


# Chapter 4

## Global Indigenous Oral Traditions: Storytelling and Intergenerational Transmission of Knowledge

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### ABSTRACT

*Literature, particularly novels, serves as a platform for exploring Indigenous oral traditions—dynamic, culturally embedded knowledge systems. Novels by Indigenous authors extend oral storytelling within written narratives. This study examines how Indigenous oral traditions are preserved, transformed, and transmitted through novels from America, Canada, India, Australia, and Africa. Focusing on ten works, it explores storytelling as both a literary technique and an epistemological framework and act of cultural resistance. The selected novels include Ceremony (Leslie Marmon Silko), There There (Tommy Orange), Green Grass, Running Water (Thomas King), The Marrow Thieves (Cherie Dimaline), The Legend of Pensam (Mamang Dai), Son of the Thundercloud (Easterine Kire), Carpentaria (Alexis Wright), The Swan Book (Alexis Wright), The Palm-Wine Drinkard (Amos Tutuola), and The Healers*

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-3927-6.ch004

(Ayi Kwei Armah). *Using qualitative research and close reading, the study identifies oral narrative elements, affirming fiction as a vessel for Indigenous knowledge and cultural survival.*

## INTRODUCTION

*“There’s a saying in the oral tradition of storytelling that when you tell a story, when you give out a story, it is no longer yours; it belongs to everyone who encounters it and everyone who takes it in” (Beah, 2014).*

Indigenous oral traditions have long served as the primary means of preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge, values, and histories across generations. Rooted in spoken word, performance, and communal memory, these traditions embody holistic worldviews and spiritual cosmologies that resist fragmentation. In recent decades, Indigenous authors across the globe have turned to the written word—particularly the novel—as a powerful medium to sustain and reimagine these oral legacies. This paper explores the convergence of oral storytelling and literary expression in contemporary Indigenous fiction from diverse regions, including North America, India, Australia, and Africa. The chapter foregrounds fiction not simply as artistic representation, but as a critical space for cultural survival, intergenerational dialogue, and resistance against colonial silencing. Through close readings of ten seminal novels, the research underscores the enduring vitality of Indigenous oral traditions in shaping both literature and lived experience on a global scale.

Literature, and especially the novel form, offers a nuanced and immersive space to explore Indigenous oral traditions as living, dynamic, and culturally embedded systems of knowledge. Novels by Indigenous authors often serve as literary extensions of oral storytelling practices, integrating myth, memory, performance, and ritual within written narratives. This makes them not only artistic expressions but also repositories of communal history, pedagogical tools, and instruments of cultural resilience. Through character, voice, plot structure, and symbolism, novels can convey the rhythms, repetitions, and worldviews of oral traditions in ways that reflect how knowledge is shared across generations. Moreover, literature allows for a decolonial intervention, where Indigenous voices reclaim narrative authority from colonial historiography and reassert storytelling as a legitimate epistemology.

*“We are a people of oral tradition, we hand down things by word of mouth”*  
(Cambridge University Press)

This research focuses on ten novels drawn from five countries—the United States, Canada, India, Australia, and Africa—with two novels representing Indigenous voices from each. These countries have been intentionally selected for their rich yet historically marginalized Indigenous storytelling traditions, shaped by colonization,

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