



INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION: THE ROLE OF TIWA WOMEN

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Abstract: Indigenous knowledge is rooted in deep connections of indigenous people to the land, environment, and culture. Indigenous Knowledge Transmission refers to the process through which the knowledge of indigenous people of a community is passed from generation to generation. The Tiwa tribe, an indigenous group mainly residing in Nagaon, Morigaon, Karbi-Anglong and Kamrup districts of Assam and in the Khasi-Jayantiya hills of Meghalaya. Generally, it is seen that, in a society of Assam, the managers or bearers of indigenous knowledge systems which is related to the development, care and well-being of women and children are senior women, or grandmothers. Tiwa women plays a central role in almost all social aspects of Tiwa community by holdings several portfolios and performing assigned duties and responsibilities. Women are important part of various domestic, agricultural, community-based rituals related to fertility, health, seasonal cycles and worship to the ancestors in Tiwa community. This paper aims to analyze the significant role of Tiwa women in indigenous knowledge transmission to future generation through rituals, festivals etc. This research follows a qualitative methodological framework and relies exclusively on secondary sources.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge, Knowledge Transmission, Tiwa community, Tiwa women.

I. Introduction:

Indigenous knowledge refers to the understanding, skills, and philosophies developed by indigenous peoples over millennia. This knowledge is rooted in their deep connections to the land, environment, and culture. It encompasses various aspects, including traditional ecological knowledge, cultural practices, and social structures. Various forms of indigenous knowledge such as traditional ecological knowledge, medicinal knowledge, cultural knowledge, farming knowledge, and other forms, have served human civilizations for generations. These systems have facilitated thoughtful and deliberate interactions with livelihood factors that result in a process that is thought to be more sustainable for the environment (Choudhury & Kalita, 2025). Knowledge from the indigenous people of a community which is passed from generation to generation is known as Indigenous Knowledge (IK). It refers to understanding, skills and philosophies developed by local communities with long histories and experiences of interaction with their natural surroundings. (Dutta et al., 2023).

Indigenous Knowledge Transmission refers to the process through which the knowledge of indigenous people of a community is passed from generation to generation. "IKS is fundamentally important to indigenous identity, culture, languages, heritage, and livelihoods. The transfer of IKS from one generation to the next must be preserved and promoted, as these interactions represent the knowledge of the local ecologies." (Malapane et al., 2024).

According to the Tribal Development Plan for NNP-Assam (2024), the Tiwa tribe is one of the major tribal groups in Assam. In Tiwa tribe, traditional festivals like Junbeel Mela, agricultural festivals like Wansua, religious festivals like Langkhan Puja, fertility festivals like Sagra-Misawa always carry a special expression of Tiwa identity. Besides these festivals practices, some community-based domestic knowledge are carried by Tiwa people from one generation to other generation which serve as repositories of indigenous knowledge.

According to the Tribal Development Plan for NNP-Assam (2024), “the Gender Ratio in Assam is 958 women for each 1000 men and it has improved substantially over the last decade. The gender related development indices in Assam are more-or-less favourable compared with the corresponding national figure, implying lesser instances of gender-based disparity in the State. Women enjoy better status as compared to women in India in terms of decision-making power at the household level”.

Tiwa women actively participate in various domestic, agricultural, and community-based rituals related to fertility, health, seasonal cycles, and ancestor worship. Through oral traditions, symbolic performances, ritual preparations, and the preservation of sacred customs, women ensure the continuity of indigenous belief systems across generations. Tiwa women, in plain and hill areas plays a significant role in the society. Tiwas are mainly patriarchal but some of the matrilineal characteristics distinctly visible in the Tiwa societies of hill area (Kakati, 2024).

II. Objectives:

The objectives of the study are:

1. To understand the indigenous knowledge of the Tiwa tribe.
2. To examine the role of Tiwa women in the transmission of indigenous knowledge.

III. Scope of the study:

The scope of the study will be limited to the indigenous knowledge of Tiwa tribes in Assam. According to Ministry of tribal affairs, India, Schedule tribes of Assam consist of 38.84 lakh which is 12.4% of total tribal population of the country. (Dutta et al., 2023). According to the Tribal Development Plan for NNP-Assam (2024), the Tiwa tribe is one of the major tribal groups in Assam, constituting 5.2% of the total Scheduled Tribe population in the state. Further study will be limited to the role of Tiwa women in indigenous knowledge transmission with special reference to their involvement in cultural life, agricultural practices, festivals and religious beliefs of their community through which indigenous knowledge is preserved and transmitted across generation. The Tiwa people are mainly residing in Nagaon, Morigaon, Karbi-Anglong and Kamrup districts of Assam and in the Khasi-Jayantiya hills of Meghalaya.

IV. Methodology:

In preparing this paper, mainly the descriptive method has been followed. The researcher follows a qualitative methodological framework and relies exclusively on secondary sources. The information are collected from the existing literature available in the form of books, journals/ e-journals, reports etc.

V. Significance of the Study:

Without proper documentation and preservation, indigenous knowledge will be lost, making it inaccessible not only to other indigenous systems but also to development practitioners. Development projects will be unable to provide sustainable solutions to local challenges unless they incorporate local knowledge (Warren, 1991). To bring development in local community, indigenous knowledge plays a very important role. The use of indigenous knowledge can guarantee the survival of the economics of the developing world (Hangshing, 2020). To effectively support indigenous organizations and local communities in achieving sustainable socio-economic progress, it is essential to acquire, organize, and disseminate indigenous knowledge to drive meaningful change.

VI. Indigenous knowledge Transmission (IKT):

Indigenous knowledge transmission is the intergenerational sharing of community-based knowledge related to nature, rituals, festivals, seasonal cycles, worship to the ancestors etc. IKS can be transmitted through informal education, which conveys knowledge through observation, participation, and oral literature. (Malapane et al., 2024)

6.1 Key Features of IKT-

- a. Oral tradition like stories, songs, myths, folklore.
- b. Learning by participation in community-based rituals, festivals, daily practices etc.
- c. Local knowledge from family elders, women, ritual specialists.
- d. Sustainable and adaptive knowledge evolves with surrounding environment

VII. Involvement of Tiwa women in Indigenous Knowledge Transmission:

Among the Tiwa tribe, women play a crucial role in Indigenous Knowledge Transmission by:

- a) Teaching ritual practices and religious customs to younger women.
- b) Maintaining cultural identity and social norms through festivals
- c) Transmitting medicinal and agricultural knowledge within households
- d) Passing ecological knowledge (seasons, forests, plants, animals)

In different festivals, rituals, social activities Tiwa women play important role as follows-

7.1 Agriculture related festivals-

7.1.1 Junbeel Mela: This festival is celebrated annually in the month of January at time of Magh Bihu in the Morigaon district of Assam. In the Junbeel Mela, the traditional barter system is followed with active participation of Tiwa and other communities. Tiwa women also play a significant role in the barter procedure, particularly in exchange of items such as grains, vegetables, fish and other local produce.

7.1.2 Wansuwa: It is a post-harvest festival that celebrates the yield of crops and honours to the deities for fertility and abundance. Key features of this festival is rituals sacrificing, ceremonial offerings and community feasts where women also participate actively.

7.1.3 Sagra Misawa or Sagra Puja: Sagra Misawa is a fertility festival celebrated by the Plain Tiwa community. Starting from Sunday or Wednesday, Sagra-misawa festival is celebrated for a week. At the core of Sagra Misawa is the worship of deities associated with agriculture and fertility. The ceremonies included in the festival are those that help to encourage good harvest, which evidence the perception of Tiwa people on the cycles of nature and their dependence on it (Senapati, 2020).

7.2 Rituals and other domestic ceremonies-

7.2.1 Langkhan Puja: It is a significant religious ritual observed by the Tiwa community, and it holds a deep connection with the principles of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), especially in the realms of ecological balance, spirituality, and community well-being. In line with the Indian Knowledge System, which emphasizes a harmonious relationship with nature, Langkhan Puja is a ritual that reflects the Tiwa people's deep reverence for the natural world. The puja is typically conducted to appease the spirits of nature and to seek blessings for favorable weather and agricultural productivity (Doloi et al., 2024).

7.2.2 Birth Purification Ceremony: Birth purification ceremony is cheerfully observed in Tiwa community. *Bahirulua* and *mancha* or *akhauj* are two rituals performed to purge the impurity of a child after birth. The women called *Hajani* is associated with this ceremony, who is appointed from a different clan, bathes and dresses the new born baby in new clothes and performs other rituals along with the *deuri*, the priest. She sprinkles holy water around the house and prepares special curry with arum stem and chicken, especially for the mother of the baby (Kakati, 2024). The second ritual, the naming ceremony, is locally known as *Mancha* or *Akhauj* in Tiwa tradition. *Hajani* plays an important role in this ceremony. All the rituals work related to this ceremony done by these particular women called *Hajani*. She prepares a special dish for all the grandees from different clans called *bhakats*.

7.2.3 Funerals rituals: In Tiwa society women are the important part of funerals also. *Gyati* or *giyati* is associated with funerals rituals. When a person dies, two female and male *giyatis* each are appointed from separate clans. Female *giyatis* does their rituals works in the home of the deceased and help the male *giyatis* (Kakati, 2024).

7.2.4 Barat Utsav or Festival: A grand royal festival of the Tiwas called *Barat* which is organised by a female organiser named *Baratani*. In this religious festival, which is celebrated by the Tiwa king of Tetelia approaches the *Baratani* along with his grantees to discuss the procedures of the festival. In this festival, *Baratani* plays a leading role in the different phases of the festival (Kakati, 2024).

7.2.5 Household worship: The married daughter who takes matrilocal residence after marriage and who is responsible for household worship is called a *Hari konwari*. Again, in the Tiwa community each clan has a *Hari Konwari* to clean and perform worship in the *Barghar* (for worship and other social activities).

Besides the active participation in those festivals, ceremonies, Tiwa women are experts in weaving and they have knowledge of eri silk production and the art of dyeing. These traditional knowledge of silk production and dyeing of Tiwa community need to be preserved and scientifically transmitted to future generation. So, it is clear that in different festivals, rituals, ceremonies observed in the Tiwa community, women plays a leading role and women carries the traditional knowledge to future generation also.

Following initiatives need to be taken for indigenous knowledge transmission for future generation: (Marrie AM, 2019).

1. **Host regional meetings on indigenous women and traditional knowledge:**

Actions are needed to: i) increase Indigenous women's visibility and capacity, ii) recognize their role in traditional knowledge transmission, iii) enable their participation in decision-making processes related to environmental management at the local and national levels, and iv) support Indigenous women's knowledge exchange to address development challenges.

2. **Host regional meetings on youth and traditional knowledge:**

Action is needed to identify and design modalities that develop capacity of future leaders in advocacy, skill building and knowledge sharing.

3. **Convene an expert group meeting on traditional knowledge:**

Generation, transmission and protection to network the body of successful global experience and address emerging issues.

4. **Develop guidelines, tools and training courses on the use of digital technology and Indigenous Peoples.**

5. **Conduct research on autonomous Indigenous territories and Indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCAs) and their impact on protecting, transmitting and generating traditional knowledge.**

6. **Study on innovative methodologies for revitalizing native languages among youth.**

VIII. Conclusion:

The indigenous knowledge and skills held by women often differ from those held by men, affecting patterns of access, use, and control, while resulting in different perceptions and priorities for the innovation and use of Indigenous Knowledge (IK). It also impacts the way in which IK is disseminated, documented, and passed on to future generation. (Khan Wallace & Pidatala, 2003). It has become important to examine how rituals and festivals continue to preserve Tiwa heritage within the broader Indian knowledge framework, which encompasses both indigenous knowledge systems and more modern, institutionalized forms of learning. In case of participation and involvement in different community-based rituals, festivals, ceremonies, Tiwa women enjoy a better status. According to Aubel (2006), senior women or grandmothers are the managers of indigenous knowledge system which is related to the development, care and well-being of the women and children. So, in Tiwa society also it is seen that senior women are respected in various social ceremonies and through their active involvement community-based traditional knowledge has been transmitted to younger generation since the past.

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