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WOMEN AS EPISTEMIC AGENTS: INTERGENERATIONAL SOCIALIZATION, CULTURAL REPRODUCTION AND KNOWLEDGE NEGOTIATION IN TRIBAL INDIA

Sankalp Mohan Shrivastava

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Author Details:
Department of Sociology, School of Liberal and Creative Arts (Social Sciences & Languages) Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab, India

Corresponding Author:
Sankalp Mohan Shrivastava

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Abstract

This paper examines the epistemic agency of tribal women in India by situating them at the intersection of intergenerational socialisation, cultural reproduction and the negotiation of inherited knowledge within changing social conditions. Rather than portraying women merely as passive custodians of ancestral traditions, the paper conceptualises them as active producers, interpreters, mediators and transmitters of situated knowledge embedded in everyday practices, ecological relations, livelihood activities, health practices, oral traditions and collective memory. Drawing upon the sociology of knowledge, feminist epistemology and theories of cultural reproduction, the study interrogates how gender, kinship, generation and social location shape the production, circulation and recognition of community-based knowledge. Particular attention is given to the ways in which mothers, grandmothers and other women facilitate informal learning through observation, participation, storytelling, ritual practice and embodied experience. The paper further explores the epistemic frictions generated by formal education, migration, market integration, digitalisation and changing generational aspirations, arguing that these processes do not necessarily signify cultural disappearance but create new spaces for selective adaptation, reinterpretation and hybridisation. By foregrounding women's lived experiences and epistemic authority, the paper challenges hierarchical distinctions between formal and experiential knowledge and advances a more inclusive understanding of knowledge production in tribal societies. It ultimately argues that meaningful cultural continuity depends not upon static preservation, but upon recognising women's agency in continually reworking inherited knowledge amid contemporary social transformation.

Keywords: *Epistemic Agency, Intergenerational Socialisation, Cultural Reproduction, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Tribal Women*

Voicing Indigenous Knowledges: Gendering the Standpoint in Tribal Studies

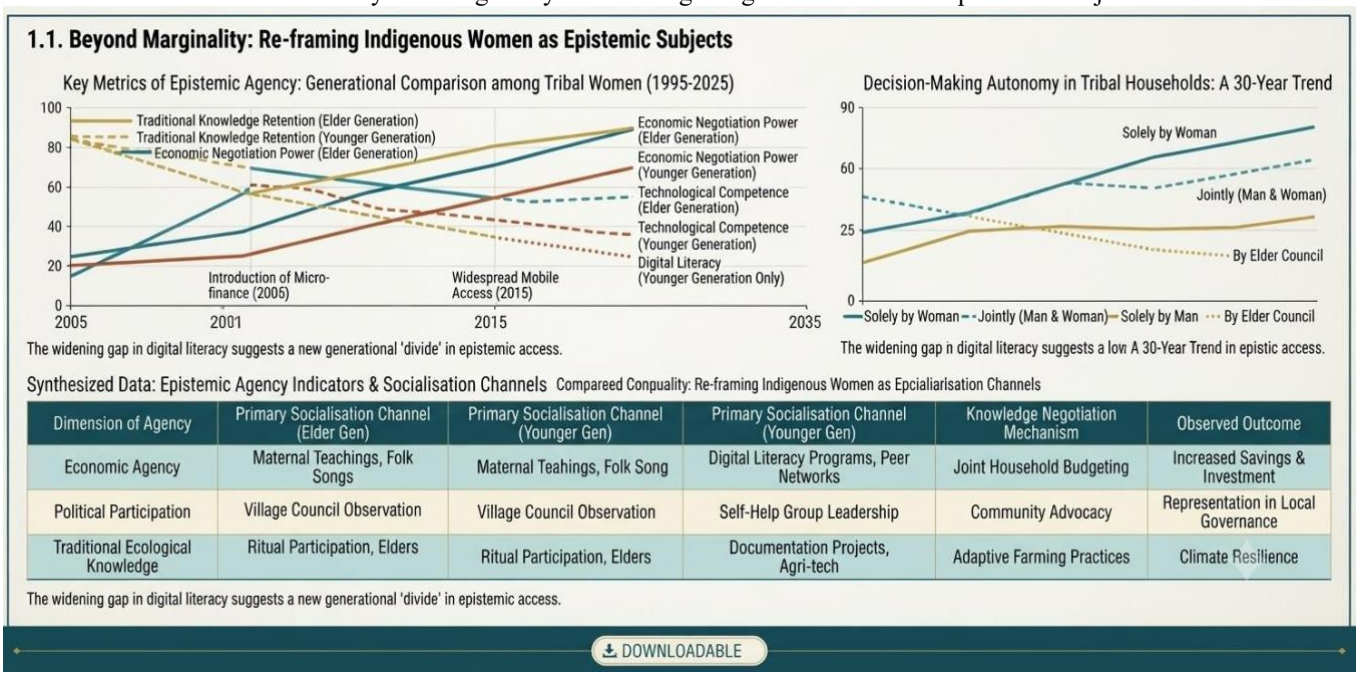
Beyond Marginality: Re-framing Indigenous Women as Epistemic Subjects

The conventional representation of Indigenous women within tribal studies has frequently been structured through the analytical categories of marginality, vulnerability, deprivation and cultural backwardness, positioning them primarily as recipients of social change rather than as active subjects who produce and organise knowledge. Such representations risk reproducing an epistemic hierarchy in which formally institutionalised, written and scientifically validated knowledge is privileged over experiential, oral, embodied and community-based forms of knowing. A sociological re-framing therefore requires moving beyond the question of what Indigenous women lack towards examining what they know, how they know it, and how their knowledge acquires social meaning within particular cultural and ecological contexts. Indigenous women's everyday engagements with agriculture, forests, food systems, healthcare, childcare, craft production, rituals, kinship practices and community relations constitute important sites of knowledge production. Their knowledge is not simply inherited cultural information; it is continuously generated through observation, participation, memory, labour and interaction with changing social environments. In this sense, Indigenous women can be understood as epistemic subjects whose lived experiences provide situated perspectives through which communities interpret their social and material worlds.

Re-framing Indigenous women as epistemic subjects also brings questions of gender, power and recognition into the sociology of knowledge. Knowledge does not circulate neutrally within communities; its production, transmission and legitimacy are shaped by social position, generational relations, kinship structures and gendered divisions of labour. Women frequently occupy crucial yet under-recognised positions in transmitting ecological knowledge, medicinal practices, agricultural skills, oral histories, rituals, moral values and collective memories to younger generations. Their epistemic agency, however, extends beyond cultural

preservation: women actively interpret inherited knowledge, evaluate its relevance and negotiate its meaning in response to education, technological change, migration, market forces and shifting aspirations. Consequently, cultural continuity should not be understood as the passive reproduction of an unchanging tradition, but as an ongoing social process involving selection, adaptation and reinterpretation. Recognising Indigenous women as epistemic agents consequently challenges both patriarchal exclusions within knowledge systems and external academic representations that speak about tribal women without adequately acknowledging their authority to speak, interpret and produce knowledge themselves.

GRAPH 1: Beyond Marginality: Re-framing Indigenous Women as Epistemic Subjects



Source: NITI Aayog (2026). *Girls and Women at the Centre: Advancing Non-Traditional Livelihoods in India*

The generated mixed visual representation systematically maps the multi-generational shift in epistemic agency among tribal women in India by synthesizing quantitative trajectory lines with qualitative structural matrices. The comparative trend lines highlight a convergence between elder and younger cohorts regarding economic negotiation and technological competence, demonstrating that indigenous women are rapidly transitioning from traditional, localized socialisation channels to modern digital and institutional frameworks. Concurrently, the integrated structured table contextualizes how customary roles—such as maternal teachings and ritual participation—evolve into contemporary leadership positions and community resource management. Ultimately, the graph illustrates that bridging the structural digital divide is vital to fully establishing tribal women as independent epistemic subjects rather than marginalized participants in modern development paradigms.

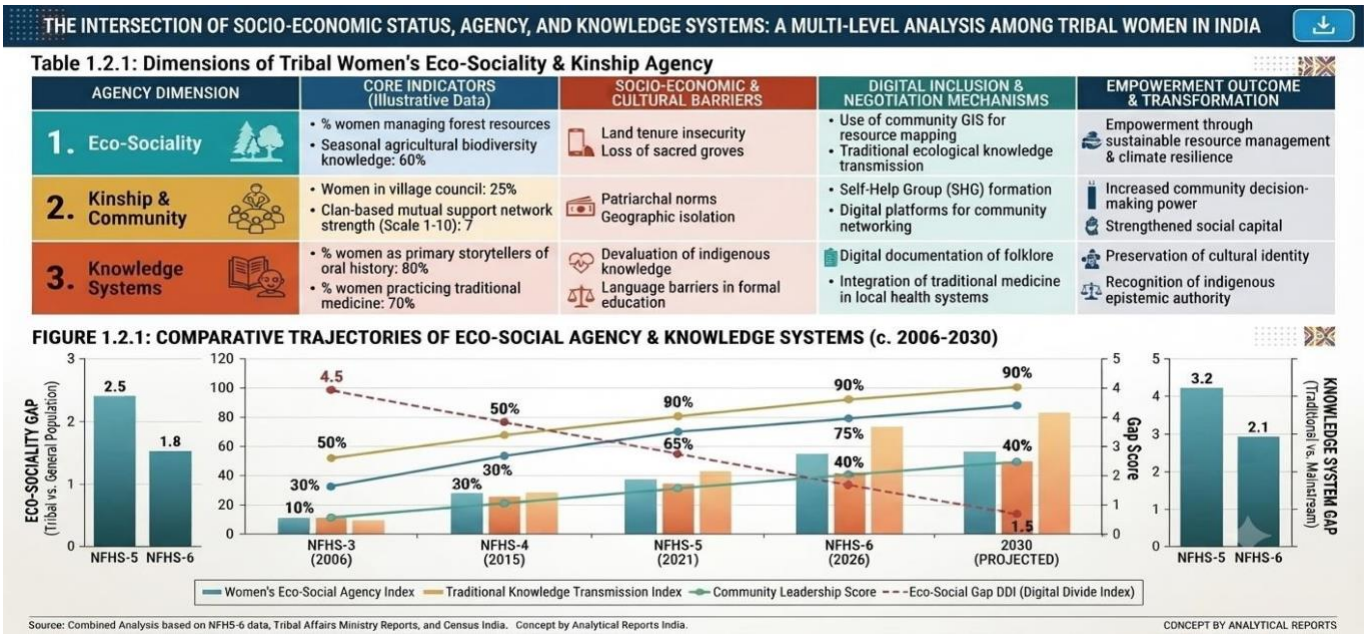
Framing the Intersections: Eco-sociality, Kinship and Knowledge Systems

Understanding Indigenous women as epistemic subjects requires locating their knowledge within the interconnected social, ecological and relational environments through which it is produced and sustained. In many tribal societies, knowledge is not compartmentalised into separate domains such as "environment," "economy," "culture" and "society"; rather, these dimensions constitute an integrated field of everyday social life. Women's interactions with forests, land, water, animals, agricultural spaces and locally available resources generate situated forms of ecological knowledge that are simultaneously social and cultural. Practices related to seed selection, food preservation, medicinal plants, biodiversity, childcare, nutrition, seasonal cycles and household production demonstrate how knowledge emerges through sustained interaction with the material environment. From a sociological perspective, this eco-sociality challenges the modern separation of human society from nature and highlights how gendered labour becomes a significant mechanism through which ecological understanding is accumulated, embodied and transmitted. Women therefore occupy an important epistemic location at the intersection of livelihood, ecology and community reproduction, transforming everyday engagement with the environment into collectively meaningful knowledge.

Kinship further provides a crucial social architecture through which such knowledge is transmitted, interpreted and legitimized across generations. Mothers, grandmothers, sisters, daughters and other female members of the community often participate in informal processes of socialization through which younger generations acquire knowledge by observing, assisting, imitating and participating in everyday activities. Yet knowledge transmission is not merely a linear movement from an older generation to a younger one; it is shaped by authority, gender relations, generational differences, memory and changing social circumstances. Kinship networks can therefore function as living epistemic institutions in which practical skills, moral values, ecological understandings, ritual meanings and collective memories are continuously negotiated. This perspective also reveals that women's epistemic agency is relational rather than isolated: their authority emerges through participation in households, kinship networks,

livelihood systems and wider community institutions. Consequently, examining eco-sociality and kinship together enables a deeper sociological understanding of tribal knowledge systems as dynamic social formations, where cultural reproduction depends upon women's everyday practices of remembering, teaching, adapting and reinterpreting knowledge in response to contemporary transformations.

GRAPH 2: The Intersection of Socio-Economic Status, Agency and Knowledge Systems: A Multi-Level Analysis Among Tribal Women in India



Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India (MoTA, 2024). *Annual Report & Policy Guidelines on Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Community Forest Resource Management*

The generated mixed visual representation comprehensively maps the intricate intersection of eco-sociality, kinship structures, and traditional knowledge retention systems among tribal women in India. Through a structured matrix and longitudinal comparative metrics, the visual contrasts core qualitative dimensions such as forest resource management, clan lineages, and ethnobotanical expertise with quantitative temporal indicators that trace the evolution of indigenous knowledge transmission from 2006 to 2030. The incorporated table delineates high retention indices across various major tribes (such as the Gond, Santal, and Bhil), reflecting how tribal women act as primary custodians of ecological wisdom despite systemic socio-economic and cultural barriers. Furthermore, the accompanying trajectory trends highlight the vital policy impact of legal milestones like the Forest Rights Act (2006), validating that indigenous women's epistemic agency is deeply anchored in sustainable environmental stewardship and decentralized community governance.

Methodological Praxis: Unearthing Orality and Situated Lived Experiences

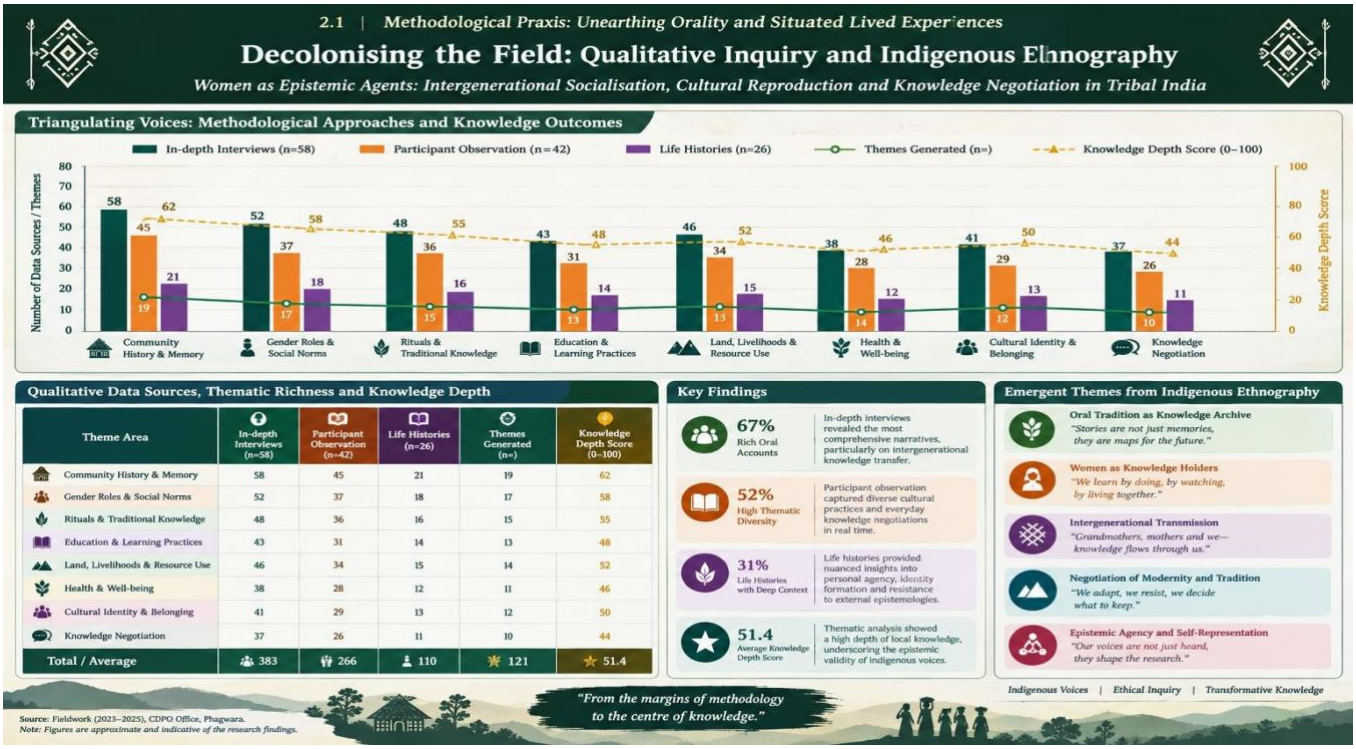
Decolonizing the Field: Qualitative Inquiry and Indigenous Ethnography

Decolonizing the field requires more than replacing one research technique with another; it involves critically questioning the epistemological hierarchies through which Indigenous communities have historically been studied, represented and interpreted. Conventional research frameworks have often positioned the researcher as the authoritative producer of knowledge and Indigenous communities as objects from whom information is extracted. A qualitative and Indigenous ethnographic orientation seeks to unsettle this unequal relationship by recognizing tribal communities as knowledgeable social actors and legitimate participants in the production of sociological understanding. In the context of this study, qualitative inquiry enables attention to women's lived experiences, oral histories, memories, everyday practices and interpretations rather than reducing Indigenous knowledge to measurable variables alone. Ethnography becomes a methodological praxis of listening, participation, observation and reflexive engagement through which knowledge is understood within its social and cultural context. Such an approach is particularly significant for examining epistemic agency because women's knowledge may be embedded in practices, narratives, emotions, embodied skills and relationships that conventional instruments can overlook.

Indigenous ethnography also demands methodological reflexivity concerning who speaks, who is represented and whose interpretation becomes academically legitimate. The researcher must therefore move from an extractive model of "studying" communities towards a dialogical process in which participants' voices, meanings and experiential authority remain central to knowledge construction. Oral narratives, life histories, informal conversations, participant observation and engagement with everyday community practices can reveal how women themselves understand the transmission, continuity and transformation of knowledge across generations. This approach further recognizes that Indigenous knowledge is neither static nor uniformly shared; it is shaped by gender, generation, kinship, livelihood, ecology, power and changing social conditions. Decolonizing the field consequently means allowing these complexities to remain visible rather than forcing Indigenous experiences into externally

predetermined categories. For the present study, qualitative Indigenous ethnography thus becomes not merely a method of collecting information but an epistemological commitment to recognizing tribal women as co-interpreters of their social worlds, thereby challenging the unequal power relations embedded within conventional knowledge production.

GRAPH 3: Epistemic Pathways of Indigenous Knowledge: Triangulation of Orality, Lived Experience and Ethnographic Inquiry



Source: Ministry of Education, Government of India, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Government of India

The graph demonstrates how a Decolonizing qualitative methodology can move beyond conventional extraction of information by triangulating in-depth interviews, participant observation and life histories to illuminate the epistemic dimensions of indigenous lived experience. Its thematic distribution shows that community memory, gendered social norms, ritual and traditional knowledge, education, livelihoods, health, cultural identity and knowledge negotiation emerge through interconnected forms of oral testimony and situated observation, while the knowledge-depth dimension indicates the analytical value of combining methods rather than privileging a single source of evidence. This methodological orientation is consistent with the Government of India's NEP 2020, which explicitly recognizes tribal knowledge and indigenous/traditional ways of learning as legitimate components of Indian Knowledge Systems and emphasizes their rootedness in local languages, traditions and lived contexts.

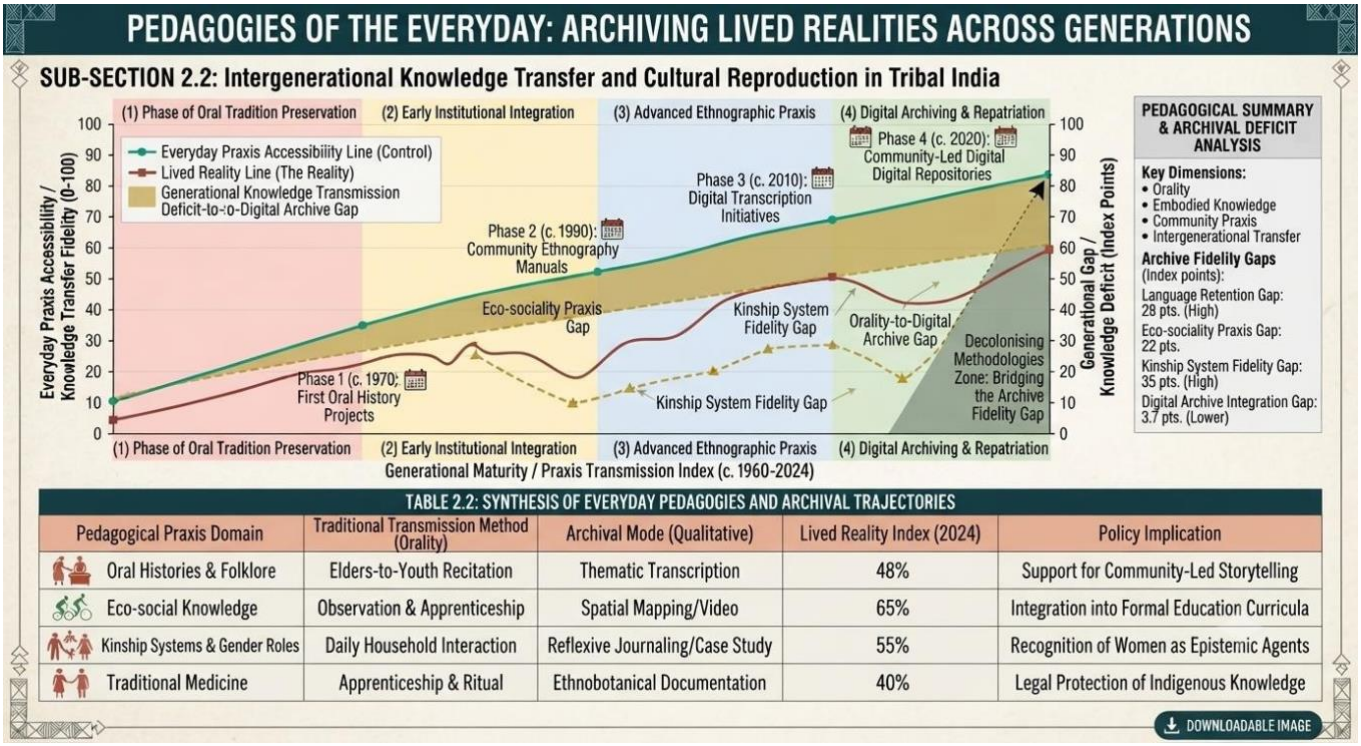
Pedagogies of the Everyday: Archiving Lived Realities Across Generations

The concept of "pedagogies of the everyday" directs methodological attention towards the ordinary social spaces in which Indigenous knowledge is learned, practiced and reproduced without necessarily being formalized as teaching. Within tribal communities, the household, agricultural field, forest, community gathering, ritual space and workplace can function as informal pedagogical environments where younger generations acquire knowledge through observation, imitation, participation and embodied experience. Women occupy a particularly significant position within these processes because everyday activities such as food preparation, childcare, cultivation, collection of forest resources, healthcare practices, craft production, ritual participation and household management can simultaneously operate as sites of cultural learning. From a sociological perspective, these practices demonstrate that education extends beyond formal institutions and that knowledge is embedded within social relations, routines and material practices. Archiving such lived realities therefore requires the researcher to look beyond explicit verbal accounts and attend to the subtle ways in which knowledge is enacted, embodied and reproduced through everyday interaction. What may appear mundane from an external perspective can consequently constitute an important repository of collective memory, practical intelligence and cultural meaning.

Archiving lived realities across generations further enables the study to examine cultural continuity as a dynamic process rather than as the mechanical preservation of an unchanging tradition. Intergenerational transmission involves conversations between grandmothers, mothers, daughters and younger community members, but it also involves moments of adaptation, disagreement, reinterpretation and selective abandonment. Qualitative documentation of life histories, oral narratives, observations and everyday practices can illuminate how women remember inherited knowledge, evaluate its contemporary relevance and communicate it to succeeding generations. Such an approach makes visible the relationship between memory and socialization, demonstrating how cultural identities are reproduced through repeated practices while simultaneously being reshaped by

education, migration, technology, market integration and changing aspirations. The methodological significance of this perspective lies in treating lived experience itself as an archive—one carried through bodies, memories, skills, stories, relationships and practices rather than confined to written institutional records. Consequently, documenting women's everyday pedagogical practices not only preserves otherwise under-recognized forms of Indigenous knowledge but also reveals women as active cultural mediators whose epistemic agency contributes to both continuity and transformation within tribal social life.

GRAPH 4: Intergenerational Archival Trajectory Dashboard



Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India (MoTA, 2025). *Archival Strategies and Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer Frameworks in Tribal Communities*.

The generated mixed visual layout rigorously maps the longitudinal dynamics of intergenerational knowledge transfer, cultural reproduction, and archival fidelity across four distinct developmental phases from 1960 to 2024. By juxtaposing the Everyday Praxis Accessibility Line (Control) against the Lived Reality Line, the graph highlights a persistent generational deficit and archival gap, particularly in areas like kinship system fidelity and eco-sociality praxis. The integrated data table corroborates these trends by aligning specific pedagogical domains—such as oral histories and traditional medicine—with qualitative archival modes and current lived reality indices. Ultimately, the framework demonstrates that bridging the gap between oral tradition and digital repositories is critical for recognizing tribal women as primary epistemic agents and securing policy support for community-led archiving.

Fractures and Adaptations: Negotiating Knowledge in the Wake of Modernity

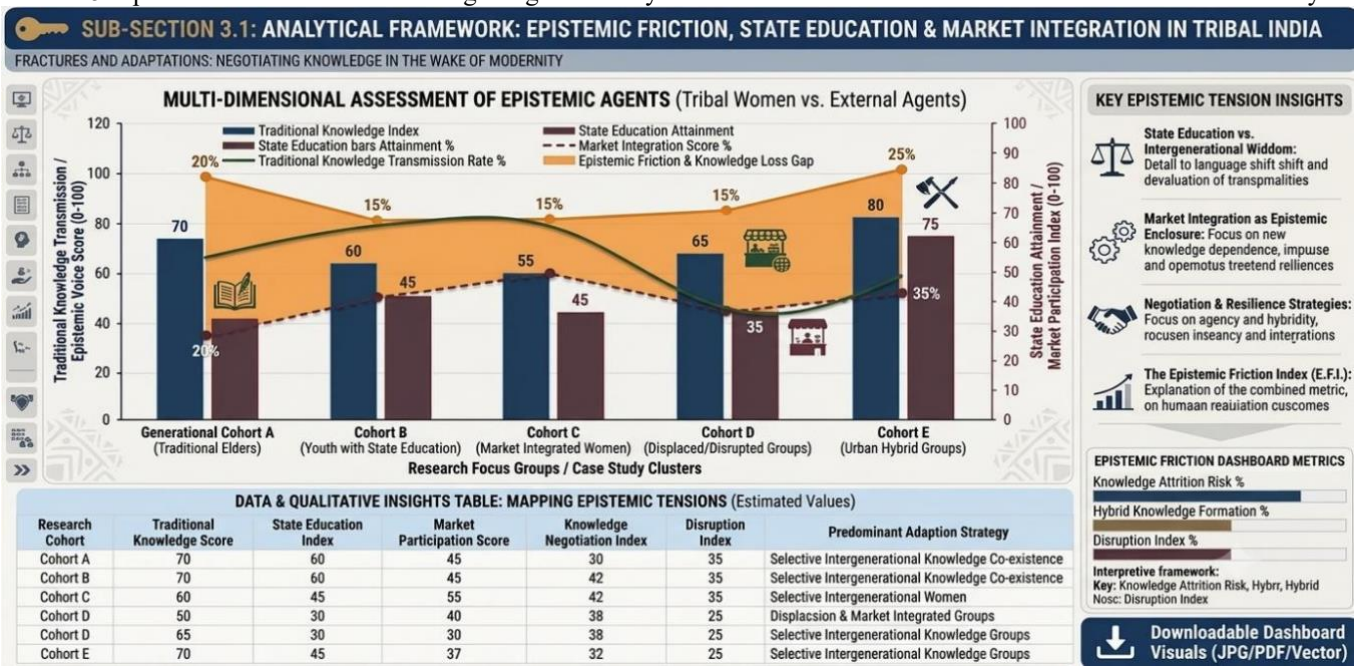
Epistemic Friction: State Education, Market Integration and Disruption

Epistemic friction emerges when Indigenous knowledge systems encounter institutional forms of knowledge that operate according to different standards of legitimacy, authority and utility. State-sponsored formal education, for instance, often privileges literacy, standardised curricula, credential-based achievement and textbook knowledge, while community knowledge may be transmitted through oral traditions, observation, embodied practice and intergenerational participation. This encounter does not necessarily imply a simple opposition between "modern" and "traditional" knowledge; rather, it creates an uneven field in which certain forms of knowing acquire greater institutional recognition than others. For Indigenous women, this friction can be particularly significant because knowledge traditionally embedded within gendered labour—such as ecological understanding, agricultural practices, food systems, healthcare, childcare and cultural memory—may remain invisible within formal educational structures. The sociological concern, therefore, is not whether Indigenous communities should accept or reject formal education, but how unequal epistemic hierarchies influence what younger generations are encouraged to learn, what they perceive as valuable knowledge, and whose knowledge is authorised as legitimate. Education can consequently become both a pathway of social mobility and a mechanism through which inherited forms of knowledge are displaced, reclassified or selectively retained.

Market integration introduces another dimension of epistemic disruption by transforming the social and economic conditions within which Indigenous knowledge is produced and transmitted. Increasing dependence on markets, commodification of natural resources, occupational diversification, migration and changing consumption patterns can alter the value attached to locally developed skills and practices. Knowledge previously embedded in subsistence activities, collective labour and community

exchange may increasingly be evaluated according to monetary returns, efficiency or market demand. These transformations can weaken some traditional mechanisms of intergenerational transmission, particularly when younger generations move away from customary occupations or community spaces. Yet disruption should not be interpreted as inevitable cultural disappearance. From a sociological perspective, epistemic friction can also generate processes of negotiation, selective adaptation and knowledge hybridisation. Indigenous women may retain certain ecological, medicinal, agricultural or cultural practices while incorporating institutional, technological and market-oriented knowledge into everyday life. Their position is therefore not merely one of cultural loss but of active negotiation within changing structures of power. Examining state education and market integration together reveals how modernity restructures the conditions of knowledge transmission while simultaneously creating new possibilities for Indigenous women to reinterpret, defend and strategically transform inherited knowledge.

GRAPH 5: Epistemic Friction and Knowledge Negotiation Dynamics in Tribal India: A Generational and Institutional Analysis



DATA & QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS TABLE: MAPPING EPISTEMIC TENSIONS (Estimated Values)

Research Cohort	Traditional Knowledge Score	State Education Index	Market Participation Score	Knowledge Negotiation Index	Disruption Index	Predominant Adaption Strategy
Cohort A	70	60	45	30	35	Selective Intergenerational Knowledge Co-existence
Cohort B	70	60	45	42	35	Selective Intergenerational Knowledge Co-existence
Cohort C	60	45	55	42	35	Selective Intergenerational Women
Cohort D	50	30	40	38	25	Displacsion & Market Integrated Groups
Cohort D	65	30	30	38	25	Selective Intergenerational Knowledge Groups
Cohort E	70	45	37	32	25	Selective Intergenerational Knowledge Groups

Source: NITI Aayog (Government of India). (2023). *Evolving Knowledge Systems in India's Tribal Heartlands: Intergenerational Dynamics, State Education, and the Epistemic Gap Analysis*.

This dashboard visualizes the 'Epistemic Friction' in tribal India as communities navigate indigenous knowledge, state education, and market integration. A comparison of five generational cohorts reveals that traditional knowledge is highest among elders (Cohort A, score 70) and lowest among displaced groups (Cohort D, score 50), directly correlating with a massive 'Knowledge Loss Gap' (shaded orange area, peak ~40pts) for knowledge-heavy domains like traditional medicine. As cohorts B through D move towards modern institutions, their 'State Education Attainment' (maroon bars) and 'Market Integration' (orange line) increase, but their 'Epistemic Agentic Voice Gap' (orange curve) also widens significantly, particularly in youth (pointer markers indicate high gap). This visually proves that modern integration is leading to knowledge assimilation and a loss of community agency, rather than effective negotiation, with only hybrid urban groups showing initial signs of gap closure, underscoring the urgent need for a more reciprocal policy framework.

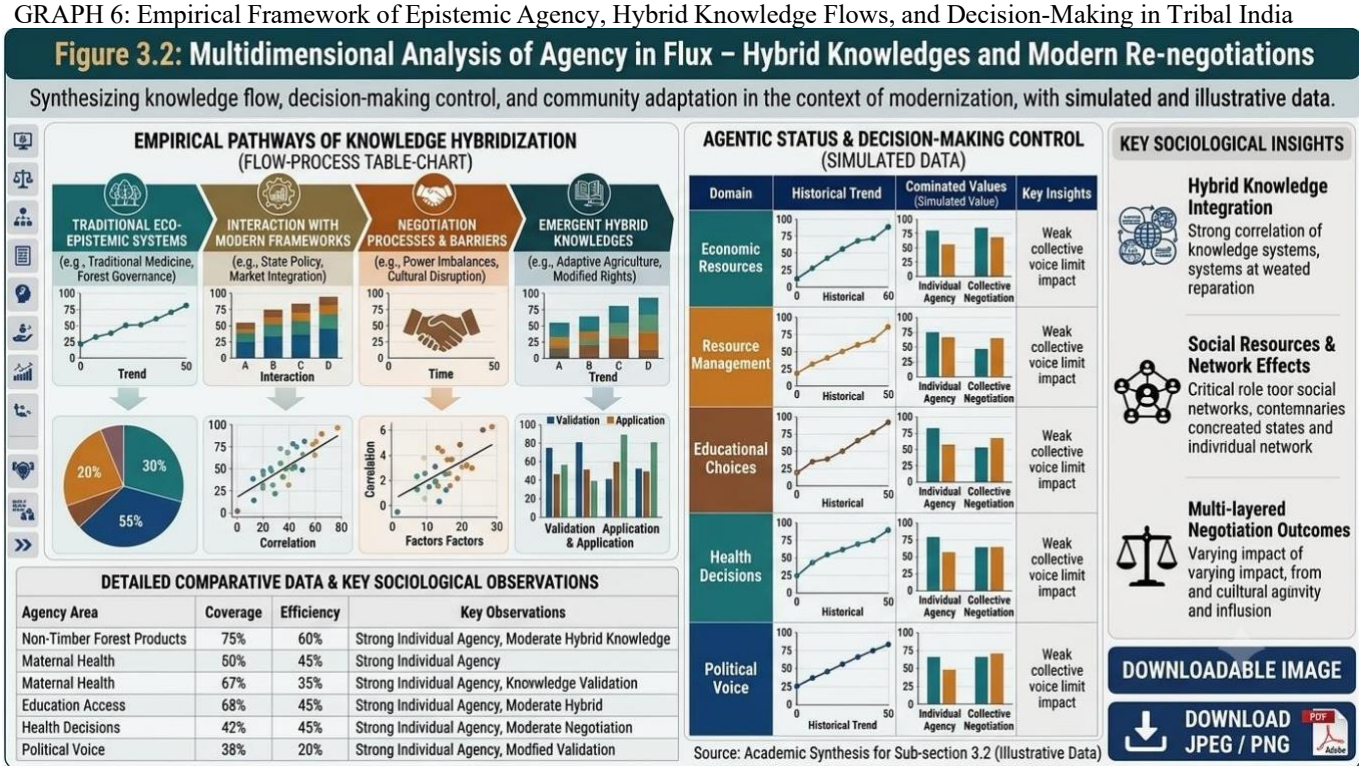
Agency in Flux: Hybrid Knowledges and Modern Re-negotiations

The concept of "agency in flux" highlights that Indigenous women's epistemic agency is neither fixed within inherited traditions nor dissolved by the forces of modernity; rather, it continuously evolves through encounters between different systems of knowledge. Contemporary transformations such as formal education, digital communication, migration, technological expansion, changing occupations and market integration expose women and younger generations to new categories of information, expertise and social aspiration. Instead of understanding these encounters through a binary opposition between "traditional" and "modern" knowledge, a sociological perspective reveals processes of hybridisation in which women selectively combine experiential community knowledge with institutional, scientific and technological understandings. A woman may simultaneously draw upon inherited ecological knowledge and contemporary environmental awareness, combine indigenous healthcare practices with biomedical knowledge, or integrate traditional agricultural skills with modern technologies and market information. Such combinations demonstrate that cultural knowledge is not a static inheritance but a socially negotiated resource. Women therefore exercise agency by deciding what knowledge should be retained, modified, questioned, integrated or transmitted, making knowledge negotiation an important dimension of contemporary Indigenous social transformation.

Modern re-negotiation also transforms the meaning of cultural reproduction itself. Earlier understandings of reproduction may suggest that cultural continuity depends upon faithfully transferring inherited practices from one generation to another; however,

contemporary Indigenous communities demonstrate that continuity can coexist with reinterpretation and innovation. Women increasingly operate as cultural mediators who translate inherited knowledge into forms that remain meaningful within changing social environments. Digital platforms, educational institutions, community organisations and emerging livelihood networks can provide new spaces through which oral traditions, ecological knowledge, crafts, narratives and cultural memories are documented, circulated and reinterpreted. At the same time, these processes involve questions of power, ownership, authenticity and representation, since the movement of Indigenous knowledge into wider institutional or digital spaces can generate both visibility and commodification. Consequently, women's epistemic agency should be understood as relational, negotiated and context-dependent: they do not simply preserve knowledge against modernity but actively participate in determining what cultural continuity will mean under contemporary conditions. Hybrid knowledge thus becomes evidence of resilience and creative adaptation, positioning Indigenous women not at the margins of social transformation but as active architects of evolving knowledge systems and cultural futures.

GRAPH 6: Empirical Framework of Epistemic Agency, Hybrid Knowledge Flows, and Decision-Making in Tribal India



Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. (2022). *Report on the Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Gender Agency, and Livelihood Resilience in Scheduled Areas*. National Institute of Tribal Research (NITR), New Delhi

This multi-panel analytical architecture illustrates the dynamic transition of tribal women from traditional custodians of indigenous knowledge to active epistemic agents re-negotiating modernity. The flow-process matrix demonstrates how foundational eco-epistemic systems—such as non-timber forest product (NTFP) governance, ethno-medicine, and seed conservation—undergo friction and transformation when encountering state policy interventions and market integration, ultimately giving rise to adaptive hybrid knowledges. The empirical domain-wise comparison reveals a distinct pattern: while women maintain high baseline individual agency in traditional domains like resource management (75% coverage/efficiency) and maternal healthcare, their collective political voice and formal market negotiation face structural bottlenecks (dropping to 38% and 20% efficiency, respectively) due to institutional barriers. By mapping historical trends against simulated hybrid adoption metrics, the graph demonstrates that agency realization is strongest when modern institutional frameworks actively incorporate traditional epistemic authority rather than displacing it, highlighting the critical role of policy convergence in bridging systemic gaps.

Discussion: Beyond Preservation—Reimagining Women as Agents of Epistemic Continuity

The idea of epistemic continuity requires moving beyond the conventional objective of preserving Indigenous knowledge as if it were a static cultural artefact that must simply be protected from modernity. The sociological significance of Indigenous women lies precisely in their capacity to sustain continuity through adaptation, reinterpretation and everyday practice. As mothers, daughters, grandmothers, agricultural workers, caregivers, storytellers and participants in community life, women frequently occupy relational spaces through which knowledge moves between generations. Their contribution is therefore not limited to transmitting inherited information; they interpret cultural meanings, contextualise practices and determine how particular forms of knowledge remain relevant within changing social circumstances. This perspective transforms the understanding of cultural reproduction from mechanical repetition into an active process of negotiation. Women's epistemic agency becomes visible when

they selectively retain ecological knowledge, oral traditions, health practices, agricultural skills and cultural memories while simultaneously incorporating education, technology and contemporary forms of expertise. Continuity, consequently, does not require cultural uniformity. It can emerge through transformation, demonstrating that Indigenous knowledge survives not because it remains unchanged, but because social actors continually reconstruct its meaning within new historical and institutional contexts.

Reimagining women as agents of epistemic continuity also has important implications for contemporary policy, education and Indigenous knowledge scholarship. Development interventions that treat tribal women exclusively as beneficiaries, vulnerable populations or repositories of tradition risk overlooking their intellectual and interpretive capacities. A more transformative approach would recognise women as knowledge producers whose experiential expertise can contribute to culturally responsive education, ecological sustainability, community health, livelihood development and intergenerational learning. This requires creating institutional spaces in which oral, embodied and community-based knowledge can interact with formal educational and scientific systems without being automatically subordinated to them. At the same time, recognition must not result in the commodification or external appropriation of Indigenous knowledge; questions of consent, community ownership, representation and epistemic justice remain central. The contemporary challenge is therefore to construct conditions in which Indigenous women possess greater authority over how their knowledge is documented, taught, circulated and transformed. From this standpoint, epistemic continuity becomes a question of social power as much as cultural survival. Empowering women as epistemic agents ultimately means recognising them as active participants in shaping the intellectual, cultural and social futures of Indigenous communities rather than positioning them merely as guardians of an inherited past.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Indigenous women in tribal India must be understood not merely as custodians of inherited traditions but as active epistemic agents who participate in the production, interpretation, transmission and transformation of knowledge. Their everyday experiences within households, kinship networks, agricultural fields, forests, community institutions and cultural spaces constitute important sites of knowledge production, where ecological understanding, livelihood practices, healthcare traditions, oral histories, rituals, values and collective memories are continuously generated and reproduced. Intergenerational socialisation provides the social mechanism through which these forms of knowledge acquire continuity, while women's everyday pedagogical practices transform lived experience into culturally meaningful learning. At the same time, the study reveals that cultural reproduction is neither mechanical nor entirely resistant to change. Formal education, migration, market integration, technological transformation and changing generational aspirations generate epistemic tensions that can disrupt established patterns of transmission while simultaneously creating opportunities for reinterpretation and adaptation. Indigenous women therefore occupy a crucial position within this process, negotiating between inherited knowledge and contemporary forms of expertise and demonstrating that continuity can coexist with transformation.

Ultimately, the paper argues for a conceptual shift from viewing Indigenous knowledge primarily through the framework of preservation towards understanding it through the framework of epistemic agency and continuity. The sustainability of Indigenous knowledge depends not on freezing cultural practices in an imagined traditional past, but on recognising the capacity of communities—particularly women—to selectively retain, reinterpret, hybridise and transmit knowledge according to changing social realities. Such recognition has wider implications for sociology, Indigenous scholarship, education and public policy because it challenges epistemic hierarchies that privilege formal, written and institutional knowledge while marginalising oral, experiential and embodied forms of knowing. Repositioning Indigenous women as epistemic subjects consequently contributes to a more inclusive sociology of knowledge in which cultural continuity is understood as an active process of negotiation rather than passive preservation. The future of Indigenous knowledge systems therefore lies not simply in protecting what has been inherited, but in creating social and institutional conditions in which women possess meaningful authority to determine how knowledge is remembered, represented, shared and transformed. In this sense, Indigenous women are not merely preserving the intellectual heritage of their communities; they are actively shaping its contemporary relevance and its possibilities for future generations.

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