



The Resonance of Tradition: Reclaiming Women's Empowerment through the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) Vs African Indigenous Knowledge System (AIKS)

Smriti Kashyap (a), Prof. Dr. Subhashree Mukherjee (b)

a. Research Scholar, Kamla Nehru Mahavidyalya Sakkardara Square, Nagpur

b. Professor, Kamla Nehru Mahavidyalya Sakkardara Square, Nagpur

Abstract

Modern feminist discourse frequently overlooks the epistemological wealth of the Global South. This paper presents a comparative analysis of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and the African Indigenous Knowledge System (AIKS) as foundational frameworks for female agency. While IKS emphasizes a codified tradition of intellectual and spiritual leadership, AIKS highlights the community-based role of women as guardians of biodiversity and social health.

This study investigates how reclaiming these indigenous identities in 2025 serves as a decolonial strategy for empowerment, shifting women from the periphery of "development targets" to the center of "knowledge custodians."

Keywords: Women's Empowerment, IKS, AIKS, Indigenous Wisdom, Decolonial Feminism, Sustainable Development 2025.

Introduction

The global landscape of 2025 is marked by an urgent return to indigenous wisdom to solve modern crises, from climate change to social inequity. However, women's roles in these systems are often marginalized by colonial historical narratives. This paper explores the "resonance of tradition" by comparing the empowerment paradigms of IKS and AIKS. It posits that for women in India and Africa, empowerment is not merely a modern acquisition but a reclamation of historic roles as epistemic leaders, economic anchors, and environmental stewards.

Modern feminist discourse has largely been dominated by Western epistemological frameworks, often sidelining the indigenous socio-cultural legacies of the Global South. This study, titled "The Resonance of Tradition: Reclaiming Women's Empowerment through the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) Vs African Indigenous Knowledge System (AIKS)," argues that indigenous systems are not merely historical artifacts but are vital, living blueprints for contemporary female agency. The global focus on sustainable development and decolonial education has intensified the need to explore how ancestral wisdom can address persistent gender disparities.

In India, the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) presents a multifaceted paradigm where women have historically been recognized as scholars, philosophers, and spiritual leaders, as evidenced in Vedic and post-Vedic traditions. Despite the pervasive influence of colonial and patriarchal structures, contemporary initiatives—such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020—seek to reintegrate these indigenous perspectives to foster gender equity and sustainable entrepreneurship. Similarly, the African Indigenous Knowledge System (AIKS) positions women as the primary custodians of biodiversity, food security, and community health. In many African contexts, indigenous practices remain essential survival strategies, where women's traditional roles in land management and herbal medicine provide a foundation for modern economic participation and resilience.

While both systems emphasize a holistic worldview—connecting spiritual, ecological, and social domains—they diverge in their methods of preservation and transmission. IKS often draws from a rich repository of codified ancient texts, whereas AIKS is predominantly anchored in community-based oral traditions and lived experiences. This research identifies a critical gap in existing literature: the lack of a comparative, cross-continental framework that synthesizes these two distinct yet harmonious systems to redefine empowerment beyond Western-centric models.

The objective of this paper is to investigate the unique mechanisms of female empowerment within IKS and AIKS, highlighting their contemporary relevance in 2025. By examining the roles of women as knowledge transmitters and economic actors in both regions, the study aims to provide actionable insights for developing culturally sensitive policies.

Ultimately, this research posits that reclaiming indigenous identities is an imperative step toward decolonizing gender discourse and achieving global knowledge equity.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this research is to evaluate how the reclamation of indigenous knowledge serves as a contemporary vehicle for women's empowerment in the Global South. Specially, the study seeks to reach the following objectives:

***To Investigate the Epistemic Roles of Women in IKS and AIKS:** The study aims to map the historical and contemporary roles of women as creators, guardians, and transmitters of knowledge,

highlighting their intellectual agency in the Indian Vedic tradition and their pedagogical leadership in African oral traditions.

***To Compare Mechanisms of Ecological Stewardship and Economic Sovereignty:** A key objective is to analyze how women in both regions utilize indigenous wisdom—such as seed preservation in Africa and traditional herbal sciences in India—to foster sustainable livelihoods and community resilience against climate and economic shocks.

***To Identify and Filter Patriarchal Distortions within Traditional Systems:** Through a decolonial lens, this research seeks to distinguish between authentic, gender-inclusive indigenous practices and the regressive patriarchal norms that have influenced these systems during colonial and medieval periods.

***To Evaluate the Integration of Indigenous Systems into 2025 Policy Frameworks:** The study aims to assess the effectiveness of current initiatives, such as India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the African Union's Agenda 2063, in formalizing traditional knowledge as a tool for modern female-led entrepreneurship and socio-political agency.

***To Propose a Cross-Continental Framework for Knowledge Equity:** Ultimately, the study seeks to synthesize the "resonances" between IKS and AIKS to offer a non-Western model of empowerment that can inform global development policies and support the decolonization of gender discourse.

Women in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS)

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) presents a robust historical framework for female agency, predating modern legislative pushes for gender equality. This system reveals a legacy of gender inclusivity rooted in the intellectual and spiritual domains of ancient India, where early texts such as the Rigveda and Upanishads demonstrate that women were active participants in scholarly and philosophical life. The Vedic tradition specifically documents prominent women philosophers such as Gargi Vachaknavi and Maitreyi, who engaged in complex metaphysical debates alongside male counterparts. Their contributions were not limited to philosophy; figures like Lopamudra and Ghosha are credited with composing sacred hymns, signifying a society that officially recognized female intellectual and theological capabilities.

Beyond the philosophical sphere, IKS incorporates diverse socio-economic models that challenge perceptions of a uniformly patriarchal past. Indigenous governance structures in Northeast India, particularly the matrilineal societies of the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes, represent historic models where lineage, descent, and inheritance are traced through the mother's line. In these communities, women—specifically the youngest daughter or Khatduh—serve as the primary custodians of family property and cultural continuity. This indigenous structure grants women significant economic security and authority in family decision-making, offering a resilient cultural alternative to patriarchal social organizations.

The relevance of these historical precedents is being actively resurrected in modern India through 2025 policy initiatives. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 champions the integration of IKS into formal curricula to dismantle deep-seated patriarchal biases and restore the continuity between India's civilizational heritage and contemporary educational needs. By embedding indigenous wisdom into modern frameworks, current reforms aim to foster Shakti and Shiksha (power and education), promoting women-led entrepreneurship in sectors such as traditional medicine, sustainable agriculture, and the arts. This strategic shift transforms ancient knowledge into a functional tool for economic sovereignty and social equity in the 21st century.

Women in the African Indigenous Knowledge System (AIKS)

In Africa, indigenous knowledge serves as a critical survival strategy deeply embedded in female lived experience, positioning women as the primary link between ecological health and community stability. AIKS defines a worldview where women are the fundamental guardians of biodiversity, acting as the chief selectors and custodians of indigenous seeds. By preserving these genetic resources, women maintain agricultural diversity essential for food security and resilience against climate volatility. For example, the Paran Women Group in Kenya—a collective of over 64 indigenous organizations—utilizes ancestral land management techniques to restore degraded ecosystems, such as the Mau Forest, thereby reviving water catchment areas and protecting community livelihoods through intergenerational knowledge transfer.

The influence of women within AIKS is equally prominent in community health and pedagogy. Women possess encyclopedic knowledge of medicinal plants and traditional healing practices, serving as the primary healthcare providers and midwives in rural areas. This system places high value on "elder" women as mentors who use indigenous pedagogy—including storytelling and oral testimonies—to transmit essential values and survival skills to younger generations. This relational and community-oriented approach to knowledge ensures that spiritual, social, and physical health are treated as interconnected domains, with women at the center of this holistic governance.

Furthermore, AIKS is a driver of economic innovation, where women adapt indigenous technologies to

meet modern needs and improve the Human Development Index (HDI) of their regions. This includes the creative use of local resources for sustainable manufacturing, such as the production of *Jatropha curcas* oil for medicine and fuel in Mali, or the manufacturing of organic briquettes and fuel-efficient stoves in Kenya to reduce deforestation. By integrating traditional techniques with entrepreneurial initiatives—such as artisanal mining or climate-smart agriculture—African women transform ancestral wisdom into economic sovereignty, fostering resilience against both environmental shocks and global market pressures.

Comparative Analysis: Synthesis of Systems

The synthesis of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and the African Indigenous Knowledge System (AIKS) reveals a shared ontological foundation where women are viewed as the primary link between the spiritual, social, and natural worlds. While Western models of empowerment often emphasize individualistic achievement and labor-market participation, both IKS and AIKS define empowerment through a holistic framework of "relational agency." In this context, a woman's power is derived from her role as a custodian of collective memory and a bridge between generations. However, the manifestation of this agency differs based on the historical documentation of each region; Indian traditions often lean on a high-culture, textual reclamation of status, whereas African traditions emphasize a grassroots, praxis-oriented approach to leadership.

A primary point of convergence is found in the domain of ecological stewardship and sustainable resource management. In the African context, indigenous knowledge is frequently operationalized through women's mastery of biodiversity and seed conservation, which serves as a vital defense against climate-induced food insecurity. Similarly, the Indian tradition recognizes the feminine principle (Prakriti) as the source of all material creation, a philosophy that informs modern community-led conservation movements. Both systems advocate for a "biocentric" approach to empowerment, where women's traditional roles in managing local ecosystems are not seen as domestic chores but as sophisticated scientific contributions to environmental resilience.

Furthermore, the mechanisms of knowledge transmission provide a unique contrast in how empowerment is institutionalized. IKS benefits from a deep history of codified pedagogy, where the reclamation of ancient philosophical roles allows women to challenge contemporary patriarchal interpretations of religious and social law. Conversely, AIKS relies on the resilience of oral history and communal mentorship, where the "elder woman" serves as a non-formal educator and political advisor. Despite these differences in medium, both systems face the shared threat of "epistemicide"—the systematic erasure of indigenous wisdom by globalized educational standards. The synergy between these two systems suggests that a successful model for Global South empowerment must combine the textual authority of IKS with the practical, community-based resilience of AIKS.

Challenges and Shared Resilience

As of 2025, both the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and the African Indigenous Knowledge System (AIKS) face a critical inflection point characterized by the rapid erosion of knowledge. A primary driver of this loss is the accelerating rate of urban migration, which physically and socially detaches younger generations from the ancestral lands and community elders where this wisdom is rooted. This demographic shift has created a significant "pedagogical gap," where the oral and experiential methods of transmission—fundamental to both systems—are being severed by the demands of globalized, formal education systems that frequently devalue indigenous epistemology. Without systematic formal documentation, both regions face the imminent risk of "biocultural extinction," where unique local solutions for medicine, climate resilience, and social governance vanish alongside their aging custodians.

Furthermore, a significant 2025 challenge lies in the complex negotiation between preserving tradition and purging patriarchal distortions. Over centuries, colonial influences and internal social shifts have often layered regressive patriarchal norms over originally egalitarian indigenous practices. In India, this is evident in the struggle to reclaim the high status of women found in ancient texts from later medieval social restrictions. In Africa, it manifests in the tension between women's critical role in food security and their often-limited legal rights to land ownership under customary law. Both systems, therefore, are engaged in a process of "internal decolonization"—filtering out historical prejudices to revitalize the empowering core of their traditions.

Despite these hurdles, a shared spirit of resilience is emerging through the integration of indigenous wisdom with modern technology. From digital archives of medicinal plant lore in rural India to the use of mobile apps by African women to track seed varieties and climate patterns, tradition is being reclaimed as a modern tool for sovereignty. The resilience of these systems lies in their adaptability; by framing indigenous knowledge not as a static relic of the past, but as a living science, women in both regions are transforming their roles from "targets of development" to "architects of sustainable futures."

Research Methodology



This study utilizes a Qualitative Comparative Research Design grounded in a Decolonial Epistemological Framework, specifically tailored to examine the intersection of indigenous wisdom and gender agency. Moving beyond traditional Western empirical models, the methodology adopts an "indigenous-centric" approach that treats the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and the African Indigenous Knowledge System (AIKS) not as passive subjects of study, but as active, legitimate sources of theory and practice. The research is structured as a cross-continental comparative analysis, allowing for a synthesis of "convergent resonances"—shared themes of empowerment—while maintaining a high degree of sensitivity toward the distinct historical and cultural nuances of each region. This methodology prioritizes the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance, ensuring that the analysis respects the collective benefit and authority of the communities from which this knowledge originates.

Data collection for this paper followed a multi-dimensional strategy designed to capture both the codified nature of IKS and the predominantly oral tradition of AIKS. This involved a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of archival texts, such as the Vedic scriptures and the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), alongside an analysis of contemporary African oral testimonies and community-led reports from organizations like the Paran Women Group. To ensure the study remains relevant to the current global landscape of 2025, the methodology included a rigorous Document Analysis of modern policy frameworks, including India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the African Union's Agenda 2063. These documents provided the necessary context to evaluate how ancient roles are being re-integrated into modern socio-economic strategies.

The analysis of the gathered data was conducted through Thematic Content Analysis, categorized into three primary pillars: epistemic authority, ecological stewardship, and economic sovereignty. To refine this analysis, the study applied a lens of Intersectional Decolonial Feminism, which was essential for distinguishing between original indigenous empowerment models and the patriarchal distortions that emerged during colonial and post-colonial eras. By filtering the data through this critical framework, the study was able to identify how women in both India and Africa are leveraging their ancestral roles to navigate 21st-century challenges.

This methodological approach ensures that the "resonance of tradition" is presented as a functional, living science rather than a static historical relic, providing a robust foundation for the paper's findings and policy recommendations.

Discussion

The comparative exploration of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and the African Indigenous Knowledge System (AIKS) underscores a profound "resonance of tradition" that serves as a counter-narrative to Western-centric development paradigms. As identified in the 2025 landscape, the primary strength of these systems lies in their holistic integration of the feminine principle with ecological and intellectual governance. In the Indian context, the reclamation of epistemic authority is significantly anchored in textual revivalism. By revisiting the contributions of philosophers like Gargi and Maitreyi, contemporary scholars are able to challenge the "patriarchal distortions" that marginalized women in later centuries [Dan, 2025]. This textual sovereignty allows for a structured reintegration of women into the national intellectual discourse, as promoted by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which seeks to transform traditional wisdom into modern entrepreneurship [Tembhurne, 2023].

In contrast, the discussion surrounding AIKS highlights a more praxis-oriented agency, where empowerment is manifested through lived experience and community survival. African women's roles as "custodians of biodiversity" are not merely domestic responsibilities but are recognized as sophisticated scientific contributions to global climate resilience [The Gaia Foundation, 2015]. The success of groups like the Paran Women Group in Kenya demonstrates that indigenous land management techniques are essential for 2025 food security strategies [Paran Women Group, 2025]. While IKS often emphasizes "Shiksha" (education) as a path to power, AIKS emphasizes "relational agency," where a woman's leadership is validated through her ability to sustain the communal health and the intergenerational transmission of values [Machinga, 2021].

A critical synthesis of both systems reveals that both regions face the shared threat of epistemicide—the systematic erasure of traditional knowledge due to urban migration and the lack of formal documentation. However, the resilience shown in 2025 suggests a move toward "digital indigenization." From the use of the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) in India to protect medicinal patents [CSIR, 2025] to the mobile tracking of seed varieties by African women [World Resources Institute, 2024], technology is being used to bridge the generational gap. This discussion posits that true empowerment is achieved when global stakeholders move beyond treating women as "objects of development" and instead recognize them as the "rightful owners" of a knowledge economy that is both culturally rooted and intellectually sovereign [De Sousa Santos, 2014].

6. Conclusion

The resonance of tradition within the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and the African Indigenous Knowledge System (AIKS) provides a compelling and necessary alternative to Western-centric models of female empowerment. As we navigate the global socio-political landscape of 2025, it is increasingly evident that achieving genuine gender equity requires more than superficial policy adjustments or legislative mandates; it demands a profound epistemic shift. This shift must acknowledge and validate women not merely as beneficiaries of modern progress, but as the primary custodians and rightful owners of ancestral wisdom that has sustained civilizations for millennia. By reclaiming these indigenous frameworks, empowerment is redefined—moving away from individualistic, market-driven metrics toward a model that is deeply rooted in cultural identity, ecological stewardship, and intellectual sovereignty.

To ensure the longevity of these systems against the pressures of globalization and knowledge erosion, there is an urgent need for global stakeholders to support the formal documentation and institutionalization of indigenous practices. Bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary science allows for a "modernity with roots," where women lead the way in solving global crises through localized knowledge. Ultimately, this comparative study suggests that the path to a sustainable and equitable future for women in the Global South lies in the strategic synthesis of their past and present. By centering IKS and AIKS, we foster a global knowledge ecosystem where women are recognized as the architects of a resilient, sovereign, and decolonized world.

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