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Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Health Sovereignty: Ethnomedical Systems, Resilience and Justice in Indigenous Communities

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KEYWORDS Kincentric Ontology. Biocultural Rupture. Cultural Suppression. Epistemic Violence. Decolonial Pathways. Ecoliteracy

ABSTRACT This review paper examines the biocultural relationship between ecological integrity and Indigenous health, emphasising that ecological justice is integral to health justice. Synthesising global and Indian scholarship from 2000 to 2024 through decolonial frameworks, the study highlights how kincentric ontologies position health as relational harmony sustained by reciprocal ties to land and ancestral knowledge systems. Land dispossession, cultural suppression, and epistemic violence led to intergenerational health trauma, nutritional deprivation, and epidemics of non-communicable and mental health crises. In India, deforestation, industrialisation, and restrictive policies have eroded Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), exacerbating malnutrition and gendered epistemic injustice. It identifies TEK as vital for Indigenous health sovereignty, enabling preventive care, environmental monitoring, and culturally grounded resilience. It calls for land repatriation, biocultural conservation, healthcare models integrating TEK with biomedicine, and policy reforms centering Indigenous data sovereignty and gender justice. The findings underscore that healing Indigenous health requires restoring ecological and cultural relationships.