

'Earth's Green Ambassadors and the drivers of Green Growth'

Rethinking Tribal Development

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We may perceive tribal communities as 'backward,' assuming they lack modern education and intellect, and even debate their need for development. However, the reality is that tribal groups serve as the cornerstones and foundational pillars of sustainable development. Their unique and inherent knowledge manifests in everything they do, from crafting items with leaves and straws to practicing organic farming and creating seed banks. Their intricate crafts, pottery, artistic expressions in wall paintings and body tattoos, preparation of 'handia' and 'taddi,' and their commitment to environmental protection—all showcase a distinct amalgamation of tribal science, scientific knowledge, rich culture, and heritage. This fusion forms the basis of a sustainable way of life, creating assets and avenues for others. They are, truly, Earth's Green Ambassadors and the drivers of 'Green Growth.'

The contribution of tribal communities to increasing 'Green Wealth' by utilizing 'Green Capital' with

extraordinary knowledge and care is unique. Their diversity is not a sign of underdevelopment but a source of strength. Unfortunately, our ignorance about tribal diversities often prevents us from recognizing their practices as forms of development.

When discussing sustainable growth and tribal development, we frequently overlook crucial questions such as:

- What is the true meaning of tribal development?
- What are the perspectives of tribal communities towards development?
- What does real development look like for tribal people?
- Who defines the meaning of development, and for whom?
- Are economic indicators the sole measure of progress and development? Should development always follow the Trickle-Down Theory?

We must move beyond our ignorance and recognize the valuable

lessons the tribal communities offer for sustainable growth and development. Addressing unexplored questions related to tribal development is essential. Similar to Industrialization and Globalization, Tribalization can be a crucial force for growth and development.

Tribal communities are the foundation of Science, Literature, Economics, Sociology, Technology, and even Modernity. Highlighting tribal development theories, methods, and processes for achieving real development is necessary for a sustainable future. The fact is that those we label as Tribals, Adivasis, Primitives, Aborigines, or Janajatis are, in fact, the real mentors of development—individuals we follow but often forget to acknowledge. Therefore, every time we discuss tribal development, we expose our limited understanding of progress and sustainable growth. Instead of imposing external models, we must learn from their inherent understanding of living in harmony with nature and empower them to share their knowledge for a truly shared future.

Integrating Tribal Wisdom: A Symbiotic Approach to Sustainable Development Goals

Seventeen global goals have been established to guide the pursuit of sustainable development by 2030, and among them, Goal 12, “Responsible Consumption and Production,” emerges as a crucial focal point. This goal underscores the importance of wise resource management, minimizing waste, and

reducing harm to the environment. Indigenous communities, often living in close proximity to nature, serve as exemplars of such mindful practices.

Their traditional knowledge and way of life prioritize taking only what is necessary, respecting natural limits, and fostering a harmonious relationship with the environment. Unlike modern societies fixated on limitless growth, indigenous communities comprehend that overconsumption and unsustainable practices lead to destruction. They avoid overexploitation, hoarding, or trading resources for personal gain at the expense of others or the future. Their connection with nature is deeply symbolic, woven into their traditions and practices, viewing themselves as integral parts of the ecosystem.

This wisdom on sustainability and living within limits is precisely what the world needs to avert the destructive consequences of overconsumption and resource depletion. This prompts a critical question: Who truly needs development? Perhaps not the tribal communities who are already living in harmony with the planet, but it is our thinking and actions that need to evolve, embracing the sustainable values and practices demonstrated by indigenous people for millennia.

Examining Tribal Lifestyles and Sustainable Development Goals through a symbiotic relationship perspective reveals an opportunity for integrating tribal wisdom into the discourse surrounding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The SDGs, designed to address pressing global challenges and promote sustainable development across various dimensions of human life, can benefit from the deep connection tribal communities have with the natural world.

Tribal communities, with their sustainable lifestyles, offer valuable lessons for scientists and policymakers grappling with current environmental challenges. Their extensive experience in living in harmony with nature has given them a profound understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence between humans and the environment. Four major areas that warrant consideration in this context are:

- i) Preservation of Biodiversity,
- ii) Community Empowerment and Inclusivity,
- iii) Cultural Diversity and Sustainable Tourism, and
- iv) Climate Change Mitigation.

Governments and policymakers must recognize the invaluable role that tribal communities play in protecting and preserving forest resources. Preserving tribal knowledge and incorporating their sustainable practices will be instrumental in promoting environmental sustainability and biodiversity conservation. By embracing the diversity of human experiences, we can forge a path towards achieving the SDGs that respects and integrates the wisdom of tribal societies into the broader framework of sustainable development.

Empowering Tribal: The Path to Genuine Progress

Tribal communities play a distinctive role in generating “green wealth” through their resourceful use of nature’s “capital.” However, they often face exploitation, where their knowledge and products are appropriated for profit. It is crucial to acknowledge and respect their ancestral science and discoveries, ensuring they reap the rewards of their contributions. Using tribal heritage for development projects without genuinely considering the needs of tribal communities is a misguided approach. True development requires understanding and addressing their specific needs.

While success stories like the Kotia (Koraput, Odisha) strawberry harvest are promising, it’s essential to question who ultimately benefits from such successes. Were fair prices paid to hardworking tribal farmers? In instances like buying pineapples from tribal farmers at low rates and selling them in the market at four-to-five times higher than the original price, the disparity raises concerns. Pineapple lovers should be aware of the significant price difference between what tribal farmers receive and what they pay. The ongoing struggle for fair compensation emphasizes the necessity for a transparent and equitable marketplace. Sustainable progress goes beyond flashy headlines, demanding fair practices that empower and uplift tribal communities. Unfortunately, the reality often contradicts these ideals, as developed communities exploit tribal labor under the guise of development. Unfair compensation

perpetuates a cycle of exploitation, rooted in prejudiced assumptions about the basic needs of tribal people.

In Koraput (Odisha), over 33 different native millet varieties found in tribal areas outshine modern hybrids in terms of nutrition. The Telugu, Bada, and Dashera variety, for instance, boasts higher levels of protein, fiber, flavonoids, and antioxidants compared to commercial versions. Tribal farming practices, relying on indigenous wisdom and natural methods, demonstrate sophistication and sustainability without harsh chemicals. These “green ambassadors” have mastered organic farming for generations, inspiring the entire planet with their sustainable practices. Despite this, their contributions are often overlooked, and their organic products are repackaged as generic “Tribal Products,” devoid of true recognition. Scientists and businesses capitalize on their wisdom, leaving the holders of that knowledge marginalized.

Labeling something as “tribal” should not be a mere marketing tool but a symbol of respect and collaboration. Claiming their knowledge as our own and calling it development is disingenuous. Genuine progress involves empowering tribal communities, recognizing their expertise, and fostering partnerships for a more sustainable future where tribal wisdom informs modern practices, and benefits circulate back to the source.

Unveiling the Wisdom: Tribal Practices Shaping Modern Innovation

Have you ever witnessed a tribal mother working outdoors with her baby securely strapped to her back? Wrapped in a cloth or rug, the child peacefully swings with her movements, creating a safe haven even amidst dust, mud, forests, or cityscapes. What might seem as hardship to city dwellers hides generations of accumulated wisdom. Modern medical science is now catching up with what tribal mothers have known for centuries. Research confirms that carrying a baby on the back or chest promotes healthy development for both mother and child, supporting sleep, regulating heart rate, and fostering overall well-being. While modern baby carriers mimic these traditional methods, it's crucial to acknowledge the source of inspiration and appreciate the original knowledge within tribal communities.

Even in scorching 40/45°C weather, leaving the comfort of an air-conditioned house seems unbearable. However, stepping into a tribal mud house during such heat reveals surprising coolness. Acting like a natural thermos, these houses stay cool in summer and warm in winter, preventing food spoilage and curdling of milk. Big companies now capitalize on this tribal civil engineering, offering trendy “mud houses” and tree houses amidst the city chaos. Yet, they imitate the ingenuity of indigenous communities while ignoring the tribal scientists behind the original knowledge.

City life is evolving, with people drawn to gated communities for security and shared amenities, driving up apartment

prices. However, the idea of gated living is not a new invention; it has been a part of tribal communities for generations. Tribal wisdom has guided them to live in secure, enclosed spaces, enjoying shared resources and amenities. Despite this obvious inspiration, “developed” societies often overlook tribal knowledge, engaging in endless discussions about “developing” tribal counterparts. It’s time to re-evaluate priorities, recognizing the richness of tribal knowledge and learning from them instead of imposing our own ideas of “development.”

Unveiling the Roots: Tribal Influence on Modern Art and Fashion

Tribal influence has undeniably left an indelible mark on the realm of modern art and fashion, offering a rich tapestry of inspiration that transcends cultural boundaries. The vibrant and intricate patterns, symbols, and motifs originating from various indigenous communities around the world have found a compelling resonance in contemporary artistic expressions and fashion trends. From the runways of haute couture to urban street styles, the influence of tribal art is pervasive, breathing new life into design aesthetics. Bold geometric shapes, earthy color palettes, and traditional handcrafted techniques are now seamlessly integrated into modern fashion, creating a fusion that celebrates both the avant-garde and the ancestral.

What makes tribal influence particularly captivating is its ability to infuse meaning and authenticity into modern

creations. Many contemporary designers and artists draw upon the cultural depth embedded in tribal art, incorporating symbols that carry profound significance for indigenous communities. Beyond aesthetics, the adoption of tribal elements in modern art and fashion also serves as a bridge between different worlds, fostering cross-cultural appreciation and understanding. This symbiotic relationship between tradition and innovation not only revitalizes ancient artistic traditions but also challenges the mainstream to move beyond cultural appropriation, encouraging a more respectful and collaborative approach to the integration of tribal influences into the global artistic narrative.

Today’s youth proudly showcase trendy painted bodies, adorned with tattoos and piercings, often experimenting with ear and nose ornaments, long hair, and embracing hipster styles. But have you ever wondered about the true origin of these fashionable trends? The answer is: Tribal communities! For centuries, they have engaged in these practices, not merely for jewelry or caste identification, but as profound expressions of their beliefs and individuality. For instance, some tribes perceive belly button piercings as a preventive measure against complications, boosting immunity through what they view as acupuncture, enhancing blood circulation. These tattoos and piercings, blending belief and tradition, carry sociological and medicinal significance for tribal communities. Invented with a unique fusion of beliefs and superstitions, these body art practices possess traditional cultural and

scientific attitudes among tribal people. Unfortunately, in the pursuit of modern style and knowledge, we often imitate these practices without acknowledging the rich cultural and scientific heritage of the tribal communities associated with them.

Nurturing Bonds: Tradition and Hospitality in Tribal Culture

In the intricate tapestry of tribal culture, the celebration of life's significant moments, particularly the arrival of a girl into the family, stands out as a testament to their unique perspectives and traditions. Unlike some communities burdened by gender biases, many tribal groups welcome the birth of a girl with open arms, rejecting the concept of dowry that prevails in certain societies. Instead, the groom embraces his bride as Lakshmi, a symbol of fortune and happiness, marking the beginning of a union celebrated with genuine joy and cultural richness. The tradition extends beyond the matrimonial union, as the groom's family expresses gratitude to the bride's father, exemplifying a deep sense of respect and appreciation. This practice not only reflects the absence of dowry-related pressures but also underscores the well-developed social systems within tribal communities.

In stark contrast to the modern struggle with hospitality, where guests might be seen as inconveniences in the age of constant connectivity and technology, tribal communities welcome guests with profound reverence. In their eyes, every guest is revered like Lord Rama, and every host embodies the warmth and generosity of Mother Sabari. This deep-rooted

relationship, characterized by respect and hospitality, lies at the core of tribal culture, fortifying their social fabric. Words fall short in capturing the essence of this bond, serving as a testament to the enduring values that bind tribal communities together.

Conclusion

Genuine development for aquatic life doesn't involve confining them to ornate aquariums, just as true progress for birds isn't achieved by trapping them in gilded cages. Similarly, aiding the less fortunate extends beyond mere handouts—it's about imparting the skills and knowledge needed for self-sufficiency, akin to teaching someone to fish rather than offering a one-time meal. Authentic development entails a nuanced understanding of individual needs, considering context and time, and providing the tools for a sustainable future. It isn't about imposing solutions but cultivating independence and resilience. Instead of coercing indigenous communities into adopting external development models, the focus should be on empowering them to thrive on their own terms, preserving their languages, settlements, and traditions. Indigenous communities harbor invaluable knowledge and cultural practices often dismissed as antiquated; it's time to move past biases and appreciate the wisdom in their unique ways of life. Emphasizing true tribal development necessitates thorough observation, recording tribal perspectives, and implementing inclusive programs that prioritize their rich tapestry, unleashing their immense potential for building a sustainable future.

Recognizing the symbiotic relationship between indigenous communities and their environments, policies should champion conservation practices, ethical resource utilization, and environmentally friendly development strategies. Preserving cultural practices, languages, and traditional knowledge becomes paramount in indigenous politics, requiring policies that reinforce identity against the pressures of modernization. Balancing modern technologies, education, and economic practices with the preservation of indigenous values ensures holistic development that respects unique community identities. Education plays a pivotal role, empowering indigenous youth with programs blending traditional and contemporary knowledge. Political strategies must prioritize economic empowerment in line with indigenous values, promoting sustainable livelihoods and community-based enterprises. Bottom-up development models, community engagement, and advocacy for legal frameworks protecting indigenous rights are essential components. Engaging in global forums amplifies indigenous voices, while recognizing intergenerational wisdom ensures the continuity of cultural practices and ecological understanding. The delicate

balance between tradition and modernity, centered around conservation, cultural preservation, and strategic encounters with modernity, paves the way for sustainable development, contributing to a more inclusive, diverse global landscape. Recognizing and honoring tribal life is therefore integral to building a culturally rich, and ecologically sustainable society.

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