



### NATIVE KNOWLEDGE: A ROAD TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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#### Abstract:

Today, we are witnessing a global ecological crisis and concerns at the expense of growth and development projects that have reached even the most remote corners of the globe. Despite significant improvements in development indicators such as health status, education, poverty reduction and life expectancy, the world encounters ecological debt owing to increased pressure on natural resources to meet the demands of growth and advancement (Aggarwal, 2008). The issue of sustainability has plagued developing countries around the world, including India, these countries have over-exploited their natural resources. Therefore, the present study contextualizes the significance of native knowledge for conserving fragile resources and sustainable development.

Cultural traditions and knowledge which are embedded in the beliefs and practices of the natives have conserved and protected nature for centuries. They have used natural resources responsibly; therefore, their knowledge is critical in promoting sustainable development as it continually delivers insights, ideas, and abilities rooted in harmonious natural relationships.

For this study a systematic literature search on native knowledge and sustainable development was conducted on databases such as PubMed, Research Gate, Academia and Google Scholar. The literature search resulted in a selection of 33 papers. The title search string used for the present study includes Native knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, local knowledge, green wisdom, traditional knowledge, local wisdom, sustainable development, etc.

The findings suggest that native knowledge can play a substantial role in sustainable development such as food system, Land and resource management, Medicinal knowledge, Climate change, Disaster Risk Management and Indigenous Tourism.

**Keywords:** Native, Knowledge, Sustainable Practices, Management, Resources

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**Introduction:** Native knowledge, also known as indigenous knowledge, is a vast body of information, insights, and practices that have been accumulated and passed down through generations within a particular ethnic group or culture. This knowledge is rooted in the experiences and observations of native people and is closely tied to their unique relationships with the environment, culture, and community. However, despite its richness and value, much of this indigenous

knowledge has been lost over time due to the introduction of modern technologies and developmental projects which often fails to ensure long-term sustainability.

The natives around the world continue to struggle to maintain their rights, traditions, and knowledge within a system still dominated by a Western worldview. This struggle is fuelled by the tension between the



indigenous and non-indigenous worlds, with the latter exerting greater power in shaping the former.

Despite centuries of invasion and oppression, indigenous populations have adapted to adverse climate conditions and created sustainable livelihood systems, demonstrating the resilience and importance of indigenous knowledge. Therefore, understanding their practices and preserving their knowledge is critical in promoting sustainable development.

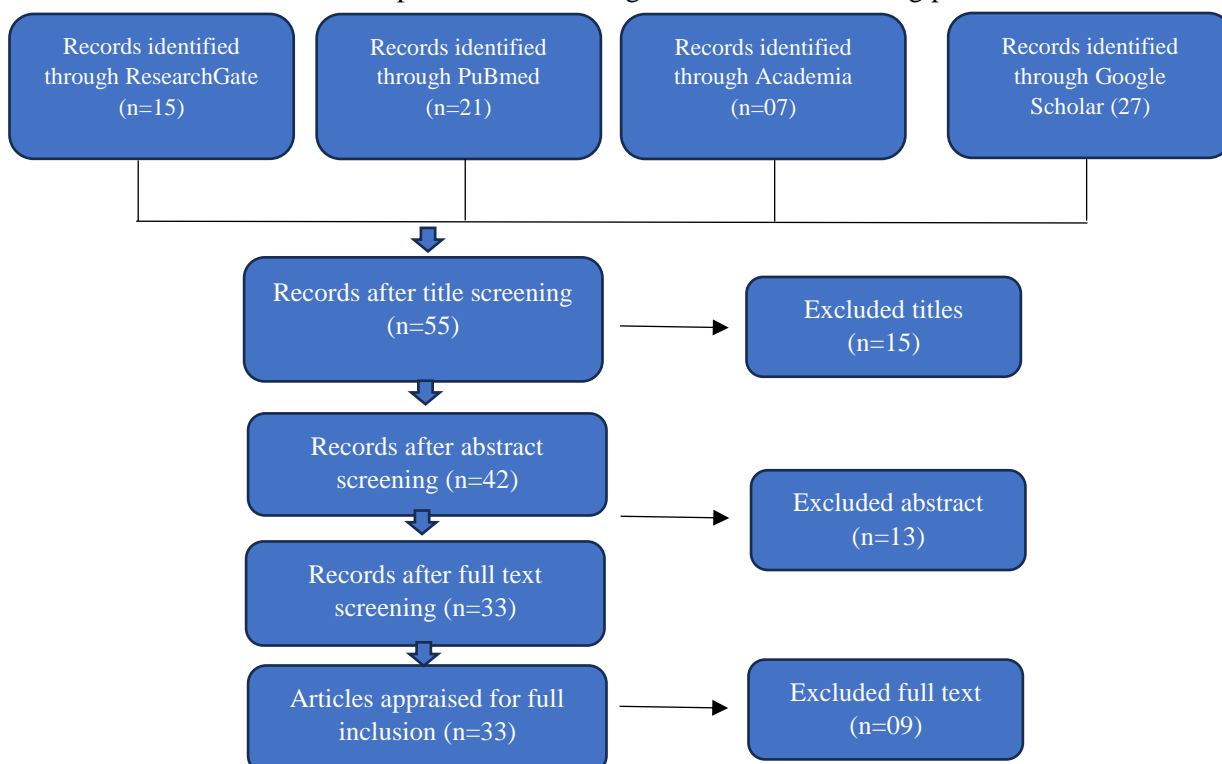
**Methodology:** The main aim of this research paper is to conduct a comprehensive review of existing literature on native knowledge and sustainable development. The paper accomplishes this objective by investigating the research that examines concepts, practices and belief system of natives in promoting sustainability.

The data from various databases, including ResearchGate, PubMed, Academia, and Google Scholar, were exported to the Mendeley reference management software. Duplicate entries were identified and eliminated by comparing the search outcomes from the databases. Specific search strings

were used such as native knowledge/traditional knowledge/ local wisdom/indigenous knowledge etc related to native knowledge and sustainable development.

This search resulted in the selection of 70 papers for screening. After reviewing the titles of the articles, 15 articles were excluded from further analysis. The articles that focussed on Native Knowledge and Sustainable Development (n= 55) were included for further analysis. After reading the abstracts, 13 articles were excluded. Only the most significant (n=33) and applicable data were utilized, along with the expertise and experience collected during the research process.

The contribution of the present paper to the literature lies in its investigation of the native knowledge for achieving better developmental outcomes. Beside it add to the ongoing discourse on sustainability and sustainable development and provides insights for seeking solutions to ecological challenges by incorporating native knowledge and making them an active agent of change by involving them in the decision-making processes.





### Food System:

Native food systems nurture a robust sense of community, with co-responsibilities and collective efforts in agricultural processes and food preparation. However, their food system face threat from emphasis on modernization, industrial agricultural practices and climate change. Despite facing criticism from agricultural officials' traditional techniques used by native farmers are farmer-friendly, economically and environmentally sustainable, socially accepted, and customized to local and environmental conditions. Thus, it is necessary to adopt these traditional practices as it can lead to sustainable development for both the community and the country as a whole (Shanmugaraja, *et al*, 2019). The Malayali tribal women sustainably fulfil their economic and nutritional requirements by adopting mixed-cropping techniques. Similarly, folklores in the district of Kumaun region features several traditional agricultural practices (PS Mehta, *et al*, 2010; I P Sharma, *et al*, 2020).

Native people also rely on wild harvesting and foraging for dietary diversity and nutrition. Unfortunately, traditional foods are being replaced by processed, less healthy options in the diet that has contributed to non-communicable diseases and nutritional imbalance (FAO 2017; Singh, A., *et al*, 2007; Kshatriya, G. K., & Acharya, S. K, 2016) leading to an increase in ailments such as obesity, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes (Singh, A., *et al*, 2007). However, some traditional foods are still used to cure diseases and improve health, such as Banko leaves, which are used to cure malaria, balance blood sugar, and treat high blood pressure, cardiac and gastric illness (Singh RK, *et al*, 2021; F F Sidiq, *et al*, 2022).

Eco-friendly pesticides such as kitchen ash, cow dung, and fish, among others, which are non-toxic and pose no harm to the environment while other practices such as seed saving and smoking food contribute to food

security and sustainability (P Narayansamy, 2006; Punabati Heisnam, *et al*, 2022).

Native agricultural practices include the crucial aspects of seed saving and exchange. Success stories of Lehri Bai, a 27-year-old woman from the Baiga tribe in Madhya Pradesh and Gulabi Tete and other members of the self-help group in Madhupur, located in the Baksa district of Assam showcase effectiveness of native agricultural practices and inspiration for others to walk.

### Land and Resource management:

The traditional knowledge and practices of natives have been instrumental in sustainable land and resource management. A thorough understanding of their practices can help identify critical gaps in land and resource management, which may be used to determine the direction and pace of environmental changes. To plan successfully, we must increase our awareness of the historical changes in the terrain over the last century or two. Only locals can discuss the ethno-history of the region in terms of ecosystems and habitats, as well as describe the deterioration of resources beneath grazing land, water supplies, agricultural fields, and other common difficulties over time. (Das A, *et al*, 2023) In India, intercepting monsoon runoff to replenish groundwater is a traditional practice employed by small farmers for irrigation, which can improve agricultural resilience (P K Sharma, *et al*, 2023).

Natives have historically relied on forest resources and marginal agriculture for their livelihood and have developed specific belief systems that prioritize the preservation of biodiversity in virgin forests, as a result, they have conserved numerous flora and fauna in sacred groves. For instance, the sacred grove in Maharashtra's Western Ghats (Rai & Nath, 2021). Additionally, the Mendha-Lekha Village in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district serves as an excellent example of community-driven conservation (Jha & Vats, 2021).



Native communities demonstrate prudence and ecological wisdom in resource utilization. For instance, the "Kadars" of Tamil Nadu select only mature plants of the yam *Dioscorea* for harvesting the tubers. Similarly, in southern India, tribes use many plants for a single purpose, even though other parts of the plants may have potential utility values (T. Ravishankar). Furthermore, the tribals classify soil types primarily based on soil texture, colour, and moisture-retaining capacity. Sixteen soil types, as classified by the tribes, have been documented, including Bhurbhuria, Chikti, Kamkaltori, Potini, Chikni, Kasai, Dadra, and Barrimitti. The selection of crops grown in various soil types is mainly based on soil moisture and type (Chandra Prakash Kala, 2022).

### Medicine:

India has a rich history of utilizing plants for medicinal purposes, with evidence of such practices documented in ancient literature. Traditional knowledge, particularly on the medicinal properties of plants, has contributed significantly to the development of important drugs in modern medicine, almost 80% of the human population in developing countries relies on plant resources for healthcare (Samita M & Aritra G, 2021).

Natives have a unique classification of diseases, dividing them into two categories: those related to the body and those related to the mind and divine powers. The former is treated using herbal medicines, often combined with animal parts, while the latter is addressed through magico-religious practices in conjunction with herbal remedies (Lalit T & D.P.Agrawal; U.K Sharma, et al, 2012).

The medicinal plants are extensively used to treat a wide range of diseases, from simple stomach-aches to more complex male and female disorders. Many of the plants used by the locals in Chhota Bhangal are documented in ancient medicinal literature and are integral part of Ayurveda and Unani medical system.

*Aconitum heterophyllum*, for instance, is used by the Bhangalis to treat stomach ailments, is also cited in Ayurvedic literature as a cure for stomach aches and fever. In the Unani system of medicine, it is a crucial component of "Sufuf habib," used to treat piles, and "Ma'jun jograj guggal," used to alleviate arthritis (Uniyal S K., *et al*, 2006; S.N. Ojha, *et al*, 2020). The Tagin people of Arunachal Pradesh use numerous types of plants in their traditional healthcare practices such as Pattoi for treating hypertension and obesity (Jaiswal A, 2019). Another indigenous community, the Bhangalis, have accumulated a wealth of traditional knowledge, particularly in the field of medicinal plants. This is evident from the prevalence of local sayings in the region that attest to the efficacy of certain plants. For instance, the saying "Bana, basuti te bare jethi houan thethi manu kian more" suggests that a person can remain free from diseases if they are in an environment where *Vitex negundo*, *Adhatoda vasica*, and *Acorus calamus* grow, provided they have the necessary knowledge of their usage (Sanjay K, *et al*, 2006). Even A. O. Issa Dr.'s research indicates that traditional health practitioners in Kwara State have a positive attitude towards documenting their indigenous knowledge which will help preserve their traditional practices and prevent them from being lost over time (Jaiswal A, 2019).

### Climate Change:

Natives have accumulated valuable traditional knowledge and practices that enable them to sustain their livelihoods using natural resources (Sherpa, *et al*, 2013). They have shown exceptional adaptability to various changes, including climate change, and have a comprehensive understanding of the interconnected human-environmental system. Incorporating traditional knowledge can improve the adaptive capacity of farmers to cope with stressors. However, policies in India aimed at enhancing farmers' adaptive capacity often overlook traditional knowledge. To make these



policies more effective, it is essential to mainstream stakeholders' perspectives through knowledge co-production. This approach can facilitate the integration of traditional knowledge into policies and ensure that the policies are more inclusive and effective (Madhav K, et al, 2014; Singh RK, *et al*, 2021).

The native communities offer valuable insights into sustainable living practices that the world can learn from. For instance, as the world grapples with plastic pollution, indigenous communities have been using alternatives to plastic for generations, such as biodegradable plates made from leaves and toothbrushes fashioned from neem tree twigs or date palm. The recent initiative undertaken by rural women in Uttarakhand, India, serves as a reaffirmation of the active participation of women in the environmental movement, given the increasing threat of global climate change. Women members in the panchayat have taken proactive measures to encourage the planting of broadleaf trees to increase the oxygen level in the environment (Bishnoi, et al, 2014).

Natives are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change; thus, it is critical to involve them in the creation and implementation of climate-smart adaptation programs. Such measures would benefit not just the communities, but the country as a whole, by supporting resilient and sustainable development methods (Priya P & Abhilash, 2019).

### **Disaster risk reduction:**

According to the International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction (2020), local knowledge plays a crucial role in enhancing early warning systems for impending disasters. Additionally, people rely on invisible local knowledge, such as social relations and personal experiences, to build their capacities to respond to disasters. Indigenous communities have developed a unique set of skills that enable them to respond quickly and efficiently to natural disasters. These communities can observe and interpret environmental signs and take

proactive measures to protect themselves and their belongings. This has enabled some communities to not only survive but even thrive in the face of calamities that have devastated others. By recognizing and leveraging the power of local knowledge, disaster prevention efforts can be greatly enhanced (Rai & Khawas, 2019).

The survivors of the 2004 tsunami, the earthquake safe housing technique of “taq” and “Dhajji-Dewari of Kashmir and bamboo plantation of Nandeswar village to protect village from floods and soil erosion are an excellent example of how indigenous societies use their observation skills to adapt to disasters. Indigenous and traditional knowledge can serve as a vital national resource in disaster prevention, preparedness, and response. It is also cost effective, participatory and sustainable (Jha & Jha, 2011; ISDR, 2008).

### **Tourism:**

The traditional tourist business often overlooks the critical aspects of environmental sustainability and native participation. However, in recent years, community-based tourism has emerged as a practical option, involving indigenous communities' active engagement in the tourism business. Indigenous tribes have a deep connection to the environment and a wealth of information about it. Community-based tourism promotes both environmental protection and the preservation of local communities' cultural heritage. One such example of community-based tourism is ecotourism which emphasizes conservation, sustainability, and biological diversities. Who stay at hilltops and hill slopes their livelihood is primarily based on cultivation, both shifting and settled. By operating tourism activities themselves, the Bondo Tribe ensures that resources are utilized efficiently and in a manner that protects the environment (Nilakantha Panigrah, 2005; Vineet Chouhan, 2022).

During full moon evenings, the Baiga tribes of Madhya Pradesh perform a ritual dance known as 'Karma',



which tourists are welcome to join in. Similarly, the Khasi people of Meghalaya built a natural bridge known as the living root bridge by manipulating the roots of a rubber tree. These live root bridges demonstrate the strength and longevity of ancient ways, leaving tourists in amazement. By providing such unique experiences, community-based tourism in India may give tourists a more real and ethical option (Bharat Guglani, 2023).

### Conclusion :

The extensive review of literature on native knowledge and sustainable development reveals significance of traditional practices across various spheres. From agriculture and land management to medicine, climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and community-based tourism spring up time tested valuable knowledge for achieving holistic and sustainable practices.

The success stories of native communities emerging from various states of India such as Maharashtra's-Mendha Lekha, Tamil Nadu's Malayali tribal women efforts or the self-help group in Madhupur accentuate the tangible benefits of espousing traditional methods in fostering food security, land and resource management, economic stability and environmental sustainability.

Sacred groves, community-based conservation practices and the elaborate understanding of types of soil exhibit the rich tapestry of knowledge embedded in the native communities' cultural practices. In the domain of medicine, the integration of traditional medicinal practices into modern healthcare systems would develop a comprehensive and culturally sensitive health care system.

Moreover, natives' distinctive understanding of disaster risk management, which is rooted in their cultural practices and experiences, would provide an opportunity to develop early warning systems and community-based responses to natural disasters. Beside community-based tourism would serve as a model for

adopting sustainable tourism practices. Thus, the study emphasizes on the significance of recognising, respecting and incorporating native knowledge into broader sustainable development agenda. The coalescences of the native wisdom and modern knowledge would make development more inclusive and sustainable.

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