Oral and Native Tradition as Resilience in the Indian Context: Indigenous Story Work and Decolonial Healing

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the role of indigenous narratives as a tool for decolonial healing in Indian writing. Drawing on oral traditions, tribal narratives, and marginalized voices, it examines how indigenous communities across India use storytelling as cultural preservation as well as a form of resistance and reclamation of identity in the face of historical erasure and colonial violence. By engaging with works by tribal and Dalit authors, oral epics and regional folklore, the study highlights how indigenous narratives challenge dominant literary and historical discourses, recenter subaltern perspectives, and foster a collective healing process rooted in land, memory, and community. An additional focus is on women as keepers of oral tradition and generational resilience. Along with examining oral storytelling practices as a mechanism of cultural continuity and healing from cultural trauma, this paper discusses how narrative, ritual, and collective memory is used by indigenous communities in India to resist development-induced displacement. The paper also discusses the intersection of language politics and ecological consciousness as critical dimensions of indigenous story work, arguing for a more inclusive, pluralistic understanding of Indian literature. It positions storytelling as both an act of survivance and a transformative pathway toward epistemic justice and cultural resurgence in postcolonial India – in an independent India, storytelling becomes a form of protest against displacement, state violence and cultural erasure. Finally, the paper also takes note of transformation of oral forms into modern, digital spaces while trying to retain decolonial ethos.

Keywords: *indigenous writing, subaltern and marginalized literature, politics of resistance*

Introduction

Indigenous cultures across the world have survived through Oral Traditions. In, India, they remain a powerful conduit of history, spirituality, ecological knowledge, and resistance among its diverse indigenous communities viz., Adivasis, or the "original inhabitants". These communities comprise of forest dwellers, tribal groups, and other subaltern populations who have historically and categorically been excluded from mainstream literary and cultural

narratives. The storytelling practices of these communities; often expressed through songs, myths, folktales, rituals, and performances, are not merely aesthetic or nostalgic acts. These constitute an intricate form of "indigenous story work" (Archibald, 2008) that functions as cultural preservation, intergenerational teaching, and political resistance.

In India, colonialism was significantly devastating to the Adivasi identities. Colonial policies of the British, particularly forest acts and land appropriation laws, systematically displaced tribal communities and refined them through orientalist frameworks as "primitive" or "savage" (Skaria, 1999). In the postcolonial era, these narratives have survived state-led development projects, forced assimilation, and cultural erasure. Consequently, the oral traditions of indigenous communities have become endangered – threatened by both material displacement and ideological marginalization.

Therefore, oral storytelling practices emerge as critical tools for decolonial healing, providing an outlet for indigenous communities to reassert identity, reclaim lost narratives, and resist epistemic domination. Here, decolonial healing refers to a process of restoring cultural, spiritual, and psychological wholeness after generations of violence, dislocation, and systemic marginalization (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Oral traditions enable communities to remember and narrate themselves in their own voices (and languages/dialects), refusing the silence imposed by hegemonic history and literature.

This paper contends that indigenous oral traditions in India are powerful forms of resilience and healing, countering colonial narratives and preserving cultural identity. Through the lens of 'oral tradition, indigenous story work, resilience, and decolonial healing', it examines how Adivasi and tribal storytelling traditions function as resistance to cultural erasure. The study draws from literature, cultural studies, anthropology, and decolonial theory to explore the significance of narrative in sustaining indigenous worldviews.

It further investigates how these oral traditions are not static relics but living, evolving forms of knowledge—capable of adapting to modern contexts without losing their decolonial spirit. From Gond myths and Santhal songs to Baiga cosmologies and Bhil folktales, these stories offer insights into indigenous ontologies, ecological ethics, and communal healing.

Additionally, the role of women as custodians of oral memory and the transformation of these traditions in digital media are addressed.

Methodologically, the paper combines textual analysis of indigenous literary works with theoretical insights from "decolonial theory" (Quijano, Mignolo, Smith), "orature studies" (Thiong'o, 1986), and "trauma theory". It uses 'Indigenous Storywork' as proposed by Jo-ann Archibald (2008) as a key theoretical lens—adapting its principles to the Indian tribal context.

Through this interdisciplinary approach, the paper aims to affirm the importance of storytelling as a strategy of survival, resurgence, and resistance in postcolonial India.

Historical and Cultural Contexts

India is home to an extraordinarily diverse range of indigenous communities: collectively referred to as Adivasis, which translates to "original inhabitants." These groups, including the Gond, Santhal, Baiga, Bhil, and many others, have sustained rich oral traditions, distinct social structures, and complex ecological relationships for millennia. However, the colonial encounter violently disrupted these systems, producing lasting socio-political and epistemic consequences.

British colonial rule reclassified and restructured India's tribal communities through administrative tools like the Criminal Tribes Act (1871) and the Forest Acts (1865, 1878, 1927). These laws effectively criminalized tribal mobility, expropriated ancestral lands, and redefined forest-dwelling communities as trespassers in their own ecosystems (Guha, 1983). Colonial ethnographers and missionaries further constructed the image of Adivasis as primitive, savage, or backward, thereby legitimizing their subjugation and exclusion from the modern nation-state.

This framing continued into the postcolonial era. Developmental policies; such as large dam projects, mining operations, and deforestation for infrastructure, led to the mass displacement of indigenous populations. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, while a significant legal intervention, has often seen inconsistent implementation, leaving many communities in a state of insecurity (Kujur, 2020).

Alongside material dispossession, indigenous cultures have faced erasure through language decline, assimilationist education policies, and mainstream religious and political pressures. Adivasi voices remain marginalized in dominant Indian literature and history, where their narratives are often silenced or appropriated. In the light of this, oral storytelling becomes a tool of cultural transmission as well as a political act of resistance and survival.

This marginalization of oral traditions is not limited to India: Native Americans, Aboriginal Australians, and the Sámi people of Northern Europe are some indigenous communities from across the world which have similarly used oral narratives to resist colonial (grand) narratives and assert sovereignty. For example, in Aboriginal Australian traditions, the *Dreaming* or *Dreamtime* stories are used to narrate cosmology as well as legal code, grounding the land rights claims and cultural continuity (Rose, 1996). In Native Americans, oral storytelling safeguards creation myths, clan histories, and ecological knowledge in the face of cultural genocide (Deloria, 2006).

The above parallels highlight the universal importance of storytelling as a mode of indigenous resistance and resilience, reiterating the idea that *orature* (coined by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986) is a pre-literary and fully developed system of knowledge transmission and cultural production instead of an inferior one.

In India, the colonial characterization of tribal people as "forest-dwelling primitives" continues to influence government policies, public discourse, and even education. The image of the "noble savage" is perpetuated in popular culture, often flattening the complexity of Adivasi life into stereotypes. Furthermore, language policies that promote Hindi and English have led to the erosion of many tribal languages, thus displacing oral traditions embedded within them.

The scholar G.N. Devy, in the People's Linguistic Survey of India, documented hundreds of endangered languages, many of them tied to tribal communities. According to him, language loss is not merely linguistic; it marks the disappearance of entire cosmologies, ritual systems, and knowledge about forests, healing, and community ethics (Devy, 2013). Oral traditions, then remain one of the few remaining repositories of indigenous epistemologies (along with performance arts, hand-me-downs, and other cultural relics) and must be protected not just as heritage but as living systems of resistance.

Thus, there is an urgent need to foreground indigenous narratives in both literary and socio-political discourse within the historical and cultural context. Oral narratives remain largely excluded since mainstream Indian literature tends to privilege written forms and elite languages. However, these traditions embody deep histories of resistance, resilience, and relationality with the land, offering a powerful counter-narrative to colonial and developmental paradigms.

The oral epics and folk traditions like the *Pandavani* performances by Teejan Bai (Prasad, 2013), show how indigenous communities reinterpret and retell dominant, popular narratives like the *Mahabharata* to establish their resilience and worldview. This type of adaptive storytelling represents the survival and transformation of oral tradition under the colonial and postcolonial pressures.

Another example can be the Santal poetry and songs (Hembrom, 1999) who have gendered spaces of resilience in their oral narrative or the Bhil songs documented in the aforementioned *People' Linguistic Survey of India* (Devy, 2013) which preserve histories of rebellion and ecological knowledge, presenting a challenge to the colonial narrative of primitiveness and/or paganism.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on multidisciplinary theories to better understand the power of indigenous oral traditions in India as mechanisms of healing, resistance, and identity. The main focus is on Decolonial Theory, Indigenous Story Work, Orature Theory, and Resilience and Trauma Studies. This overview allows for a literary, epistemological, ecological, and political interpretation of oral narratives which counter the colonial modes of knowledge production.

The Decolonial Theory was introduced mainly in Latin America, by thinkers like Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo. This theory critiques the colonial matrix of power which continues to shape knowledge, identity, and social structures even after political independence (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). The concept of epistemic disobedience or the refusal to accept Western knowledge systems as universal is essential to this theory as it affirms the marginalized ways of knowing.

This includes recognizing tribal storytelling, ritual, and oral memory as different from folklore since it constitutes legitimate epistemologies, in India. Decolonizing then demands an epistemic shift centered on the Adivasi Knowledge systems and oral traditions, challenging Eurocentric and Brahmanical dominance in Indian intellectual life.

Indigenous Storywork by Jo-ann Archibald analyses oral traditions as pedagogical and healing practices. The ideas originated with reference to Canadian First Nations yet can be applied to Indian tribal storytelling. This work provides a framework based on seven core principles of Indigenous Storywork, namely, respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. This framework helps understand stories as narratives along with viewing them as relational acts that bind individuals to land, community, and memory. Archibald's model helps decode the ethical values which form an intricate part of tribal myths, epics, and rituals when applied to Indian oral traditions. Hence, confirming Archibald's notion that storytelling can be a "culturally grounded, transformative practice" (Archibald, 2008; p.25).

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o introduced the theory of orature which challenges the supremacy of written literature by identifying oral forms as essential to cultural identity and resistance. The theory of orature argues that a community's oral traditions (songs, proverbs, rituals, myths) express the lived experiences, ethics, values, and worldview of the people. Applying this in the Indian context, orature often gets sidelined or marginalized in favor of the written Sanskritik or Anglophone literary traditions.

Communities and groups like the Gond, Bhil, and Baiga hold oral narratives as archives of communal memory, a shared reality containing of political, ecological, and spiritual knowledge. Categorizing these as orature helps explore narratives beyond the written texts. These narratives voice the performative forms of knowledge transmission which were historically excluded from the literary canon.

Another academic field that can be employed is postcolonial ecocriticism which studies environmental studies along with colonial critique. These can be in the face of colonial narratives or even developmental colonialism that is prominent in the contemporary era.

Indigenous oral traditions have a tendency to convey ecological ethics which stand in direct opposition to exploitative, anthropocentric development models that are imposed by the state.

Furthermore, the trauma theory helps understand the collective, generational trauma that various communities in India have experienced in the wake of displacement, violence, and cultural erasure. The process of storytelling helps articulate and process this trauma, allowing the communities to name their experiences, grieve their losses, and reaffirm a sense of continuity. This the draws upon the resilience of the narration of the indigenous experiences; as their "capacity to recover, adapt, and thrive despite adversity" (Gone, 2013). The community experience of story circles, ritual storytelling, and the intergenerational transmission of oral knowledge help reestablish a sense of agency and belonging. As Archibald (2008) emphasizes, stories are not just about survival; they are about "reviving the spirit". In this sense, oral traditions are vital for what is called "cultural resilience" in academia: the capacity of communities to maintain and evolve their cultural identity when faced with systemic oppression.

A critical interpretation of the epistemic resistance of marginalized communities through both oral and written narratives, situating Indian indigenous storytelling within a global discourse of decoloniality has been done in *Decolonizing Knowledge: Voices from India's Margins* (Anandhi & Manoharan, 2020)

Another example can be Mahasweta Devi's essays in *Orality and Memory in Tribal India (1997)* which provides a lived perspective on storytelling as political resistance and cultural preservation. Particularly, "Draupadi" (1993) presents the struggles of tribal women and demonstrates state violence, highlighting the political potential of oral-rooted literature (Devi, 1993).

Oral Tradition as Resilience

In India, oral tradition carries cultural continuity, whether it be in indigenous stories or even folksongs and tales. This tradition (including songs, myths, epics, chants, and rituals) serves the dual role of being artistic expressions as well as living systems of knowledge, passed on through generations as a mode of survival, identity, and resistance. Tribal communities like Gond, Santhal, Baiga, and Bhil employ oral storytelling to reinforce the integrity of memory,

linking individuals to the land, to each other and to ancestral wisdom. The acceptable argument thus, that oral traditions serve as resilient epistemologies which preserve indigenous worldviews and challenge the forces of colonial and developmental erasure.

Another significant role that oral storytelling plays is in preserving collective memory. Several communities contest their exclusion from written records and state-sanctioned histories by using oral traditions as alternative archives of identity and experience. Here, and particularly in Adivasi stories, mythological and cosmological knowledge is accompanied by accounts of resistance, migration, trauma, and survival. For instance, the Santhal Rebellion of 1855-56, is hardly ever addressed in mainstream Indian historiography yet, it is one of the largest tribal uprisings against British colonial rule. The Santhal people remember and recount this event through songs, epics, and oral poetry which celebrate the leaders like Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu. This is a remembering to resist forgetting and erasure as well as an attempt to reaffirm the dignity and agency of the people in shaping (and recording) their own history (Sarkar, 2012).

Adivasi communities view land as an extension of their group, full of spirit and memory; not as property alone. Herein, the myths and oral cosmologies reflect a profound and sacred relationship with the natural world. For instance, the Baiga consider themselves as 'children of the forest' and their narratives; mainly oral, reflect complex ecological ethics. The stories emphasize balance, sustainability, and reverence for the natural environment and sometimes, even a resistance to modern development (Shah, 2010). Gond oral myths are visually narrated through Gond paintings which serve equally as an art form and a narrative tradition. These myths range from explaining the origins of the world to cycles of nature to moral responsibilities of humans within the ecosystem (Bose, 2018). These counter-narratives challenge the exploitative ethos of settler colonial mindset.

Oral narrative traditions also play a major role in intergenerational resilience. These are the stories that get passed on in communal settings: around the hearth, during rituals, during festivals, or at community gatherings. They carry heritage and convey ethics to children; generally mediated by elders, women, and spiritual leaders, strengthening communal cohesion and identity. The Bhil, folktales, for instance, are told during the harvest or festival seasons. They teach moral lessons and knowledge about agricultural practices, and social ethics. The stories here are pedagogical with relational knowledge, unlike the traditional abstract and

textbook-oriented education which is a remnant of the colonial/postcolonial schooling systems (Xaxa, 2005). Within a community, stories are not simply told in isolation, but also performed in dances, rituals, and enactments of stories. These performances are an act of cultural resurgence wherein memory is not only recalled but also ritually renewed. Storytelling thus becomes a ceremonial practice, i.e., a mode of affirming identity, invoking ancestral guidance, and healing historical wounds. The Oraon and Munda communities celebrate the Karam Festival where the story of the Karam tree is sung, hailing the tree as a symbol of fertility and justice. Through song and ritual, the community can reaffirm its bond with nature and among themselves, resisting the fragmentation, displacement and divide created by modernization (Patnaik, 2014).

When it comes to dealing with narratives of displacement, mining projects, and deforestation, storytelling in itself is Resistance Literature. Numerous oral songs and stories narrate the loss of land or environmental destruction, mourning the loss of nature and inspiring collective action. These serve as counter-discourses critiquing the violence of state policies and development schemes. For example, regions of Odisha that have been affected by bauxite mining, share oral protest songs that local tribal communities use to narrate the destruction of sacred hills and forests. These songs are performed during marches and community gatherings, functioning as mobilizing narratives which unite people around shared histories and futures (Padel & Das, 2010).

Finally, oral traditions embody a cultural resilience: the ability of a community (or culture) to maintain its cultural identity while adapting to changing circumstances (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

These stories are more than texts; they are acts of survivance, to borrow Gerald Vizenor's term, acts that "create a presence" and defy erasure (Vizenor, 1999). Through the continual re-telling, adaptation, and performance of stories, indigenous communities assert that they are not vanishing relics, but living cultures in motion and in existence.

Storytelling as Decolonial Healing

Indigenous storytelling in India is not only a medium for preserving culture and identity but also a profound process of decolonial healing. It serves as a restorative practice that helps

communities reclaim agency, confront trauma, and foster collective resilience in the aftermath of colonial violence, displacement, and cultural erasure.

Colonial and postcolonial narratives often silence or distort indigenous voices, reducing Adivasi peoples to passive victims or exotic "others." In contrast, oral storytelling functions as an act of epistemic resistance, reclaiming narrative sovereignty. Through story circles, ritual narration, and communal performances, indigenous peoples assert their own histories, values, and worldviews on their own terms.

In this light, storytelling becomes a site of political empowerment. Elders and storytellers emerge as custodians of memory, whose voices carry the authority to define communal identity and values. As argued by Archibald (2008), Indigenous Story work embodies "relational accountability", where storytellers are responsible to their communities and ancestors. This accountability in the Indian tribal context is visible in the manner in which oral traditions maintain social cohesion and moral order. It serves a guidance for the communities to navigate present challenges through past wisdom.

Storytelling also enables and facilitates Decolonial Healing because it addresses the collective trauma which the indigenous communities have suffered due to reasons varying from land dispossession, violence, forced migration, to systemic marginalization. Trauma studies celebrate the role of narratives in helping individuals and communities to process painful histories, articulate loss, and envision futures beyond victimhood (Herman, 1997). The Santhal songs often mourn lost forests and ancestral lands, dealing with the grief of said loss while fostering resilience by connecting the listeners to collective memory and hope (Sarkar, 2012). Hence these stories can become narratives of displacement and resistance, while bringing in a shared sense of identity. Simultaneously, the ritual context in which stories are narrated; be it at festivals, during rite of passage or for seasonal ceremonies, becomes a sacred space for healing. The pain of loss and displacement is neither forgotten nor internalized but collectively acknowledged and transformed, allowing for an intergenerational transmission of trauma as well as resilience.

This communal nature of storytelling practices assists in decolonial healing. 'Story Circles' where a community gathers to share (and exchange) stories, creates a space for dialogue,

empathy, and solidarity – fostering intergenerational bonds, connecting the elders with the youth. The narratives serve to pass on cultural knowledge, values, and resilience strategies.

Women, particularly, play the role of custodians of oral tradition and generational resilience. In many tribal communities, women are at the center of ritual storytelling and of preserving the language and lore. They become holders of cultural responsibility while defying oppression through their storytelling, especially among indigenous women who are doubly oppressed (Narayan, 1997).

The attempt to preserve and revive endangered indigenous languages and oral practices is also a form of Decolonial Healing. Like the Ojibwe in Canada, language revitalization projects in India represent critical interventions against cultural erasure. Oral traditions and language, hence become inseparable. There are several NGOs and community groups in central India which make attempts to document tribal songs, proverbs, and stories, employing digital media to archive and disseminate oral traditions. Community consent and cultural sensitivity supporting technological adaptation creates a more accessible platform for oral narratives to thrive, blending traditional ethos with contemporary tools (Kumar & Singh, 2018).

Indigenous storytelling functions as therapy and protest, providing psychological and spiritual healing while contesting colonial (and postcolonial) violence. Thus, storytelling becomes an act of reclaiming space and voice when under the threat of invisibility and erasure be it in threatened land rights or cultural assimilationist pressures. Walter Mignolo (2011) called for "pluriversality" in the world wherein multiple epistemologies coexist and where storytelling is recognized as a valid mode of knowledge and resistance. This pluriversal framework views indigenous oral traditions as dynamic, living practices that continue to shape and reshape indigenous futures instead of mere relics.

Finally, in the contemporary age, digital revitalization of oral traditions through community radio and digital archiving initiatives documented by Kumar and Singh (2018) aligns with the principles of Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008).

Challenges and Revivals

Though the indigenous oral traditions are symbols of resilience, there are many challenges to their success in the current age. Urbanization, globalization, modern (western) education,

media, and migration pose a threat to the vitality of storytelling practices and the languages that carry them. Scholars and activists are in a consistent effort to document, revive, and protect oral traditions, creating dynamic forms of cultural revitalization which combines tradition with modern developments.

The People's Linguistic Survey of India (Devy, 2013) classifies many tribal languages as endangered or vulnerable. Certain Indian languages dominate and marginalize indigenous languages in public usage and formal education. Language loss threatens the loss of oral traditions that have been embedded in these languages (and dialects). Migration and urbanization also play a major role in uprooting traditional community structures which facilitated oral storytelling. The migration of youth to cities be it for education or employment, leads to a disconnect from ancestral languages, rituals, and narrative practices. Schooling also privileges written, standardized curriculum which does not include indigenous epistemologies, leading to an additional alienation from oral traditions.

Popular media, be it traditional media or digital, favors mainstream languages, providing limited space for tribal oral narratives. Indigenous stories are noticeably appropriated or exoticized to undermine their political and cultural significance. Indigenous communities and allied scholars have made efforts and taken initiatives to revive and protect oral traditions. For example, language reclamation programs, community-based documentation projects, and archiving through digital technologies. Tribal NGOs also partner up with universities and cultural institutions to create platforms for oral storytelling, songs, and discussions relevant to indigenous life like community radio stations which broadcast in tribal languages (Muralidharan & Srivastava, 2018). These programs reach out to dispersed communities and also provide non-formal educational resources for younger generations. Digital archives and mobile apps are also utilized to record and hare tribal narratives, creating new spaces and avenues for oral traditions to persist. For instance, the Gond and Santhal stories documented on multimedia platforms making them available, accessible, and relevant to both indigenous and wider audiences (Kumar & Singh, 2018). On a global level, successful parallels like the Maori Language Revitalization (New Zealand), the Ojibwe immersion schools (North America), and Hawaiian Language programs can be viewed as models for India's language

reclamation attempts as well. These helped revive endangered languages through immersive education, media, and community involvement (Hinton & Hale, 2001).

In India, tribal language revitalization is relatively in a nascent stage. Certain communities have created bilingual educational materials which incorporate oral storytelling in their curriculum. These efforts emphasize the role of language and narrative in cultural survival and empowerment, recognizing language revitalization as an act of decolonial resistance (Devy, 2013).

One concern with digital spaces as platforms for oral storytelling is the risk of detaching these narratives from their ritual, performative, and communal contexts. Therefore, successful digital projects prioritize community control, ethical protocols, and contextualization, recognizing that the stories are not merely content but living relationships and lived realities (Christen & Anderson, 2019). For example, the community-managed digital repositories used by tribal communities to preserve narrative sovereignty and avoid external appropriation. The attempts to revitalize traditional storytelling on the digital platforms is an attempt to overcome the challenges of urbanization, migration, and media influence, while simultaneously adapting to modern contexts without losing the decolonial ethos (Christen & Anderson, 2019).

Eventually, all attempts to revive oral traditions are intertwined with larger struggles for tribal rights, land sovereignty, and social justice. This reiterates the idea that storytelling, language reclamation and cultural documentation are acts of heritage preservation as well as political acts of resistance against colonialism, developmental colonialism, and ongoing marginalization. The revitalization movements emphasize indigenous cultures as dynamic, adapting to contemporary challenges while being rooted in ancestral knowledge. They represent resilience by maintaining traditions and by transforming them, retaining form of oral storytelling as a vital force for healing, resistance, and resurgence.

Conclusion

This paper examined the role of indigenous oral traditions in India as powerful mechanisms for resilience, resistance, and decolonial healing. Various Indian tribal communities like Gond, Santhal, Baiga, and Bhil hold stories, songs, rituals, and performances as a mode of cultural

preservation in their narration and also as dynamic, living practice that counters the colonial narratives, reclaims agency, and fosters collective healing.

The understanding of historical and cultural contexts reveals the marginalization, displacement, and cultural erasure that indigenous communities have undergone for centuries, under colonial and postcolonial regimes. Oral traditions have managed to persist as alternative epistemologies; in spite of these disruptions, as systems of knowledge rooted in relationality to land, community, and memory.

This paper has drawn upon theoretical frameworks of decolonial theory, Indigenous Storywork, trauma and resilience studies, and orature to understand storytelling as a transformative practice mediating trauma, cultivating intergenerational solidarity, and retaining cultural vitality. Storytelling becomes an act of epistemic resistance, empowering communities to assert their histories and identities in the face of dominant hegemonic discourses.

Oral traditions serve as resilience, emphasizing the role of narrative in preserving ecological knowledge and land ethics. This also draws out the sustainable environmental practices embedded in indigenous cosmologies. These narratives serve as living archives which recount the past and shape the community's response to developmental threats and environmental degradation.

Storytelling as a medium of decolonial healing assists marginalized groups in dealing with collective trauma, reclaiming their voice, and nurturing agency. Women, in particular, play the role of custodians of oral traditions by sustaining generational resilience. Story circles, ritual storytelling, and language revival projects help with communal healing, strengthening the cultural fabric amid adversity.

Challenges like growing threats of urbanization, language loss, and media homogenization are met with revival efforts by indigenous communities and allies in innovating to protect and revitalize oral traditions. Digital media, community radio, and grassroot level language reclamation movements give new platforms for indigenous storytelling, at the same time, emphasizing community control and ethical engagement to maintain decolonial integrity. It is imperative to note that indigenous story work in India is not solely about cultural survival. It is also political, spiritual, and ecological. Oral narratives are vital tools of resistance to

developmental colonialism, displacement, and state violence. They reiterate how indigenous identities are inseparable from their languages, land, and stories. The adaptability of indigenous narratives from oral traditions to digital and modern spaces reflects the role of storytelling as a form of protest and healing.

This paper calls for deeper engagement with indigenous oral traditions in academic research, policy-making, and social justice work. Recognizing and valuing indigenous storytelling as a source of epistemic justice and cultural resurgence is essential to fostering pluralistic and inclusive understandings of Indian literature and history. Only through such engagement can the stories, voices, and wisdom of India's indigenous peoples continue to thrive, empowering present and future generations.

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