



Echoes of Ancestral Wisdom: The Role of Tribal Cultural Practices in IKS

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore the significance of tribal contributions to IKS. By examining their distinctive cultural practices, environmental stewardship, and resource-management techniques, we can uncover valuable insights relevant to contemporary global issues. In a world shaped by globalization and rapid technological advancement, there is renewed interest in traditional knowledge as a guiding framework for sustainable development. The Indian Knowledge System provides crucial perspectives on sustainability, holistic well-being, community harmony, and ethical governance. The integration of traditional tribal wisdom with modern scientific inquiry holds the potential to generate innovative, culturally resonant, and globally applicable solutions.

KEY WORDS

Indian Knowledge System, Tribal Wisdom, Sustainability, Indigenous Knowledge, Ecological Practices.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) represents a vast and diverse repository of wisdom that spans multiple disciplines. It encompasses the collective intellectual heritage of India's scientific traditions, philosophical reflections, cultural achievements, and practical knowledge evolved over thousands of years. IKS integrates a wide range of fields, including philosophy, science, ecology, medicine, linguistics, and art, demonstrating the deep interconnection between thought and practice within Indian civilization. It upholds India's unique cultural, philosophical, and intellectual traditions through a

holistic world view that blends spiritual, ethical, and practical dimensions (Panda 2022, 1). In discussing the application of tribal wisdom within IKS, it is essential to recognize that tribal communities are the earliest inhabitants of the subcontinent. They serve as the foundation of the Indian Knowledge System. Their knowledge, preserved through oral traditions, rituals, folklore, and everyday practices, is rooted in sustainability, coexistence, and profound ecological understanding. Tribal communities have safeguarded generations of experiential knowledge, ensuring its transmission through stories, customs, and collective memory. From herbal healing and traditional agriculture to forest conservation, water management, and community-based resource practices, tribal knowledge offers practical and sustainable approaches to many modern-day challenges. Indigenous languages, storytelling practices, and cultural expressions play a pivotal role in preserving ecological ethics, social values, and cultural continuity areas often neglected in mainstream educational frameworks.

Literature Review

The discourse on the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) has gained momentum in recent years, especially with the growing recognition of traditional and indigenous knowledge as a valuable resource for sustainable development. According to Panda (2022), IKS represents a holistic framework of intellectual and cultural wisdom that developed over centuries, rooted in India's philosophical, scientific, and ecological traditions. Scholars emphasize that IKS is not merely a historical repository but an evolving system that continues to inform contemporary practices in health, environment, and community life (Panda 2022). A significant body of literature highlights the indispensable role of tribal communities in enriching IKS. Anthropological and ethnographic studies underscore that tribes are among the earliest stewards of India's ecological and cultural landscapes. Mahapatra (2013) argues that tribal societies have preserved sustainable practices through oral transmission, ritualistic traditions, and close interaction with nature. Their knowledge systems—particularly in agriculture, herbal medicine, forest management, and communal living—reflect a deep ecological consciousness that aligns with the sustainability goals of modern societies.

Ethnobotanical research by Jain (2004) and subsequent studies confirm that tribal medicinal knowledge continues to be a crucial resource for understanding traditional healing practices. These works document the use of herbs, roots, and natural therapies employed by indigenous healers, thereby reinforcing the scientific and practical relevance of tribal wisdom. Similarly, Ramakrishnan (2003) explores the ecological wisdom embedded in shifting cultivation, water preservation, and biodiversity conservation among tribes, illustrating how indigenous methods promote long-term ecological balance.

The role of oral traditions and storytelling in safeguarding tribal knowledge has also been widely examined. Sengupta (2020) notes that indigenous languages and folklore serve as carriers of cultural memory, ecological principles, and ethical values. These narratives not only preserve community identity but also encode critical knowledge about agriculture, natural cycles, and social conduct—elements often overlooked by mainstream education systems.

Contemporary scholarship further emphasizes the importance of integrating tribal wisdom with modern scientific approaches. Griffiths and Smith (2020) argue that indigenous knowledge contributes significantly to global sustainability debates, especially in areas such as climate resilience, resource management, and ethical governance. In India, researchers such as Baviskar (2004) have documented how tribal communities' interaction with forests and rivers offers a counter-narrative to exploitative development models, highlighting the potential of tribal practices in addressing ecological degradation. Overall, the literature affirms that tribal knowledge systems form a vital component of IKS. They offer practical, ethical, and sustainable frameworks that can address contemporary challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and social inequality. Scholars consistently advocate for a collaborative model in which tribal wisdom and modern science complement each other to create culturally grounded, environmentally sound, and future-oriented solutions.

Objectives

The primary objectives of the paper is to explore and highlight various prominent tribes found mainly in Chhattisgarh state and their indigenous cultural expressions and ecologically sustainable practices. The paper also tries to highlight how do these tribes maintain holistic approach towards life and maintain social harmony within the community. The objective of this paper is also to discuss about the major socio-cultural practices of prominent tribes reflecting on their belief system, arts and crafts, textiles, forest management, and healing herbal practices.

Discussions and Findings

Precisely, if we talk about the tribes of Chhattisgarh as per 2011 census the S.T population of the state is 30.62% The state has 43 tribal communities in the scheduled tribe list. The districts like Baster Dantewada, Bijapur Sukma, Kondagaon, Narayanpur and Kanker comes under this area. One will find tribes like Gond, Muria, Madia, Abujhmadia, Dolra, Bhatra, Halba, Gadba in this area, which is filled with dense forests, and hills. Many tribes like Baiga, kamar, Majhi, and Gonds are engaged in primitive agricultural activities besides collecting fruits, fishing and hunting. Tribes like Munda and Bhunia are generally engaged in sustainable agriculture.

Cultural Transmission and Tribal Languages

Each one of the tribes have their own costumes, language and life style. The art and craft, songs and dances show the cultural and religious belief of the people. The cultural expression of the state brings out the unique view of life with nature and Gods

Tribal Handlooms and Textiles

Tribal textiles are a living example of indigenous knowledge passed down through generations. Each motif, dye, and weaving method reflects deep ecological understanding and cultural symbolism. These traditional waving style showcase sustainable practices using natural fibres and organic colours. The state is particularly famous for 'Kosa silk', it has been registered under geographical indication of goods. The Kosa silk is a type of silk made from a thread produced by a worm. The reeling process of Kosa thread is unique and is done in this region only.

IKS and Tribal Handicraft

Every item made by tribals simply reflect rituals, mythology and folk lore of the area. Crafts like Bell Metal are made out of 'lost-wax technique'. Different wood crafts and decorative items are made using the wood of Shisham, Sal and Teak wood. Terracotta items are even offered to deities and are emotionally bounded with the tribes. The soft soil of the river is coaxed by the potter's hand into utility items like pots and vases.

Tribes and their Love for Forests and Sacred Grooves

Tribal population mainly lives in Jungles. Nature is everything for them. These Tribal communities, share a deep spiritual bond with forests, viewing them as sacred life sources. Their indigenous practices promote biodiversity, sustainable use of resources, and ecological balance. They have a strong believe that their God is found in jungles, hills, rivers, lands and air and sky. Which reflects their harmonious existence with natural world. Many tribal communities worship nature deities and perform sacred rituals to invite rainfall, honouring their deep connection with the land and climate. These tribes protect these grooves and believe that these grooves protect them from epidemic and calamities. These deep forests provide psychological strength for these tribes and ethnic identity.

Ayurveda and Tribal Indigenous Medicinal Practices

Tribal medicine is a vital part of the Indian Knowledge System, sharing strong connections with Ayurveda through the use of herbs, roots, and natural healing practices. These indigenous systems are based on deep

ecological understanding and centuries of oral tradition. Together, tribal knowledge and Ayurveda promote holistic and sustainable healthcare rooted in nature. Generation after generation tribal people have developed their own medicinal healing practices. Baiga and Ojha in Tribal communities treat the sick people with herbs. Their medicine is based on harmony with environment nature and society.

Similarity of Japanese Concept of Ikigai and Tribal Way of Living

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), The Japanese concept of Ikigai, and tribal worldviews share a common thread the pursuit of purposeful, balanced, and meaningful living. Ikigai, which means “reason for being,” aligns with tribal values where work, nature, and community are interconnected, not just for survival but for joy and fulfilment and contentment. In many tribal cultures, elders continue to contribute through farming, storytelling, healing, and craftsmanship, finding dignity and happiness in lifelong activity and eradicating boredom at the older age.

Prominent Revolts and Protests of Chhattisgarh

Tribal communities of Chhattisgarh have fiercely resisted forest exploitation through powerful revolts. The Bastar Rebellion of 1910 (Bhumkal Movement) led by Gunda Dhur was a major uprising against colonial control over forest and the destruction of sacred trees. The Koi revolt of 1859 led by the Koya tribe was a response to oppressive forest laws and the denial of traditional rights over land and trees. These revolts were not only about political freedom but also about preserving the tribal way of life and ecological balance.

CONCLUSION

Indian Knowledge System aims to develop cultural industries that leverage traditional knowledge and handicraft creating economic opportunities and preserving cultural heritage. It also aims at promoting holistic health practices such as Ayurveda and Yoga for well-being of Individuals. IKS also promotes to apply traditional ecological knowledge to contemporary environmental challenges for promoting sustainability and conversion. Tribal indigenous wisdom is vital component of the Indian Knowledge system as it embodies sustainable practices, environmental ethics and cultural richness that have been preserved through generations. Including this knowledge in the curriculum (SDG 4: Quality Education) will help students learn from real life experiences and value all culture. It also supports SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by giving importance to the voices of the marginalized tribal people who are often ignored in the main stream. Indigenous Tribal practices like saving and worshipping forests using natural farming methods and managing water wisely help fight climate change (SDG 13: Climate Action) preserving and promoting tribal wisdom is not only an act of cultural justice but a strategic move towards achieving a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient future for all.

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