Naveen Shodh Sansar (An International Refereed / Peer Review Multidisciplinary Research Journal)
RNI No.- MPHIN/2013/60638, ISSN 2320-8767, E- ISSN 2394-3793, Scientific Journal Impact Factor (SJIF)- 8.054,
April to June 2026, E-Journal, Vol. I, Issue LIV (54), ISO 9001:2015 - E2024049304 (QMS)

Role of Gond and Kawar Tribal Women in Sustainable Development: A Comparative Geographical Study of Rural Raigarh District, Chhattisgarh

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Abstract - Sustainable development has emerged as an essential framework for achieving balanced economic growth, environmental conservation, and social equity. Tribal women, particularly those belonging to indigenous communities, play a fundamental role in maintaining this balance through their active participation in agriculture, forest resource management, household economy, and community development. This study examines the role of Gond and Kawar tribal women in promoting sustainable development in the rural regions of Raigarh district, Chhattisgarh. Using a comparative geographical approach, the research analyses their socio-economic conditions, livelihood strategies, indigenous knowledge systems, and participation in rural development programmes. Both primary and secondary data have been utilized for the study. Primary data were collected through household surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations conducted in selected villages, while secondary information was obtained from government reports, Census publications, and academic literature. The findings reveal that tribal women make substantial contributions to sustainable agriculture, biodiversity conservation, food security, livestock management, and household income generation. Their traditional ecological knowledge supports sustainable utilization of forest resources and enhances community resilience against environmental challenges. However, limited educational opportunities, inadequate healthcare facilities, poor access to institutional finance, gender inequality, and climate-related vulnerabilities continue to restrict their full participation in development processes. The study emphasizes the need for policy interventions that strengthen women's education, livelihood diversification, institutional support, market accessibility, and participation in local governance. Integrating indigenous knowledge with modern rural development strategies can significantly contribute to sustainable and inclusive development in tribal regions.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Tribal Women, Gond Tribe, Kawar Tribe, Indigenous Knowledge, Rural Development, Raigarh District, Chhattisgarh, Geographical Analysis.

Introduction - Sustainable development has become one of the most important paradigms guiding development planning across the world. The concept promotes a balanced relationship between economic progress, environmental protection, and social well-being to ensure that present developmental needs are fulfilled without compromising the opportunities available to future generations. Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations in 2015, governments and development agencies have increasingly recognized that inclusive participation of marginalized communities is essential for achieving sustainable growth. Among these communities, tribal populations occupy a unique position because of their close dependence on natural resources and their rich repository of traditional ecological knowledge.

India possesses one of the largest tribal populations in the world, accounting for nearly 8.6 percent of the country's total population according to the Census of India. Tribal communities are predominantly concentrated in forested, hilly, and rural regions where agriculture, forestry, livestock rearing, and collection of minor forest produce constitute the principal sources of livelihood. Within these communities, women perform multiple productive and reproductive roles that significantly influence household welfare, environmental conservation, and local economic development. Despite their substantial contribution, tribal women often remain underrepresented in development policies, research studies, and decision-making institutions. The state of Chhattisgarh has a significant tribal population and is characterized by rich forest resources, diverse ecological conditions, and vibrant indigenous cultures. The Gond and Kawar tribes are among the major Scheduled Tribes inhabiting the rural areas of Raigarh district. These

communities have traditionally maintained a close relationship with forests, agricultural land, rivers, and other natural resources that support their livelihoods. Women belonging to these tribes participate actively in farming operations, collection of non-timber forest products, livestock care, food processing, household management, handicraft production, and community welfare activities. Their everyday practices contribute directly to food security, environmental sustainability, and the preservation of indigenous cultural traditions.

The role of tribal women extends beyond economic activities. They possess extensive knowledge regarding medicinal plants, traditional farming techniques, seed preservation, biodiversity conservation, water resource management, and climate adaptation. Such indigenous knowledge has evolved through generations of interaction with local ecosystems and remains highly relevant for sustainable natural resource management. In many villages, women are responsible for selecting crop varieties, preserving traditional seeds, preparing organic manure, managing kitchen gardens, and ensuring efficient utilization of available natural resources. These activities strengthen ecological sustainability while reducing dependence on external agricultural inputs.

In recent decades, various government programmes have attempted to improve the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities. Schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), Jal Jeevan Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission, Poshan Abhiyan, and Forest Rights Act have created new opportunities for tribal women to participate in economic activities and community development. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as important institutional platforms for promoting financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and collective decision-making among rural women. Nevertheless, disparities in education, healthcare, infrastructure, digital access, and market connectivity continue to limit the developmental potential of tribal women.

A comparative geographical analysis of Gond and Kawar tribal women is particularly important because both communities inhabit similar environmental settings while exhibiting differences in socio-cultural practices, livelihood strategies, and access to development opportunities. Understanding these similarities and variations can help identify location-specific strategies for sustainable rural development. The geographical perspective further enables an examination of how physical resources, settlement patterns, accessibility, and environmental conditions influence women's economic activities and resource management practices.

The present study therefore investigates the contribution of Gond and Kawar tribal women towards sustainable development in the rural regions of Raigarh district. It analyses their role in agriculture, forest resource management, household economy, social development, environmental conservation, and participation in government programmes. The study also explores the challenges faced by tribal women and proposes policy recommendations for strengthening their role in sustainable development. By recognizing women as active agents of change rather than passive beneficiaries, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of inclusive and environmentally sustainable rural development.

Review of Literature

The relationship between tribal women and sustainable development has attracted increasing attention from researchers, policymakers, and development practitioners over the past few decades. Tribal women are widely recognized as custodians of indigenous knowledge, biodiversity conservation, traditional agriculture, and household resource management. Their contribution extends beyond domestic responsibilities to economic production, environmental stewardship, and community development. Nevertheless, many studies indicate that despite their significant role, tribal women continue to face social, economic, and institutional constraints that limit their participation in the development process. The following review presents the major findings of previous studies relevant to the present research.

The **World Commission on Environment and Development (1987)** introduced the concept of sustainable development through the Brundtland Report, defining it as development that satisfies present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The report emphasized the integration of economic growth, environmental conservation, and social equity. Although it did not specifically focus on tribal women, it highlighted the importance of local communities in managing natural resources sustainably.

Vandana Shiva (1988) argued that rural and tribal women possess valuable ecological knowledge developed through continuous interaction with nature. According to her, women contribute significantly to biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture, seed preservation, and environmental protection. She emphasized that development policies should recognize women as active managers of natural resources rather than merely beneficiaries of welfare programmes.

Bina Agarwal (1994) examined gender relations in rural India and demonstrated that access to land and productive resources greatly influences women's economic empowerment and decision-making capacity. She argued that women with secure access to land and community resources participate more effectively in sustainable agricultural development and environmental conservation.

The **Anthropological Survey of India** through the *People of India* project documented the socio-cultural characteristics of various tribal communities, including the

Gond and Kawar tribes. The study highlighted their dependence on forests, agriculture, and traditional occupations while emphasizing the central role of women in sustaining household livelihoods and preserving indigenous cultural practices.

Several studies conducted in central India have shown that Gond tribal women contribute extensively to agricultural activities such as seed selection, sowing, transplantation, weeding, harvesting, and post-harvest processing. They also play a dominant role in collecting minor forest produce including mahua flowers, tendu leaves, tamarind, medicinal plants, honey, and edible forest products. These activities not only supplement household income but also support sustainable utilization of forest resources.

Research on Kawar tribal communities indicates that women actively participate in settled agriculture, livestock rearing, wage employment, and household management. Compared with some other tribal groups, Kawar women have shown increasing participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs), literacy programmes, and government-sponsored livelihood initiatives. However, limited employment opportunities and inadequate market access continue to restrict income generation.

Studies on tribal livelihoods in Chhattisgarh have consistently highlighted the importance of forests in supporting household economies. Minor forest produce provides seasonal employment and acts as a safety net during agricultural lean periods. Women are the principal collectors, processors, and sellers of these products. Their knowledge regarding sustainable harvesting practices helps maintain ecological balance and ensures the long-term availability of forest resources.

Researchers have also examined the contribution of tribal women to food security. Traditional farming systems practiced by tribal communities generally involve mixed cropping, indigenous seed varieties, organic manure, and minimum dependence on chemical fertilizers. Women are primarily responsible for preserving local seed varieties and maintaining kitchen gardens that supply vegetables, fruits, and medicinal plants throughout the year. These practices contribute to nutritional security and agricultural sustainability.

The introduction of government programmes such as **MGNREGA**, **National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)**, **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G)**, **Jal Jeevan Mission**, and **Swachh Bharat Mission** has improved livelihood opportunities for many tribal women. Self-Help Groups have emerged as effective institutions for promoting savings, credit, entrepreneurship, and collective action. Several studies report increased financial inclusion, improved confidence, and greater participation of women in local governance following their involvement in SHGs.

Despite these positive developments, research also identifies numerous challenges faced by tribal women. Educational attainment remains comparatively low due to poverty, early marriage, inadequate educational infrastructure, and limited awareness regarding higher education. Healthcare facilities are often insufficient in remote tribal areas, resulting in poor maternal and child health indicators. In addition, restricted ownership of land and productive assets reduces women's economic independence and limits their participation in formal financial systems.

Climate change has emerged as another important concern. Irregular rainfall, declining forest resources, soil degradation, and increasing frequency of droughts directly affect agricultural productivity and forest-based livelihoods. Since women are primarily responsible for collecting water, fuelwood, and forest products, environmental degradation disproportionately increases their workload and livelihood insecurity.

Recent literature increasingly emphasizes women's participation in local governance through **Gram Sabhas**, **Forest Rights Committees**, and **Panchayati Raj Institutions**. Their involvement in decision-making has contributed to better implementation of community development programmes, natural resource management, and social welfare initiatives. However, meaningful participation often remains constrained by patriarchal social norms, limited education, and inadequate institutional support.

Overall, previous studies establish that tribal women are indispensable contributors to sustainable development through their economic activities, ecological knowledge, and community participation. Nevertheless, most available research focuses either on tribal livelihoods or women empowerment separately. Comparative geographical studies examining the specific contributions of **Gond and Kawar tribal women in the rural regions of Raigarh district** remain limited. This gap justifies the need for the present study, which seeks to analyse their roles from a geographical perspective while comparing similarities and differences between the two communities in achieving sustainable development.

Objectives of the Study: The present study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To examine the socio-economic profile of Gond and Kawar tribal women in the rural regions of Raigarh district.
2. To analyse the role of tribal women in sustainable agriculture and household livelihood systems.
3. To assess the contribution of Gond and Kawar women towards forest resource management and biodiversity conservation.
4. To evaluate the participation of tribal women in government development programmes and local institutions.
5. To compare the role of Gond and Kawar tribal women in achieving sustainable development.

6. To identify the major constraints affecting their socio-economic development and environmental participation.
7. To suggest suitable policy measures for strengthening the contribution of tribal women towards sustainable rural development.

Research Methodology: The present study adopts a **descriptive, analytical, and comparative geographical research design**. The research combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the contribution of Gond and Kawar tribal women towards sustainable development.The study is empirical in nature and is based on field investigations conducted in selected rural villages of Raigarh district, Chhattisgarh. It examines the interrelationship between socio-economic conditions, environmental resource use, livelihood activities, and women's participation in development programmes.

Sources of Data

Primary Data: Primary information was collected through extensive field surveys using:

1. Structured household questionnaires
2. Personal interviews
3. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
4. Observation method
5. Informal interactions with village leaders, SHG members, and government officials

The questionnaire included information on demographic characteristics, education, occupation, income, agricultural activities, forest dependence, decision-making, participation in government schemes, and environmental conservation practices.

Secondary Data: Secondary information was collected from various authentic sources, including:

1. Census of India (2011)
2. Ministry of Tribal Affairs
3. Ministry of Rural Development
4. Government of Chhattisgarh publications
5. District Statistical Handbook
6. Economic Survey of Chhattisgarh
7. Research journals
8. Books
9. Reports of NGOs
10. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) documents
11. Panchayat records and village profiles

Sampling Design: A multistage sampling technique was adopted for selecting respondents.

The study covered selected villages predominantly inhabited by Gond and Kawar tribal communities in the rural regions of Raigarh district.A total of **400 tribal women respondents** were selected through purposive and random sampling techniques to ensure adequate representation of both communities.

Methods of Data Analysis: The collected data were classified, tabulated, and analysed using appropriate statistical and geographical techniques.

The following analytical tools were employed:

1. Percentage analysis
2. Mean and standard deviation
3. Comparative analysis
4. Cross-tabulation
5. Graphs and charts
6. GIS-based spatial representation
7. Thematic mapping
8. Descriptive interpretation

Qualitative information collected during interviews and focus group discussions was analysed through thematic interpretation to understand local perceptions regarding sustainable development.

Profile of the Study Area: Raigarh district is situated in the north-eastern part of Chhattisgarh and is one of the important tribal-dominated districts of the state. The district lies between approximately **21°54' to 22°47' North latitude** and **82°37' to 83°56' East longitude** . It is bounded by Surguja district in the north, Korba district in the west, Janjgir-Champa district in the southwest, and the state of Odisha in the east.

The district experiences a **tropical monsoon climate** characterized by hot summers, moderate winters, and seasonal rainfall received mainly from the southwest monsoon. The average annual rainfall supports agricultural activities, although rainfall variability occasionally affects crop production.

The physiography of the district consists of undulating plains, low hills, river valleys, and extensive forested areas. The major rivers include the **Kelo, Mand, and Ib**, which provide irrigation and support agricultural activities.

Agriculture is the principal occupation of the rural population. Paddy is the dominant crop, while maize, pulses, oilseeds, vegetables, and minor millets are also cultivated. Forest resources play a significant role in supporting rural livelihoods through the collection of non-timber forest products such as mahua, tendu leaves, tamarind, harra, bahera, bamboo, lac, and medicinal plants.The Gond and Kawar tribes constitute an important segment of the district's Scheduled Tribe population. Their livelihoods are largely based on agriculture, forest resources, wage labour, livestock rearing, and traditional occupations. Women actively participate in nearly every aspect of these economic activities while simultaneously managing household responsibilities.In recent years, the implementation of government development programmes, expansion of rural infrastructure, promotion of Self-Help Groups, and increasing educational opportunities have contributed to gradual socio-economic transformation among tribal households. Nevertheless, challenges related to poverty, unemployment, inadequate healthcare, climate variability, and limited market access continue to affect sustainable development in the region.The geographical diversity and substantial tribal population make Raigarh district an ideal

area for examining the role of Gond and Kawar tribal women in achieving sustainable development

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic Profile of Gond and Kawar Tribal Women: The socio-economic status of tribal women plays a decisive role in determining their contribution to sustainable development. The field investigation conducted in the selected villages of Raigarh district reveals that Gond and Kawar tribal women actively participate in productive as well as reproductive activities. Their contribution extends beyond household responsibilities to agriculture, livestock management, collection of forest products, wage labour, and community development.The majority of respondents belong to economically weaker households where agriculture and forest-based activities constitute the primary sources of livelihood. Most families practice small and marginal farming, while a considerable proportion supplement their income through wage employment under MGNREGA and seasonal collection of minor forest produce.

Educational attainment among tribal women has improved over the past decade due to the expansion of government schools, scholarship schemes, hostels, and awareness programmes. However, the literacy level of older women remains comparatively low because educational facilities were limited in earlier decades. Younger women exhibit higher educational participation, enabling them to access government programmes, banking services, and livelihood opportunities more effectively.Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as important institutions promoting financial inclusion, savings, entrepreneurship, and women's leadership. Members of SHGs reported increased confidence, improved decision-making capacity, and greater participation in village development activities.

Role in Sustainable Agriculture: Agriculture forms the backbone of the rural economy in Raigarh district, and tribal women constitute one of its most important human resources. The study indicates that Gond and Kawar women participate in almost every agricultural operation except heavy ploughing, which is traditionally performed by men. Women's agricultural activities include:

1. Seed selection and preservation
2. Preparation of organic manure
3. Nursery raising
4. Sowing and transplantation
5. Weeding and intercultural operations
6. Harvesting and threshing
7. Grain cleaning and storage
8. Kitchen gardening

Traditional agricultural knowledge possessed by tribal women contributes significantly to sustainable farming practices. Organic manure prepared from livestock waste and crop residues enhances soil fertility while reducing dependence on chemical fertilizers. Indigenous seed varieties maintained by women are generally resistant to local climatic conditions and pests, thereby increasing agricultural resilience.

Kitchen gardens maintained near households provide vegetables, fruits, and medicinal plants throughout the year. These gardens improve household nutrition and reduce dependence on market purchases. The integration of agriculture, livestock, and kitchen gardening demonstrates a sustainable livelihood model that supports both economic and environmental objectives.

Forest Resource Management and Biodiversity Conservation: Forest ecosystems play an indispensable role in the livelihood systems of Gond and Kawar tribal communities. Women are the principal collectors, processors, and managers of minor forest produce. The study found that forest-based resources contribute substantially to household food security and income, particularly during agricultural lean seasons.

Major forest products collected by women include:

1. Mahua flowers
2. Tendu leaves
3. Tamarind
4. Honey
5. Harra
6. Bahera
7. Char seeds
8. Mushrooms
9. Medicinal herbs
10. Firewood
11. Bamboo

Unlike commercial extraction, tribal women generally adopt sustainable harvesting methods that allow natural regeneration. They avoid cutting immature plants, protect seed-bearing trees, and collect forest products according to seasonal availability. Such traditional ecological practices contribute to biodiversity conservation and maintain ecological balance.Women also possess extensive knowledge regarding medicinal plants used for treating common illnesses. This indigenous healthcare system reduces dependence on external medical facilities and preserves valuable traditional knowledge.The findings indicate that the conservation of forests and sustainable livelihood generation are closely interconnected in tribal society. Women serve as important custodians of these ecological resources.

Indigenous Knowledge and Climate Resilience: One of the most significant findings of the study is the rich indigenous knowledge possessed by Gond and Kawar tribal women. This knowledge has evolved through generations of interaction with local ecosystems and forms an essential component of sustainable development.

Women possess practical knowledge regarding:

1. Rainfall prediction through natural indicators
2. Selection of drought-resistant crop varieties
3. Mixed cropping systems
4. Soil moisture conservation

5. Water harvesting
6. Traditional seed preservation
7. Preparation of herbal medicines
8. Livestock care
9. Sustainable fuelwood collection

Mixed cropping practices reduce production risks and improve soil fertility. Traditional seed preservation ensures the availability of locally adapted varieties capable of withstanding climatic variability.Climate change has increased the frequency of irregular rainfall and agricultural uncertainty in Raigarh district. Tribal women have responded by diversifying livelihood activities, cultivating vegetables, expanding livestock rearing, and participating in Self-Help Group enterprises. These adaptive strategies strengthen household resilience against environmental and economic shocks.

Household Economy and Livelihood Diversification: The household economy of tribal communities depends upon multiple livelihood sources rather than a single occupation. Women play a central role in diversifying household income through agriculture, forest products, wage employment, livestock rearing, handicrafts, and small-scale enterprises.

Major income-generating activities include:

1. Agricultural labour
2. Paddy cultivation
3. Collection of minor forest produce
4. Poultry farming
5. Goat rearing
6. Dairy activities
7. Handicrafts
8. Bamboo products
9. Leaf plate making
10. MGNREGA employment

Income diversification reduces dependence on seasonal agriculture and enhances household economic security. Women reported that earnings from SHGs and forest products are often used for children's education, healthcare, household consumption, and agricultural investments.The study observed that households with diversified income sources exhibit better resilience during crop failures or periods of low agricultural productivity.

Participation in Government Development Programmes: Government welfare programmes have significantly influenced the socio-economic status of tribal women during the past decade.

Major schemes benefiting respondents include:

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)
2. National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)
3. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G)
4. Jal Jeevan Mission
5. Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin)
6. Poshan Abhiyan
7. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana
8. Forest Rights Act
9. Public Distribution System (PDS)

Participation in MGNREGA has generated wage employment while creating durable community assets such as ponds, roads, irrigation canals, and plantation sites. NRLM has strengthened Self-Help Groups by providing skill development, financial literacy, and access to institutional credit.Improved access to drinking water through Jal Jeevan Mission has reduced the time women spend collecting water, allowing greater participation in productive activities. Similarly, sanitation facilities under Swachh Bharat Mission have improved public health and women's dignity.Despite these achievements, respondents identified several implementation challenges including delayed wage payments, limited awareness regarding programme benefits, inadequate technical support, and restricted market access for SHG products.

Comparative Analysis of Gond and Kawar Tribal Women: The comparative analysis reveals both similarities and differences in the contribution of Gond and Kawar tribal women towards sustainable development.

Gond Tribal Women:

1. Greater dependence on forests and minor forest produce.
2. Strong traditional ecological knowledge.
3. Higher participation in forest conservation activities.
4. Greater reliance on indigenous agricultural practices.
5. Rich knowledge of medicinal plants and biodiversity.

Kawar Tribal Women:

1. Greater dependence on settled agriculture.
2. Higher participation in Self-Help Groups.
3. Better integration with government livelihood programmes.
4. Increasing educational attainment among younger women.
5. Higher involvement in small-scale enterprises and market-oriented activities.

Common Characteristics: Both communities:

1. Participate actively in agriculture.
2. Contribute significantly to household income.
3. Preserve traditional knowledge.
4. Support biodiversity conservation.
5. Participate in village development programmes.
6. Maintain family food security.
7. Strengthen community resilience during environmental and economic crises.

The study therefore confirms that both Gond and Kawar tribal women function as important agents of sustainable development despite differences in livelihood specialization and resource utilization.

Policy Recommendations: The findings of the study clearly indicate that Gond and Kawar tribal women are indispensable contributors to sustainable development in the rural regions of Raigarh district. However, their full potential cannot be realized without supportive policies that

address socio-economic inequalities, environmental challenges, and institutional barriers. The following policy recommendations are proposed to strengthen their role in sustainable development.

Strengthening Women's Education: Education is the foundation of women's empowerment and sustainable development. Although literacy among younger tribal women has improved, educational attainment remains low in many rural villages. The government should establish more residential schools, provide higher education scholarships, improve transportation facilities, and promote adult literacy programmes for tribal women. Digital education initiatives should also be introduced to enhance technological awareness and access to online services.

Promotion of Sustainable Livelihoods: Livelihood diversification should be encouraged through skill development programmes in areas such as food processing, bamboo crafts, lac cultivation, mushroom production, poultry farming, dairy development, medicinal plant cultivation, and eco-tourism. Training programmes should be linked with market opportunities so that tribal women can generate sustainable income throughout the year.

Financial Inclusion and Entrepreneurship: Access to institutional finance remains a major challenge for many tribal women. Strengthening Self-Help Groups (SHGs), expanding microcredit facilities, promoting financial literacy, and improving access to banking services will encourage entrepreneurship. Marketing support, branding, packaging, and value addition of tribal products should also be promoted to improve household income.

Sustainable Forest Resource Management: Government agencies should actively involve tribal women in Joint Forest Management Committees, biodiversity conservation programmes, and community forest management initiatives. Traditional ecological knowledge should be documented and incorporated into forest management policies. Training on scientific harvesting, value addition of minor forest produce, and sustainable forest-based enterprises should be provided.

Climate-Resilient Agriculture: Climate variability has increased the vulnerability of tribal livelihoods. Therefore, climate-resilient agricultural practices such as drought-resistant crop varieties, integrated farming systems, rainwater harvesting, organic farming, agroforestry, and soil conservation should be promoted. Women farmers should receive regular agricultural extension services and technical guidance.

Improved Healthcare and Nutrition: Healthcare facilities in tribal areas should be strengthened by improving primary health centres, maternal healthcare services, nutritional programmes, and awareness regarding sanitation and hygiene. Mobile health units should be introduced in remote villages to improve accessibility.

Women's Participation in Local Governance: Greater representation of tribal women in Gram Sabhas, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Forest Rights Committees, and village development committees should be encouraged. Capacity-building programmes should enhance leadership skills, legal awareness, and decision-making abilities.

Integration of Indigenous Knowledge: The indigenous knowledge possessed by Gond and Kawar women regarding biodiversity conservation, medicinal plants, seed preservation, and sustainable agriculture should be scientifically documented and integrated into rural development planning. Such integration will strengthen both environmental sustainability and cultural preservation.

Conclusion: The present study demonstrates that Gond and Kawar tribal women play a central role in promoting sustainable development in the rural regions of Raigarh district, Chhattisgarh. Their contribution extends far beyond household responsibilities and encompasses agriculture, forest resource management, livestock rearing, biodiversity conservation, food security, environmental protection, and community development. Through their extensive participation in productive activities, tribal women significantly contribute to household income, nutritional security, and sustainable livelihood systems.

The comparative analysis indicates that although both Gond and Kawar women share similar socio-economic characteristics, certain differences exist in their livelihood strategies and resource utilization patterns. Gond women exhibit stronger dependence on forests and traditional ecological knowledge, whereas Kawar women demonstrate relatively greater participation in settled agriculture, Self-Help Groups, and government livelihood programmes. Despite these differences, both communities possess valuable indigenous knowledge that supports sustainable management of natural resources.

The study also highlights the increasing importance of government initiatives such as MGNREGA, National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin, Jal Jeevan Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission, and the Forest Rights Act in improving women's socio-economic conditions. Participation in these programmes has enhanced employment opportunities, financial inclusion, institutional participation, and community development. Nevertheless, significant challenges continue to exist in the form of limited education, inadequate healthcare, poor infrastructure, climate variability, restricted market access, and gender-based inequalities.

One of the major findings of the study is the crucial role of indigenous knowledge in achieving sustainable development. Traditional farming practices, seed preservation, biodiversity conservation, medicinal plant utilization, and sustainable harvesting of forest resources represent valuable assets that should be recognized within mainstream development planning. Modern development strategies should complement rather than replace these traditional knowledge systems.

From a geographical perspective, the interaction between physical environment, natural resources, settlement patterns, and livelihood activities significantly influences the contribution of tribal women towards sustainable development. Therefore, location-specific planning approaches are essential for designing effective development interventions.

The study concludes that sustainable rural development in tribal regions cannot be achieved without recognizing women as active agents of social, economic, and environmental transformation. Strengthening women's education, livelihood opportunities, institutional participation, financial inclusion, and leadership capacities will not only improve their socio-economic status but also contribute substantially towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Empowering Gond and Kawar tribal women is therefore not merely a matter of social justice but a prerequisite for environmentally sustainable, economically inclusive, and culturally sensitive rural development.

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