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PERFORMATIVE ARCHIVES: EMBODYING MEMORY, ENVIRONMENT, AND SPIRIT IN INDIA'S INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

Dr. Nidhi Vats [1]

[1] Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

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Corresponding Author
Nidhi Vats, nvats@english.du.ac.in

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ABSTRACT

In India, indigenous knowledge systems are complicated epistemic worlds that are difficult to translate into textual archives or codified information. This paper suggests that this kind of knowledge is preserved through embodied practices: ritual healing, martial movement, artisanal labour, ecological stewardship, and spirit-mediated communication, which serve as living archives. It uses several examples in the region to show how memory, body, environment, and cosmology are set up to encode ecological intelligence, historical memory, and ethical relationships with both the land and community. The research criticizes the mainstream epistemologies that favour textuality and scientism and shows how the colonial and postcolonial paradigm splintered indigenous knowledge. This paper suggests a pluralistic, practice-oriented model of knowledge, taking into account bodily, sensory, and environmental aspects by foregrounding embodiment as an epistemic situation and not as a metaphor. The paper methodologically shifts from a text-based approach to one that focuses on bodily, sensory, and environmental experiences in creating and sharing knowledge. Embodiment is viewed as an actual way of knowing (epistemology) where a person's memories, skills, and environmental awareness are combined. The approach encourages practitioners of indigenous knowledge to consider their practical methods as the main source of their knowledge systems and accepts these systems as valid epistemologies within contemporary India. It also illustrates how these "archives in motion" (memories, rituals, and the body performing) are not only epistemic sovereignty, but also provide valuable information for sustainable conservation, healthy policy, and a culturally sensitive environment.

Keywords: Indigenous Epistemologies, Embodied Knowledge, Ecological Thinking, Ritual and Cosmology, Decolonial Knowledge Frameworks

1. INTRODUCTION

In India, the systems of indigenous knowledge function in a thick meshwork of practice, memory, cosmology, and ecological interaction. Contrary to the textual and archival knowledge, which relies on the documentation and preservation of the knowledge (that remains inactive), indigenous knowledge is in circulation and is associated with the body, the environment, and daily rituals Batacharya and Wong (2018), 9. This renders such knowledge living, dynamic and always changing in response to social and ecological change. These systems include performances of personal and cultural pasts which encode intergenerational memory and moral connections with land and people Bissell and Haviland (2018), 18. A prime example of this would be the Bishnoi people of Rajasthan, who have maintained a sense of ecological stewardship based on the spiritual teachings of their 15th-century guru Jambheshwar, who taught them to protect both trees and animals, to the extent of sacrificing their own lives for the sake of trees. Thus, what was once considered to be

an abstract philosophy has become an infinitely deep experience, as evidenced by the infamous Khejarli massacre of 1730, where 363 Bishnoi made the choice to sacrifice themselves in order to protect Khejri trees, as evidenced in both local folklore and historical records Sinha (2017).

Though hegemonic academic and bureaucratic patterns determined by colonial epistemologies and, subsequently, strengthened by postcolonial state institutions, have favored textuality, rationalism, and scientific abstraction. Consequently, bodily, sensual and experiential knowledge achieved from traditional practices has been discriminated or disregarded on account of being superstitious, folklore or just a cultural by product Berkes (2012), 7. This paper challenges the epistemological presuppositions that inform such exclusions and presents a different approach, which is more practice-based and which considers embodiment, sensory perception and relations with the environment as a valid form of knowledge.

2. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AS "ARCHIVES IN MOTION"

The term archives in motion are used to describe an understanding that the body of knowledge in indigenous contexts is not always written but always practiced in the body through routines, movement and community involvement Carrin (2018), 9. Ritual healing, agricultural cycles, martial arts and communication through spirits are practices that are repeated, modified, adapted, and strengthened through generations and act as memory systems. These archives are mobile, sensitive to ecological variations, and densely related to social identity and cosmological world visions. The Eastern Indian *Chhau* martial dance incorporates foot patterns, breath control, and narrative gestures that are more than ornamental and include a vast amount of information Biswal (2025), 4, including the art of war, the natural environment of the area, and the history of a particular clan. When considered in the way it is being developed and passed down through kinesthetic memory, it is similar to the muscular memory theory; however, the Chhau martial dance is based on a collective cultural experience rather than an individual. This methodology has been well documented through many ethnographies related to folk art forms in India.

3. THE LIMITS OF TEXTUAL AND RATIONALIST EPISTEMOLOGIES

The hegemony of Western archival cultures, defined by written documents, scientific organization and commercial documentation, contributed to the definition of knowledge and its establishment in modern institutions. These paradigms put a distance between the mind and the body and between the reason and the cosmos, which causes marginalization of the indigenous epistemologies that do not fit into the text or empirical template. This generates the hierarchies of epistemology where the oral, sensory and ritual practices are inferior, even though they are complex and ecologically sophisticated. One of the most striking historical examples of marginalization is when the colonial British administration dismissed the traditional irrigation systems of India, such as guhls in the Himalayas or Johads in Rajasthan, which had existed for centuries based on community labour and oral tradition, in favour of massive engineering projects built on Western scientific models Rathi (2019), (3-4). When such imposed systems came into being, they caused the demise of local sustainable practices, just as described in the book *Water and the Culture of Dependency* by Vandana Shiva, where she discusses how the prioritization of textual knowledge over practical knowledge has been harmful.

4. TOWARDS AN EMBODIED AND ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper proposes a methodological re-orientation whereby the body, senses and the environment are considered central in the production and transmission of knowledge. The incorporation of embodiment is not presented here as a metaphor but as an epistemic that is centered by aligning it with knowledge where memory, skill and cosmological imagination are manifested Causevic et al. (2020), 7. The paper, by proposing a pluralistic and decolonial methodology to the figure of the indigenous as epistemic, which acknowledges the epistemic validity of indigenous systems in modern India, recommends foregrounding practices, as opposed to texts, as the main repositories of indigenous knowledge. For example, current recognition of yoga and Ayurveda as global practices is the result of their traditional transmission through an apprenticeship based on embodiment; this included physical demonstration of one's awareness of the subtle energies within the body (prana), the use of medicinal herbs, and the method of diagnosis of pulse reading (nadi pariksha) combined with direct sensory engagement and intuitive experience between guru and student rather than

exclusively through written texts such as the Charaka Samhita, which were used only as reference materials Elendu (2024).

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: EMBODIMENT AND KNOWLEDGE

To comprehend the knowledge systems of the indigenous people in India it is necessary to go beyond the text-based epistemology and into a framework that acknowledges the body, environment, memory, and cosmology as mutually constitutive sites of knowledge. The theory of embodied archives breaks the traditional division of intellect and practice, which is supported by colonial scholarship and contemporary bureaucratic institutions Chartrand (2023), 9. This framework focuses on how communities do and live their knowledge in their everyday gestures, rituals, ecological interactions and sensory involvement in the world rather than regarding knowledge as a stored object in a written form. In “Rudali,” Mahasweta Devi uses the professional mourners to illustrate how their 'embodied performances', or performances of grief, are more than just an expression of emotion; it is a systemised method of recording our social memory, the way a community heals itself, and an act of resistance against the written, static records of oppression. Nuzrath and Haneef (2022), 1829.

Phenomenological theorists, especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), maintain that the body is not a passive vessel but is an active medium by which human beings use to perceive, interpret, andregal understand reality (preface xxii). Information is based on embodied practice: touching the earth, watching the monsoon, moving in a ritual, or making a pot is not a technical act in itself, but it is the representation of memory, technique, and cosmological significance. The potters in Kutch, Gujarat have experience working with clay for generations, developing an "embodied" or physical understanding of the clay's moisture content and the properties of plasticity and elasticity. This experience allows the potter to form pots in complex shapes without having any written directions, rather through a physical relationship with the clay, while having memories of how to make pottery passed down to them through generations, as shown in many ethnographic films of Indian artisans. Such embodied practices in indigenous Indian situations are part of social persistence and environmental continuity

The scholars of environmental humanities (including Ingold (2011)) also emphasize a relational ontology, as human and non-humans, animals, plants, rivers, landscapes, and spirits of ancestors, are involved in the knowledge-making. The knowledge in this ontology is not just cognitive but ecological. It is developed through constant interaction with the environment, conditioned by seasonal cycles, habitual patterns and sensory sensitivity. An ideal example is the Dongria Kondh Tribe of Odisha, whose entire cultural environment and subsistence practices depend on the Niyamgiri Hills, which they view as a “living god” (Niyam Raja). Knowledge of medicinal plants, water sources, forest products, etc. are all interwoven within the physical and metaphysical relationship with the mountain that the tribe has developed over thousands of years and continues to demonstrate through passionate resistance to bauxite mining and their roles as environmental activists and anthropological subjects within social sciences (The Dongir Kondh)."

This paper considers indigenous practices as mobile archives by incorporating phenomenology, relational ontology, and decolonial theory. These archives are performed and not described; they are recalled in movement but not in written form, and maintained through ecological proximity and not in institutional preservation. The Santhal community's annual Sohrai Festival, which takes place during harvest season and honors cattle, is a perfect example of how this community expresses its cultural identity through mobile archives. Collective activities such as dance, song, and oral traditions about the past contribute to the ongoing process of recording and sharing their historical narratives, agricultural knowledge, and *Bandna* with the land and animals Behera and Kumar (2023), 594. These activities are constantly changing with the changes in the world's environment but maintain their core traditions. Anthropology is supported by the work of many anthropologists, including Marine Carrin.

This theoretical prism enables one to better appreciate the fact that indigenous communities have complex epistemic systems that are not necessarily documented in writing.

The following table aligns major theoretical traditions with the indigenous Indian practices and shows how the indigenous Indian practices are managed to invoke the epistemic condition of embodiment:

Table 1

Table 1 Conceptual Foundations of the Embodied Knowledge Framework

Theoretical Tradition	Core Idea	Relevance to Embodied Knowledge	Example from Indigenous Indian Context
Phenomenology Merleau-Ponty (1962)	The body is the primary medium of perception and knowledge.	Knowledge is enacted through movement, gesture, and sensory experience.	Martial practices like *Kalaripayattu* where bodily discipline transmits historical memory and skill.
Relational Ontology Ingold (2011)	Humans and non-humans mutually shape knowledge systems.	Knowledge emerges from ecological relations and environmental attunement.	Tribal ecological practices where planting cycles follow bird migrations, insect activity, or flowering patterns.
Decolonial Epistemology	Colonial modernity undervalues non-textual knowledge systems.	Embodied, oral, and ritual forms are seen as legitimate epistemic sites.	Ritual healing in Central India where chants, touch, and spiritual invocation act as diagnostic tools.
Practice-Based Transmission	Skills and memory are preserved through performance, repetition, and apprenticeship.	Knowledge is stored in the body and transmitted across generations through doing rather than writing.	Pottery, weaving, and metalwork traditions where techniques are taught through hands-on learning.

The next point to be made after this conceptual mapping is that the indigenous knowledge systems in India cannot be comprehended using one theoretical approach. Rather, they arise at the place of embodied perception, ecological interdependence and socio-spiritual practice. The table of traditions reveals that knowledge is not just a collection but is practiced and repeated in the day-to-day interactions with land, community and cosmology. It is the rhythmic body memory of martial arts, the sensitivity to the environment contained within the farming methods or the ritual movements of the healers, but these practices explain the way the body works as both a repository of knowledge, as a mediator of knowledge and a transmitter of knowledge i.e. inhabitant and scientific knowledge Ingold (2011), 155. This multidimensional framework enables us to perceive indigenous epistemology as dynamic archives where the meaning is constantly re-produced and break the privileged position of the textual and broadens our comprehension regarding the space and time in which it has been created Lee (2020), 42.

6. MEMORY, RITUAL, AND KINESTHETIC ARCHIVES

The knowledge of indigenous communities in India is preserved and transmitted in highly embodied modes of memory, namely in gestures, rhythms, performance, seasonal rites, and routines of the body which blur the boundaries between remembering, doing and becoming. Kinesthetic archives are performed by the moving body as opposed to written archives, which archive information in external objects Merleau-Ponty (1962). The encoded form of memory is stored in the form of the patterns of the muscles, sensory signals, location, and ritualized behavior that is passed down through generations.

Ritual practices provide one of the best illustrations of the functionalization of memory within bodily performance. An example is the Chhau martial dance of Eastern India, which does not merely tell local epics or tales of heroism: the footwork, breath management, leaps and patterns of choreography are not only transmitted across generations, but works as a "prehistory of contemporary represented in modern art" Brannigan (2023), 9. The movement in this case becomes a mnemonic tool- every gesture has a piece of historical and social memory. The archive is unable to record what is done by the body. Anthropological scholarship has consistently emphasized that Adivasi and Indigenous epistemologies in India are regionally specific and historically situated, shaped by distinct ecological settings, social formations, and colonial encounters rather than constituting a single unified epistemic world Elwin (1964), Xaxa (2019), Sundar (2016).

Similar examples of how ecological memory is performed, but not written, can be seen in agricultural rituals in the Himalayan and Northeastern regions. There are festivals like Losar, Mopin and Karam, which are directed by the sowing, harvesting, rainfall pattern, migration of birds and lunar phases. People notice minor environmental signals such as soil texture, insect behavior, and cloud movement, which inform them when to plant. The cues are not maintained in written materials but through rituals, songs, and dances done seasonally. The rituals act as ecological time keeping and thus the information about the biodiversity, soil health, and climatic cycles are still alive. The Moatso Festival, for the Ao Naga community in northeast India, indicates that planting is complete and is the beginning of a resting time for the

community. During this celebration, certain songs and dances depict the traditional farming of our ancestors, the changing of the seasons, and how we relied on the forest for our way of life. All the knowledge necessary for planting crops, recognizing good and bad insects, and knowing when it will rain is stored in the memories of our people Culture and Heritage: Moatsu Festival (2024). This memory will be brought out in dance and song each year as a form of an ever-evolving record of all life forms in the region. This process is described by the Naga heritage and culture through ethnographies.

These processes demonstrate the emphasis on memory as corporeal in indigenous settings, i.e. memory is stored in the body and it is practiced in movement. The implementation of knowledge is not strengthened by repetition as an abstract theory but works "as a link between ideas and lives" Puwar (2021), 6. The archival role of ritual is further reinforced by a collective aspect of ritual, its communal attendant, rhythmic concord and mutual spatiality. The community members are taught through the observation of the elders, through performing in groups and through living with the gestures that bear the ancestral memory.

Rituals are also important when it comes to curing social and cultural trauma. In Central India, rituals in Adivasi societies, such as rituals of collective grief, illness or conflict, are practiced with the help of dancing, trance, drumming, and invocation of spirits. The embodied acts transform into a storage of community histories of displacement, lost ecology or disrupted colonialism. Ritual repetition does not eliminate the trauma, but internalizes it, digests it, and incorporates it into some collective story. This continuity assists communities in remaining ethical and ecological: respecting forests, reciprocity with the land and following social responsibilities.

Overall, three approaches, memory, ritual, and kinesthetic practice, support the operation of indigenous knowledge systems as living, mobile archive. They pass on historical consciousness, ecological intelligence and ethical values through the enactment of the body, as opposed to being preserved in writing. We can then take a step towards a more inclusive and decolonial knowledge of India by accepting such practices as valid forms of epistemology.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE AND ECOLOGICAL STEWARDSHIP

The Indian indigenous communities maintain incredibly intricate ecological information which is developed over generations of experience, observance, and interaction with the land. In contrast to the scientific models that are based on abstraction, classification, and validation within the laboratory, indigenous ecological knowledge is located in the contextual specificity and continuous sensory contact with the environment. This information does not remain constant, but it responds to seasonal changes, climatic changes and biodiversity changes and as such, it is very resilient and ecologically responsive.

In Adivasi communities in Central India, the shifting cultivation techniques, often referred to as podu, daiya or bewar, at least within a given region, are frequently mistaken to be primitive or destructive. Nevertheless, when they are practiced in conventional cycles these systems maintain soil fertility, accumulation of pests and enhancing biodiversity since land is regenerated. Embodied ecological literacy can inform knowledge of when to turn fields, what species to cultivate and how long to leave the field fallow rather than knowledge of these things having been learned through written manuals. Sensory indicators are how the farmers monitor the soil texture, shedding patterns of the leaf, and animal activities and observation of monsoon winds, which are the indicators of the environment.

This kind of ecological intelligence can also be seen in the tribal groups in the Western Ghats and Northeast India, where the forestry is managed by complex classifications of plants, fungi, insects, and sources of water. Hundreds of species are distinguished by communities according to seasonality, medicinal or ecological functions. This taxonomic system is encoded in the songs and stories and also in the ritual practices as opposed to the written texts. As an example, the phenological stage of a plant, such as when it flowers, when it sheds, or when a seed is dispersed, would notify the members of the community that it was the appropriate time to harvest, harvest honey, or do a controlled burning. Studies by Baviskar (2005) and Fürer-Haimendorf (1982) demonstrate that ecological knowledge among Indigenous communities in Central India, the Northeast, and Himalayan regions emerges from distinct social histories, subsistence practices, and landscape relations, cautioning against generalized representations of Indigenous knowledge systems.

In addition, indigenous stewardship systems are problematic to mainstream scientific paradigms in that they prioritize relationality and reciprocity. Knowledge is not seen as a resource through which to use nature but as a model of co-existence whereby humans, plants, animals, rivers, and ancestral spirits are members of the same ecological world Spencer et al. (2020), (45-46). This model of relationship brings practices like selective harvesting, preservation of

sacred groves and offering during rituals, which depicts an ethical aspect that is not portrayed in most of the technocratic-based approaches in the contemporary world.

In general, indigenous ecological knowledge demonstrates a different approach to environmental stewardship, one in which contextual wisdom, sensuality, and interdependence take precedence over generalized abstraction. The consideration of such practices as valid options of knowledge opens the opportunities of sustainable conservation, climate resilience, and biodiversity protection in modern India.

Table 2

Table 2 Examples of Indigenous Ecological Practices and the Knowledge They Transmit

Ecological Practice	Knowledge Embedded	Mode of Transmission	Example from Indian Communities
Shifting cultivation (Podu/Bewar)	Soil regeneration cycles, fallow management, crop rotation	Sensory observation, intergenerational apprenticeship	Central India (Gond, Baiga communities)
Sacred Grove Conservation	Biodiversity protection, spiritual ecology, watershed regulation	Rituals, taboos, clan stewardship	Western Ghats, Meghalaya, Rajasthan
Phenology-based farming	Seasonal cues from plants, birds, insects, monsoon winds	Ritual calendars, songs, oral narratives	Himalayan communities; Naga tribes
Selective harvesting and foraging	Sustainable extraction, species identification, habitat awareness	Embodied practice, guided walking, storytelling	Adivasis in Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh
Traditional water management (Kuhls, Johads, Zabo)	Hydrological cycles, soil-water balance, community regulation	Collective labour, ceremonial maintenance	Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Nagaland

The table of practices shows that indigenous ecological knowledge is not an extraneous addition to modern science but a powerful and adaptive system of ideas based on centuries of practical experience. The practices are all environmental learning systems in which the knowledge is perfected by the continuous interaction with land, water, climate, and biodiversity. Most importantly, they are ecological stewardship that transcends the utilitarian relation to the ecological context; they instill a sense of ethical commitments, mutuality in care and spiritual responsibility which cannot be found in technocratic conservation paradigms. With environmental knowledge integrated into the ritual, community governance and the kinesthetic learning, indigenous communities can sustain their ecosystems despite acute environmental pressures experienced in the areas considered. These practices, identified as valid ecological archives, question the prevailing paradigms focused on placing textual or scientific knowledge in dominance and lead to a more holistic, contextual, and decolonial understanding of governing the environment.

8. HEALING, SPIRIT, AND EPISTEMIC PLURALISM

The Indian healing practices demonstrate the interwoven nature of spiritual, ritual, ecological, and bodily knowledge to challenge the biomedical paradigm, which separates illness as a physiological phenomenon. The process of healing in indigenous and folk tradition is not merely the elimination of symptoms, but collecting, arranging, describing, communicating, and preserving the balance between the body, the environment, or community, and the world of spirits Ngulube (2011), 266. This holistic understanding of wellbeing is an epistemic pluralism whereby various knowledge systems, material, sensory, cosmological, and emotional, are simultaneously and mutually dependent.

The Ayurveda practices, e.g., are based on embodied diagnostic methods, e.g., pulse reading (nadi pariksha), emotional reading of the tongue, skin, and eyes, and listening to what the patient tells. These are methods that need nurtured sensitivity, years of apprenticeship, and experience that cannot be diminished to textual study. In other folk medical traditions as well as folk medicine systems in rural India, including the Vaidya tradition of Rajasthan, or the Nattu Maruttuvam of Tamil Nadu, environmental knowledge is incorporated with healing; medicinal plants are chosen not only on the basis of biochemical activity, but also on the basis of seasonal activity, energy quality and association to local ecology Kareem and Yoganandham (2024), 14.

The Shamanic healing practices, which are common among the tribal people such as the Gond, Santal, Bhil, Dongria Kondh, and the Mizos, propose an illness in terms of cosmological associations. Spirit mediums or healers (ojha, deory, gurumai, maiba/maibi) diagnose suffering in a trance, by movement, breathwork, drumming, and communication with protective or ancestral spirits. In these systems, disease can be caused by disrupted social relations, ecological

dissonance or spiritual dissonance, or inter-generational trauma. The healing ritual itself turns into the process of restoring the relational and cosmological order, which is accompanied by offerings, songs, symbolic gestures, and rhythmic acting that brings therapeutic effects both at the individual and communal levels.

Colonial and early postcolonial regimes rejected these practices as irrational, superstitious, or non-scientific and forced them to adopt biomedical models according to which laboratory knowledge was superior to embodied, spiritual, and ecological knowledge. This epistemic dominance divided the indigenous healing systems, taking away their authority and destabilizing the transmission through apprenticeship. Nevertheless, current research in medical anthropology, environmental humanities, and decolonial studies has suggested that these traditions are articulated practices of advanced embodied knowledge - that is, practices that are sensitive to affect, environment, memory, and social relations in a manner that biomedicine frequently overlooks.

By acknowledging these practices as epistemologies that are manifested, one can have a wider perception of health encompassing sensory perception, emotional resonance, cosmological meaning, and ecological attunement. Communicating through spirits, e.g., is not just a belief in metaphysics but a technology of relationship that assists communities to express social conflict, negotiate distress and strengthen moral duties towards land, water, ancestors and non-human beings. Healing, therefore, becomes a knowledge in practice, an embodied archive storing cultural memory, ethical values, ecological intelligence and spiritual practices.

This section highlights the importance of epistemic pluralism: the belief that more than one framework of knowledge can exist simultaneously, instead of discounting all knowledge to biomedical or scientific rationality by presupposing the plurality of healing knowledge systems in India. This pluralism has a lot to offer to modern health policy, community wellbeing, and cross-cultural medical discourse that knowledge cannot be divorced from the worlds it is lived, sensed, and practiced in.

9. ARTISANAL LABOUR AND PERFORMATIVE TRANSMISSION

Artisanal labor in India, including pottery in Kutch and blacksmithing in Odisha, represents an advanced form of skill-memory-agency material and ecological sensibility. They are acquired not in terms of formalized education but in terms of performative modes of knowledge transmission, where memories, stories, and lived experiences are cogulated Warin et al. (2020), 3. To indicate a few examples, the sense of the precise dampness of clay in the hands of a potter or the rhythmic action of the weaver in the movements of the loom comes about because of tacit knowledge developed over years of bodily activity. The result of this kind of learning is a kind of material literacy, in which materials, textures, sounds, and body motions are co-constructive of meaning.

These artisanal knowledge systems demonstrate that cognition is not located in the mind but is spread throughout the body, the community, and the environment. They are in opposition to the current epistemic belief that legitimate knowledge must be written, codified, or laboratory-based. Rather, artisanal traditions demonstrate the ways in which skill is stored within muscle memory, improvisation and within stories as passed across generations within craft practices. Also, the crafts tend to incorporate morality and cosmological stories, such as weaving societies in the presence of gods before starting work or metalworkers synchronizing their work with the seasons, stating the fact that art, livelihood, spirituality and ecological knowledge are an inseparable continuum. In this regard, artisanal labour is both a material practice and performative archive and this provides an alternative knowledge in which knowledge is lived, enacted and relational, not abstract and detached.

10. COLONIAL FRAGMENTATION AND POSTCOLONIAL RESILIENCE

It is important to note, prior to exploring the specific disruption mechanisms, that the indigenous knowledge systems in India have historically been integrative and interdependent worlds based on embodiment, ecology, and collective memory. These epistemic traditions were not separate spheres but integrated approaches where ritual, labour, spirituality, and environmental care were merged in an acceptable manner in the day-to-day existence. Participation and performance were used to transmit knowledge instead of formalized institutions and gave communities adaptive strategies to survive, to have identity, and to maintain a socio-ecological balance. The emergence of colonial administrative systems did not merely mean the emergence of new knowledge regimes- it completely changed the definition, validation, and distribution of knowledge. This transition generated divisions on cultural, ecological, and

mental levels, paving the way for "epigenetic aspirations that lead to indigenous knowledge" Warin et al. (2022). Before the arrival of European settlers to India, traditional learning was mainly in the form of a teacher-disciple system known as the guru-shishya parampara, which allowed students to live and learn with their teachers in a privatelyowned property (known as a gurukula) or as an apprentice to someone else. This way of learning involved transmitting knowledge not just by listening but also through physical practice, and had an all-encompassing view of the human condition (physically, mentally, and emotionally) and a very unified approach to the connection between all three aspects of the self; it has been argued that this was a much more integrated view compared to the fragmented and text-based structure of education imposed by the British, as outlined in Gauri Vishwanathan's Masks of Conquest. (1989)

11. EPISTEMIC DISRUPTION UNDER COLONIAL RULE

Colonial rule also brought about classificatory and bureaucratic forms of governance that subjected European scientific rationality as the prevalent knowledge form. Instruments like land surveys, cartography, the census and codified laws formed fixed categories that broke up amorphous indigenous epistemologies. Orally based practices, ecological sensitivity and collective memory were commonly branded as retrogressive, unscientific and superstitious. Standardized schooling also led to the replacement of local knowledge systems by favoring English literacy and textbook education over the performative, embodied and experiential forms of knowledge. Consequently, a great number of communities were structurally disconnected to their traditional knowledge landscapes.

12. POSTCOLONIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE PERSISTENCE OF EPISTEMIC MARGINALIZATION

Development policies, even after independence, tended to recreate colonial hierarchies in the sense that they placed the superiority of industrial modernity against native expertise. The agricultural extension programs pushed chemical fertilizers out of the traditional methods of soil management; the urban planning disregarded the vernacular architecture; and bureaucratic systems still encountered the embodied knowledge with the status of informal or unverified. In addition to ruining ecological equilibrium, these policies had an effect of degrading the transmission of knowledge across generations. However, it is also through the continued marginalization that the extent to which epistemic frameworks are embedded within collective identity, cultural memory as well as daily practice becomes apparent. India's Green Revolution provides a definitive example of post-colonial epistemic marginalization as a result of this project. Encouraging the use of highly productive hybrid plants and the application of chemicals to grow these plants, it forced farmers to stop using many centuries-old practices (such as mixed cropping, seed-saving, and organic soil enrichment) that have been part of indigenous agriculture in India for generations. Farmers were obligated to adopt new technologies created outside of their local ecosystems, which led to the devaluing of their accumulated knowledge and disrupted the passing of knowledge between generations. This has been addressed by Vandana Shiva in her book *Monocultures of the Mind.*

13. RESILIENCE THROUGH EMBODIED PRACTICES AND COMMUNITY ARCHIVES

The indigenous knowledge systems survive and adapt despite the historical pressures and are embodied and performed and even multisensory practices. The agricultural cycles, such as seasonal ones, help to maintain the biodiversity by incorporating the soil rhythms, monsoons, and seed preservation methods. Traditional traditions like the Kalaripayattu, Silambam or the traditional tribal forms of combat act as an embodied archive carrying into consciousness past histories and ethical beliefs and solidarity of a community. Ritual and spiritual practices are also known to maintain memory and mediate with intergenerational trauma, where it provides psychosocial strength in a displacement and loss of culture. These are the embodied archives that oppose the reductionist logic of classifying the text, and they are free since they base knowledge on lived experience, relationality, and community participation. The Zabo farming system of the Chakhesang Naga tribe exists within the northeast Indian states. This system combines forestry with other forms of agricultural production (crop, animal husbandry) and water resource management, together with a unique understanding of environment, through embodied knowledge, as well as a collaborative approach to farming, has allowed these communities to remain viable and resilient despite agricultural policies imposed from outside the community Murry and Das (2021), 204.

14. EMBODIED ARCHIVES AS SITES OF EPISTEMIC SOVEREIGNTY

Indigenous epistemologies practice sovereignty to reject assimilation into hard-text or hard-bureaucratic principles. They are strong in being able to incorporate emotion, environment, ritual, and shared labour into harmonious systems of knowing. Communities uphold dynamic kinds of knowledge systems through festivals, oral narratives, craft practices, and ecological rituals that are flexible to the current challenges. This determination not only shows the continuity of indigenous epistemic worlds but also contributes to ethical environmental management, communal peace, and social-cultural revival. Although there are external pressures on Indigenous communities to assimilate into dominant societies, Indigenous communities continue to express their cosmology and ecological knowledge through the use of the Art style. Warli Art is one such style that is not just decorative, but a visual recounting of how the Warli Indigenous people interact with Nature, Agricultural Cycles, and Ancestors. Warli Art is traditionally created by painting on walls and thus is part of an ongoing tradition of re-telling, reaffirming, and passing on to future generations their embodied knowledge and resilience. As part of this communal way of creating and preserving knowledge, artwork continues to serve as a "Community Archive" and transcends the limitations of formal institutions such as schools and churches.

15. METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

An analysis of indigenous knowledge systems necessitates a paradigm shift in the approach to research, a shift out of the textual, linguistic, or documentary inclinations of traditional scholarship. Since indigenous epistemologies are performed, sensorial, and relational, they cannot be observed comprehensively by use of archives, interviews, or texts. Rather, scholars should use the techniques that take care of bodily practice, interrelation with the environment, affective experiences, and the multisensory nature of the transmission of knowledge.

First, ethnographic immersion is necessary to have access to embodied and performative knowledge. Extended practice also enables the researcher to note how the skills are developed in rhythm, repetition and kinesthetic memory; be they in agricultural work, martial arts, healing, or artisanal crafts. This kind of immersion also reinforces the tacit, ineffable aspects of knowledge that could not be excelled and explained by words only.

Second, multisensory documentation—that incorporation of audio-visual recordings, sensory ethnography, movement analysis, and material culture studies can allow the representation of the knowledge embodied in gestures, textures, sounds, and environmental prompts in a more comprehensive manner. The instruments assist in explaining how environmental awareness can be nurtured with the help of sensory sensitivity, how ritual knowledge can be developed with the assistance of coordinated movements, or how healing can be founded on touch, breathing, and spatial orientation.

Third, participatory and collaborative methodologies are of paramount importance to decolonial knowledge production. Such methods as participatory mapping, community-led documentation, or co-authorship democratize research in addition to recognizing indigenous communities as epistemic actors, not the objects of study. These strategies make the interpretations to be based on the local cosmologies and ethics.

Fourth, kinesthetic and ecological analysis offers a methodological intermediation between the social sciences, humanities and environmental studies. Kinesthetic analysis assists in deciphering the way memory has been encoded in the movement patterns, poses and rhythms of the body; ecological analysis demonstrates the way the knowledge is informed by the interaction with landscape, seasons, and non-human life forms. They can collectively predict relational ontologies and embodied cognition.

Finally, such methodologies are adopted, scholars must be able to critically reflect on their own positionalities, assumptions, and epistemic habits. The acknowledgment of the epistemic state of embodiment is an alternative to the power of the rationalist abstraction and the textual authority of academic research. It promotes more pluralistic, context-sensitive and ethically-based scholarship-one that is sensitive to the complexity, vitality and resilience of indigenous knowledge systems.

16. CONCLUSION

Embodied archives within the indigenous knowledge networks in India represent an illustration of how memory, environment, body, and spirit interconnect to generate the living epistemologies. These systems are ecologically

intelligent, historiographically conscious and morally grounded without being unlinked to bodily practice and cosmological imagination. As a way of foregrounding embodiment, an epistemic state, the present paper criticizes both textual and rationalist epistemology and underscores the power and flexibility of indigenous knowledge. In the future, scholarship will need to embrace methods that are practice-based and which acknowledge places of bodies, senses and environments as valid sources of knowledge and bring forth more pluralistic, decolonial and ecologically sensitive interpretations.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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