



PRESERVING INDIGENIOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM AND ROLE OF WOMEN

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

According to this abstract, women are crucial to preserving indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), key cultural heritage repositories and sustainable practices worldwide. This study aims to 1) examine women's vital role in maintaining indigenous traditions. 2) To elevate the voices of Indigenous women as custodians of cultural heritage and practitioners of traditional knowledge systems. 3) To provide a platform for women to discuss and uphold cultural traditions to promote the generational transmission of indigenous knowledge. Women are the main carriers of information throughout generations through storytelling, folklore, and ceremonial behaviors. The historical background shows that, in spite of the destructive effects of colonization and patriarchal systems, women have continued to be involved in indigenous civilizations. Women's involvement in the dissemination of knowledge is frequently shaped by the intersection of gender dynamics and cultural norms. Nonetheless, their agency and resilience endure, allowing them to negotiate and make their voices heard in conventional knowledge systems. Indigenous communities' women's traditional knowledge and education are founded on oral tradition, cultural practices, experiential learning, and community-based methods that respect the interdependence of nature, culture, and people. Indigenous societies maintain rich customs, robust ecosystems, and vivid cultural identities for generations to come by appreciating and protecting women's roles as educators and knowledge keepers. Due to their gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, and geographic location, Indigenous women experience multiple forms of marginalization and discrimination. Land dispossession, the absence of legal recognition of indigenous rights, and exclusion from decision-making processes are examples of structural injustices that undermine women's agency and voices in cultural preservation initiatives, making it more difficult for them to assert indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. **Findings:** this paper emphasizes that how crucial it is to acknowledge and assist women in indigenous communities as custodians of cultural legacy. We can respect the priceless contributions of women and guarantee the survival of indigenous knowledge systems for upcoming generations by adopting gender-sensitive approaches to cultural preservation. Essentially, women's voices reverberate through the halls of indigenous knowledge, acting as guiding lights of knowledge, fortitude, and cultural continuity in a world that is changing. Significance: furthermore, thanks to decades of observation and experience, women frequently have specific expertise about therapeutic techniques, medicinal plants, and sustainable resource management. In addition to treating physical illnesses, their proficiency in traditional healing arts fosters spiritual peace, cultural resilience, and overall well-being among indigenous communities. Women's responsibilities as caregivers, teachers, and cultural leaders are essential to the learning process of traditional knowledge, which is frequently acquired within the framework of community life..

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Introduction

Women have historically played important roles as keepers of traditional knowledge and protectors of cultural heritage in the complex web of indigenous cultures around the world. Indigenous knowledge systems are rooted in ancestral wisdom and have been passed down through the years. They include a wide range of behaviours, beliefs, and insights that are essential to the identity and resiliency of indigenous people. In this context, women's contributions are seen as pillars of resilience, fortitude, and wisdom that help to preserve indigenous cultures and their distinctive cultural legacy. In many indigenous societies, women

have a variety of functions that go well beyond taking care of the home. They are the custodians of holy information that unites people, the storytellers who weave tales of tradition and identity, and the healers who foster both bodily and spiritual well-being. Nevertheless, women in indigenous communities have frequently been ignored and their contributions underappreciated, despite the significant significance of their responsibilities. Women have faithfully conserved the cultural fabric for millennia, but it is in danger of being undermined by historical injustices, gender inequities, and outside forces. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, the critical role that women play in preserving indigenous knowledge systems and reviving cultural heritage is becoming increasingly acknowledged. This article explores the various roles that women play in indigenous knowledge systems, including the difficulties they encounter in maintaining traditional wisdom and their contributions as custodians of cultural heritage.

Literature Review

Traditional knowledge is a vast body of information, practices, and beliefs that has been passed down through generations within communities. It's deeply intertwined with how people interact with their environment and manage vital resources like land, water, and agriculture. Traditional knowledge provides invaluable insights into sustainable resource management. Indigenous and local communities have developed time-tested methods for farming, fishing, hunting, and water conservation that are well-adapted to their specific environments (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2000; Grenier, 1998; Turner & Garibaldi, 2004). Despite their crucial role, women's traditional knowledge is often undervalued and overlooked in decision-making processes related to natural resource management. Recognizing and empowering women as knowledge holders is essential for ensuring sustainable and equitable resource management (Howard, 2003). Since rural women's primary responsibility is to support their families on a daily basis, they have a strong traditional ecological knowledge and an interest in environmental management and conservation that is frequently stifled in settings where men predominate. They cultivate a unique bond with the environment and are typically more concerned with the accessibility and availability of natural resources (Gutierrez-Montes, Emery, & Fernandes-Baca, 2012; Howard, 2003). Due to its significant contribution to climate change strategies, sustainable agriculture, natural resource and water management programs, and community conservation efforts, the incorporation of traditional knowledge is at the center of global discussions (Ford et al., 2016). Similar to this, Lybbert, Barrett, and Narjisse (2002), Turner (2014), and Le Polain de Waroux (2013) all noted that, while commercialization can boost local development, alleviate poverty, and benefit the populace to a certain extent, they caution that the profits do not always trickle down to the local level.

Research Gap

Additionally, there is a substantial gap in empirical validation. Although Indigenous stories and qualitative research emphasize the importance of traditional knowledge, these perspectives are not often incorporated into mainstream resilience frameworks and policy debates. Furthermore, there aren't many thorough secondary data analyses that synthesize cross-cultural viewpoints; instead, the majority of research in this field depends on primary fieldwork or localized case studies.

Indigenous civilizations have a permanent legacy intricately woven with the knowledge, traditions, and rituals passed down over the ages. The preservation and spread of this cultural legacy depend heavily on women's roles in indigenous knowledge systems. They support various facets of communal life as pillars of continuity, knowledge, and fortitude. This article examines women's vital responsibilities as cultural heritage guards in Indigenous communities, preserving, transmitting, and renewing ancient knowledge and traditions.

Women are the primary stewards of cultural legacy in indigenous communities across the globe, possessing extensive knowledge of customs, ceremonies, and storytelling. The fundamental fabric of indigenous identity is shaped by their close ties to the land, their community, and their ancient wisdom. Oral traditions are preserved by women, who transmit lessons, songs, and stories that capture their people's collective memory. Women instill values, ethics, and cultural pride in future generations through their caring and nurturing responsibilities, creating a strong sense of connection and belonging to the land and ancestors.

Furthermore, thanks to decades of observation and experience, women frequently have specific expertise about therapeutic techniques, medicinal plants, and sustainable resource management. In addition to treating physical illnesses, their proficiency in traditional healing arts fosters spiritual peace, cultural resilience, and overall well-being among indigenous communities.

In addition to their responsibilities within the community, women frequently spearhead advocacy campaigns, grassroots movements, and cultural revitalization initiatives that support and preserve indigenous arts, crafts, and languages. In a world that is changing quickly, their leadership ensures that indigenous cultural traditions remain vibrant and relevant by promoting cooperation, empowerment, and intergenerational learning. To put it simply, women represent the strength, resilience, and wisdom of their ancestors and are the unsung heroines of indigenous knowledge systems.

By performing a thorough secondary data analysis of previous research, historical narratives, and academic literature on Indigenous knowledge and women's resilience, this study seeks to close this gap. This study will offer a synthesised, comparative viewpoint on how Indigenous knowledge contributes to women's power across various geographies and socio-political circumstances by methodically evaluating a variety of sources. The study will also point out areas that require more primary research in order to incorporate Indigenous viewpoints into more comprehensive frameworks and policies for resilience-building.

Objectives of the Study

Through an analysis of current secondary data sources, this study seeks to investigate how Indigenous wisdom contributes to women's resilience. The study's particular objectives are:

- 1) To explore the crucial role of women in preserving indigenous cultures.
- 2) To find out indigenous women's contributions as keeper of cultural legacy and users of traditional knowledge systems.
- 3) To encourage the transfer of indigenous knowledge between generations by giving women a forum to maintain cultural customs.

Methodology

This study examines how Indigenous wisdom maintains women's resilience using a qualitative research methodology based on secondary data analysis. To give a thorough grasp of the topic, the process entails a methodical assessment of the body of current literature, case studies, and academic discussions.

The sources for this study are scholarly books and journal articles on Indigenous knowledge, women's resilience, and cultural sustainability because it is based on secondary data. Policy papers and reports from institutions including UNESCO, the UN, and advocacy groups for Indigenous peoples. Ethnographic and case studies that emphasize the experiences of Indigenous women in various cultural situations. Oral histories and historical texts preserved in research archives.

Historical background and Indigenous knowledge system

- Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) have a complex historical background that spans millennia and is influenced by a wide range of sociopolitical, cultural, and environmental elements.
- Indigenous knowledge systems predate written records and have a long history. Through millennia of observation, experimentation, and oral transmission, indigenous peoples developed complex knowledge and practices in the areas of agriculture, medicine, astronomy, navigation, ecology, and spirituality.
- Indigenous peoples, each with distinct cultures, languages, and knowledge systems, lived on almost every continent and in every part of the world. These varied cultures evolved in intimate relationship with their particular ecosystems, tailoring their knowledge and way of life to the unique ecological circumstances of their respective regions.
- The idea of connectivity with nature is fundamental to indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous peoples saw themselves as essential components of ecosystems, with obligations and relationships to the land, plants, animals, and elements that are reciprocal. This all-encompassing perspective influenced spiritual beliefs that prioritized balance and harmony as well as sustainable activities.
- Indigenous societies and knowledge systems experienced significant upheavals following the advent of European colonists in the 15th century. As a result of colonization, indigenous cultures, languages, and customs were uprooted, marginalized, and even violently suppressed. Indigenous peoples had to deal with land confiscation, forced assimilation, cultural erasure, and the imposition of Western systems and worldviews.
- Native American communities and knowledge systems were severely disrupted by the advent of European colonists starting in the fifteenth century. Indigenous groups experienced cultural erasure, forced assimilation, land confiscation, and the imposition of Western systems and worldviews.
- Impact of Colonialism: Colonial policies and acts undermined Indigenous knowledge systems by methodically undervaluing, rejecting, or exploiting traditional knowledge in favour of Eurocentric ideas and technology. In favour of exploitative resource extraction and land development, Indigenous languages, oral traditions, and spiritual practices were suppressed, and traditional ecological knowledge was frequently disregarded.
- Clandestine techniques, oral transmission, and cultural resistance activities have allowed many indigenous people to adapt and preserve their knowledge systems in spite of colonial tyranny. In response to persistent challenges to indigenous rights and sovereignty, indigenous leaders, activists, and academics have endeavoured to recover, record, and revive traditional knowledge.
- Opportunities and Difficulties Indigenous knowledge systems face new opportunities and problems in the modern era due to globalization, climate change, and rapid societal change. Initiatives to support indigenous rights, cultural revival, and sustainable development increasingly recognize the importance of indigenous knowledge as a critical resource for addressing pressing global issues and fostering resilience in a rapidly changing world.

Major Findings

The findings of this study, based on secondary data analysis, provide insights into how Indigenous wisdom sustains women's resilience. These findings are categorized according to the objectives outlined in the study, offering a comprehensive overview of the crucial role of women in preserving indigenous culture and women's voices greater prominence as consumers of traditional knowledge systems and custodians of cultural heritage. It also provides a venue for women to discuss and uphold cultural traditions in order to promote the generational transmission of indigenous knowledge.

Objective No. 1: To explore the crucial role of women in preserving indigenous cultures

Findings:

1. Within indigenous societies, women have always maintained a special and close bond with environment that is deeply entwined with ancient knowledge systems. Numerous cultural, social, and ecological elements influence this relationship and support women's roles as environmental stewards and keepers of traditional knowledge. Women play a key role in subsistence pursuits like farming, fishing, foraging, and collecting wild plants in many traditional civilizations. Women gain in-depth understanding of regional ecosystems through these activities, including seasonal trends, the behavior of plants and animals, and sustainable resource management strategies.
2. Due to their great knowledge of medicinal plants and herbal treatments, women frequently play a prominent part in traditional healing techniques. Using generations of collected wisdom transmitted orally, they may work as caregivers, midwives, or healers. Women's healing traditions, which address not only physical illnesses but also emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being, are frequently intricately entwined with spiritual beliefs and rites.
3. Cultural rituals, ceremonies, and celebrations that celebrate the natural environment and ancestral spirits are often led by or involve women. Offerings to the land, prayers for fertility and abundance, and rites of passage commemorating life transitions are a few examples of these customs. The transmission and preservation of traditional ecological knowledge and cultural legacy are facilitated by women's responsibilities as spiritual leaders or ceremonial practitioners.
4. Sustainable resource management techniques that put the long-term resilience and health of natural resources first are frequently influenced by women's understanding of regional ecosystems. This covers methods that are crucial for maintaining food security and environmental sustainability, such as seed saving, crop diversity preservation, soil conservation, and water management.
5. In matrilineal civilizations where inheritance and descent are traced through the maternal line, women are especially important in passing down traditional wisdom to future generations. Women transmit important ecological information, cultural customs, and moral principles pertaining to environmental stewardship through oral storytelling, practical apprenticeship, and routine activities shared within families and communities.
6. Indigenous groups are frequently able to adjust to environmental changes and natural calamities thanks to women's traditional survival skills and understanding of local ecosystems. In times of scarcity or ecological upheaval, women may be well-versed in alternative food, water, and shelter-building techniques.
7. In indigenous communities, women frequently take the lead in environmental activism and advocacy campaigns aimed at defending natural resources, upholding traditional legacy, and defending land rights. Their distinct viewpoints and life experiences as landowners support grassroots campaigns for sustainable development, environmental justice, and indigenous rights. All things considered, the way that women relate to nature and traditional knowledge shows a deep comprehension of the connections between human cultures and the natural world, based on reciprocity, respect, and reverence for all living things.

Objective:2 : To find out indigenous women's contributions as keeper of cultural legacy and users of traditional knowledge systems.

Findings:

- a) Within indigenous societies, women's traditional knowledge and education are intricately entwined, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to education that incorporates ecological, spiritual, and cultural aspects. Here are some ways that education and women's traditional knowledge interact: Working with their mothers, grandmothers, and other female relatives from an early age teaches girls practical skills related to agriculture, food preparation, childcare, and household management. Women often acquire traditional knowledge informally through participation in everyday activities within their communities, observation, and firsthand experience. Traditional knowledge is frequently passed down orally through female-led ceremonies, songs, and storytelling. Women operate as the keepers of oral traditions, conserving cultural customs, ecological knowledge, and ancestors' knowledge that are transmitted from one generation to the next.
- b) In cultural rituals and ceremonies that uphold traditional knowledge and values, women are essential. Women actively participate in cultural events that link them to their heritage and the natural world, whether it be through spiritual rituals, communal gatherings, or harvest festivals. These activities provide chances for hands-on learning, generational transfer, and community building.
- c) Traditional knowledge is frequently learned through practical apprenticeship and mentorship partnerships, in which seasoned women teach younger generations their skills and knowledge. Through watching and helping their elders with activities like farming, making herbal medicines, weaving, and telling stories, girls pick up skills and gain real-world knowledge over time.
- d) Indigenous education frequently integrates eco-centric curricula that highlight the interdependence of all living things, the land, and humans. Teaching about ecological resilience, resource management, and environmental stewardship is based on women's traditional understanding of ecosystems, biodiversity, and sustainable practices. Indigenous worldviews and values are reflected in this immersive, place-based, and culturally relevant curriculum.
- e) Respect for elders, especially female elders, who are seen as the keepers of traditional knowledge and wisdom, is ingrained in Indigenous education. Given their significant contributions to the community and the value of intergenerational learning in maintaining cultural legacy, girls are encouraged to look to older women for advice and mentorship.
- f) Women's responsibilities as caregivers, teachers, and cultural leaders are essential to the learning process of traditional knowledge, which is frequently acquired within the framework of community life. In order to promote a sense of shared

guardianship of cultural heritage and a sense of collective responsibility, community-based learning initiatives involve women, men, children, and elders in cooperative activities that draw on a variety of knowledge, skills, and views.

- g) Indigenous communities' women's traditional knowledge and education are founded on oral tradition, cultural practices, experiential learning, and community-based methods that respect the interdependence of nature, culture, and people. Indigenous societies maintain rich customs, robust ecosystems, and vivid cultural identities for generations to come by appreciating and protecting women's roles as educators and knowledge keepers.

Objective No.3: To encourage the transfer of indigenous knowledge between generations by giving women a forum to maintain cultural customs.

Findings:

1. Because they encode spiritual beliefs, ecological wisdom, and cultural narratives, indigenous languages play a crucial role in the transmission of traditional knowledge. Indigenous language declines brought on by assimilation, language shift, or governmental regulations have the potential to disrupt oral traditions' intergenerational continuity and jeopardize women's roles as cultural mediators, storytellers, and language keepers. The livelihoods, cultural customs, and traditional knowledge systems of indigenous peoples are at risk due to environmental deterioration, which includes deforestation, pollution, and climate change. Women are disproportionately impacted by ecological disruptions, which increases their vulnerability and reduces their ability to protect IKS since they frequently shoulder the primary duty for managing natural resources and providing food and water for their families.

2. Because Indigenous Knowledge Systems are frequently based on historical marginalization, social injustices, and institutional inequalities, women in indigenous communities confront many obstacles in maintaining them. Gender inequality in indigenous societies can restrict women's access to resources, decision-making authority, and educational and leadership chances, among other significant obstacles.

3. Globalization, urbanization, and rapid social change are significant risks to preserving indigenous cultural practices and knowledge. Traditional traditions may lose meaning and relevance as newer generations increasingly embrace Western ideals and lifestyles more and more. This might result in cultural erosion and the loss of intergenerational transmission mechanisms.

4. Because of their gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, and geographic location, Indigenous women experience multiple forms of marginalization and discrimination. Land dispossession, the absence of legal recognition of indigenous rights, and exclusion from decision-making processes are examples of structural injustices that undermine women's agency and voices in cultural preservation initiatives, making it more difficult for them to assert indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. The integrity and authenticity of traditional knowledge systems may be compromised by the exploitation, appropriation, and misrepresentation of indigenous cultures that result from the commodification of indigenous knowledge and cultural objects in international markets. Women's susceptibility to economic exploitation and cultural displacement may be exacerbated by exploitation of their cultural legacy, infringement on intellectual property rights, and loss of authority over traditional knowledge.

Steps for promoting Indian indigenous women's rights

In India, fighting for the rights of indigenous women entails tackling a number of community-specific social, political, and economic issues. The following are some tactics for promoting Indian indigenous women's rights:

- **Recognition of Indigenous Rights:** Promote the acknowledgement and defence of indigenous rights, such as those related to land, culture, and self-governance, in conformity with international human rights norms and frameworks for the rights of indigenous peoples, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- **Support the fight for land and resource rights by indigenous women:** As these rights are frequently under jeopardy due to development projects, resource extraction operations, and land grabs that force indigenous groups off their ancestral lands. Encourage the adoption of laws and regulations that safeguard indigenous land tenure and guarantee women's equitable access to and management of natural resources and land.
- **Gender Equity and Social Justice:** Promote gender equity and social justice in indigenous communities by opposing discriminatory practices and patriarchal norms that restrict women's access to economic opportunities, healthcare, education, and decision-making. Encourage programs that provide indigenous women more economic, political, and social clout, such as capacity-building, leadership development, and efforts to increase public knowledge of women's rights and gender equality.
- **Addressing Gender-Based Violence:** Promote policies that address gender-based violence, which disproportionately affects indigenous women and includes sexual assault, domestic abuse, and human trafficking. Encourage the adoption of legislation and regulations that offer culturally appropriate services and resources for indigenous women who are victims of violence, as well as protection, justice, and support to survivors of gender.
- **Access to Education and Healthcare:** Encourage indigenous women and girls to have greater access to high-quality education, healthcare, and social services by tackling obstacles such poverty, discrimination, and remote location. Encourage programs that give special attention to reproductive health services, culturally appropriate education, and mental health care that is adapted to the requirements of indigenous women and communities.
- **Encourage the preservation and advancement of indigenous languages, cultural practices, and knowledge systems:** While acknowledging the crucial role that indigenous women play as keepers and disseminators of traditional knowledge.

In order to enable indigenous women to recover and celebrate their cultural identities and accomplishments, support programs that advance indigenous education, language revival, and cultural heritage preservation.

- **Sustainable Development and Environmental Justice:** Promote sustainable development and environmental justice that put the rights and welfare of indigenous women and their communities first. Encourage indigenous-led campaigns for climate resilience, environmental preservation, and sustainable livelihoods that uphold the rights, knowledge, and sovereignty of indigenous peoples over their ancestral lands and territories.
- **Legal Advocacy and Policy change:** Take part in initiatives to overcome systematic discrimination and injustices that threaten the rights of indigenous women through legal advocacy and policy change. Collaborate with civil society organizations, indigenous women's organizations, and legal professionals to push for institutional structures, policy changes, and legal reforms that support gender equity and indigenous rights in both indigenous communities and society at large. We can help indigenous communities in India achieve greater gender equity, social justice, and cultural resilience by fighting for the rights of indigenous women. This will enable women to fully engage in the social, economic, and political life of the nation, exercise their rights, and realize their potential.

This paper emphasized that how crucial it is to acknowledge and assist women in indigenous communities as custodians of cultural legacy. We can respect the priceless contributions of women and guarantee the survival of indigenous knowledge systems for upcoming generations by adopting gender-sensitive approaches to cultural preservation. Essentially, women's voices reverberate through the halls of indigenous knowledge, acting as guiding lights of knowledge, fortitude, and cultural continuity in a world that is changing. Significance: furthermore, thanks to decades of observation and experience, women frequently have specific expertise about therapeutic techniques, medicinal plants, and sustainable resource management. In addition to treating physical illnesses, their proficiency in traditional healing arts fosters spiritual peace, cultural resilience, and overall well-being among indigenous communities. Women's responsibilities as caregivers, teachers, and cultural leaders are essential to the learning process of traditional knowledge, which is frequently acquired within the framework of community life. In order to promote a sense of shared guardianship of cultural heritage and a sense of collective responsibility, community-based learning initiatives involve women, men, children, and elders in cooperative activities that draw on a variety of knowledge, skills, and views.

Conclusion

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are preserved and transmitted in large part by women in a variety of ways. Women have maintained knowledge, mediated cultures, and protected traditional wisdom throughout history and among various indigenous people. Their contributions are essential to indigenous societies' survival, resilience, and cultural continuity. IKS is preserved and passed down through women's special affinity with nature, their participation in traditional activities like farming, healing, and storytelling, and their responsibilities as community leaders and caregivers. Women transmit important ecological knowledge, cultural customs, and spiritual lessons to future generations through oral traditions, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and practical apprenticeship. Despite a variety of obstacles, such as environmental degradation, cultural deterioration, and gender discrimination, indigenous women persist in claiming their rights.

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