

# **1. Sharing Tradition**

## **About Author**

Frank LaPena (1937-2019) was born in San Francisco, California. He attended federal Indian boarding school in Stewart, Nevada. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Chico State in 1965 and a Master of Arts in Anthropology at Sac State in 1978. He lectured widely on American Indian traditional and cultural issues, emphasizing California traditions.

He was a professor of art and former director of Native American Studies at California State University, Sacramento. His paintings, sculpture, and poetry reflect a deep understanding and love of his native heritage. He was a founding member of the Maidu Dancers and Traditionalists, dedicated to the revival and preservation of Native arts. He also published several volumes of poetry and wrote a report on contemporary California art activities for News from Native California. He was quite interested in the arts and traditions of Native Americans. He coedited *Legends of Yosemite Miwok* (1992) with Craig D. Bates and wrote *Dream Songs and Ceremony: Reflections on Traditional California Indian Dance* (2004). The essay 'Sharing Tradition' is about passing on culture and values from generation to generation through oral tradition. For this, we must listen to our elders stories.

## **Summary**

The essay "Sharing Tradition" has been written by an American writer Frank LaPena. In this essay the essayist has presented the concept of sharing tradition. In this essay the sharing tradition through oral means or the oral tradition is clearly presented. According to the essayist, oral tradition refers to a form of art of human communication where knowledge, art, ideas and cultural materials are received, preserved and transmitted orally from generation to generation. In other words, oral tradition is about passing on information related to cultures and values from

generation to generation through oral means. It focuses on passing on culture and values from generation to generation through oral tradition. For this we must listen to our elders' stories. All individuals are responsible for sharing the tradition.

Elders have the role of speakers and youngers have the role of listeners. For oral tradition both the elders and young people play vital role to maintain and preserve the values of the culture. The knowledge of elders related to cultures, traditions, religions, and values must be listened and followed properly by young people. The elders share the traditions and various concepts related to cultures and values to the young people. After the death of elderly people, young people have to fill up their places being responsible. They have to take responsibility of sharing tradition after elders through oral tradition to maintain cultures and values in their community. In this way, the oral tradition keeps on moving generation to generation preserving cultures and values.

There are some problems on the way of maintaining oral tradition from generation to generation. These problems are stated as follows:

a. Difficulty in filling up the 'niche' of elders

It is very difficult to fulfil the roles of elders. Some elders have enhanced their life by creating special position (niche). The task of filling their position by the youngers becomes very difficult in this situation too. The young people may not have their interests toward their culture because the elders' strongly follow their religions, ceremonies, dance etc. which are difficult for the young people to follow. In modern time, young people don't prefer to listen to them and maintain culture and tradition. The niche of elders has become hard to fill up therefore there is a problem in passing oral tradition from generation to generation.

b. Impact of modern technology in human life

Each generation is faced with new and modern technology which replaces the old things and concepts. The population of the world is growing fast. To fulfil the demands of them modern technology is necessary. In the name of development, natural resources are disturbed. Traditional things are replaced with new things. People are seen very busy in modern technology. They must use modern technology to run their life smoothly. They must leave useless traditional things. Human life is also busy because of modern technology. In this situation, it is difficult to maintain traditional and cultural values through oral means due to the lack of active listeners or followers.

#### c. Impact of modern education system

In modern society the people learn the things not only through oral tradition but they learn the things through written materials too. The knowledge in the present time is perceived through making researches and collecting data. The researchers do not agree with oral materials because they may not be correct. They lack validity and reliability so the information related to oral tradition is even modified while printing. But, the information of oral tradition can be modified or even corrected through oral means. The educational process forces people to accept the information from the printed pages which are full of errors and very difficult to correct. Therefore, the published information related to cultures and values creates a problem in passing on cultures and values from generation to generation orally.

#### d. Source of information and way of perceiving it

In oral tradition, the information is passed orally. It completely depends on oral means. It doesn't have any writing records as a literary tradition. Sometimes the information passed by the speakers may have errors. Sometimes, the information is even perceived mistakenly by the listeners. Due to the gap between generations, the truth of the elders' historical information might turn into fantasy for the listeners. In this situation, it becomes quite

difficult to validate oral tradition or traditional stories. There must be a proper understanding between the speakers and the listeners. The listeners must have belief on what they are listening to. The way of perceiving and transmitting information must be made keeping trust on our traditions and elders.

In nutshell, oral tradition is a tradition in which elders pass on their concepts related to culture and values to young people through oral means. It is very important to preserve culture and values. The roles of the elders and young people are very important in oral tradition. The elders pass time information and the young people receive it. When the young people become elders, they start passing on the information to young people of their time so it is a process of sharing tradition from generation to generation.