatory methods provided students with relevant information and motivated them to learn more.
Equipped with knowledge of the latest digital tools and technology, the tribals will return to their villages at the end of the training with the aim to transform their tribal communities — socially, culturally and economically — using digital literacy.

The training was a great learning experience for us since it broke several presumptions that we held about the participants. Often, we as trainers, go with a set agenda and try to control the class. However, once your truly understand a community and its need, you also understand that the best way of facilitating a class is to push the remote controller into the trainees' hand, allowing them to control the pace, content and context of the classes. At Netrang and Ranchi,

the trainings were successful not because the trainers controlled the class but because the students learnt to train the trainers according to their needs. All we had to do was provide them with a democratic platform to question or express freely.

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