

THE FOREST AS UNIVERSITY: INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND ADIVASI INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Adivasi communities in India have sustained rich, structured bodies of knowledge for centuries. These systems cover everything from plant medicine and seasonal forecasting to land governance and visual cosmology. Yet formal education in India treats them as peripheral, if it acknowledges them at all. This article argues that Indigenous Knowledge Systems among Adivasi peoples are genuine intellectual traditions, not folklore or superstition. They encode ecological understanding, ethical frameworks, and historical memory with a depth and precision that merits serious academic attention. Drawing on examples from Gond, Santal, Munda, Dongria Kondh, and Baiga communities, the article examines how knowledge is produced, stored, and transmitted outside formal institutions. It traces how British colonial forest and land policies disrupted these systems, how resistance movements have reasserted their validity, and where Indigenous knowledge and modern science converge. The article closes with a call for bringing these systems into India's educational mainstream, on terms set by the communities themselves.

KEYWORDS: *Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Adivasi; Ecological knowledge; Oral tradition; Gond; Santal; Munda; Niyamgiri; Decolonial education; India.*

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