

Course Title: Indigenous/Tribal Knowledge Systems

Course Type: Add-On Certificate Course

Target Group: Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Literature

Duration: 30 hours

Mode: Offline / Hybrid

Assessment: Reflection essays, presentations, fieldwork reports, and a final project

Aims:

This course aims to explore the richness and relevance of Indigenous and Tribal Knowledge Systems (ITKS) in India and globally. It seeks to valorize oral traditions, ecological knowledge, cultural practices, and epistemologies of indigenous communities while promoting critical engagement with issues of marginalization, sustainability, and cultural continuity.

Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Understand the concept and scope of Indigenous Knowledge Systems.
 2. Identify and analyze various forms of tribal knowledge – oral, ecological, medicinal, spiritual, and artistic.
 3. Examine the socio-cultural and historical significance of ITKS.
 4. Explore the intersections between tribal knowledge, identity, and resistance.
 5. Understand threats to Indigenous knowledge and efforts for preservation and integration.
 6. Apply interdisciplinary methods to document, interpret, and advocate for ITKS.
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Module Outline

Module 1: Foundations of Indigenous Knowledge

- What is Indigenous/Tribal Knowledge?

- Characteristics and Epistemology of ITKS
- Difference between Indigenous and Western Knowledge Paradigms
- Intergenerational Transmission and Oral Traditions

Activities:

- **Interactive Icebreaker:** "What Do You Know?" – Students list any tribal knowledge they are already aware of.
 - **Story Circle:** Sharing folk stories from tribal communities (Jharkhand, Northeast, Odisha, etc.)
 - **Reflection Writing:** "*Is Indigenous Knowledge Scientific?*" – Personal viewpoint essay (300–500 words)
 - Interactive lecture using indigenous proverbs and myths
 - Group discussion on "What counts as knowledge?"
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Module 2: Ecological and Environmental Knowledge

- Traditional Agricultural Practices (e.g., shifting cultivation, seed preservation)
- Water Management, Forest Knowledge, and Biodiversity Conservation
- Sacred Groves and Spiritual Ecology

• **Activities:**

- **Case Study Analysis:** Examine and present a tribal community's environmental practice (e.g., Baigas and forest conservation).
 - **Field Visit / Virtual Tour:** Sacred grove or eco-village (e.g., Simlipal Biosphere or Sunderban tribal settlements).
 - **Mapping Exercise:** Students draw a visual map of an imagined eco-friendly tribal village, showing sustainable practices.
 - Short film screening and reflection
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Module 3: Indigenous Medicine and Healing Systems

- Ethnobotany and Herbal Remedies
- Role of Shamans and Healers

- Interface with Ayurveda and Modern Science

- **Activities:**

- Guest session with a tribal healer/local ethnobotanist
 - Compilation of local medicinal plant uses
 - **Herb Walk (Campus-based):** Identify local plants with known medicinal uses. Document traditional remedies.
 - **Healer Interaction (Live or Recorded):** Q&A with a local tribal medicine practitioner.
 - **Creative Poster Making:** Indigenous healing vs. modern healthcare – Visual comparison.
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Module 4: Language, Arts, and Oral Histories

- Role of Language in Preserving Knowledge
- Indigenous Art Forms: Painting, Craft, Song, Dance
- Myths, Folktales, and Genealogies

- **Activities:**

- **Mini-Ethnography:** Interview a tribal artist (or watch a video) and write a short ethnographic reflection.
 - **Creative Workshop:** Students try their hand at Warli, Sohrai, Gond, or Paitkar painting styles.
 - **Group Performance:** Enactment of a tribal folktale or song (students can translate, adapt, and perform).
 - Fieldwork or virtual exhibition of tribal art
 - Student presentation of a documented folk narrative
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Module 5: Identity, Politics, and the Struggle for Recognition

- Colonial and Postcolonial Marginalization
- Land Rights and the Forest Rights Act (2006)
- Role of ITKS in Cultural Assertion and Resistance Movements

- **Activities:**

- **Debate:** “Tribal Displacement in the Name of Development: Inevitable or Avoidable?”
 - **Documentary Screening and Discussion:** Suggested: *India Untouched*, *Adivasi Lives Matter* series.
 - **Critical News Analysis:** Evaluate how tribal resistance is portrayed in mainstream vs. independent media.
 - Media analysis of tribal protests and rights movements
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Module 6: Preservation, Ethics, and Policy Interfaces

- UNESCO and ILO Conventions on Indigenous Rights
- Threats: Globalization, Climate Change, Cultural Appropriation
 - Role of Academia, NGOs, and Policy in Safeguarding ITKS

- **Activities:**

- **Simulation:** Role-play a tribal council meeting on a mining project – roles: elders, youth, NGO workers, state officials.
- **Write a Policy Brief:** Choose one issue (e.g., tribal language extinction) and suggest strategies.
- **Create a Digital Exhibit:** Students work in teams to build a simple online display (Google Slides/Padlet) showcasing tribal knowledge themes.
- Reflection essay on ethical fieldwork with tribal communities

Final Project Options (to be submitted by end of course)

- Photo essay/documentary on a local tribal community’s knowledge system
 - Interview-based report on a tribal artist, healer, or elder
 - Creative writing piece integrating tribal folklore (story/poem/play)
 - Academic reflection essay: “*Why Indigenous Knowledge Matters Today*”
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Suggested Readings:

1. Berkes, Fikret. *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management*
2. Gadgil, Madhav and Guha, Ramachandra. *This Fissured Land*
3. Xaxa, Virginius. *State, Society, and Tribes in India*
4. Devi, Mahasweta. *Imaginary Maps* (for literary representations)
5. Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*
6. Sen, Amartya. *The Argumentative Indian* (relevant essays)
7. Government of India. *Report of the High-Level Committee on Socio-Economic, Health and Educational Status of Tribal Communities of India* (Xaxa Committee Report, 2014)
8. Selected documentaries: *India's Hidden Forests, The Songs of the Little Road, Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World*