



Tribal Youth and the Preservation of Culutrl Heritage: Exploring Cultural Practice and Identity in Alluri Sitarama Raju District, Andhra Pradesh

Apio Sharon Aphia ^{1*}, Dr. S Narayana Rao ²

¹ Post graduate student, Dept. of Anthropology, Andhra University- Visakhapatnam, India

² Guest faculty, Dept. of Anthropology, Andhra University- Visakhapatnam, India

* Corresponding Author: Apio Sharon Aphia

Article Info

ISSN (online): 3107-3972

Impact Factor (RSIF): 8.08

Volume: 03

Issue: 04

Received: 10-05-2026

Accepted: 08-06-2026

Published: 06-07-2026

Page No: 13-23

Abstract

Cultural practices among Indigenous people are fundamental to identity, heritage conservation, and unity within tribal communities. Nevertheless, a few factors, such as rapid modernisation, increased educational opportunities, and socio-economic changes with the availability of digital media, have influenced how tribal youth perform their ethnic traditions. This study examines the traditional cultural practices actively practised by tribal youth in Alluri Sitarama Raju District, Andhra Pradesh. It analyses their role in preserving tribal identity and strengthening community cohesion. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and key informant interviews among tribal youth aged 15–30 years from selected villages representing Bagata, Valmiki, Porja, Kotiya, Gadaba, Mali, kondh and other tribal communities. The findings reveal that youth continue to participate actively in traditional festivals such as Korakota traditional harvest festival and Sankranti, perform traditional cultural expressions like the Dhimsa dance, observe customary food practices and rituals, and contribute to the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. Modernization has created new lifestyles and aspirations, but these cultural practices continue to serve as important signifiers of tribal identity and collective belonging. The tribal youth negotiate between the traditional values and the contemporary influences by way of adaptation and not total abandonment of their cultural heritage. The study shows that young people are custodians of indigenous culture and play a central role in ensuring cultural continuity in the face of social change. It is recommended to reinforce community-based cultural education, support tribal festivals and promote participation of youth in cultural preservation projects, in order to protect tribal heritage and strengthen cultural identity among the coming generations.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54660/GMPJ.2026.3.4.13-23>

Keywords: Tribal youth, Indigenous culture, cultural heritage, cultural identity, Dhimsa dance, Festivals, Cultural transmission, Community cohesion

Introduction

Culture forms the basis of social life by offering communities a set of shared values, beliefs, traditions, and practices which help to establish a collective identity and control social relationships. It has always been the view of anthropologists that culture is not passed on in a biological way but is instead acquired as a result of socialization and passed down from one generation to another (Tylor, 1871; Geertz, 1973) ^[22, 8]. In indigenous societies, cultural practices are closely linked to everyday life and are shown in the form of rituals, festivals, oral traditions, music, dance, food systems, and indigenous ecological knowledge. These cultural manifestations serve not only to keep historical memory alive but also to strengthen social solidarity and the feeling of belonging among the members of the community (Durkheim, 1912/1995; Turner, 1969) ^[7, 20]. As a result, the ongoing presence

of indigenous cultures depends mainly on the effective transmission of cultural knowledge from the older generations to the younger members of society.

Young people play a special role in this process of cultural continuity. Acting as a link between the old traditions and the coming generations, they inherit, reinterpret, and pass on indigenous cultural knowledge in the light of changing social circumstances. Far from being mere recipients of tradition, young people actively deal with cultural meanings by combining the customs they have inherited with the new social conditions (Bhabha, 1994) ^[3]. This kind of dynamic process shows that culture is not static or fixed; on the contrary, it keeps on changing while at the same time retaining the core values which define collective identity. It is therefore essential that young people take an active part in traditional festivals, rituals, performing arts, and community institutions if indigenous cultural heritage is to be preserved.

. In tribal areas all over the world, rapid globalization, modernization, formal education, migration, tourism, and digital technologies have changed cultural practices and social structures. Although these changes have given indigenous young people more opportunities in terms of education and employment, they have at the same time subjected them to outside cultural influences which often question traditional knowledge systems and customary ways of life (Appadurai, 1996; UNESCO, 2003) ^[1, 23]. Current academic work tends to acknowledge that modernization does not always lead to the extinction of indigenous cultures; on the contrary, cultural practices are often adapted, reinterpreted, and incorporated into modern social settings (Sahlins, 1999; Smith, 2012) ^[16, 18]. Indigenous youth thus find themselves in a difficult position, having to constantly strike a balance between keeping their ancestral heritage and accepting the chances offered by the modern world.

The connection between culture and identity is especially important in the case of tribal groups. A sense of belonging is given to individuals via the common language, customs, beliefs, rituals, and shared history (Hall, 1996) ^[9]. For indigenous people, identity goes beyond simply being a member of a particular ethnic group to involve relationships with ancestral lands, natural resources, and traditional ecological knowledge (United Nations, 2007) ^[25]. Festivals, dances, rituals, and collective ceremonies help to reinforce these identities by producing shared experiences that promote social unity and solidarity across generations (Durkheim, 1912/1995) ^[7]. Victor Turner (1969) ^[20] also claims that ritual performances lead to the formation of communities — that is, a feeling of equality and common identity — which in turn helps to integrate the community during times of social change.

Tribal communities in India are recognized as valuable treasure of cultural diversity in the country. According to Census India (2011) ^[5], the scheduled tribes include around 8.6% of the total population of the country and encompasses over 700 communities that differ through their languages, religions, environmental knowledge and cultural practices. Despite the fact that tribes are getting increasingly accepted into the mainstream way of life via education, physical infrastructure improvement and government assistance programs, they still have retained their unique cultural forms of social organization and identity (Xaxa, 2008). However, these communities are simultaneously experiencing significant socio-cultural transformations arising from

market integration, migration, expanding communication technologies, and formal education (Shah, 2010) ^[17]. Educational expansion, social media, tourism, and increased mobility have created new aspirations while simultaneously reshaping traditional lifestyles and value systems. Nevertheless, several studies suggest that tribal youth do not simply abandon indigenous traditions; instead, they selectively adapt cultural practices that remain meaningful within contemporary contexts (Mishra, 2016; Bhabha, 1994) ^[3]. Such adaptive processes demonstrate cultural resilience rather than cultural erosion, highlighting the capacity of indigenous communities to preserve identity while responding to changing socio-economic conditions.

The tribal groups in Alluri Sitarama Raju District in Andhra Pradesh provide a significant scenario in which to analyze these processes. The district is located in the Eastern Ghats and inhabited mainly by indigenous tribes like the Bagata, Valmiki, Porja, Kotiya, Gadaba, Mali, Konda Dora, etc. who have livelihoods and culture that are intricately connected with forest ecosystems and traditional agriculture. The cultural practices in the area include various indigenous festivals like Korakota and Sankranti, traditional dance forms like Dhimsa, social rituals, oral history, traditional food practices, and communal work systems that strengthen community ties. These cultural practices act not just as forms of expression but also as means to pass on social values, tribal culture, and knowledge across generations.

In these communities, tribal youths are increasingly getting involved in formal schooling, using digital technology, participating in tourism activities, and witnessing various social changes in as much as all those aspects shape their way of life, the youth are still actively engaged in traditional festivals, dances, and rituals, which help them feel connected to their culture and society. This indicates that the youth can be both the drivers of modernity and keepers of traditions. Thus, the need to study the youth's ways of preserving their traditions becomes apparent.

While research on the topic of tribal development, indigenous livelihood, and cultural change has been conducted in India, limited work has been done in order to analyze tribal youth's role in preserving indigenous cultural practices in Alluri Sitarama Raju District. Most studies focus on some socioeconomic issues or education without analyzing the role of the youth in preserving cultural practices and connecting the community.

Against this background, the present study examines the traditional cultural practices actively practiced by tribal youth in Alluri Sitarama Raju District and analyzes how these practices contribute to preserving tribal identity and strengthening community cohesion. Specifically, the study focuses on indigenous festivals such as Korakota and Sankranti, the Dhimsa dance, traditional food systems, customary rituals, and the participation of youth in the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. By documenting these cultural practices and exploring the central role played by young people in sustaining them, the study contributes to broader anthropological debates on indigenous identity, cultural resilience, and youth participation in heritage preservation. Furthermore, the findings provide evidence that can inform policies and community-based initiatives aimed at safeguarding indigenous cultural heritage while empowering tribal youth as custodians of their cultural traditions.

Literature Review

Indigenous Culture, Youth, and Cultural Identity

Culture is a key part of human life that includes accepted beliefs, customs, values, traditions, knowledge, language, and behaviors people acquire from their previous generations. Culture was adhered by Tylor (1871)^[22] who introduced it as “a complex whole”, including knowledge, belief system, art, morals, law, customs, among other things. According to Geertz (1973)^[8], “culture viewed as a system of inherited meanings, expressed through symbols” means that it allows people to understand and process their life. With modern societies, citizens of indigenous communities express their cultural identity through rituals, festivals, dances, oral tradition, food systems and environmental knowledge.

In tribal communities, culture is intertwined with indigenous knowledge and community living. In his work Hall (1996)^[9] argued that cultural identity is constructed rather than being a biological trait. Indigenous identity is therefore continuously reinforced through participation in cultural activities that symbolize community values and historical continuity. Similarly, Smith (2012)^[18] emphasizes that indigenous knowledge systems represent living bodies of knowledge maintained through practice, participation, and intergenerational learning rather than through formal educational institutions. Consequently, the preservation of indigenous identity depends largely on the continued practice of cultural traditions by younger generations.

In India, tribal communities possess rich cultural diversity reflected in their languages, rituals, ecological knowledge, festivals, and traditional institutions. Xaxa (2008) notes that tribal societies have historically maintained distinct cultural identities despite increasing interaction with mainstream society. However, modernization, market integration, education, migration, and digital communication has increasingly influenced indigenous lifestyles and value systems. Rather than disappearing, tribal cultures have demonstrated remarkable resilience by adapting to changing socio-economic contexts while retaining core cultural values (Shah, 2010)^[17]. This adaptive process places tribal youth at the center of cultural continuity and transformation.

Youth as custodians of Cultural Heritage

The role of youth in preserving indigenous cultural heritage has attracted increasing scholarly attention because they constitute the primary link between older generations and future custodians of culture. Earlier modernization theories suggested that younger generations would gradually abandon traditional cultural practices in favor of modern lifestyles. However, more recent anthropological scholarship challenges this assumption by demonstrating that indigenous youth actively negotiate between traditional values and contemporary influences (Bhabha, 1994)^[3].

According to UNESCO (2003)^[23], safeguarding intangible cultural heritage depends upon the active involvement of younger generations in practicing, preserving, and transmitting cultural traditions. Cultural heritage survives only when communities continue to perform rituals, celebrate festivals, practice traditional arts, and transmit indigenous knowledge through lived experiences. Berkes (2018)^[2] similarly argues that indigenous knowledge is maintained through continuous participation in community activities where youth learn directly from elders by observation, participation, and apprenticeship.

Research conducted among indigenous communities worldwide indicates that youth increasingly function as cultural mediators rather than passive recipients of tradition (Smith, 2012)^[18]. They selectively preserve traditional practices while adapting them to contemporary social realities. This perspective aligns with Bhabha's (1994)^[3] concept of cultural hybridity, which explains how individuals combine elements of indigenous traditions with modern influences to construct new cultural identities. Thus, tribal youth become both agents of continuity and agents of cultural adaptation.

Within Indian tribal societies, youth participation in festivals, rituals, community work, music, dance, and oral traditions strengthens intergenerational learning and reinforces cultural identity. Such participation ensures that indigenous knowledge remains relevant despite increasing exposure to formal education, digital media, and globalization.

Festivals as Instruments of Cultural Preservation

Festivals represent one of the most visible expressions of indigenous cultural identity because they integrate religious beliefs, ecological knowledge, social relationships, and communal participation. Anthropological studies have consistently demonstrated that festivals function as mechanisms for transmitting cultural values while strengthening collective identity.

Durkheim (1912/1995)^[7] argued that collective rituals generate social solidarity by reinforcing shared beliefs and collective consciousness. During festivals, individuals temporarily transcend personal interests and participate in activities that strengthen their emotional attachment to the community. Turner (1969)^[20] expanded this understanding by introducing the concept of *communitas*, referring to the intense feeling of equality, unity, and belonging experienced during ritual participation. Festivals therefore function not merely as celebrations but as social institutions that reinforce community cohesion.

Among tribal communities, agricultural festivals occupy a particularly important position because they connect ecological cycles with spiritual beliefs and social cooperation. Posey (1999)^[15] observed that indigenous festivals often incorporate environmental knowledge, traditional agricultural practices, and collective labour, thereby preserving both ecological wisdom and cultural identity.

Within the tribal communities of Alluri Sitarama Raju District, festivals such as Korakota and Sankranti continue to serve as important occasions for communal participation. Young people actively participate in organizing ceremonies, performing traditional dances, preparing ritual foods, and assisting elders in customary practices. Such participation facilitates intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge while strengthening community cohesion.

Dhimsa Dance and the Preservation of Tribal Identity

Traditional dance plays a major role in the preservation of cultural memory and maintenance of social ties by indigenous societies. Unlike formal artistic performance, traditional dances combine spirituality, history, social structures and public participation into one cultural event. Turner (1982)^[21] defined rituals as acts involving symbols, where communities convey meaning and manage their social relations. Accordingly, dance performances carry cultural stories and help with the creation of shared identity. Kaeppler

(2000)^[11] supports the idea arguing that dance is a kind of language in the sociocultural context through which a community preserves its history and values.

Dhimsa dance is one of the most important examples of indigenous identity manifestation among Tribals of Eastern Ghats in Andhra Pradesh. Traditionally performed during harvests and weddings, the dance focuses on the cooperation of dancers rather than on individual performance. Circular formations, rhythmic movements and songs are indicative of unity and harmony present in this tribal community. The research on tribal performing arts shows that youth participation in tribal dancing contributes to the transmission of culture and development of emotional bond with traditions of the community (UNESCO, 2003)^[23]. Dhimsa engagement enables tribal youth to learn folk songs, traditional costumes, symbolics, and ethics of community activities thus establishing cultural identity.

Traditional Food Practices and Rituals in Indigenous Communities

The importance of food in indigenous culture is evident in its capacity to capture ecological adaptations, cultural wisdom, and social organization. Indigenous food systems rely on biodiversity, seasons, and local natural resources based on centuries of adaptation to livelihood requirements (Kuhnlein, Erasmus & Spigelski, 2009)^[12].

According to anthropologists, food-related practices are not merely about feeding individuals. They play a vital role in indicating identity, kinship, spirituality, and community attachment. Mintz & Du Bois, (2002)^[14]. Ritual meals that are made during festivals, agriculture ceremonies, weddings, and community events serve to improve social ties as well as to promote cultural messages. When traditional food is being prepared, older representatives of the community pass their knowledge to the younger members, thus facilitating intergenerational transfer from one generation to another in cooking and food preparation.

In the case of people living in Alluri Sitarama Raju District, traditional food made from locally available plants is still widely used in ceremonial practices. Traditional food is offered at community feasts dedicated to Korakota, Sankranti, and other celebrations of this kind. Modernization is changing food preferences of communities but indigenous food is still traditionally cooked in many households together with modern food.

Youth Participation in Cultural Transmission

The sustainability of the native culture relies on its intergenerational transmission of culture. In contrast to formal education systems, indigenous education takes place through the engagement of individuals in community activities where children and youth learn from elders by taking part in rituals and various everyday activities. According to Vygotsky (1978)^[26], "Learning is a social process; it takes place through the interaction with educated members of the community." The observation can be also made according to Lave and Wenger (1991)^[13], who state that knowledge is formed during legitimate participation in the community of practice, as it is the case in the indigenous cultural traditions.

Berkes (2018)^[2] claims that the traditional ecological knowledge, ritual practices, oral traditions, and customary law continue to exist because young generations take part in cultural life. Thus, festivals, dances, joint farming,

storytelling, and different rituals make young people the keepers of indigenous culture.

The research indicates that modern young generations of natives use both traditional methods of cultural transmission and modern devices, such as social networks or digital documentation (UNESCO, 2022)^[24]. As a rule, the innovations that are introduced to create a brand-new approach to preserving indigenous culture do not substitute traditional practices but contribute to its sustainability.

Cultural Practices, Identity, and Community Cohesion

The field of anthropology has repeatedly shown that cultural practices help shape people's identities as well as unity in terms of social context. The social identity theory indicates that belonging to a culturally important social group gives people the feeling of self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)^[19]. Therefore, participation in culture makes it possible to feel more responsible for community values.

Similarly, Durkheim (1912/1995)^[7] insists on the idea that rituals contribute to solidarity in the society. Indigenous celebrations, dances, and rituals allow for community involvement and the development of the feeling of belonging. In tribal societies, youth engagement in cultural activities not only helps in the preservation of native culture but also strengthens community integration. Young people gain knowledge of customary norms, social duties, and common values through active involvement in the culture rather than just passive observation. Thus, by participating in cultural activities, the society can preserve its cultural identity and maintain social cohesion in difficulties brought about by dynamically changing socio-economic realities.

A significant amount of research has been done on indigenous culture, ritual theory, traditional ecological knowledge, and modernization in tribal societies (Berkes, 2018; Durkheim, 1912/1995; Turner, 1969; Xaxa, 2008)^[2, 7, 20]. There have also been studies of indigenous identity, cultural hybridity, and youth participation at a national and global level (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996; Smith, 2012)^[3, 9, 18]. Nevertheless, scant empirical studies have been dedicated to understanding tribal youth as guardians of indigenous culture specifically in relation to the Alluri Sitarama Raju District of Andhra Pradesh. Prior publications have predominantly dealt with tribal means of livelihood, development initiatives, and the cultural activities of tribal members, but not with how actual youth exercise their role in continuing celebrations of culture through rituals such as Korakota, Sankranti, Dhimsa, and food customs, and in preserving indigenous knowledge through these celebrations. The present research helps to address this already highlighted gap by investigating how tribal youth assist in preserving cultural identity and fostering social unity of the community.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative ethnographic research design to explore the cultural practices of tribal youth and their role in preserving indigenous identity among tribal communities in Alluri Sitarama Raju (ASR) District, Andhra Pradesh. An ethnographic approach was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of people's lived experiences, beliefs, and cultural practices within their natural social environment (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019)^[10]. The study sought to understand how tribal youth participate in traditional festivals, dances, rituals, and food practices, and how these activities contribute to cultural

identity and community cohesion.

The study was conducted in selected tribal villages of Munchingiputtu Mandal, ASR District, including Pedaguda, Beeta, Godugulaputtu, Jangamputtu, Panasa, Kodaput, Chivukuchintha, Thotaputtu, Goddiput, Galaganda, Bakubeda, Saradhi, Doraguda, Jarripada, and Vanuguputtu. These villages are predominantly inhabited by tribal communities such as the Bagata, Valmiki, Porja, Gadaba, Kotiya, Mali, Konda Kamara, and Muliya, where indigenous cultural practices remain an important part of community life. The target population comprised tribal youth aged 15–30 years who actively participated in cultural activities. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who possessed adequate knowledge and experience of indigenous cultural practices. In addition, village elders, traditional leaders, and cultural practitioners were interviewed as key informants because of their knowledge of cultural traditions and their role in transmitting indigenous knowledge to younger generations.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and key informant interviews. Interviews and discussions explored youth participation in festivals such as Korakota and Sankranti, the Dhimsa dance, traditional food practices, customary rituals, and perceptions of cultural identity. Participant observation was undertaken during community festivals and cultural events to understand how these practices were performed and how youth interacted with elders in the transmission of cultural knowledge. Using multiple data collection methods enhanced the credibility of the findings through triangulation

(Creswell & Poth, 2018) [6].

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) [4]. Interview transcripts and field notes were carefully coded to identify recurring themes related to indigenous festivals, traditional dance, food practices, rituals, youth participation, cultural identity, and community cohesion. The themes were interpreted within anthropological perspectives on culture, identity, and cultural transmission to explain the role of tribal youth as custodians of indigenous heritage.

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Department of Anthropology and local community leaders before fieldwork commenced. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by protecting participants' identities, while cultural norms and community traditions were respected during all stages of data collection.

Results and Discussion

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants

The study involved 30 tribal youth aged between 15 and 30 years drawn from selected villages in Munchingiputtu Mandal, Alluri Sitarama Raju District. Participants represented several tribal communities, including Bagata, Valmiki, Porja, Gadaba, Mali, Kotiya, and Konda Kammara. The majority of participants were engaged in agriculture while others were students, daily wage laborers, or involved in community-based occupations.

Table 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 30)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	16	53.3
	Female	14	46.7
Age	15–20 years	10	33.3
	21–25 years	12	40.0
	26–30 years	8	26.7
Education	Primary	7	23.3
	Secondary	13	43.3
	College	10	33.4
Occupation	Student	11	36.7
	Farming	10	33.3
	Daily labour	6	20.0
	Others	3	10.0

The findings in table 1 indicate that participants represented different educational and occupational backgrounds, providing diverse perspectives on indigenous cultural practices. Youth with higher educational attainment continued participating in traditional ceremonies alongside formal education, suggesting that schooling had not completely displaced indigenous cultural engagement. The diversity of participants enhanced the credibility of the findings by providing multiple viewpoints on cultural continuity and change

Theme One: Indigenous Festivals as Spaces of Cultural Learning

Thematic analysis identified indigenous festivals as the principal setting through which cultural knowledge is transmitted across generations.

Participants consistently described Korakota and Sankranti as important occasions where tribal values, rituals, songs, dances, and communal responsibilities are learned through active participation rather than formal instruction.

One participant explained: "When Korakota begins, everyone gathers. We learn from our grandparents by participating."

Another participant remarked: "Festivals teach us how our ancestors lived. Every year we learn something new."

Participant observation supported these narratives. During Korakota celebrations, young people were observed cleaning communal spaces, preparing ritual sites, assisting elders with ceremonial activities, and participating in collective dances and songs. These activities created opportunities for informal learning through observation, participation, and interaction with older community members.

Village elders similarly emphasized the importance of festivals in preserving indigenous knowledge.

One elder explained: "Children first watch us, then they

begin helping us, and eventually they conduct the traditions themselves."

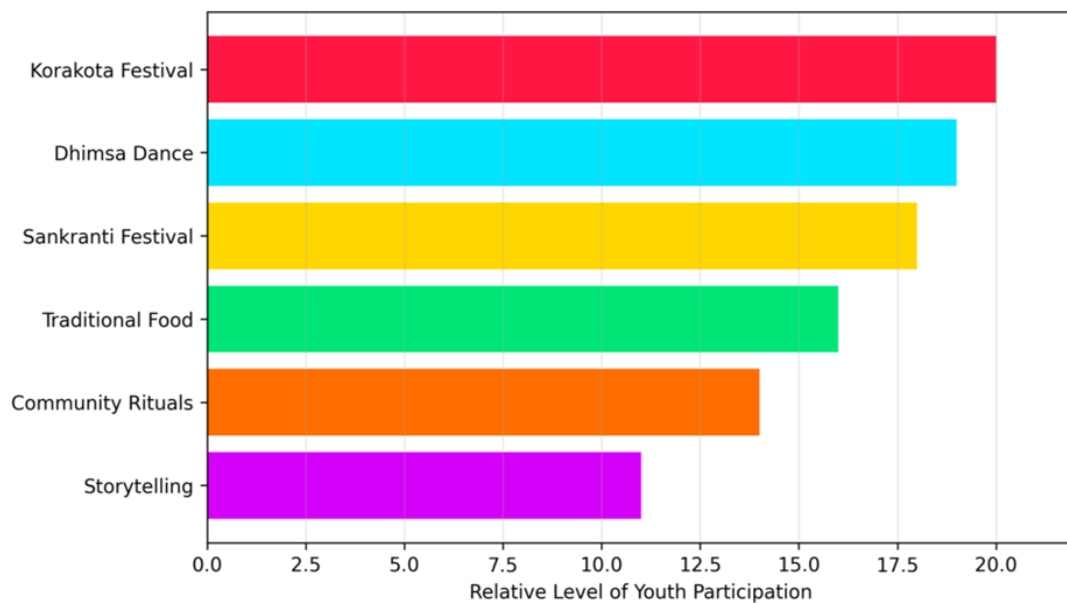


Fig 1: Indigenous Cultural Practices Most Frequently Practiced by Tribal Youth

Figure1 shows that Korakota, Sankranti, and the Dhimsa dance were the most frequently reported cultural practices among participants, followed by traditional food preparation, community rituals, and oral storytelling. These findings indicate that indigenous festivals continue to provide important opportunities for cultural participation, intergenerational learning, and the transmission of tribal values. Taken together, the interview narratives, participant observations, and visual summary demonstrate that festivals remain central institutions for preserving indigenous culture and strengthening community cohesion among tribal youth.

Theme Two: Dhimsa Dance as a Marker of Tribal Identity

Across all participating communities, the Dhimsa dance emerged as the strongest expression of tribal identity. Participants viewed the dance as representing unity, cooperation, respect for elders, and collective belonging.

One participant stated: "Without Dhimsa we would forget who we are." Another explained: "When we dance together, we feel like one family."

Participant observation showed that elders instructed younger dancers during rehearsals while experienced performers demonstrated traditional movements and songs. Preparation involved learning traditional attire, musical rhythms, and ritual etiquette, making Dhimsa both a cultural performance and a learning process.

A cultural practitioner commented: "Dhimsa is our history. Every movement has meaning."

Several participants also observed that Dhimsa is increasingly performed during tourism and government cultural programmes. Although tourism has increased visibility for tribal culture, participants emphasized that the dance retains its primary significance during traditional ceremonies. This finding reflects Turner's concept of

communitas, where collective ritual performances strengthen shared identity and social cohesion.

Theme Three: Traditional Food Practices and Intergenerational Learning

Traditional food practices emerged as an important means through which indigenous ecological knowledge and cultural values are transmitted.

Participants explained that millet-based foods, bamboo chicken, forest vegetables, indigenous beverages, and ritual meals continue to be prepared during festivals and ceremonial occasions.

One participant explained: "Our mothers teach us how to prepare traditional foods during festivals."

Another participant added: "Traditional food reminds us of our forests and our people." Participant observation revealed that meal preparation involved collaboration between elders and youth. Younger participants collected forest products, prepared ingredients, and learned cooking techniques while elders explained the cultural significance of specific foods.

One village elder stated: "When children cook with us, they learn our traditions without anyone forcing them."

These findings demonstrate that food practices preserve ecological knowledge, kinship relationships, and cultural identity.

Theme Four: Intergenerational Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge

Participants consistently described parents, grandparents, village elders, festivals, and community rituals as their principal sources of indigenous knowledge.

One participant explained: "Nobody teaches us from books. We learn by staying with our grandparents."

Another participant stated: "Every festival teaches us something different."

Participant observation showed elders mentoring young people during ritual preparation, storytelling, dance rehearsals, and communal activities. These informal learning

processes allowed cultural knowledge to be transmitted naturally through participation. Traditional leaders emphasized that formal schooling

complements rather than replaces indigenous learning. One elder explained: "School teaches education, but our culture is learned in the community."

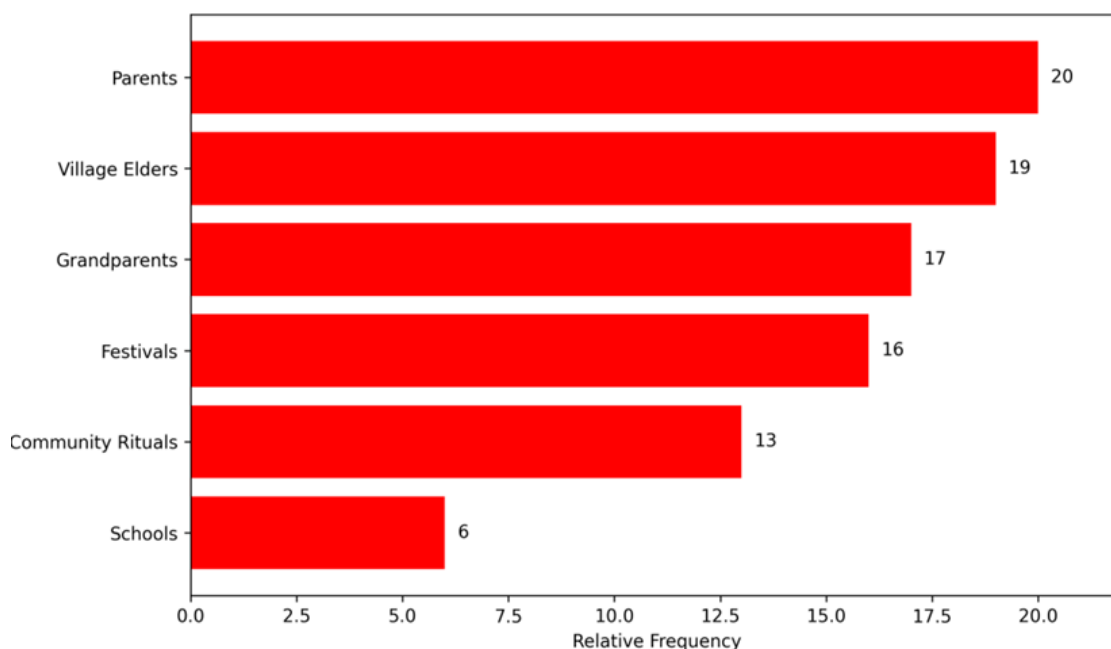


Fig 2: Sources of Indigenous Cultural Learning

Figure 2 indicates that parents, grandparents, village elders, festivals, and community rituals are the principal sources of indigenous cultural knowledge, while formal schooling plays a complementary role. The findings suggest that the transmission of indigenous knowledge remains embedded in everyday social interactions and collective cultural activities, reinforcing the importance of intergenerational learning in sustaining tribal identity and cultural continuity.

Theme Five: Negotiating Modernization while Preserving Indigenous Culture

A recurring theme concerned how tribal youth balance traditional cultural practices with modern influences. Participants acknowledged that education, mobile phones, social media, migration, and tourism have influenced their aspirations and lifestyles.

One participant explained: "Education has changed our lives, but not our traditions." Another remarked: "We use mobile phones every day, but when festivals come everyone returns home."

Participant observation similarly revealed that while young people frequently used smartphones and social media, they continued participating actively in festivals, rituals, and Dhimsa performances.

A cultural practitioner commented: "Tourism helps others know our culture, but we must protect its meaning."

Rather than abandoning indigenous traditions, participants described adapting cultural practices to contemporary realities while maintaining their cultural significance. These findings illustrate Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity, where traditional and modern identities coexist.

Theme Six: Indigenous Cultural Practices, Identity and Community Cohesion

Participants consistently associated cultural participation with belonging, mutual cooperation, and respect for elders. One participant explained: "When we celebrate together, we

remember who we are. Our culture keeps us united."

Another stated: "Our traditions teach us to work together and respect each other." Participant observation showed that festivals encouraged cooperation across generations through communal labour, collective dancing, ritual participation, and shared meals. Village elders emphasized that youth participation is essential for preserving tribal identity.

One elder remarked: "As long as the young people continue participating, our culture will survive."

These findings demonstrate that indigenous cultural practices reinforce both tribal identity and community cohesion by creating opportunities for shared participation and collective responsibility.

Discussion

The study focused on the contribution of tribal youth to the conservation of their ethnic culture and cultural identity of tribal communities in Alluri Sitarama Raju District, Andhra Pradesh. The results of the study confirmed that tribal youth are involved in celebrations, traditional dances known as Dhimsa, cooking custom recipes, conducting traditional rituals, and learning from older generations regardless of the influence of formal education, digital media, tourism and other factors linked to modernization. The study results indicate that young people actively mediate between traditions received from their ancestors and modern-day aspects of life rather than losing traditions due to modernization. The findings make a significant contribution to cultural anthropology as they prove that young indigenous people should not be seen as passive receivers of traditions but as active people responsible for their preservation and development.

One of the most significant findings is the persistent role of indigenous festivals, such as Korakota and Sankranti, as sites of education and participation. Festivals are often viewed as platforms through which youngsters in the tribal communities learn about rituals, community work, traditional music,

dance, and food preparation while being taught the indigenous principles of their culture by their parents and elders. This finding supports Durkheim's (1912/1995) ^[7] claim that collective rituals reinforce social cohesion and collective morals, while also being aligned with Turner's (1969) ^[20] concept of *communitas*, which refers to the fact that participation in rituals creates equality among participants and gives them a sense of belonging to the communal group. Xaxa (2008) presents a similar argument, stating that festivals are still vital for tribes to maintain their tribal identity despite being exposed to modern society. The present research expands on this previous literature by exploring the way cultural festivals function as venues for dissemination of indigenous knowledge within the tribal communities of Alluri Sitarama Raju District.

The findings also emphasize the importance of Dhimsa dance in strengthening tribal identity. The participants in the study viewed Dhimsa dance as a tool for achieving collective identity and have shown that it is a place where elderly people enjoy the respect of youth. The participant observation revealed that the rehearsals and performances of Dhimsa dance allow young people to learn traditional songs, moves, clothing, and rituals from more experienced members of the community. The findings provide support for Turner's (1982) ^[21] interpretation of ritual performances as symbolic actions of cultural communities that communicate meanings and build social relations. At the same time, Kaeppler (2000) ^[11] views dancing as a form of the language through which historical memory and social values of a given community are preserved. It needs to be underlined that the respondents are aware of the fact that Dhimsa dance has become popular among the tourists and is included into the governmental programs, but they have stated that the importance of Dhimsa dance lies not in its performance but in its functioning within the community. Traditional food practices emerged as another important mechanism through which indigenous knowledge and cultural values are preserved. Participants described the preparation of millet-based foods, bamboo chicken, forest vegetables, and ceremonial meals as collective activities involving both elders and youth. Participant observation further demonstrated that food preparation created opportunities for younger generations to learn indigenous ecological knowledge, customary cooking techniques, and the cultural meanings associated with ceremonial foods. These findings are consistent with Mintz and Du Bois (2002) ^[14], who argue that food practices symbolize identity, kinship, and social relationships beyond their nutritional value. Similarly, Kuhnlein, Erasmus, and Spigelski (2009) ^[12] emphasize that indigenous food systems embody generations of ecological knowledge developed through long-term interaction with local environments. The present study extends these perspectives by illustrating how food preparation within the tribal communities of Alluri Sitarama Raju District functions simultaneously as cultural education, ecological learning, and community building.

The second significant observation emphasizes the unchanged role of intergenerational transmitting of indigenous knowledge. The interviewees have named their parents, grandparents, village elders, festivals, and community practices as the main sources of cultural education. At the same time, they considered formal education to complement rather than be the main source of safekeeping indigenous knowledge. This is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) ^[26] life-long learning theory as he believes

that learning happens through people who are knowledgeable in the society. In a similar vein, Lave and Wenger's (1991) ^[13] conception of communities allows understanding how different types of learning occur. Berkes (2018) ^[2] argues that indigenous knowledge exists timely owing to younger generations learning from the elders. The results of this case study serve to confirm the given ideas as they show that indigenous peoples do not neither use printed materials for gaining knowledge nor consider it to be the best way of learning process.

The research indicates that modernization has indeed changed indigenous culture but has not destroyed the native traditions. Participants stated that education, mobile phones, digital media, tourism, and migration opened up many new possibilities for them, yet they added that these factors were not able to influence their participation in festivals, rituals, Dhimsa dancing, and other forms of traditional culture. Furthermore, the respondents noted that they adapted indigenous practices to contemporary realities and made them relevant in modern times. The results obtained in this study are consistent with Bhabha's (1994) ^[3] theory of cultural hybridity since it suggests that cultural identities are constantly being formed through interactions between traditional and modern world. Also, the results support the conclusions made by other researches (Sahlins, 1999; Smith, 2012; Mishra, 2016) ^[16, 18] who explain that indigenous cultures are resilient because they adopted some outside elements without losing their cultural roots. Contrary to modernization theorists who believe that indigenous culture will disappear, this study proves that tribal youth are trying to incorporate modern education, communication technologies, and tourism into their lives.

The results reveal a significant link among indigenous cultural engagement, tribal affiliation, and community solidarity. All the participants connected cultural practice participation with solidarity, respect for elders, cooperation, and collective responsibility. The findings confirm Hall's (1996) ^[9] theory of cultural identity formation and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) ^[19, 21]. It's possible to conclude that cultural practices not only lead to the formation of one's identity, but also contribute to the bonding process. The present study's main contribution is its examination of how tribal youth act as custodians of indigenous culture in the context of Alluri Sitarama Raju District. Most previous studies have focused on tribal development, livelihoods, education, or cultural changes in general, while very few studies have concentrated on how young people maintain indigenous cultural practices at the local level, as done in this study. By using different methods such as interviews, focus groups, fellowship, and key informants, the current research shows that for cultural continuity to be upheld, youths need to be actively involved in community life instead of just preserving culture passively. These results suggest that indigenous culture in tribal communities in the Alluri Sitarama Raju District is progressive rather than stagnant. Such cultural continuity is facilitated by festivals, dances, traditional cuisine, and rituals, and a continuous flow of culture across generations accomplished by adapting to modernization instead of replacing it. The youth of tribal communities serve as key players of indigenous culture within those communities. Overall, the outcomes of this research re-emphasize the idea that the best way to maintain the indigenous heritage is to engage the local community.

Conclusion

In this research, the tribal youth's constructive role in conserving indigenous cultural activity and fostering cultural identity in the tribal communities of Alluri Sitarama Raju District, Andhra Pradesh, has been analyzed. This study follows a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore how youth engage with indigenous festivals, Dhimsa dance, traditional gastronomy, customary rituals, and the passing of cultural knowledge from generation to generation. By using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and key informant interviews as the major research methods, this research has identified the role of tribal youth in keeping the rich legacy of indigenous cultural activity. The results suggest that although tribal youth is undergoing assimilation through modern forms of education, digital innovations, migration, tourism, and social and economic changes, indigenous cultural activities are still relevant in their daily life. The indigenous festivals Korakota and Sankranti provide a vital source of learning & socialization, while the Dhimsa dance strengthens the tribal identity of the community as a whole.

The specific nature of traditional cuisine, native traditions, and social events promotes awareness of ecological knowledge and family ties. The research shows that knowledge is transmitted by parents and older generations from their ancestors. One of the advantages of this research is the conclusion that modernization has not wiped out traditional culture among local tribes of Alluri Sitarama Raju District. The research indicates that tribal youth settle their conflict between traditions and modernity. It proves that the process of modernization could not be directly connected with degradation of traditions. The conclusion of this study contradicts the idea that the process of modernization is accompanied by cultural decline for the indigenous groups and emphasizes the great capacity of adaptation of the indigenous communities. In short, the study claims that the indigenous youth are not just passive carriers of cultural heritage but are very active participants in the process of preserving indigenous culture. Through patronage in various festivities, including festivals, traditional dance, food habits, rites and ceremonies, and community life, indigenous youth help preserve indigenous knowledge, tribal identity, and social bonding of the community across generations. By analyzing the phenomenon in the case of Alluri Sitarama Raju District, the study makes a significant contribution to anthropology pertaining to cultural resilience, indigenous youth engagement, and cultural continuity in the context of indigenous peoples.

Limitations of the Study

There exist numerous limitations in this research that should be taken into account while interpreting the findings of the study. Firstly, the research only covered tribal youth from some selected villages located in Munchingiputtu Mandal in the district of Alluri Sitarama Raju and therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to the entire state of Andhra Pradesh or to other tribal communities in India. Secondly, the research design is based on qualitative and ethnographic methods and purposive sampling technique that gives importance to depth of understanding rather than the statistical representativeness of the findings. Lastly, the findings are time specific in nature

and based on the experiences and perceptions of participants at a specific point of time and are not an accurate reflection of the cultural changes that may take place over a period of time. Despite these limitations, the use of abundant research methods including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observations and key informant interviews provide a way out for data triangulation, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Implications of the Study

The results of this study present critical implications for the anthropology field, exhibits indigenous cultural preservation, community development and policy making. By showing that tribal youth are still engaged in the indigenous cultural practices in spite of the approaching modernity, the study proves that cultural continuity can be achieved from adaptation and not cultural isolation.

From a theoretical stand, the outcomes support anthropological interpretations of culture as a living and changing phenomenon and not a fixed legacy. The research supports the ideas about cultural resilience, intergenerational learning and cultural hybridity as tribal youth negotiate between traditional beliefs and modern ideas while remaining true to their cultural identity.

The research also has significant implications for cultural protection among indigenous communities. The results show how festivals, the Dhimsa dance, indigenous practices, traditions, and oral practices are still employed in the process of preserving indigenous wisdom. Therefore, recognizing these practices as vital cultural practices will help in empowering initiatives aimed at supporting indigenous communities. Moreover, enhancing the ability of young members of the community to participate in cultural activities will lead to the long-term preservation of indigenous knowledge and culture.

In addition, the findings demonstrate the importance of relations of the community members and especially parents, grandparents, and elders in transmitting indigenous knowledge to younger generations. The main conditions for the successful transfer of experiences include the existence of strong relationships between generations and the availability of places that allow the young generation to participate in cultural life.

According to the findings, one may conclude that formal education needs to be regarded as an addition to indigenous knowledge systems instead of replacing them. More recognition of indigenous cultural knowledge within educational programs can result in youth engaging with their cultural history and the benefits of formal education. Employing local cultural history, indigenous ecological knowledge, traditional art and local heritage in the school and community education programs could improve both educational performance and cultural identity.

There are also implications of the discovered information for the cultural policy and heritage management fields. With the ongoing development of tourism, infrastructure, and digital technology in tribal areas, it is essential to have cultural preservation mechanisms based on the involvement of indigenous communities and tribal youth.

In conclusion, this research lays the groundwork for future anthropological studies concerning indigenous youth and

their culture. Findings from the research endorse qualitative ethnographic tools used in obtaining information regarding the practice, negotiation, and transmission of cultural information in daily life.

Future studies may be concerned with similar issues in other Indigenous tribes; how cultural knowledge differs in different regions, or the influence of modern technology on preservation of Indigenous culture.

Note of gratitude

We express our sincere gratitude to tribal communities, village elders, cultural practitioners, and tribal youth from Alluri Sitarama Raju District for their kind involvement and valuable information. We thank also the Department of Anthropology for helping to carry out this research.

Funding. no financial support from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors for the conduct of this research.

Conflict of Interest

No financial or other interests can bias this study

Ethical Approval

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Department of Anthropology and the respective community leaders before fieldwork commenced. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

Data Availability Statement

The qualitative data generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available because they contain information that could compromise participant confidentiality. Data may be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical considerations and participant consent.

Author Contributions

Apio Sharon Aphia: Conceptualization, methodology, field investigation, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and manuscript preparation. Dr. S. Narayana Rao: Research supervision, methodological guidance, critical review, manuscript editing, and overall academic oversight.

References

- Appadurai A. *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; 1996.
- Berkes F. *Sacred ecology*. 4th ed. London: Routledge; 2018.
- Bhabha HK. *The location of culture*. London: Routledge; 1994.
- Braun V, Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual Res Psychol*. 2006;3(2):77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
- Census of India. *Primary census abstract for Scheduled Tribes*. New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India; 2011.
- Creswell JW, Poth CN. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks (CA): SAGE; 2018.
- Durkheim É. *The elementary forms of religious life*. Fields KE, translator. New York: Free Press; 1995. Originally published 1912.
- Geertz C. *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books; 1973.
- Hall S. Who needs identity? In: Hall S, du Gay P, editors. *Questions of cultural identity*. London: SAGE; 1996. p. 1-17.
- Hammersley M, Atkinson P. *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. 4th ed. London: Routledge; 2019.
- Kaeppler AL. Dance ethnology and the anthropology of dance. *Dance Res J*. 2000;32(1):116-25.
- Kuhnlein HV, Erasmus B, Spigelski D, editors. *Indigenous peoples' food systems: The many dimensions of culture, diversity and environment for nutrition and health*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; 2009.
- Lave J, Wenger E. *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1991.
- Mintz SW, Du Bois CM. The anthropology of food and eating. *Annu Rev Anthropol*. 2002;31:99-119. doi:10.1146/annurev.anthro.31.040402.085711.
- Posey DA, editor. *Cultural and spiritual values of biodiversity*. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme; 1999.
- Sahlins M. Two or three things that I know about culture. *J R Anthropol Inst*. 1999;5(3):399-421. doi:10.2307/2661275.
- Shah G. *Social movements in India: A review of literature*. 2nd ed. New Delhi: SAGE; 2010.
- Smith LT. *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. 2nd ed. London: Zed Books; 2012.
- Tajfel H, Turner JC. An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In: Austin WG, Worchel S, editors. *The social psychology of intergroup relations*. Monterey (CA): Brooks/Cole; 1979. p. 33-47.
- Turner V. *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Chicago: Aldine; 1969.
- Turner V. *From ritual to theatre: The human seriousness of play*. New York: PAJ Publications; 1982.
- Tylor EB. *Primitive culture: Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art, and custom*. Vols. 1-2. London: John Murray; 1871.
- UNESCO. *Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage* [Internet]. Paris: UNESCO; 2003 [cited 2026 Aug 4]. Available from: <https://ich.unesco.org>
- UNESCO. *MONDIACULT 2022 declaration* [Internet]. Paris: UNESCO; 2022 [cited 2026 Aug 4]. Available from: <https://www.unesco.org>

25. United Nations. United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples [Internet]. New York: United Nations; 2007 [cited 2026 Aug 4]. Available from: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples>
26. Vygotsky LS. Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press; 1978.
27. Xaxa V. State, society, and tribes: Issues in post-colonial India. New Delhi: Pearson Education; 2008.

How to Cite This Article

Aphia AS, Rao SN. Tribal youth and the preservation of cultural heritage: Exploring cultural practice and identity in Alluri Sitarama Raju District, Andhra Pradesh. Glob Multidiscip Perspect J. 2026;3(4):13-23.
doi:10.54660/GMPJ.2026.3.4.13-23.

Creative Commons (CC) License

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial Share Alike 4.0 International (CC BYNC-SA 4.0) License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.