Chapter- 3

Function of Folktales as a Pedagogic Device

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.

Bell Hook, 1994

3.1. Introduction:

The role of Assamese folktale tradition in educating children is the focused area of this chapter. Although folktale has found its way in to new realms and adapted to modern means of communication, the traditional folktales have been subjected to an array of experimentations. The oral tale, which was a means of entertainment and educate, is now having its pedagogic, its ideological premises, and its socio-economic and cultural background explored more consciously and critically today than ever before. The importance and function of storytelling and listening to stories, especially in primary education, for the development of narrative skills, language learning, the access to literacy, strengthening of creativity, co-operation, and social awareness, initiation to one’s own culture, and inter personal relation and intercultural understanding has been pointed out in numerous socio-educational studies.

In this chapter, the educative function of folktales in different areas will be described and defended in the context of present day society and sufficient
light will be thrown on re-developing the curriculum and re-defining the technique of storytelling in the present day context. Lastly, this chapter makes some policy recommendations to promote, document, disseminate and study the Assamese folktales through the mass media such as the press, radio, TV, internet, and film industry.

3.2. Education as Social Institution:

Education, both formal and informal, is an important quality marker of society. It is fundamental to human growth and developmental process. It not only assists the individual’s intellectual growth but also accelerates the new pathways for future. Without education, no developmental process is possible in the society. It shapes how our societies interact within our own society and with other societies around us. Diana Kendall states in her textbook,

> Education is the social institution responsible for the systematic transmission of knowledge, skills, and cultural values within a formally organized structure. (Kendall, 2006, 348)

Functionalists believe education, one of the five chief social institutions, the other four being family, religion, politics, and economics as most important parts of our society. While each institution does deal with a different aspect of life, they are interrelated and intersect often in the course of daily life. For example, for schools to be able to exist they rely on funding from the government. This is an intersection between politics and education.

The school format is designed to teach children to be productive members of society. Schools bear most of the responsibility of preparing young people for the working environment. Children learn punctuality, time management, and to respect the authority of their teacher which prepares them to respect their boss. The curriculum also plays an important role. A class in civics teaches a child to be a good person, and a class in home economics teaches a child how to operate a household. Most socialization, however, occurs beyond the curriculum. Extra-curricular activities such as student government, eco club, science club, school houses, being a part of a school newspaper and wall
magazine provide anticipatory socialization for adult jobs. Children spend much time with their peers while at school, and peers are a very important agent of socialization. Students use their reference group as a way to measure self-worth.

The education system serves several different purposes in regards to disobedience and grievance too. Foremost, education is a deterrent for disobedience and grievance and promoter of disciplines. Children learn very early about crime and punishment. They learn it in the curriculum, but they also learn it in a natural way. They are punished for cheating, fighting and other grievances. Thus, the education system plays a vital role in social control by producing compliant citizens who understand what deviance is and how to avoid it to become a responsible member of the society.

Educational institutions affect individual lives through other aspects of society such as socialization, transmission of culture, social control, social placement, and change and innovation. Socialization is the subject matter learned according to age and skill level. Transmission of culture is how people learn of new cultures and those new to our culture are assimilated into our society. Social control teaches students how to maintain order in their society via discipline and the following of rules. Social placement determines who is best suited for what job in their society. Finally, change or innovation is simply what it appears to be: students bring about change and make things new and better. (Kendall, 2006, 351-352)

Hence, in the study of social function the education system of the present day society as a representative unit is accommodated.

3.3. Function of Folktales in Educational Institution:

According to Cheung (2001), using popular culture, which is defined to include television, special-effect movies, highly stimulating music, gossip magazines, comics, fashion, computer games and the Internet (Cheung, 2005, 56)
to motivate a group of secondary school students in Hong Kong was effective in promoting English learning. She found that the students performed better with the use of popular culture. This implies that recognizing individual learners’ backgrounds results in better educational outcomes. Based on the finding, Cheung recommended that language teaching should be made to benefit from popular culture. The same is true of using folktale narration as a teaching learning tool in English language classroom.

In the story telling activity, the storyteller often involves his listener directly as a form of arousal and active participation to join in the choruses of songs, which he introduces into his narrative. The audience is stimulated to perform. These qualities mark the distinction between oral and written literature to enhance and increase learning.

The fact is that, modern education, which primarily provides secular, pluralistic, egalitarian and market values necessary for running economic, political and legal institutions and the machinery of the modern nation-state is deficient in many ways; it is the oral tradition, which fills this gap by inculcating universal, humanistic and cultural values. Modern education may succeed in turning man into an efficient machine for the market. It rarely transmits important cultural and social values, knowledge, and behaviours. Indigenous knowledge systems of families and communities, age-old institutions and rituals that punctuate the life cycle, richly supplement the deficiencies of the modern system. But in creating value-based, socially responsible individuals, oral tradition plays an important role. Certainly, there is a potential for schools to be neutral institutions in promoting universal and humanistic values in overcoming the serious incongruities between what is taught and what is socially and politically valued. The oral tradition of one’s own culture carries in them a showcase of culture or a moral lesson, regardless of if they were fictional or true. Without the survival of the oral narratives, songs and chants significant facts or ideas concerning one’s cultural and moral values may very well have been lost.
In the research, it is seen that the main functions of Assamese folktales, which are about trivial events but embedded with multi-layered meanings, are of great moral and social importance, with experiences drawn from daily life. The common motifs of the tales are chosen to relate them to the daily realities of the Assamese life. Of the tales’ many functions, the most important one is the education of children. Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales narrated than in any truth that is taught in life.

In today’s learning by doing classroom situation the activity based on simple animal tales provide a stimulating and interesting exercise. The stories can be selected from anthologies or collected translated versions. The four main educative functions of Assamese Folktale tradition have been mentioned here:

1. As a tool in language learning classroom
2. Imparting moral lesson or practical wisdom
3. Stimulating creativity
4. Assisting cognitive development

3.4. As a Tool in Language Learning Classroom:

Language – with all of its magnificent complexity – is one of the greatest gifts one can give his children. It is a misconception that children learn language passively. Language acquisition is a product of active, repetitive, and complex learning. It is a stimulus-response activity. The child's brain is learning and changing more during language acquisition in the first six years of life than during any other cognitive ability he is working to acquire. When adults are active participants, this learning process becomes much easier for children. In the early childhood classroom, silence is not golden. Spoken words are opportunities for learning that should take place throughout the day—especially during conversations between children and between teachers and children. It is remarkable that in three short years a child can hear, mimic, explore, practice, and finally, learn language.
There is no genetic code that leads a child to speak the first or second language. Language is acquired. Human child is born with the ability to make 40 sounds and our genetics allows our brain to make associations between sounds and objects, actions, or ideas. The combination of these capabilities allows the performance in language.

In the first years of life, children listen, practice, and learn. The amusing chattering sounds of a young toddler practicing language are really their reproducing of the rhythm, tone, volume, and non-verbal expressions they see in adults.

It is very common for teachers in early childhood classrooms to have children with speech and language delays. The process of learning language can be impaired in many ways. These can include difficulties in hearing, problems in making associations between sight and sound, attention deficits, and a limited background of experience. A child's language skills are directly related to the number of words and complex conversations they have with others. In order to learn the relationship between sounds and objects a child must hear. Then make the association between the sound and what it symbolizes. If a child hears few words, if a child is rarely read to, sung to, or talked with, he will not have normal language development. Children growing up in verbally and cognitively weakened settings have speech and language delays. In more extreme situations, children neglected by their caregivers and rarely spoken with can have completely undeveloped speech and language skills. Fortunately, the parts of the brain responsible for language are very compliant. Given opportunities to hear, talk and have complex conversations, these children can catch up. The challenge for the early childhood teacher is to make sure that these children have many developmentally appropriate language activities. It is important that concerns about delayed language skills are share with the family and other school personnel in order to properly diagnose potential causes. Many parents are inexperienced and may not be aware of what is ‘normal’ language development at any given age. Early
childhood classrooms are one of most important settings for early identification of language problems. The teachers can create conversation buddies, talk with children and encourage them to have conversations with each other several times during the day, help children ‘discuss’ various topics with their conversation partners.

At this stage students should be introduced exercises where they are asked to repeat back what they hear the teacher or co-learner say. It is interesting to notice how varied and inaccurate their interpretations can be. In language learning classroom students should be exposed to listening activities so that they can respond immediately. Noam Chomsky, in his epoch making book, *Syntactic Structure* (1957) had demonstrated that the mere structural theories were incapable of accounting for the fundamental characteristics of language—the creativity and the uniqueness of individual sentences. Simultaneously the British Applied Linguistics pointed out another fundamental dimension of language – the functional and communicative potential of language. They saw the need of focus on the communicative competence rather than on Linguistic Competence. Communicative competence is now the basic aim of language teaching. Through various activities, dealing with authentic materials, role-play, simulations, and language games communicative language teaching can be made successful experience.

In this context, one of the useful tools will be the narration of the oral tales. Also, Kachru (1991) and Olajide (2006) advocated the use of folktales in the teaching of English as a second language. (Olajide, 2006, 92-109). There are different types of folktales, and many of them have been published as children’s literature. The tales can be used as a medium for developing specific basic skills in young learners—listening, speaking, reading and writing. Folktales have already been adopted in many languages learning classroom all over world. But in Assam no systematic provision has been made to encourage the policy makers adopt the specific tales as the specific tools in the sphere of education.
In order to know how tale telling activities help in classroom situation, a preliminary survey was conducted among school teachers of Nalbari district and a few interesting points came up. Fifty teachers from different secondary schools were randomly selected. Questionnaire was used to collect information from respondents. Results were analyzed using descriptive method. The results indicate the use of storytelling pedagogy, influence of folktales in the language learning classroom, affects of tales in changing the attitude, building the character and new concepts and ideas of the target audience and also the need of teacher education in the near future. It is observed that every teacher has his/her own bag of tricks and adapts and adjusts the samples to suit his/her own needs and students.

From the analysis of collected information, a few exemplary activities have been cropped up in which simple folktales can play a role in present day teaching learning situation of Assam. These are documented here.

**Activity 1.**

**Exercise:**

Teacher can tell a story from *Panchatantra* or *Jataka* collection. Then engage students in a conversation if they know the story, who said them that story and then ask them to tell other similar story from their memory.

**Objectives:**

Students will listen with full concentration and engrossed interest. It will generate quick response from the students and they will speak.

**Activity 2.**

**Exercise:**

Most of the Assamese traditional tales have the structure of ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ relation. Tales can be narrated in that way. For example, ‘The Lion and the Rat’.

a. The Lion grew angry at the rat as the rat disturbed the sound sleep of the lion, *and as a result the lion wanted to kill the trifle rat.*
b. The rat requested the lion to excuse him promising to help him at the
time of need and as a result, the lion decided to do so.
c. The lion was trapped in a net, and as a result, he shouted for help to save his life.
d. The rat ran towards the lion and cut the net and as a result, the life of the lion was saved.

Objective:
The learners will develop logical reasoning power and grow cognitively.

Activity 3.
Exercise:
Ask for a show of hands just to see how many students recall tales told or read to them as very young children. Then ask for a volunteer among those who raised hands to recount a story as he or she recalls it. If no one volunteers then either tell or read or play recordings. Lead this to a discussion of various versions and how this can happen to stories, which are supposed to be constant in form, when they are passed on orally or commercially popularized.

Objective:
Students will develop imagination, concentration and memory and at the same time communicative competence.

Activity 4.
Question:
The common formula of beginning of a tale is ‘Once upon a time’ or ‘Long ago’ and the setting is often in old castles, deep woods, or locked rooms. Why do you think this is so?

Objective:
To develop communicative competence by engaging the students in expressing their opinion about the setting of fairytales.

Activity 5.
Question:
Describe how the animals in two fables they read act like people.

Objective:
The student will recognize and define the animals’ human qualities and experience a closeness to it.

Activity 6.

Question:
The fable presents a moral truth or lesson. Explain your favorite fable in terms of the moral.

Objective:
The learner will take the moral to heart without being directly instructed

Activity 7.

Exercise:
Learners are to be narrated two tales – one fairy tale and the other a fable.

Question:
Fables and fairytales both seem to teach some kind of lesson. What are other likenesses and differences between them?

Objective:
The student will grow aesthetically and be enriched with a critical ability to look into the text in order to offer comparing and contrasting analysis.

Activity 8.

Exercise 1:
Teacher can cite a few maxims like ‘Honesty is the best policy’, ‘Don’t bite the hand that feeds you’, ‘Slow and steady wins the race’, ‘United we stand, divided we fall’, ‘A friend in need is a friend indeed’ etc. Engage the students in a conversation of the meaning of the maxims, the implications and interpretations of those maxims. And to narrate one or more tales that will illustrate these maxims.
Exercise 2:

a. Choose one of Aesop’s Fables for the students to read.
b. Discuss the fable and the moral.
c. Have the students make up their own story to illustrate the moral.
d. With original sketches by the students, their own stories, in the fable model, would be excellent for class display.

Exercise 3:

Each student group is to read the folktale and then prepare a note listing the elements of the story that were reviewed during the class:

- Main and secondary characters
- Time period
- Setting
- Cultural information
- Problem and solution
- Moral lesson or wisdom

Objective:

The student will be able to write a story outline and thus it will enhance developing writing skill, creative imagination and ability to illustrate an abstract with literate or concrete examples.

Activity 9.

Exercise:

Divide students into small groups of three to four, and assign each group a different folktale from the *Panchatantra* or *Jataka* or *Burhi Air Sadhu* or from memory.

Objective:

Students can have another opportunity to exercise memory power and practice narratorial skill.

Activity 10.
Exercise:
Give the class a few outlines from the very popular tales like *Satimati, Tejimala, Champabati, Kamala Kuwari* and ask the learners to play the roles of the tale characters.

Objective:
The learners will get a chance to develop their speech delivery in an enjoyable and interesting manner. The young learners always carry in memory the tales narrated by their grand mother or elderly persons. So their response will be quick and spontaneous when they are to play the roles. Even the most silent learner will be prompted to speak in this way.

3.5. Imparting Moral Lesson and Practical Wisdom:
Introducing moral to children is an important but arduous task, but with the help of time-tested folktales it can be done with little contrivance, all the while presenting children with stories that are enjoyable, inspiring, and often rich in meaning. For many folktales represent an attempt to distill wisdom, a summation of ideas and insights that have remained relevant over time. Traditional value systems gradually seep into their brain and occupy a permanent place in the core of their hearts. This will have more impact than any amount of lectures and sermons, which the listeners generally find very boring. Tales like *The Three Fishes, The Four Friends, The Wisdom of The old Gander, The Impatient Son* etc can be very effective tools in imparting practical messages and to help the listeners acquire various qualities for success and survival, such as unity, earnestness, friendship, firmness of mind, earnestness, perseverance etc.

The other educative function observed in listening to folktales is where one is expected to learn to change one’s negative attitude and character in the society. Thus, transformation of character is possible with the traditional folktales. Many youths have been educated on the importance of such virtues
as patience and sincerity. Tales like the *Rabbit and the Tortoise*, *The Thirsty Crow* etc can be prescribed to provide such lesson.

Most of the tales show that that struggles in life are unavoidable, but that if one perseveres against unexpected hardships and unjust odds he or she can survive and even win. The hero emerges victorious challenging all adversities in wonder tales and the discussion of the steps he/she takes and the circumstances or helpers he/she encounters to achieve that end may provide positive encouragement to the listeners. Tales like *The Woodpecker*, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, *Satimati Bai* may be functional in this context.

Many tales weave the motif that love transforms even ugly and non-living things into that which is beautiful, as when the snake, which is loved turns into a prince. *Champavati, Tejimala, Panesoi, The Demon Pandit, The Owl Kuwari* etc.

Bruno Bettelheim applies the psychoanalytic model of the human personality to the fairytale. He says that

> ..fairy tales carry important messages to the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious mind, on whatever level each is functioning at the time. (Bettelheim, 1977, 72)

The form and structure of fairy tales, he continues,

> suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams and with them give better direction to this life. While fairytale are excellent for young children because they present positive solutions to difficult problems, they also give form to his formless, nameless anxieties, and his chaotic, angry, and sometimes violent fantasies. It is specifically this underside of fairytales that I believe will appeal to adolescents. (Bettelheim, 1977, 73)

The theme of a giant in conflict with an ordinary person appears in Grimm’s ‘The Spirit in a Bottle.’ The hero must then use his wits and cunning to extricate himself from a dangerous situation. Here there is also the theme of reason winning over emotions. Then the hero is not released on his first try. Efforts must be continued before success is achieved. Bettelheim suggests
that giants are often parental figures and that children can thus project and work out family conflicts and anxieties. He says that the young child should not be confronted with direct interpretations of the symbols because his conscious is not yet ready to receive them. It seems, however, that by age thirteen or fourteen students would be ready to translate some of the images, consciously, with delicate and respectful guidance. Other symbols in the fairytale world include animals, which are either all devouring or all helpful. The wolf, ferocity and maliciousness incarnate, is typical. Bettelheim theorizes,

Both dangerous and helpful animals stand for our animal nature, our instinctual drives. (Bettelheim, 1977, 76)

In the context of tale telling activities in Assam’s classroom, the following activities are found helpful in value inculcation and wisdom generation:

**Activity 1.**

**Exercise:**

Assign students to choose and prepare to read two stories each from two different collections.

Review the ways the folktales are universal in nature. What stories do the students already know that are similar in plot or lesson to the tales that were just read.

Then, also ask which aspects of folktales make the stories uniquely Assamese.

Discuss with students the differences and like qualities they find between the two stories.

**Objective:**

To increase cultural awareness of the students.

**Activity 2.**

**Exercise:**
Have students identify and describe either orally or in writing the who, why, what, where and when elements of the tales.

**Objective:**

To make the students identify moral values and lessons within these stories. These values and lessons will be used to guide their actions and develop their character.

**Activity 3.**

**Question:**

Fairytales show that struggles in life are unavoidable, but that if one perseveres against unexpected hardships and unjust odds he or she can survive and even win. Discuss a fairytale in which the hero emerges victorious. Describe the steps he/she takes and the circumstances or helpers he/she encounters to achieve that end.

**Objective:**

The student will recognize the theme of unavoidable conflict.

**Activity 4.**

**Question:**

Same long tales tell of two brothers or sisters who are completely different from one another. Discuss a tale in which the two act in completely different ways. How are they different? What is the result of their actions?

**Objective:**

The student will recognize the dual nature theme.

**Activity 5.**

**Question:**

Sometimes a person is shunned by parents or others and may feel isolated or may feel overpowered by them. Discuss a tale in which either or both of these conditions occur. Describe how the hero resolves his or her problem.

**Objective:**
The student will recognize the isolation theme.

**Activity 6.**

**Question:**
Very often animals appear in fairytales which are either very threatening or very helpful. Contrast two such animals either in the same or different tales and tell how they either helped or hindered the hero.

**Objective:**
The student will recognize the motif of helpful or hindering forces apart from, or within oneself.

**Sample Tales:**

Here are a few samples of traditional tales that can be utilized to function in moral values and wisdom inculcation:

**The Foolish Sparrow:**

A pair of sparrow once made their nest on a big, leafy tree. When winter arrived, it was cold and windy, but the sparrows were happy because their little home was sung and warm.

One day a monkey came running to take shelter under their tree. The rain had drenched him, and he was shivering with cold. He closed his arms around his chest, and leapt up and down as he tried to warm himself. The sparrow’s wife who had been watching the monkey’s actions curiously, asked him, ‘Mr. Monkey, why are you running about in the rain like this? Why don’t you go home, and stay indoors when it’s too cold and rainy?’

‘I don’t have one particular home,’ said the monkey. ‘I just live among different treetops.’

‘How strange,’ said the sparrow. Your feet and hands are just like those of a human being. Why didn’t you use them to build a nice house for yourself so that you would not have to shiver under this tree?’
The tired and bed ragged monkey was very irritated to be given uncalled for advice. He said sharply. ‘You stupid sparrow, why don’t you mind your own business instead of bothering about mine?’

But the sparrow paid no attention to the monkey’s angry retort, and persisted in giving her advice again. She said very loudly, ‘I only have a small beak, yet I have built a very fine nest with it for myself. You, on the other hand, have such strong arms and hands, yet you have been too lazy to use them to make a safe home for yourself. That’s shameful. If you ask me!’

The monkey was furious to hear this, and make fun of me. I must teach her a lesson. Turning to the talkative sparrow, the monkey said, ‘Why are you so worried about my plight? Haven’t you heard that you should offer advice only to those who ask for it and cherish it?’ He then leapt up the tree and tore the foolish sparrow’s nest to shreds.

‘The next time you want to give advice to someone, make sure it is not unwanted advice!’ the monkey called out to the weeping sparrow as he scampered away. (Source-The Panchatantra)

Moral: Don’t try to give an unwanted advice.

The Wisdom of the Old Gander:

A banyan tree once grew deep within a forest. Like all banyan trees, it was a friendly tree that spread it branches wide, and allowed a host of creatures to make it their home. A flock of geese arrived every year to build their nests in the tree’s leafy green canopy. The geese were very happy living in the gracious old tree, but one day, as the geese were sitting in the tree, an old gander noticed that a small vine had sprouted at the base of the tree. He was alarmed to see it, squawked loudly, and told the other members of his flock. ‘This vine will surely be a danger to us if we let it grow thick and strong. It will encircle the trunks of the tree and rise up, and then it will be easy for anyone to hold onto it and climb up and seize us. I think we should uproot the vine while it is tender, and can easily be torn out of the ground.’
The other geese did not pay much attention to the old gander’s words.

‘He’s always predicting dire things that never come to pass,’ one young gander whispered scornfully to another, ‘so it’s best to ignore him!’

As the days went by the geese were very busy looking after their nests. The vine began to grow and become thicker and stronger. It twined itself around the banyan’s trunks and reached up into the heart of the tree.

One day, when the geese were out looking for food, a hunter happened to pass by the banyan. His eyes lit up when he saw the number of nests nestled among the leafy branches of the tree. ‘Today is my lucky day,’ he said, rubbing his hands together in glee. ‘Not only have I found a tree full of birds, but it has a nice staircase too, to lead me to them!’

Quickly and nimbly, the hunter climbed up the hunter’s strong net trapped them. Though they struggled with all their might, they could not free themselves. They were and truly caught!

‘I had warned you about the danger of letting that vine grow unchecked,’ said the old gander with a long sigh. ‘Now we’ll all be dead by tomorrow morning if only you had cared to listen to my words.’

The other geese began to tremble and weep when they heard this. ‘We’re very sorry for our foolishness,’ they said, full of remorse. ‘But we don’t want to die. Please tell us what we can do to save ourselves.’

‘There is a way whereby we can escape from the hunter clutches,’ said the gander after a while. ‘But you must all do exactly as I tell you.’

‘Yes, of course,’ said the frightened geese eagerly. ‘We will’

‘When the hunter comes back here tomorrow morning you must all pretend to be dead. Don’t move a limb or feather. The hunter will pick us up one by one and toss us to the ground. Then before he can climb down, we should all rise into the air together and fly away.’
This time, the geese did exactly as the gander had advised. When the hunter arrived, he found his net full of dead birds. He hurled them to the ground in disgust, but as he was slowly climbing down the tree along the vine, he heard a rustling sound.

He turned and looked around and, to his astonishment, he saw the geese he had thought to be dead rising into the air breathing their wings strongly.

The geese flew away safely, and as they winged their way through the skies, one of the young ganders said respectfully to the old one, ‘We used to make fun of you, Sir, but now you have proved that wisdom and experience lies with the old- your words are truly worth their weight in gold’. (Source-The Panchatantra)

*Moral: Wisdom and experience lie with the old /One should have regard for old people’s experienced wisdom*

**The Foolish Crab and the Crane:**

Once upon a time, a crane and crab, who were very good friends, lived on the banks of a river. The crane was worried by a terrible problem though. There was a vicious and greedy snake in the area, who was always eating his wife’s eggs. The crane and the crab put their heads and tried to work out a way to solve this problem. Then the crab had a brilliant idea, ‘The snake is able to terrify us because we are not equipped to kill such a powerful enemy. In order to kill him, we must invite an enemy of the snake to our neighbourhood,’ he said.

The crane was thrilled with this idea. But his wife, a sensible creature, was not too sure about the wisdom of this plan. ‘Dear husband’, she said cautiously. ‘I think you should go over all the implications of this idea very
carefully before committing yourself to it. We don’t want it to backfire un
us!’

‘Nonsense!’ said the crane airily. ‘How can plan made on such sound
reasoning backfire? I’m up a basket of fish and set out towards the home of a
mongoose. As he walked along the road to the mongoose’s house, he dropped
fish at regular intervals along way.

When the mongoose came out of his house, and spotted the first fish, he was
delighted.

‘What a lucky day, this is for me,’ he exclaimed joyfully, ‘to find a juicy fish
lying close to my doorstep.’ He gobbled the fish quickly and as he wandered
along, he found, to his great joy, another fish a little farther away. He ate this
too with relish. Then, to his great joy, he soon spotted the whole line of fish
strewn on his way, just waiting to be devoured. The happy mongoose soon
finished eating all the fish strewn along by the crane. Finally, he arrived at the
where the crane lived.

Almost immediately, he spied the snake who lived there, and a fierce battle
ensued between the two bitter enemies. After a long struggle, the mongoose
was victorious. The cranes were delighted to see that the wicked snake had
been killed. The next day, they off to look for food very happily, convinced
that their eggs would now be safe.

In the meanwhile, the mongoose came out of his house, and looked around to
see if anyone had left a fish at his doorstep once again. When he couldn’t find
one, he walked along the long road leading to his home, hoping that he would
find some fish there at least. But there was not a single fish to be found, and
the mongoose began to feel irritable and hungry too. He soon reached the tree
where the crane lived. He climbed the tree and was delighted to find the
crane’s eggs nesting snugly in a nest. He quickly ate them.
When the cranes flew back home, to their despair, they found that the mongoose had gobbled up their eggs. The crane hung his head in shame as his heartbroken wife chided him between tears, ‘You got rid of one enemy, but unwittingly invited another because you did not think before you acted. And now we have paid a heavy price for your foolishness.’ *(Source-The Panchatantra)*

**Moral : Look before you leap / value of wisdom**

The Four Friends:

Once upon a time four friends lived by a lake in a forest. One of them was a small brown mouse with black eyes and a long tail. He lived in a small brown snug hole near the edge of the water. Another friend was a jet-black crow, who lived in a *jamun* tree close by. A tortoise was another of the friends. He lived in the waters of the lake. The fourth of this group of friends was a gentle deer with large eyes, and a spotted golden body. The four friends lived together in peace and happiness, reveling in each other’s company.

One evening, the mouse, the crow, and tortoise met beside the lake as usual. They waited for a long time for their friend, the deer, to join them, but she didn’t appear. ‘What could have happened to her?’ asked the mouse, looking worried. ‘She’s usually never late when we meet.’

‘Perhaps she has been caught in a hunter’s trap,’ said the crow. ‘He may even have killed her.’

‘Then we must go and search for her, friends’ said the tortoise immediately. He told the crow, ‘Dear crow, why don’t you fly over the forest and see if you can find her?’

‘Certainly’, agreed the crow, ‘I shall go at once’.

The crow flew over the forest, and looked down to see if he could spot the deer. As he flew, he cawed loudly and called out, ‘Where are you, deer? Where are you?’
At last, he heard a faint voice calling out in reply: ‘Help! I am here. Help me!’
It was the deer!

‘Oh thank God, I have found you,’ said the crow in relief. It flew down and, to his dismay, found the deer caught in a hunter’s net. ‘Oh dear! It is as we had feared! You have been caught in a trap,’ said the crow anxiously. ‘What can I do to help you? Shall I fly back to our friends to get help?’ he asked.

‘Oh, yes, please do,’ answered the deer with tears in her eyes. ‘Please do something to help me quickly.’

The crow flew back to the lack swiftly. When the tortoise and the mouse saw the crow winging his way back, they shouted, ‘Have you found our friend? Have you found the deer?’

‘Yes, yes, my friends, I have’ replied the crow. ‘But she is in great danger. She has been trapped in a hunter’s net.’

The tortoise thought quickly. ‘Mouse,’ he asked, ‘Can you cut the strong net that holds our friend captive with your sharp teeth and set our friend free?’

‘Yes, Yes of course I can!’ said the mouse confidently. ‘But how will I get the place where the deer is lying?’ ‘I can easily carry you on my back,’ said the crow.

‘Then let’s not waste any time. Let’s go’, cried the mouse excitedly. He quickly clambered onto the crow’s back.

The crow flew swiftly through the sky, with the mouse holding on to his back for dear life.” Soon they reached the place where the deer was.

The mouse jumped off the crow’s back and set to work at once. With his knife-sharp teeth, he began to cut the net. Soon the deer was free, and she stood up shakily and stretched her limbs. By this time, the tortoise too had reached the spot, crawling all the way.
‘Oh, how nice to see you, tortoise!’ cried his friends happily.

As the four friends rejoiced in the deer’s escape, they heard the sound of someone walking stealthily through the forest. Instinct told them it was the hunter! The frightened crow immediately flew away to the top of a tall tree, and the mouse dashed into a hole and hid himself. The fleet footed deer ran away in a flash. The poor tortoise, however could not move quickly, and he ambled slowly towards a green bush.

When the hunter arrived and found the net empty, he was furious. ‘Oh! the deer has escaped!’ he shouted. As he looked around in agitation. (Source: The Panchatantra)

*Moral: A friend in need is a friend indeed / value of friendship*

**The Impatient Son:**

An old man had an accomplished son. The boy was so good, but his father never spoke a word in appreciation of him. This annoyed the boy very much, and, out of anger, he thought of killing his father. So, one moonlight evening he took a spear and kept waiting for the father under a banana tree. When the old man came home he asked his wife, ‘Where’s our son gone?’ The old woman replied, ‘Why you don’t even like him, how is it that you ask of him?’ Her husband said, ‘Old woman, even if the full moon has spots, our son has none. Do you know why I don’t seem appreciating him? If I start flattering him it may go to his head and ultimately do him harm. Perhaps, I love him in my heart more deeply than you do.’ When the son overheard him speaking in this way, he came in running and fell at his feet and said. ‘O father, forgive me.’ His father asked, ‘What’s the matter with you?’ The boy then told him everything and the old father readily forgave him. (Source: Tales of Assam)

*Moral: Flattery is not real appreciation / the value of filial piety*

*Analysis:*
These sample tales, it has been observed, express moral or practical wisdom and provide an insight into the adult world. The morals embedded in the tales may be packaged in the form of proverbs. The characters who do not observe some basic social values have to suffer. Some of the values are, respect for ruler, parent, senior, superior, master, older person, teacher; help or advice for needy; truthfulness; presence of mind etc. Children will soon face the adult life portrayed in the tales. This prepares children for adult life. It cultivates universal values such as compassion, generosity, and honesty, while disapproving attributes such as cruelty, greed and dishonesty.

Listening to folktales momentarily transports the audience, mostly children, to a different world; later reflection connects the folktale world to the real world that they will soon inhabit as adults. It is when they first understand and link these two worlds that the values so imparted are used in their interactions with man, animals, the physical world and spirits. They also become equipped with the power to judge the righteousness of the action. This wisdom is not ordinary; it has been time-tested through many years of interaction or experience with the real world.

3.6. Function of Folktales in Stimulating Creativity:

Folktales make children imagine and create their own mental pictures, and this mental exercise leaves the deepest impression on them, creating the folktales’ rightful place in their imagination. A learner can transform the oral tale into a poem to be recited or a drama to be enacted and a simple saying can be expanded to a tale by the learner.

Activity 1.

1. Introduce the concept of a proverb – the short saying that can stand alone as a means of imparting advice or wisdom.

2. Make a list of proverbs that the students know and perhaps use in their families.
3. Discuss the meaning of the different proverbs, and how the meaning is not always overtly apparent when stating the proverb – and yet within our culture, we often still know its meaning. The meaning is one that is derived metaphorically.

4. Also, briefly discuss the structure of the proverbs – how they often make use of rhyme or poetry techniques such as rhyme, alliteration, or assonance.

5. Talk about the stories that might be behind some of these proverbs.

6. Share the list of Chinese proverbs with the students. Ask if the students are familiar with any of these proverbs, and if so, what their meaning might be.

7. Discuss the ways in which these proverbs are different from those used within the families of the students. Review the connotation of each of the proverbs, and in doing that, the stories that might be behind the proverbs. What animal characters would be in the stories? What common folk? What problems might the characters have been facing and what solution was reached?

8. Assist the students in a survey of Assamese proverb. Ask each student to find a proverb to share with the class. The students should read the proverb, give its meaning, and propose a story that might be behind the proverb.

Sample Example:

The Tale – *The King Who Wanted to Wear Clothes Made Up of Stone* and *The Thirsty Crow* have been adapted as poems by Vivekananda Kendra, Assam during a workshop.

**Thirsty Crow:**

*Kauri Janie ahi kale ka ka ka
Paka kal paki ase kha kha kha*
Amar dalat bahi tai kandi kandi kole  
Pani Alop bisari Habathuri Khale  
Pirik pirik kari tai iphale siphale sale  
Bhanga matir kalahat pani dekha pale  
Pani Alop Khao buli dingi melile  
Talot thaka pani kan dhuki napale  
Pihatur Kauri Janie chinta kari chale  
Eti duti kari tai silguti anile  
Bhanga kalahat pelai diat pani gol uthi  
Rangmane pani khale pakhi gol titi  
Pani khai kauri baye hahi hahi kole  
Gan eta gabar paro konobai sunile  

(Source: Filed Study, 2010)

The King Who Wanted to Wear Clothes Made Up of Stone:  
Siladitya raja asil bar aponbhola ,  
Pindhiboloi man karile eti silar sola.  
Bhabi chinti kathato Mantri barak kole,  
Ek mahar bhitarat silar sola lage.  
Nakhai noboi mantra paril chintar sagore ,  
Murha mati rajai kintu eko nubuje .  
Matrir asil budhimati Manomati ji.  
Pitakak sudhile tai chintar karan ki ?  
Dukhe soke mantribare sakolobor kale  
Monomatie misikia hahi marile .  
Rangmane thaka pita chinta nakariba samay mate saju habo eti silar sola  
Enekoie edin dudin koi samoy urile  
Rajai mantrir gharoloike barta pathiale .  
Mantribore kole heno alop baki ase  
Silor sola siboloi panir beji lage.
Panir bejir kathai rajak bhabai tulie
Nijar bhular babe rajai nijei laj pale
(Source: Filed Study, 2010)

Extension of the Activity 1:
Students will create an illustration for their selected Assamese proverbs. They will write folktales conveying the selected proverbs as morals. Cultural elements of Assam could be included in these tales, if the student has enough knowledge of the setting and time period, or they could set the stories within a familiar context.

Proverbs common to the Assamese culture are:

1. *Lobhei pap, papei mrityu.*
   (Greed begets sin, Sin leads to disaster)
2. *Abshyasar nar karma pathe kare sar*
   (Practice makes perfect)
3. *Raije nakh jokarile nei boi*
   (Unity is strength)
4. *Abhabei abiskarar mul*
   (Necessity is the mother of invention)
5. *Burhar katha nusuna deka , tanat pari kiya keka ?*
   (The youth seldom honours the advice of the old, but groans at the time of danger)
6. *Samair sar marilehe sar pahur mangah khabo pari*
   (A stitch in time saves nine)
7. *Tenga am ebarhe besiba pari*
   (A lie comes out)
8. *Ag bhari sai pas bhari pelaba*
   (Look before you leap)
9. *Keca baralak jokai lole ga sariboloi tan*
   (One should not attack the enemy before they are mature)
10. *Eke salot duta hati nathake*

(the two men of equal status or power can not live in good terms)

This activity will serve an important function of stimulating creativity arousing interest on the one hand and creating value-based, socially responsible individuals, on the other.

3.7. **Function of Folktales in Children’s Cognitive Development:**

The Cognitive science deals with the scientific study of thinking, reasoning and the intellectual processes of mind. It is concerned with how knowledge is represented in the mind, how language is understood, how images are comprehended, and what the mental processes underlying conferencing, learning, problem solving and planning are. Multiple researches on the subject of the cognitive impact between verbal-listening medium of understanding (like radio) and visual medium (like television), conclude that hearing a story on radio may stimulate the ability of creating a new story in a greater extent than seeing it on television. The traditional IQ test had limitations in many aspects. It only measured the logic and language, whereas the human brain has other equally important types of intelligence. All humans have multiple levels of intelligences, which can be developed over a life time through stimulants and practice. Today’s liberal education concept asserts that the classrooms cannot be taken as a place for therapy sessions, rather a place of self actualization through clear ethical guidelines shaping actions. Knowledge received in the classroom settings will enrich and enhance the young learner’s multiple level of intelligences. The traditional folktales can be an effective tool in developing the following levels of intelligence in a more liberating way. These are –

1. Linguistics/Verbal: The ability to use language in effective and creative way
2. Logical Development: The ability to think rationally realizing the cause and effect relations
3. Visual/Spatial: The ability to orient oneself to the environment, to create mental images
4. Musical/Rhythmic: An ability to recognize tonal patterns and a sensitivity to rhythm, pitch, melody, a good care for music
5. Interpersonal: The ability to develop relationship with other people understanding another person’s moods, feeling, motivation and intentions
6. Kinesthetic: The ability to use one’s body to express oneself
7. Intrapersonal: The ability to understand oneself and practice self discipline and move towards self actualization
8. Naturalist: The ability to respond to changes in Nature, and understand and organize patterns of nature

In order to achieve all round development of these intelligences the teacher has to be very innovative and creative as there is no prescribed syllabus to be concerned with this. In this context, the traditional tale telling activity can be an interesting and stimulating one in actual classroom situation. Some of the respondents mentioned this point to our inquiry. Analysing their points we have listed a few activities in which the tales can be utilized to help students grow actually.

Activity 1.

Objective:
Awaken the intelligence

Exercise:
The students can be exposed to the many faceted properties of folktale events to develop a sensitivity towards the world that surround them and awaken intelligently.

The Sample Tales:
Watch for the Burglar:
A burglar had appeared in a certain kingdom. So the king gave a sword and a shield to a watchman and said, ‘Keep these in your hands and watch for the burglar.’ The watchman took his job seriously and while he kept burglar at the palace gate, the latter entered the palace and carried off a lot of goods. Next morning, the king took the watchman to task like this, ‘How is it that while you were keeping watch the burglar entered my palace?’

‘Your Majesty, didn’t you order me to keep the sword and the shield in my hands? While my hands were thus engaged, how could I catch the burglar?’

The king said, ‘Do you follow my words only?’

The watchman said, ‘I but did what your Majesty asked me to do.’

The kind said, ‘You have lost your job.’

The watchman observed, ‘It’s a relief. Now I can move about freely.’

(Source: Tales of Assam)

The Flight of the Beasts:

Once upon a time, a Bodhisattva was born as young lion. He lived in a forest with many other beasts. One day, a hare was sitting under a bael tree and thinking ‘If this earth breaks upon suddenly, what will happen to me?’

At that very moment, a ripe bael fruit fell on the ground and rolled on some dry leaves and twigs.

Hearing the sound the hare thought that the earth was indeed splitting apart. He got up and fled. Another hare saw him running and asked him why he was running.

‘The Earth is breaking’, said the hare. So the second hare also started running with the first hare.

They were seen by a deer, a goat, a buffalo, a jackal, a tiger, and an elephant.

They asked them why they were running. They were told that the earth was breaking up. So these animals also followed them.
A lion also saw the herd of beasts and asked them why they were running, and they told him that the earth was breaking up.

But the lion didn’t believe them. He thought, ‘The earth cannot break up. They must have heard other noise which they have mistaken. If I do not stop them, they will all die. I will have to save their lives.’

He roared and the animals, terribly frightened, stopped in their tracks.

‘Who had seen the earth breaking up?’ The lion asked the herd of beasts.

‘The elephant saw it’, one of them said.

So he asked the elephant. He said that he didn’t know anything about it, and that he had been told by the tiger. So the lion questioned the tiger.

The tiger said, ‘The deer knows.’

The deer said, ‘The buffalo knows.’

This went on till it came to the first hare who had heard the noise.

The lion asked the hare whether he had seen the earth breaking up.

‘Yes, I saw the earth breaking up,’ replied the hare.

‘Where did you see this?’ asked the lion.

The hare told him that he had heard the noise of the earth breaking up near a bael tree.

The lion thought, ‘A ripe bael fruit must have fallen, and this must have frightened the hare. I will have to find out the truth.’

He asked the hare to show him the spot and instructed the rest of the animals to stay there till he returned.

The hare took the lion to the spot. The lion went to the foot of the bael tree. Lying nearby was a bael fruit.
‘So, I was right’, thought the lion, and went back to the herd of beasts.

He told them the whole story and asked them not to worry. Reassured, the animals returned to their dwellings.

Had it not been for the lion’s presence of mind, all the animals would have rushed in to the sea and drowned. (Source : Jataka Tales)

**The Four Kills and the Brahmin:**

In a certain forest, there lived an elephant and a snake, but neither knew of the existence of the other. The elephant was proud of his strength and the snake of his venom. The elephant cared little for the smaller creatures of the forest.

One day, as he walked through a narrow lane in the forest, he came upon the snake lying in the way. The elephant was annoyed at the sight of the snake and asked him to move away. The latter spread his hood and refused to move. The snake was crushed to death but the elephant too did not survive. A vulture, who had been flying in the sky, noticed the two dead bodies, and came down. He pushed his head into the soft lower part of the elephant and started having a good meal. While gorging himself the vulture forgot to pull out his head and, as a result, he suffocated to death.

Now, a wood-cutter while going through the forest happened to pass along that way. The sight of the bodies lying there perplexed him but when he noticed the tusks of the elephant his joy knew no bounds. He tried in various ways to pull them out. As they would not come out, he sat on the ground, caught hold of one of them, and gave a mighty pull. The tusks suddenly came out, giving him good thrust in his belly. The man died of the wound.

So there were now four kills-the elephant, the snake, the vulture and the wood-cutter. Eventually a Brahmin happened to pass that way. The sight of the bodies surprised him and he tried to puzzle out the reason of the deaths. After studying the situation for some time, he made up this verse:

*Because of pride the elephant died,*
The snake died for his temper, 
While craving for the dead the vulture died,  
The man when the tusk he pulled.

(Source: Tales of Assam).

Analysis:
These are a few examples of folktales, which help the young learners grow intelligently. Symbolically these are warnings against being too foolish in one’s activity. The three tales help in awakening the intelligence of the learners. The tale Watch for the Burglar gives the listener an advice of what one’s action would be during the urgency of situation. The second tale teaches the lesson of exercising the presence of mind in the most crucial moment of life as was done by the lion. The third tale is a warning against one’s foolish action that symbolizing that one may even to lose his life because of his foolish act. Misfortune occurs in life not for fate but for an error in character as moralized by the Brahmin.

Activity 2.

Objective:
Amplify the intelligence/presence of mind.

Exercise:
Learners should be given the outline of popular stories that are enjoyable, inspiring and often rich in meaning and give them worksheet including the information they have heard, derived and discussed.

Sample Tales:

The Thirsty Crow:

It was a very hot day. A crow felt awfully thirsty and wanted to drink water. It looked for water here and there but in vain. At this moment it saw a jar near by. It flew to it and looked inside. But the water was almost at the bottom. It was too low for its beak to reach. It tried to dip its beak but to no effect. Then
it tried to upside the jar but failed to turn over. The efforts only made it thirstier. At last it caught sight some stones lying at hand. It picked up some of them and began to drop them one by one, the water seemed to rise a little. So it went on doing same till the water came up within the reach of its beak. The crow now slaked its thirst by drinking as much as it’s like. (*Source: Aesop’s fable*)

*Moral*: Where there is a will there is a way.

**Money Saved:**

An old man had six sons. He was well off with six sturdy working sons and plenty of paddy in his stores. He was also honest, wise and well meaning. Now, once there was a great shortage of rice in the old man’s village. As the man had several stores of paddy he thought of disposing off some of it. The price of paddy was four *puras* (*pura=twenty kilograms*) a rupee. The man said to his sons, ‘My boys, the price is four *puras* a rupee. Let us sell at five *puras* a rupee.’ Though his youngest son did not like the idea of selling so cheaply, the paddy was sold and purchasers were happy that they received a *pura* more for the rupee than usual.

After he paddy was sold, the money was counted and it was found that there was thirteen hundred rupees. The old man said, ‘Now tie the money up in a piece of *endi* cloth and drop the bundle in the river to the west of the pool.’ His sons wondered what the old man meant by dropping the money in the river. The paddy after all was obtained as the result of back breaking work in the fields. The youngest son did not follow his father’s instructions. The other sons however said, ‘We have not so far gone against our father’s word. Let us not do so now. Let us conclude that we have not earned this money as it were. Let us have faith in God and hope for the best.’ So the money was dropped in the river.

That pool of the river was full of big fish. A large *Barali* swallowed the bundle of money and it could hardly move with the weight. Fishermen had
laid their nets to the west of the pool and on the third day after it has swallowed the money, the fish rolled into a net. When the fishermen noticed the belly of the fish, they suspected that it must have fed on a dead body. The middleman sent the fish with two men to get it sold. The price was fixed at six puras of paddy. But they were unable to sell the fish. So they decided to sell the fish for just four puras of paddy. They came to the old man house and asked him to keep the fish. The old man at once paid them seven puras instead of four as a price for the fish. His sons were annoyed at the father’s decision.

The old man said, ‘my children, do not get annoyed, but take the fish to the inner courtyard and cutup its belly.’ When the fish’s belly was open, outcome that bundled of thirteen hundred rupees. The old man said, ‘now my boys, get the coin wash in hot water and keep them carefully. This is your money saved. It is not going to leave you again. Not even a burglar can steal it.’ The son got a good lesson of the value of hard earned and saved money.  

(Source: Tales of Assam)

Analysis:

The tale The Thirsty Crow is enriched with positive impact of exercising one’s intelligence at the time of need to work out any problem in life.

Activity 3.
Objective: Teach with/for the intelligence
Exercise: At this activity, the intelligence is linked to the focus of the class that is an information– transfer activity from a narration of the tales to a tree diagram. This is done via worksheet. The teacher will read the story and the learners have to complete the tree diagram.

Activity 4.
Objective:
Transfer the intelligence/information

**Exercise:**

Students are asked to reflect on their own moods as they listen to stories and express their mood in various ways. Discovering many cultural aspects of the society embedded in these folktales. Awakening and intensifying a spiritual urge among the young generation unique to the culture it can be channelized into various activities of national reconstruction – economic, political and social.

**Activity 5.**

**Objective:**

To develop learner’s narratorial skill, interpersonal relation, kinesthetic skill and visual and spatial intelligence.

**Exercise:**

Divide the class into three groups those who enjoy drawing, those inclined toward acting, and those who prefer discussing. Have each group read different selected stories both from *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesa* or *Burhi Air Sadhu*. Each group might do two to six stories from each depending on students’ capacity.

a. The first group would draw illustrations of each story read for class display.

b. The second group could be organized to do a simple mime presentation of stories which the teacher deems to be particularly geared toward quick improvisation, for example, one student would act as narrator and four others could take the parts of *Tejimala* – the step mother, the father, the old woman and *Tejimala* etc.

c. The third group might be challenged by memorization of part of all of the shorter stories to be presented for the class.

**Analysis:**
This group activity will help them nourish the value of collective will. The collective will generated by working with folktales is not only but also rewarding.

3.8. Advantages of Using Folktales in Educating Children:

In the analysis, a few interesting points regarding the advantages of using folktales in classroom situation are seen. These are mentioned here:

1. The tales are short and hence it is easy to use them effectively during a class period in comparison to long narratives that requires more time for extensive reading.

2. They are enjoyable because most of the people have fond memories of stories that have been known since childhood. In present day context, viewing illustrated versions or film adaptations can also add variety and enjoyment.

3. As the narrative pattern is simple, they are too easy to memorise and retell and dear to the heart of tellers and listeners.

4. They are found in infinite variety everywhere. Every culture has long traditions of oral storytelling, verse-making, joke-telling, and rhymes. Once one starts looking for them, they find allusions to familiar folktale characters heroes.

5. They are infinitely meaningful, because folk and fairy tales represent human experience through symbols and archetypes. What is unsaid is more meaningful than what is said or narrated in a tale.

6. They enhance transitions from childhood to adult life. People get an opportunity to look at their own self and correct their characteristic mannerism by remembering the same from the tales they hear.

9. They unite children and adults. Many types of folktales have been reprinted and adapted in children's books in the past couple of years, while older children and adults who don't read or hear folklore or picture books often lose touch with exciting parts of
their own culture. They sensitize children to the immediate environment.

10. They help the children develop self-confidence and measure their own worth.

11. They also sharpen the children’s survival instinct. The struggles presented in the life of folktale characters and their endeavour to come out successful in overcoming them gives the children an encouragement to face any untoward situations of life with courage.

12. Folktales increase the children’s patriotism by arousing respect for their own culture.

3.9. Difficulties in Teaching with Short Narrative of Folktales:

However, some of the respondents mentioned the problems of teaching with folktales, like—

1. Sometimes the tellers are too literate for their own good. When discussing oral traditions, the teachers must break students of the habit of referring to the writer, the original source, or the ‘real’ or ‘correct’ version. Usually there is no known original version or writer, and obviously folklore is often written down or retold using features of vernacular dialects, not in standard language.

2. Because people have strong emotional ties to tale they knew in childhood, they sometimes have trouble analyzing it objectively and don’t want to critique their favorite stories or learn other versions. It takes some time to realize that one can keep personal memories and preferences of his own while also appreciating the larger social implications, variations, and methods of interpretations.

3. So many people associate folk or fairy tales and nursery rhymes with early childhood, they may assume that the content should be only entertaining and innocent, or that it should always teach
lessons to children. Most folktales, nursery rhymes, ballads, and jokes were originally told by adults to other adults or mixed audiences (the Romantic concept of childhood innocence came along). Students may be shocked by the story details and ‘adult themes’ in many traditional tales and rhymes, but of course, these are the very elements young people enjoy if they get beyond misconceptions based on twentieth-century ideas about literature written for children.

4. There can be special problems with research and documentation. Students may need extra instructions for documenting oral, audiovisual, and unpublished sources or picture books (which often have no page numbers). Adapters, retellers, translators, and illustrators should be recognized when full citations are given in documented papers.

3.10. Recommendations:

To deal with these downsides a few recommendations are offered here:

i. The curriculum must be developed and reviewed to provide for the introduction of story-telling across all levels of primary and secondary schools.

ii. The teacher-training programme should prepare teachers to cope effectively with the challenge of using story-telling as pedagogic device.

iii. The poor attitude to the discipline, which has hitherto hindered the study and teaching of the subject, must be removed. Active research activities into the use of storytelling in the teaching of not only literature but other subjects should be encouraged and vigorously pursued.

iv. Strategies should be enhanced to convert the teaching learning
situation to a valuable and enjoyable learning experiences.

v. Seating arrangement is also very important for successful story-telling activity. There are various arrangements depending upon the story-teller’s bias and physical surroundings. The listeners, however, must be able to hear and see the storyteller’s face and eyes without straining. The usual form of seating arrangement is the semi circle whereby the story-teller sits and his listeners sit in a semi-circle around him. The essential thing is the informal and relaxed climate, which must prevail.

vi. When selecting folktales, the following points are to be taken into consideration:
   a) Clearly identify relevant concepts
   b) Communicate focused messages
   c) Appeal to age level
   d) Provide humor for comic relief
   e) Entertain not to divert attention.

The foregoing discussion has attempted to highlight the crucial role of story-telling in the teaching-learning situations in schools of Assam. There is no denying the fact that folktales can be an invaluable part of the instructional process. Almost every idea can be extracted from a tale and used for instructional value. Folktales are replete with themes and sub themes that can be examined in greater depth. By beginning with the folktale, a safe didactic environment is created to discuss the sensitive and most philosophical subject. The implementation of these lessons would be possible if proper guidelines are provided by the concerned authority. The revival of oral literature as a subject will not be an easy task but the society must be properly oriented towards its acceptance. People themselves must cease to regard it as primitive and practical causes in story-telling must be enshrined in the syllabi. In doing
so, a more holistic attitude toward the significant opportunities new technologies offer in reshaping the way in which narrative for children is conceived and presented should be encouraged so that the time-honored role in value orientation for children will not be lost. To transform the existing mode of education is a challenging task. But professors who embrace the challenge of self actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engages students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply. (Hook, 1994, 22)

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