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## Women of Indigenous Mayan Communities in Central Highlands of Guatemala

Mayan Indians are one of the few remaining cultures of the Mesoamerican civilization of Central and South America that continues to exhibit many of its original indigenous traditions. Mayans were one of the few pre-Columbian American cultures that had a fully developed written language and are still famous for the Mayan Calendar, as well as art, astronomical and mathematical systems developed long before the arrival of the Spanish. Unlike Aztec and Inca Civilizations, the Mayans were not completely destroyed or disseminated into the conquering bloodlines, and many of the ancient customs and traditional roles persist, yet they remain a persecuted and impoverished society in Guatemala and other parts of Central America.

The role of women among these mountainous Mayan communities has likewise remained largely unchanged over the centuries, yet efforts are being made to enhance awareness and precipitate change in the subservient role to which these women have acceded for so long. International relief agencies and foundations as well as local officials and even the role of increasing tourism have all served as a beginning to shed the shackles of a strongly male dominated culture in these remote mountainous villages.

The purpose of this paper will be to identify the long held customs and roles of the women in mountain communities of Guatemala, and the efforts that are being made to provide resources and education to a population long underserved.