



Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management

*An Official Publication
of the Informing Science Institute*

SCOPUS INDEXED

Vol. : 20, Issue 2 2025

ISSN: (E) 1555-1237

Beyond Custodianship: Women's Role in Protecting Indian Traditional Knowledge

Manjari Chandra¹

Introduction:

India is a domestic platform and a repository to an extraordinary array of traditional information systems, cultivated over centuries via near interdependence with its land, forests, and waterways. These know-how structures span sustainable agriculture, medicinal plant use, water control, food maintenance, ritual practice, artisanal crafts, and more. Throughout the world it's miles regularly ladies—particularly from tribal, rural, and indigenous groups—who serve as custodians, educators, and transmitters of this information. However, their relevant position is threatened through the combined pressures of modernization, migration, environmental degradation, and socio-cultural shifts. Spotting, empowering, and incorporating this knowledge in India's developmental and felony frameworks is now an pressing priority for sustainability, fairness, and the preservation of cultural background.

Women in the tranquillity of life where the human mind is gripped by technology and advancement, the society is still running around the periphery of Indigenous knowledge. Rooted deeply in ancestral wisdom and passed down through generations, indigenous knowledge encompasses a rich array of practices, beliefs, and insights that are integral to the identity and resilience of indigenous communities. In the intricate tapestry of indigenous cultures worldwide, women have long held pivotal roles as custodians of traditional knowledge and guardians of cultural heritage. Within this framework, the contributions of women stand as pillars of strength, wisdom, and resilience, shaping and knitting the caricature of indigenous societies and preserving their unique cultural heritage. Across diversified indigenous communities and cultural beliefs, women play many roles that extend far beyond their daily chores on the domestic front.

They are the thread runners and weavers who have intertwined the golden threads of the innumerable stories and narrations on the tradition and their fundamental identity. Women in one aspect can be taken as the guardians of the sacred and indigenous knowledge that has been coming down from one generation to another. From traditional knowledge about the utilisation of land, its resources to the transmission of verbal antiquities and traditional dexterities and expression, women's contributions are both diverse and indispensable, exemplifying the essence of cultural continuity and sustainability. Sadly, even after their deep association with the upkeep of the traditional knowledge, women within indigenous communities have often been left out and their contribution has been neglected from the mainstream. Gender disparities, historical injustices, and external pressures have threatened to erode the cultural fabric that women have steadfastly preserved for centuries. Yet, amidst these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the pivotal role that women play in safeguarding indigenous knowledge systems and revitalizing cultural heritage. This is a small step towards highlighting the multifaceted roles of women within indigenous knowledge systems, travelling through their journey as the torch bearers of cultural heritage and the challenges faced in preserving traditional wisdom. The major task is to elevate the voices of indigenous women and highlight the urgent need for their recognition, empowerment, and inclusion in efforts to uphold and celebrate the richness of indigenous cultures.

¹ Assistant Professor(Law), Rashtriya Raksha University



The Landscape of Indian Traditional Knowledge

Traditional Knowledge Systems (TKS), or Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), represent living bodies of knowledge that adapt in symbiosis with shifting ecologies, patterns of land use, and cultural change. Indian tribal groups, officially numbering over 700, have unique systems of understanding land, food, health, and spirituality. These systems are practical, holistic, and rooted in centuries of environmental stewardship.

Indigenous knowledge systems have deep roots in human history, predating written records. Indigenous peoples developed sophisticated understanding and practices related to agriculture, medicine, astronomy, navigation, ecology, and spirituality through centuries of observation, experimentation, and oral transmission.²

Indigenous peoples inhabited virtually every continent and region of the world, each with its own unique cultures, languages, and knowledge systems. These diverse societies developed in close connection with their local environments, adapting their lifestyles and knowledge to the specific ecological conditions of their territories. Central to indigenous knowledge systems is the concept of interconnectedness with the natural world. Indigenous peoples viewed themselves as integral parts of ecosystems, with reciprocal relationships and responsibilities towards the land, plants, animals, and elements. This holistic worldview informed sustainable practices and spiritual beliefs that emphasized harmony and balance.

The arrival of European colonizers from the 15th century onwards brought profound disruptions to indigenous societies and knowledge systems. Colonization led to the displacement, marginalization, and often violent suppression of indigenous cultures, languages, and traditional practices. Indigenous peoples faced forced assimilation, land dispossession, cultural erasure, and the imposition of Western worldviews and systems.

The rich legacy of knowledge, customs, and practices that have been passed down through the generations are deeply ingrained in indigenous civilizations. The core to this domain comprises of the role played by the women in the preservation of the traditional knowledge that has been woven as a golden thread from generation to generation. Their contributions span across various facets of community life, serving as pillars of resilience, wisdom, and continuity. In this article, we delve into the vital significance of women as guardians of cultural heritage within indigenous communities, shedding light on their pivotal roles in preserving, transmitting, and revitalizing traditional knowledge and practices. In indigenous communities worldwide, women serve as the custodians of cultural heritage, holding profound knowledge of ancestral traditions, rituals, and storytelling.

Their intimate connection with the land, network, and ancestral expertise shapes the very fabric of indigenous identification. Women are the keepers of oral traditions, passing down tales, songs, and teachings that encapsulate the collective memory in their humans. through their nurturing and caretaking roles, women instil values, ethics, and cultural satisfaction in destiny generations, fostering a deep experience of belonging and interconnectedness with the land and ancestors. Furthermore, females regularly own specialised knowledge of medicinal plants, recovery practices, and sustainable useful resource management, honed through centuries of remark and experience. Their understanding in traditional restoration arts no longer best addresses physical illnesses however also nurtures holistic well-being, religious harmony, and cultural resilience inside indigenous communities. past their roles inside the community, ladies often lead grassroots actions, advocacy efforts, and cultural revitalization projects aimed

² WIPO define TK as: *Traditional knowledge (TK) is knowledge, know-how, skills and practices that are developed, sustained and passed on from generation to generation within a community, often forming part of its cultural or spiritual identity.*



Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management

An Official Publication
of the Informing Science Institute

SCOPUS INDEXED

Vol. : 20, Issue 2 2025

ISSN: (E) 1555-1237

toward retaining and promoting indigenous languages, arts, and crafts. Their management fosters collaboration, empowerment, and intergenerational gaining knowledge of, making sure the continued vibrancy and relevance of indigenous cultural practices in a rapidly converting global. In essence, women stand as the unsung heroes of indigenous expertise systems, embodying the awareness, electricity, and resilience of their ancestors. Spotting and amplifying their voices isn't best critical for the preservation of cultural heritage however also for fostering gender fairness, social justice, and sustainable improvement inside indigenous communities and past.

Historical Context of Indigenous Knowledge Systems:

The historical context of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) is multifaceted, spanning millennia and shaped by diverse cultural, environmental, and socio-political factors

Colonial rules and practices systematically undermined indigenous knowledge systems by way of devaluing, discrediting, or co-opting conventional know-how in desire of Eurocentric ideologies and technologies. Indigenous languages, oral traditions, and non secular practices had been suppressed, and traditional ecological know-how became regularly omitted in desire of exploitative resource extraction and land improvement. Resistance and edition: no matter colonial oppression, many indigenous communities have resiliently preserved and tailored their information structures through clandestine practices, oral transmission, and cultural resistance actions³. Indigenous leaders, activists, and pupils have worked to reclaim, record, and revitalize traditional expertise within the face of ongoing threats to indigenous rights and sovereignty.

Contemporary Challenges and Possibilities:

Inside the cutting-edge generation, indigenous information structures face new challenges and opportunities amidst globalization, weather alternate, and speedy social transformation. Efforts to promote indigenous rights, cultural revitalization, and sustainable development an increasing number of understand the importance of indigenous know-how as a crucial useful resource for addressing urgent global problems and fostering resilience in a unexpectedly converting global. Women's specific dating with nature and conventional knowledge: women have lengthy held a unique and intimate dating with nature within indigenous communities, which is intricately tied to standard know-how systems. This relationship is formed by using numerous cultural, social, and ecological elements, contributing to female's roles as stewards of the environment and holders of traditional awareness. Here are some key components of women's relationship with nature and traditional know-how: in many indigenous societies, females are valuable to subsistence sports together with farming, foraging, fishing, and gathering wild flowers. Through those practices, ladies expand deep knowledge of nearby ecosystems, consisting of seasonal styles, plant and animal behavior, and sustainable resource management techniques. Women frequently play a extensive function in conventional healing practices, possessing extensive information of medicinal flowers and herbal treatments. They may function as healers, midwives, or caretakers, drawing on generations of gathered information handed down thru oral traditions. Females' recuperation practices are often closely intertwined with religious ideals and ceremonies, addressing now not only bodily illnesses but additionally emotional, mental, and religious nicely-being. Ladies are often answerable for main or taking part in cultural rituals, ceremonies, and celebrations that honor the natural international and ancestral spirits. These practices can also consist of offerings to the land, prayers for abundance and fertility, and rites of passage marking existence transitions. Females' roles as spiritual leaders or ceremonial practitioners contribute to

³ *Legal Protection of Traditional knowledge in India* by Dr. Kshetrapal Singh, Assistant Professor, J.R.N. Rajasthan Vidyapeeth, Udaipur; 2022 IJCRT | Volume 10, Issue 1 January 2022 | ISSN: 2320-2882



Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management

An Official Publication
of the Informing Science Institute

SCOPUS INDEXED

Vol. : 20, Issue 2 2025

ISSN: (E) 1555-1237

the transmission and renovation of traditional ecological expertise and cultural history. Women's knowledge of local ecosystems regularly informs sustainable aid control practices that prioritize the long-time period health and resilience of herbal resources. This includes techniques consisting of seed saving, crop range protection, soil conservation, and water management, which can be essential for making sure meals security and environmental sustainability. Women play an important position in transmitting conventional knowledge to future generations, mainly within matrilineal societies where descent and inheritance are traced thru the maternal line. Through oral storytelling, hands-on apprenticeship, and normal practices shared within households and communities, ladies bypass on precious ecological expertise, cultural traditions, and ethical values associated with environmental stewardship. Women's know-how of local ecosystems and traditional survival capabilities often allow indigenous communities to evolve to environmental changes and herbal disasters.

Women might also own unique understanding of opportunity meals sources, water assets, and safe haven-building strategies that can be deployed all through times of scarcity or ecological disruption. Females in indigenous communities often play main roles in environmental activism and advocacy efforts to protect land rights, guard natural resources, and keep cultural background. Their precise perspectives and experiences as caretakers of the land contribute to grassroots movements for environmental justice, indigenous rights, and sustainable development. Normal, women's dating with nature and conventional information displays a profound expertise of the interconnectedness among human societies and the natural global, grounded in admire, reciprocity, and reverence for all residing being.

Women's Traditional Knowledge:

Women's conventional knowledge and education inside indigenous groups are deeply intertwined, reflecting a holistic method to gaining knowledge of that integrates cultural, religious and ecological dimensions. The females often accumulate traditional information informally via hands-on revel in, commentary, and participation in everyday activities within their communities. From a younger age, women examine realistic competencies related to agriculture, food guidance, childcare, and family management by way of working alongside their moms, grandmothers, and different lady loved ones. Conventional understanding is often transmitted orally thru storytelling, songs, and rituals led via women. Women serve as custodians of oral traditions, retaining ancestral expertise, ecological insights, and cultural practices which are exceeded down from technology to technology. These narratives deliver vital teachings approximately environmental stewardship, social values, and religious beliefs, fostering a sense of identity and belonging amongst community individuals. Women play a relevant function in cultural practices and ceremonies that strengthen conventional expertise and values. Whether or not it is participating in harvest gala's, community gatherings, or spiritual rituals, women actively engage in cultural sports that join them to their history and the herbal international. Those practices serve as opportunities for experiential studying, intergenerational transmission, and community bonding.⁴ Conventional knowledge is regularly obtained via fingers-on apprenticeship and mentorship relationships, in which experienced females bypass on competencies and information to more youthful generations. Females learn by way of observing and helping their elders in tasks consisting of farming, herbal medicine preparation, weaving, and storytelling, regularly gaining knowledge of strategies and acquiring realistic know-how through the years. Indigenous

⁴ *Women as Custodians of Indigenous Knowledge: Insights from Rural India* by Sunita Reddy and Vinodhini Oza (2017)



Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management

*An Official Publication
of the Informing Science Institute*

SCOPUS INDEXED

Vol. : 20, Issue 2 2025

ISSN: (E) 1555-1237

training frequently carries eco-centric curriculum that emphasizes the interconnectedness between human beings, the land, and all dwelling beings. Women's traditional understanding of ecosystems, biodiversity, and sustainable practices serves as the inspiration for coaching about environmental stewardship, resource management, and ecological resilience. This curriculum is experiential, place-based totally, and culturally applicable, reflecting indigenous worldviews and values. Indigenous training instils appreciate for elders, mainly female elders, who are respected as repositories of conventional understanding and know-how. Females are trying to find steerage and mentorship from elder females, recognizing their priceless contributions to the network and the importance of intergenerational studying in maintaining cultural heritage. Traditional expertise is regularly learned in the context of community existence, wherein female roles as caregivers, educators, and cultural leaders are critical to the studying technique. Community-based mastering methods have interaction women, men, youngsters, and elders in collaborative activities that draw on diverse forms of know-how, competencies, and views, fostering a experience of collective responsibility and shared stewardship of cultural history. In women's traditional expertise and education inside indigenous communities are grounded in experiential getting to know, oral way of life, cultural practices, and community-based techniques that honor the interconnectedness among human beings, nature, and tradition. via valuing and maintaining women's roles as knowledge keepers and educators, indigenous communities maintain wealthy traditions, resilient ecosystems, and colourful cultural identities across generations.

Challenges Faced by Women in Preserving Indigenous Knowledge System

Females in indigenous groups face numerous demanding situations in retaining Indigenous know-how systems, which can be regularly rooted in systemic inequalities, social injustices, and historical marginalization. Some of the key challenges faced by females in this regard consist of: Gender disparities inside indigenous societies can restriction females get entry to to resources, choice-making energy, and opportunities for schooling and leadership. Patriarchal norms and conventional gender roles might also restrict women's participation in cultural sports, knowledge transmission procedures, and community governance, undermining their capacity to hold and transmit IKS. Indigenous ladies regularly have constrained access to formal schooling, vocational training, and literacy packages, which are essential for acquiring, documenting, and disseminating conventional knowledge. Educational barriers, consisting of poverty, geographic isolation, and cultural biases, can hinder women's capacity to interact in cultural protection efforts and make contributions to intergenerational learning within their groups. Fast social alternate, urbanization, and globalization pose giant threats to the renovation of indigenous expertise and cultural traditions. As younger generations increasingly more undertake Western life and values, traditional practices may additionally decline in relevance and significance, leading to the lack of intergenerational transmission channels and cultural erosion. Indigenous languages are valuable to the transmission of traditional expertise, as they encode cultural narratives, ecological understanding, and religious ideals. The decline of indigenous languages due to language shift, assimilation, or government regulations can sever the intergenerational continuity of oral traditions, undermining females' roles as storytellers, language keepers, and cultural mediators. Environmental degradation, including deforestation, pollution, and weather alternate, threatens indigenous peoples' livelihoods, cultural practices, and conventional expertise structures. Females, who often endure the primary responsibility for handling natural sources and securing meals and water for his or her families, are disproportionately suffering from ecological disruptions, exacerbating their vulnerability and proscribing their ability to maintain IKS. Indigenous women face intersecting styles of discrimination and marginalization based on their gender, ethnicity, socio-monetary popularity, and geographical place. Structural inequalities, including land dispossession, loss of prison



recognition of indigenous rights, and exclusion from choice-making methods, marginalize female voices and enterprise in cultural preservation efforts, hindering their ability to say indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. The commodification of indigenous expertise and cultural artifacts in global markets can result in exploitation, appropriation, and misrepresentation of indigenous cultures, undermining the integrity and authenticity of traditional knowledge structures. Females may additionally face exploitation in their cultural heritage, intellectual belongings rights violations, and lack of control over conventional knowledge, exacerbating their vulnerability to financial exploitation and cultural dislocation. Addressing those demanding situations calls for concerted efforts to empower indigenous ladies, promote gender fairness, and safeguard cultural rights within indigenous groups

Advocating for the rights of indigenous women in India:

Advocating for the rights of indigenous women in India involves addressing a range of social, economic, and political challenges specific to their communities. Here are some strategies for advocating for the rights of indigenous women in India:

1. Recognition of Indigenous Rights:

Advocate for the recognition and protection of indigenous rights, including land rights, cultural rights, and self-governance, in accordance with international human rights standards and indigenous peoples' rights frameworks such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

2. Land and Resource Rights: Support indigenous women's struggles for land and resource rights, which are often threatened by land grabs, resource extraction projects, and development initiatives that displace indigenous communities from their traditional lands. Advocate for the implementation of laws and policies that protect indigenous land tenure and ensure women's equal access to and control over land and natural resources.

3. Gender Equity and Social Justice: Advocate for gender equity and social justice within indigenous communities, challenging patriarchal norms and discriminatory practices that limit women's participation in decision-making, access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Promote initiatives that empower indigenous women economically, politically, and socially, including leadership training, capacity-building, and awareness-raising campaigns on gender equality and women's rights.

4. Addressing Gender-Based Violence: Addressing gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking, which disproportionately affect indigenous women. Support the implementation of laws and policies that provide protection, support, and justice for survivors of gender-based violence, as well as culturally sensitive services and resources for indigenous women who experience violence.

5. Access to Education and Healthcare: Advocate for increased access to quality education, healthcare, and social services for indigenous women and females, addressing barriers such as poverty, discrimination, and geographic isolation. Promote initiatives that prioritize culturally relevant education, reproductive health services, and mental health support tailored to the needs of indigenous women and communities.

6. Promotion of Indigenous Knowledge and Culture: Advocate for the promotion and preservation of indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and cultural practices, recognizing the central role of indigenous women as carriers and transmitters of traditional knowledge. Support initiatives that promote indigenous education, language revitalization, and cultural heritage preservation, empowering indigenous women to reclaim and celebrate their cultural identities and contributions.



7. **Environmental Justice and Sustainable Development:** Advocate for environmental justice and sustainable development that prioritize the rights and well-being of indigenous women and their communities. Support indigenous-led movements for environmental protection, climate resilience, and sustainable livelihoods that respect indigenous knowledge, rights, and sovereignty over their ancestral lands and territories.
8. **Legal Advocacy and Policy Reform:** Engage in legal advocacy and policy reform efforts to address systemic injustices and discriminatory practices that undermine the rights of indigenous women. Work with indigenous women's organizations, civil society groups, and legal experts to advocate for legal reforms, policy interventions, and institutional mechanisms that uphold indigenous rights and promote gender equity within indigenous communities and society at large.

By advocating for the rights of indigenous women in India, we can contribute to greater gender equity, social justice, and cultural resilience within indigenous communities, empowering women to exercise their rights, fulfill their potential, and participate fully in the social, economic, and political life of the country.

Conclusion

Women play a vital and multifaceted role in preserving and transmitting Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). Throughout history and across diverse indigenous communities, women have served as knowledge keepers, cultural mediators, and guardians of traditional wisdom. Their contributions are integral to the resilience, sustainability, and cultural continuity of indigenous societies. Women's unique relationship with nature, their involvement in traditional practices such as agriculture, healing, and storytelling, and their roles as caregivers and community leaders all contribute to the preservation and transmission of IKS. Through intergenerational knowledge transfer, oral traditions, and hands-on apprenticeship, women pass down valuable ecological knowledge, cultural traditions, and spiritual teachings to future generations. Despite facing numerous challenges, including gender inequality, cultural erosion, and environmental degradation, indigenous women continue to assert their rights, assert their expertise, and advocate for the recognition of their contributions to IKS. Their resilience, wisdom, and commitment to cultural preservation inspire hope and resilience within their communities and serve as a reminder of the importance of honoring and respecting indigenous women's knowledge and leadership. In essence, recognizing and valuing the vital role of women in preserving and transmitting IKS is not only essential for cultural preservation but also for fostering greater equity, justice, and sustainability within indigenous communities and society as a whole. By empowering indigenous women as custodians of traditional knowledge, we can ensure the resilience and vitality of indigenous cultures for generations to come.

REFERENCES

Books

1. Daughters of the Earth: Women and Land in Uttar Pradesh" by Alka Srivastava
2. Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures edited by Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty
3. Indigenous Knowledge and the Environment in Africa and North America edited by David M. Gordon
4. Indian Women: Tradition and Change by Giri Raj Gupta
5. Women's Voices: Selections from Indian Women Writers edited by Lakshmi Holmstrom.



Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management

*An Official Publication
of the Informing Science Institute*

SCOPUS INDEXED

Vol. : 20, Issue 2 2025

ISSN: (E) 1555-1237

Articles:

1. Women as Custodians of Indigenous Knowledge: Insights from Rural India by Sunita Reddy and Vinodhini Oza (2017)
2. Empowering Indigenous Women for Cultural Heritage Conservation: Case Studies from India by Meera Baindur and Shalini Iyengar (2020).
3. Gender, Culture, and Environmental Sustainability: Perspectives from Indigenous Women in India by Rashmi Venkatesan and Ravi Shanker Kumar (2018)
4. Voices of Indigenous Women: Narratives of Cultural Heritage Preservation in India by Anjali Vaidya (2019).
5. Indigenous Women's Leadership in Biodiversity Conservation: Insights from India by Vandana Shiva and Madhavi Jain (2016)

Websites:

1. Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Development (CIKD)
2. Foundation for Ecological Security (FES)
3. UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of India
4. Tribal Cultural Heritage in India Foundation (TRICHI)

