

## ROLE OF WOMEN AND TRIBES IN SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study is to investigate the significant contributions that women and indigenous communities play in advancing social and environmental sustainability. Women, in their capacity as nurturers of homes and communities, possess a distinct set of knowledge and abilities that contribute to the advancement of sustainable development and conservation initiatives. It is vital to empower them by providing them with knowledge, access to resources, and decision-making responsibilities in order to maximise their potential as agents of change. In a similar manner, indigenous communities have traditionally occupied and protected ecologically vital locations. They are in possession of traditional knowledge systems that provide essential insights into the protection of biodiversity and sustainable land management. It is essential to respect indigenous peoples' rights to land and self-determination in order to cultivate partnerships that give priority to the wisdom of local communities and the diversity of cultural backgrounds in sustainability programmes. In order for communities to develop more inclusive and resilient routes towards a sustainable future, it is necessary to acknowledge and amplify the voices and leadership of indigenous tribes and women. The purpose of this article is to highlight the significance of working together and being inclusive in order to harness the contributions of many groups in order to address urgent environmental concerns while maintaining values of justice and equality.*

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**Keywords:** Women, Tribes, Environmental.

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### Introduction

In recent decades, the discussion surrounding social and environmental sustainability has acquired major traction all over the world. This is due to the fact that societies are struggling to deal with the difficulties of climate change, the depletion of resources, and imbalances in socioeconomic conditions. Within the context of this discussion, the roles that women and indigenous tribes play have emerged as key pillars in the process of creating economic and social sustainability. Due to the fact that women and indigenous tribes both hold distinctive knowledge systems, beliefs, and practices that are intricately connected with the natural environment, their contributions are very necessary in order to achieve sustainability.

In the context of attempts to achieve sustainable development, women have been recognised for a long time as crucial agents of change. Women have a variety of responsibilities across a wide range of situations and cultures, including that of carers of homes, guardians of natural resources, and drivers of communal well-being. As a result of their profound links to the surroundings in which they live, as well as their tenacity and inventiveness, they are in a position to play a crucial role in the promotion of

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environmental conservation and sustainable livelihood initiatives. In addition, empowering women by providing them with opportunity to make decisions, access to resources, and knowledge not only improves their personal socioeconomic situation, but it also has a wider range of positive effects on families, communities, and ecosystems.

In a similar vein, indigenous communities have traditionally lived and protected some of the most environmentally significant locations in the globe. Their traditional knowledge systems, which have been handed down from generation to generation, provide vital insights into the protection of biodiversity, techniques for climate adaptation, and sustainable land management. It is possible for societies to utilize indigenous knowledge in order to address urgent environmental issues while also supporting ideals of justice and fairness if they preserve indigenous territory and respect the rights of indigenous people to self-determination. In addition, partnerships between indigenous communities and external stakeholders have the potential to generate creative approaches to sustainable development that put an emphasis on the preservation of ecological integrity, cultural variety, and indigenous knowledge.

We look into the various ways in which women and indigenous tribes contribute to the preservation of natural resources, the promotion of environmentally friendly practices, and the advancement of social fairness in this investigation of the role that women and indigenous tribes play in the social and environmental sustainability of the world. In order to create routes that are more inclusive and resilient in the direction of a sustainable future for everyone, we must first acknowledge and elevate the voices, experiences, and leadership of those individuals.

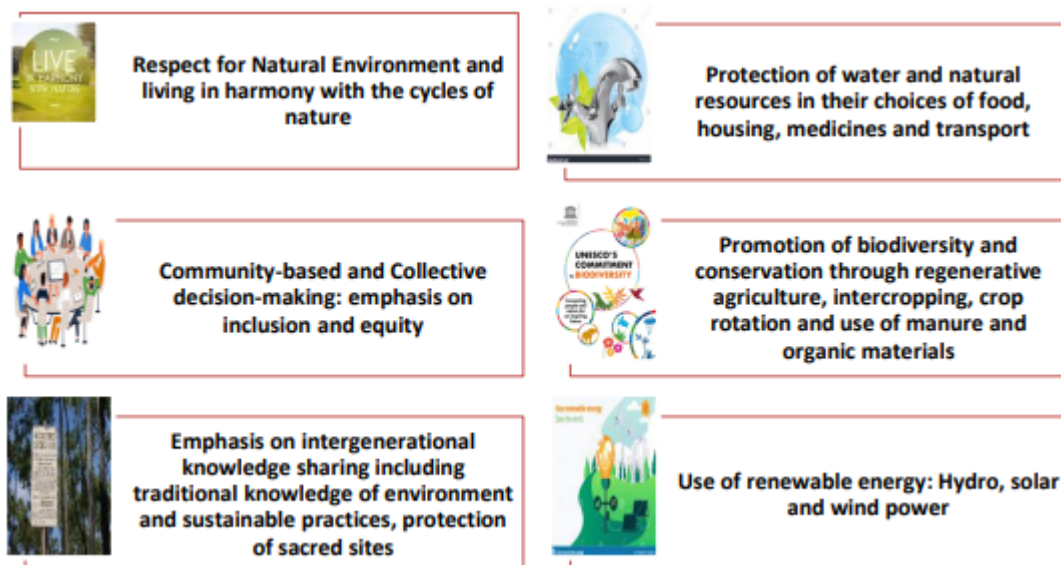
### **Role of Tribal Women**

Traditional tribal tribes place a heavy emphasis on the contributions of women. Women make up around half of the population, although they have a far more prominent role in tribal communities than in other social groupings. This is because they work more, and the family's finances and management rely on them. The economic roles of women remained significant in tribal societies even after industrialization and commercialization had engulfed them. The gathering of small forest crops is mostly done by women and children. Two issues that are highly valued on the global stage are environmental preservation and sustainable development. It is within this context that ecofeminism should be examined. Among the early advocates in the US, Sherry Ortner highlighted how women's interests are more closely tied to the natural world, while men's are more closely tied to cultural norms and values. Ecofeminism holds that (a) women and the environment are inseparable, (b) women are reliant on nature due to their specific responsibilities, and (c) women have a broader perspective on the value of natural resources. Ecofeminism stresses the importance of considering gender, culture, and the environment as a whole. It would be appropriate to have a development strategy that considers both the needs of women and the environment. To ensure that their families and communities have enough to eat, women must ensure that natural resources are used and managed properly. Women have a vital role in ensuring the long-term health of our ecosystems as consumers, producers, educators, and caretakers for their families. Consequently, people's health and quality of life are negatively affected by environmental degradation, especially young women and girls. The effectiveness of a policy in achieving its objective of conserving natural resources depends on the participation of women in all programming and policy making processes. The environmental hazards that tribal habitations throughout the world are facing are mostly caused by the government's failure to implement necessary protections in development projects and by careless, chaotic, and misguided development plans. The ecological equilibrium is disrupted by practically every development activity that has an effect on the environment. Due to extensive tree cutting, tribal communities no longer have access to fuel, food, greenery, and forest produce—all of which are vital to tribal economies. A people-centered approach is essential in the current development context, as is the assurance of environmental preservation and the promotion of sustainable development. Capacity building and empowerment within the context of ecological development may increase tribal women's involvement in environmental preservation, conservation, and movements for ecological change. The reason behind this is that these pursuits are spearheaded by indigenous women. Women of Native American Descent and the Woodlands Forests have been home to indigenous peoples for aeons, and they've used them for farming and gathering non-timber forest products. In spite of comprising just 33.6% of the country's landmass, 187 tribal districts are home to 65.04 percent of India's total forest cover and 63% of its dense forests, according to the 2003 Forest Survey of India Report. More than 67% of the land area in the 58 districts is covered by forest cover, with 51 of those districts being tribal districts. A net gain of 321,100 hectares in forest cover was seen in tribal districts between 2001 and 2003, demonstrating the strong symbiotic relationship between tribal people and forests and the leadership role of tribal people in conservation efforts.

Women in indigenous societies not only share more responsibility but also have a bigger voice in family-related decisions than their non-indigenous counterparts. Their close relationship with the forests provides them with water, fuel, and essential items like edible fruits, tubers, flowers, vegetables, and berries. They also rely on the forests for drinking water and preparing food. Even tiny quantities of forest goods have a major impact on the indigenous people's economy. This resource generates around 70% of the total income for most indigenous households, and its collection and sale is a substantial contributor to that income. There are a plethora of varieties that are categorised, including tannin plants, natural gums, resins, and balsams, as well as plants and seeds used in fragrance and medicine, and tendu leaves. Tannins are extracted from plants. Woods also have other places to find firewood. There is a stronger bond between women and woods since women are traditionally the ones who are expected to fetch firewood. Since indigenous women's lives are intertwined with the woods and they rely on the forest for the natural resources it offers, their dependence on forests is profound and inherent.

### How Tribal Lifestyle Sustains Development

Within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were formulated in 1995 by the United Nations. These objectives were meant to be accomplished on a global scale. In addition to alleviating poverty and suffering, these initiatives aim to boost economic growth. Furthermore, they work towards reducing inequality while simultaneously protecting our forests and seas, reducing the effects of climate change, and improving educational and health outcomes. We can learn a lot from the indigenous peoples' experiences that can help us achieve this fragile and challenging balance. Figure 2 provides a brief overview of the ways in which indigenous methods of existence aid in environmental preservation.



**Fig. 1: The indigenous way of life contributes to sustainability in a variety of ways**

### Ethical Environmental Movements Started by Native Americans

The contemporary phenomenon of deforestation ranks high among the most pressing environmental issues demanding prompt action. When this problem was brought to the notice of the women of Odisha's Khandmal area, they wasted no time getting innovative. The women of this tribe bring in most of the money for the family. The state government has not recognised them as farmers, even though they are actively involved in farming. Because of this, women can't take advantage of the benefits that males have. The ladies of this tribe have taken up millet growing as their main employment since it yields profits in two ways. Two advantages accrue from this: first, it is successful and economical, and second, it is eco-friendly. Legend has it that the Garasia people of Rajasthan, namely the Sirohi region, are the most knowledgeable about ethno medicinal plants. As sacred groves for their folk deities, the tribeswomen have cleared small sections of their forest to cultivate. This is being done in order to preserve and safeguard it. Many indigenous women in Himachal Pradesh spend the summer planting barley and buckwheat so that they may provide for their families. After the crop is harvested, cattle are

allowed to graze on the fields. This helps to prepare the fields for the next crop. The women of the Bhotia tribe, who live in this state, also cultivate medicinal plants. Seasonal farming describes this style of farming, while transhumance describes how they use their fields as pastures. When it comes to tribal communities, women have always had the upper hand. Since they are the ones bringing in the most money, it is their responsibility to decide how the family will spend their money. The most popular tactic employed by women is to link religious principles to various pursuits; this leads to less deforestation and animal slaughter in the end. Some examples of creatures that are considered sacred are tigers, sparrows, and pangolins, all of which are illegal to kill. The women of the Adi tribes fear that cutting down banyan trees will cause calamities like death and famine, hence cutting them down is prohibited in Arunachal Pradesh. The women of Arunachal Pradesh have done great work in protecting a wide range of flora and fauna. The native inhabitants of Nagaland are called Nagas. Although the people who dwell in these many tribal territories have a common culture and ancestral lineage, they speak a wide variety of languages. In contrast to women from other tribes, who work outside the house and in the fields, the women of this one do not get any credit for what they do. Traditional ecological knowledge is greatly aided by the immense amounts of experience that Naga women have gained through direct contact with nature. In contrast to the 44% of men who show interest in farming and related fields, more than 66% of women actually participate in these pursuits. The people there are fiercely committed to protecting the natural resources that sustain their way of life.



It is the women of the Naga tribe that are mostly responsible for the propagation and maintenance of the local plant and vegetable varieties inside their communities. They take part in a community-run seed exchange system, which adds to the rarity of the crop. They are able to strengthen their bonds with one another through this curriculum. No matter what, Naga women will only take what is absolutely essential from nature; they have zero tolerance for waste. When it comes to agricultural prospects and natural resources, tribal women in Jharkhand face significant barriers. But the women of Jharkhand's indigenous villages have been fighting tooth and nail to drive the timber barons out of the state. Their economy has benefited, and they have been able to help safeguard the environment in their own areas. This duty has been assumed by the women of the Munda tribe in Jharkhand with the aim of driving out the invaders who threaten to cut down their trees and the forest they inhabit.

### **Role of Women in Conservation of Environment**

Beyond 70% of India's overall population resides in rural regions. Biomass is a vital resource as it provides the bulk of the energy that rural people need to survive. The availability of water, an essential element for life, has a direct correlation to biomass. The biomass-based subsistence economy is mostly uncommercialized. Most people find work in the biomass industry, which includes both production and processing of biomass, as well as in agriculture, forestry, small-scale forest products, and traditional village crafts. The destruction of some biomass through deforestation and environmental degradation is an inevitable consequence of development's imperatives. Despite the fact that women have long been credited with providing for basic needs like water, food, fuel, fodder, and habitat, they are never acknowledged for the work that goes into maintaining these systems throughout their lives. When women already confront a lot of obstacles in society, these environmental destructions just make things worse for them. The current paradigms of development are having a detrimental impact, and reversing this trend

will require finding a solution that restores the symbiotic interaction between communities, women, and natural resources. As far back as recorded history goes, women have been the ones most responsible for protecting biological diversity. Things like seed selection, multiplication, and conservation are still done by them today. The many ways in which rural and tribal women have preserved agrobiodiversity via their work on the farm are well-known. Unfortunately, there aren't enough crops to support the current food security methods. To fortify the basis of food security, it is crucial to include a great deal of the plant species and varieties that families in rural and tribal regions are currently growing. Managing the non-monetized biomass-based subsistence economy within the home, which encompasses resources such as firewood, cow dung, agricultural waste, organic manure, and similar materials, has traditionally fallen on women. Conversely, males often desecrate natural areas for financial gain, even if it means interfering with their own families' ability to gather fuel and food (e.g., by selling wood and herbs). The problem is that women do more than men when it comes to making decisions about day-to-day operations on family farms, and they do it unpaid. Due to population pressure, male migration has increased, putting more work on women's shoulders. All of this points to the idea that women should be expected to perform the heavy lifting around the house and in the fields. In parts of the world that are still developing, women are seen as the main users of land, forests, and water for food, fuel, and fodder use. While it's true that women in these countries can't legally own farms and property on their own, it's equally true that they toil away in the fields to support their families. They will learn more about the land, trees, and plants if they are responsible for this task, and they will be less likely to abuse these resources. Many men still abandon farming for city jobs, even if technological advancements have increased their involvement with the field. Consequently, a larger share of the agricultural labour is being performed by women. A new culture of environmentally conscious resource management is emerging among rural women because of their increased interaction with the land and other natural resources. As a result, we can be certain that the needs of subsequent generations will be adequately met. In addition to thinking about how to achieve enough agricultural output and human nutrition, women want to make sure they can get their hands on land. There is a subtle difference between men's and women's environmental values and perspectives. Protecting and improving nature's capabilities, maintaining agricultural areas, and caring for the environment and nature's future seem to be more important to women than to males. Research shows that women care about environmental issues, and their level of concern for natural resources is an indicator of it. At its foundation, ecofeminism opposes the oppression and exploitation of women, low-income people, and the environment. Ecofeminism is a way of looking at environmental issues from a feminist and female perspective. At the moment, women all around the world are fighting concerning trends, but they are also working together to make a difference. Not only do women have the right to be involved in environmental issues, but they also have distinct connections to the environment, with their own unique set of demands, duties, and understanding of natural resources, which has been noted by many. On a global and national scale, this has been made possible by establishing non-governmental groups. This is why females are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of pollution, deforestation, and other forms of environmental degradation than men. Environmental issues disproportionately affect women, which is not unexpected given that they are often the ones who feel the effects firsthand. Research has shown that pesticides and chemicals can affect human health in a direct way. The United Nations Chronicle reports that scientists have linked the chemical DDT and its byproduct DDE to an increased risk of breast cancer. Furthermore, a World Health Organisation research found that pesticide exposure increases the risk of abortion for pregnant women. Women often feel more responsible for environmental concerns after going through health problems like these. Because of the damage that has come from men's dominance over women and all the money that women have spent on environmental protection, many think that women would do a better job than men if they were in charge of protecting the planet. Although there is no evidence to back this claim, current events have shown that women are more vulnerable to earth-related problems. They have come up with their own set of principles when it comes to environmental issues. One probable explanation is that people's experiences in nature shape their views on environmental issues. Trees and plants that are considered holistic include peepal, tulsi, awala, and bargad. Since the beginning of time, people have always seen women and the natural world as inferior, which reflects the strong bond between the two.

The government has pushed for an empowering approach that centres on expanding access to education and literacy programmes, building credit, creating jobs, and increasing income. While it's true that low-income women still face a lot of injustice, the government has been actively working to change that through a number of empowerment and development initiatives. These approaches aim to empower women by raising their self-esteem, illuminating their potential, and encouraging them to take an active role in their own growth. Even if the Indian government is working towards a sustainable and

environmentally responsible quality of life, there are still numerous problems that require fixing. Conversely, India's female population is actively contributing to environmental conservation efforts. Because women in our country have lived through different things, they bring a unique perspective to the table when talking about environmental issues. Because of their unique life experiences, low-income women in our country provide a fresh perspective to environmental discussions. Women in poverty don't see things in silos; rather, they take a broad, holistic picture of the issues they face. They understand very well that environmental concerns and economic growth are not incompatible. Their life experiences have taught them the importance of paying close attention to the soil, water, and plants that are vital to their survival. The degradation of the environment affects both the biosphere and the social sphere.

It is critical to enhance these domains nationwide because women have inherent abilities that are underutilised in management roles, and because women are also needed in entrepreneurship, development, educational and vocational training in various fields, communication, creativity, innovation, quality control, inventory, and production management. To reach this objective, we must empower women and channel their resources so that they can reach their maximum potential. Because of this, they will be able to fully participate in society as equals. Furthermore, all agricultural commodities have opportunities for value addition throughout the post-harvest phase. In developing countries, the staple crop is often sold unprocessed and unvalued. The customer and the producer both lose out when harvesting and processing methods aren't compatible. The demand for foods that have been treated or partially processed is also on the rise. Furthermore, training and the development of entrepreneurial skills would greatly benefit this sector, especially when it comes to addressing vitamin deficiencies in people's diets. More and more people are of the opinion that biotechnology's potential to empower women is crucial to the world's continued rapid technological development, which is largely attributable to scientists' and technologists' efforts. Remembering this and thinking about the possibilities of biotechnology, the Department of Biotechnology has been running programmes since 1998 to help women and people living in rural areas become more self-sufficient by providing them with skills to earn more money. The objective of the developed curriculum is to teach human resources how to produce and sell products in the market, as well as how to absorb and use the technology that will be used by them. Therefore, the capacity to market one's wares has long been considered a crucial trait. Training in entrepreneurship is also part of the strategy, with the hope that it would inspire young women and girls in rural areas to start their own enterprises and provide for their families. Managing managerial aspects, particularly financial management, has received enough attention throughout the establishment of these projects. The Department mainly funded projects in three areas: field demonstration, extension-oriented activities, and the development of entrepreneurs in research and development programmes and established biotechnologies that targeted women's unique challenges. Historically, men have looked at the environment through the lens of a commodity that can be used to make money, while women have seen it through the lens of a resource that can be used to satisfy their most basic needs. One example is how women in rural India collect fallen branches for use as firewood after a storm. Instead of chopping down live trees, this is done. African, Asian, and Latin American women learn a lot about the land, soil, water, and other parts of the environment via their work as farmers, which helps them feed their families. Deforestation and other environmental changes disproportionately affect women in these areas, making their lives difficult unless they find ways to cope.

### **Conclusion**

Achieving social and environmental sustainability would not have been feasible without the efforts of indigenous peoples and women. They are incredibly well-equipped to tackle the sustainability challenges of the present because of their strong ties to the land, traditional knowledge systems, and community-centered values. As housewives and community caretakers, women provide unique perspectives and skills to the discussion of sustainable development. When women are given the chance to be a part of decision-making, have access to resources, and get an education, communities may tap into their power as change agents to protect the environment and achieve social justice. Similarly, indigenous peoples have a treasure trove of traditional wisdom that has helped keep ecosystems healthy for generations. Partnerships that value local knowledge and cultural diversity in sustainability initiatives are formed, which is good for both the preservation of biodiversity-rich areas and the development of such programmes. One way to achieve both of these aims is to honour indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination and land. If we want to create a more eco-friendly future, we must acknowledge the importance of inclusivity and collaboration. First, we must recognise the vital roles played by women and indigenous tribes in sustainability if we are to build routes that are considerate of the interdependence of humans, the planet, and riches. To sum up, achieving environmental sustainability in the long run

requires a focus on women's and indigenous peoples' empowerment, which is a matter of social justice. I feel the need to stress how critical this matter is. Recognising and highlighting their accomplishments will allow us to build more resilient and egalitarian communities for future generations.

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