It is interesting to note that much of the theoretical concerns articulated by important Indian thinkers of both the past and the present have influenced experiments in pedagogy in the country. Two community based programmes in the state of Orissa, “Multilingual Education” and “Srujan” tried to provide culturally relevant education as “community involvement is the prerequisite in multilingual education and the cluster approach (Srujan) to the tribal education in which a host of child-friendly activities are implemented to make learning meaningful” (Mishra 2009: 62). In Multilingual Education (MLE) programme, the child through the mother tongue expresses and explores the community knowledge and then the experiential knowledge is connected with the new knowledge of the wider world:

The MLE programme provides a platform for community participation in the implementation of mother tongue-based multilingual education in Orissa. The action took off from discussions held in a workshop in which community members and the MLE teachers had participated. This is a significant departure from the manner in which the state-driven uniform curriculum is prepared (ibid: 63).

The programme was initiated through discussions with the community members, teachers. The general apprehension expressed by the community was that their culture was under duress and its continued survival at stake. Their expectation from education was that it would help in the regeneration of their cultural values and ideals. Learning for them was primarily through the collective lived experience of the people
and folk based forms and institutions like fairs, festivals, and narrative forms like tales and legends would all go a long way in the sustenance and revival of their traditional values and languages. A series of workshops in the villages amongst the community members were held to generate a school curriculum with relevant cultural themes (ibid: 64). Many riddles related to natural sciences and mathematics was incorporated as riddles present “visual metaphors that represent the wit and intelligence in indigenous knowledge” (ibid: 68).

The *Srujun* Programme in Orissa is based on the cluster approach to tribal education. A cluster consists of ten to twelve schools and ten to twelve clusters constitute a block. The *Srujun* programme attached great value to the indigenous knowledge of the communities involved and children learnt through the stories, traditional games, art and craft, and nature study. The basic idea underlying the programmes was the notion of the community as the creator of knowledge (ibid: 68). This programme was introduced in Orissa in 2007-08 and it has been prepared on the guidelines drawn “from various sources like American Folklore Centers, NCF 2005, and international Story Telling Association” (ibid: 70).

Similarly, Heritage Assam and UNICEF is running a joint project on reviving the art of story telling for the purpose of developing Assamese language skills amongst the children of plantation workers in the tea gardens of Assam. The project is based on the organisation of story telling competitions. Santanoo Tamuly, who is the president of Heritage Assam, an NGO headquartered in the city of Jorhat, Assam, mentioned that this project was envisaged when it was observed that the languages of the children of the tea gardens were different from Assamese children and the children were finding it difficult in learning subjects that were being primarily taught in the Assamese language, the medium of
instruction for most schools in tea gardens of the Brahmaputra valley in Assam (Bhattacharyya 2010:05). In the project, workshops are held after identifying the young story tellers who are fluent in Assamese as well as the first language of the learners. Santanoo Tamuly mentions that:

As there is no school offering education in their mother tongue, these children were faced with a language disadvantage arising from differences in the languages of home and school. With few teachers having bilingual abilities, the children mostly lost interest in the subjects and this may be the prime reason for the large number of school drop outs from this community...It is against this background that an initiative on story telling was conceptualised and implemented in 20 identified locations to develop the Assamese language skills and desired levels of listening, speaking and comprehension through systematic story telling sessions (ibid).

The findings of the session were great. As the parameters of the session were concentration, conversation and participation seventy percent of the students went up from C to A in all the parameters after thirteen sessions of story telling by the trained tellers. The stories were selected from *Buri Air Xadhu* (Grandmother’s Tales) and *Panchatantra* stories. Thus, it can be seen here that folklore can serve as important learning props to help children to gain academically as well as connect to the wider cultural milieu. It not only makes learning interesting and participative but also helps in improving basic skills like conversation communication:

The tales and songs, myths and legends, riddles and proverbs along with folktales, all in the oral tradition, take children back to lived lives and hence help them understand their world better. This whole physical and intellectual creation of the community, shared across generations and perpetuated by
tradition, is what is called community knowledge (Mishra 2009: 61).

Curriculum based on Community knowledge can be perceived as a way out from hegemonic imposition by powerful state machineries, and appropriative discourses aimed at mainstreaming, and which see cultural differences as a threat. This is an apprehension expressed by champions of a culturally plural curriculum in India:

...following the culturally-dominant curriculum and aim at mainstreaming all tribal children in the dominant state language and culture. Till now we don't have any evidence that the tribal community or the tribal teachers have their share in curriculum development. Even the teachers from tribal communities do not use tribal languages in the classroom for the comprehension of the tribal children (ibid: 58).

Article 350(A) of the Constitution of India states that state shall impart education to the linguistic minority children through their mother tongue at the primary stage and later this has also been reinforced through NCF 2005, where it is mentioned that children come to the school with “two or three languages already in place at the oral-aural level” and languages are “the medium through which most knowledge is constructed” and it is very important to “recognise the inbuilt linguistic potential” because “languages get socio-culturally constructed and change in our day-to-day interactions” (NCERT 2008: 36-37).

The National Curriculum Framework document is exhaustive and put emphasis on various aspects of pedagogic formulations and its implementation, with a special stress on the “language potentials of children, language education and knowledge creation. At the same time, it has also been labelled as being “quite evasive” and “deceptively challenging document” (Shrimali 2005: 41). As Anubhuti Maurya points out:
A cursory reading of this curriculum framework can not fail to impress the reader. All the correct concerns have been voiced — inequalities based on gender, caste and class; the immense burden upon students that makes learning a joyless activity; acceptance of a multiplicity of cultures and languages that make India etc...there is a great divide between the kind of education system that exists on the ground and the kind visualized in this document and there is no bridge over this divide (Maurya 2005: 59, 63).

Thus, it is felt that an interface between the different dimensions of pedagogic formulations expressed by different thinkers and the practical world of pedagogy in action would be an endeavour that would help in the understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy as it is envisaged and practiced in contemporary India. North East India, with its plural socio-cultural fabric, provides a challenging site for such an exploration.

NEGOTIATING CULTURAL PLURALITY IN THE SELECTED SCHOOLS

In the schools selected for the study, cultural plurality amongst both students and teachers is a marked feature as most of them hail from different cultural entities of the state of Assam and geographical locations of India. In Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) the teachers belong to different parts of the country and in Army Public School there are there are eighteen teachers who are wives of defence personnel and rest of the teachers and employees are from the local populace which is again a culturally plural society. Local students are also drawn mostly from in and around Tezpur and its suburbs, which is culturally a very varied space. Thus, the schools are steeped in cultural diversity, and ideally provides a vibrant atmosphere of inter cultural exchanges, both informally and in formal school occasions. It is interesting to note that the plural culture ambience generates its own group dynamics in the schools; it is not uncommon to find students changing languages in the course of a
single conversation in an informal environment. Thus Hindi, Assamese and English are used alternately, thereby proving that learners are being influenced by each other’s language. It is also not uncommon to find students exchanging tiffin, thereby experimenting with food from various cultures. Food is a very important and complex marker of group dynamics in the schools, as groups are generated based on the choice of foods, especially over the choice of vegetarian and non-vegetarian foods. While, quite often, children experiment on the sly by tasting foods that are ‘forbidden’ at home, it is also observed that some children are scandalised by others who do not conform to normative food behaviour. Since the schools selected for the study are all day schools, it is important to note that children go back to the normative cultures of their home and family every afternoon after school is over, and thus would present findings that would be markedly different from boarding schools. Thus, there is a constant movement between group dynamics generated at schools and familial norms at home. In these schools, which have a pronounced presence of personnel from the defence services and local bureaucracy, it is not uncommon to find group dynamics generated as per the status of the parents in the official hierarchy. Thus morals of the parents also influence the opinions of the children, and it is not uncommon to find a group of children deriding another group who are the sons and daughters of ‘party going parents’ or ‘meat eating families’ and vice versa. Thus, cultural and ethnic prejudices are both transgressed and reinforced, depending on case specific instances in a culturally plural ambience at schools. It is often found that exposure to cultural narratives from diverse cultural groups over a sustained period of time enables a learner to form individual opinions and imbibe liberal values that are secular and mutually accommodative, and which can transcend the prejudices practiced at
home. Folklore is an important prop, whereby children partake of mutual narratives and material culture, in forming an understanding of each other.

**INFERENCES FROM THE FIELD**

**Negotiating Cultural Difference through Folklore**

The case of Monica, a young girl from the south Indian state of Karnataka, is interesting in the sense that it shows the value of associating familiar items of food and the culture narrative around it as effective pedagogic tool that can awaken the interest of learners to other culture as well as help them overcome difficulties. Monica was admitted to standard I in May 2010. Monica, who was six plus was different from other students. She could not speak and hear. She suffered from partial hearing and total speech disability. On a particular occasion, the class had a lesson on ‘Food’ and the teacher was teaching through ‘Learning by Sharing by discovering facts’. There were thirty two students present out of forty students. Before taking the class, the teacher explained to the researcher that she would be teaching ‘Food’ through ‘active learning’, the pedagogic strategy they follow in primary classes to make classroom learning ‘interesting’. Since it was raining that day, the teacher would not take them out and make them eat in the lawns, which is otherwise an outdoor activity. The teacher made one triangle on the board and wrote vitamins on the lowest base. Proteins were written upper to this, then carbohydrates and Fats, at the apex. Then the teacher enquired about the fruits and vegetables brought by the students, and explained Vitamins by relating it to those familiar items of food. The students opened their tiffin boxes and those who had brought food rich in Vitamins started shouting and announcing their goodies. Then the teacher moved on to Proteins and same question was asked as to who all had brought dal (pulses), Chane (grams), egg, fish. In carbohydrates, many had brought chapattis (whole wheat bread), dosa, idli (rice based steamed and fried...
items popular in the southern states of India) rice. Next, she described about fats. Then finally, she asked the children to explain each other about their tiffins. There was a lot of excitement in the class. All this while, Monica was looking around and was trying to observe everything very curiously, then another student asked her to open the tiffin through the actions and finally the co-student opened tiffin for her. She looked at the student very happily and started eating her tiffin. The seating arrangement of the classroom was circular and there were eight tables and the students were sitting around the tables. When the researcher and the teacher were discussing, one student came to his teacher and asked the name of the dish which his friend had brought. The teacher called his friend and asked him to tell the name, it was peetha (traditional Assamese rice cakes with fillings). Then the teacher announced that everyone will tell their friends the name of the dishes which they have brought. Monica was giving the impression of ‘feeling good’ and was showing keen interest. The teacher explained:

I think Monica does not understand much and I too feel that I am not qualified to deal with her perfectly; however as per her parents she is happy to come to the school and happy being in the schools. Other students too like interacting with her in their own way. I generally do not interfere and check when they interact with her. She is not gaining much academically but behaviour is seen to be changing according to her parents. Even I have observed that “she feels good” sitting with the children of her age.

The teacher, who was also the Head Mistress of the primary section, feels that Monica remains very happy in the school and is very creative in art and drawing. She also looks interested and inquisitive. If she does not understand anything she would come near the teacher, would touch the teacher, and would show the teacher about the written thing in her
copy and the teacher would try to explain it in her own way. It is very interesting to note here that the teachers have not got any special training to teach differently abled children but was using her own strategies. It was interesting to note that this teacher explained the food items by using maximum verbal words and other teacher (in the second class) explained body parts with actions and the girl was ‘looking attentive’ in both the classes.

For the topic Food in the classroom, the teacher explained this sharing of lunch and named this as ‘community lunch’, where they not only gain information regarding the theory of the chapter about food but they get to know the different dishes of different culture. This class was related to learning by experience. It was observed that most of the children were more interested in eating and sharing, they were not interested in knowing the names of the dishes except Rohan, the son of an army man from the state of Uttar Pradesh in North India, who came and asked about ‘peetha’. This boy was looking older than other students and teacher mentioned that he was age wise, the senior most boy in the class. It is interesting to note that peetha is a traditional Assamese food mostly linked up with the harvesting festival of Bihu, and is an important part of traditional material culture as well as food habit. As a result of Rohan’s inquisitiveness, the whole class came to know about the traditional relevance of peetha, and the fact that it is also prepared and eaten outside the festive occasion. The discussion finally led to a much wider understanding of the relation between food and culture. As food is one of the folkways and this kind of “community lunch” means relating pedagogy and food through folklore. Sabina Magliocco had discussed the merit of relating foodways with geography in her class of Italian-American students. Recipes are representative of both climatic and social conditions and apart from cultural diversity, geographical features
can be very well elucidated through food and food habits (Magliocco 1992:455).

**Food lore, cultural prejudices and teenage binding**

Lunch and tiffin sharing amongst the senior sections is a practice which the students enjoy during the break time in the absence of the teacher. It was observed regularly during the field work that amongst the students of standard IX, 'food' served as peer bonding device and mode for the mutual exploration of familial and cultural environment. As the researcher was not known to the students, it was easy to observe the group dynamics of the students without inhibiting them; the researcher could have come across as a parent of some other student or an outsider.

A group of about twenty five students of this class generally sit together to eat their tiffins during lunch break. The composition of the group consists of local students of Assamese, Bengalis, tribals and the students from Northern India from U.P, Bihar and Punjab. Out of them six to seven students were vegetarian and others were all Non-Vegetarians. It was interesting to note that as an unwritten law, the children were not seen eating their own tiffins and would dig into tit bits brought by other students. Out of vegetarians, there were couple of students in whose homes, cooking non-vegetarian food was a taboo but they were found relishing non-vegetarian delicacies brought by their friends. While interacting with the students of this group, they shared an interesting anecdote with the researcher. Parents of two students met during a Parent-Teacher Meeting and got talking while waiting their turn to come. After their detailed introduction, one of the parents told the other about this great concept of sharing the tiffins with others and as to how her daughter used to relish the tiffin brought by her son. However, to the researcher's utter disbelief the parent instead of taking this into the right stride went home and admonished her son for sharing food with others,
which as per the parents was totally against their culture. On further interaction and observation the researcher realised that the children had continued to share tiffins in spite of being educated about the ‘cultural values’ at home, and considered such values as ‘old- fashioned’ and ‘vague’ custom. Interesting lore on food was also shared by the students, as to why certain foods were detrimental or certain food beneficial. The students learnt about interesting facts on food habit from each other, and many students expressed a keen desire to know each others culinary range. Initial prejudices and at times horror gives away to inquisition and curiosity. One good example is the Assamese preparation of ‘khar’, an alkali food prepared in a true folk way, by burning dried banana leaves and trunks, and distilling pure water through a container with residual ash. It is popularly believed that it is beneficial for a host of ailments if combined with food. Folklore about bamboo shoots, a delicacy in North East India, abounds, and how it adds to the value of preparation made of pork or beef. Students were able to overcome initial stigmas associated with ‘forbidden’ and ‘alien’ foods and understand that difference in food habit is natural and legitimate, and no one habit is superior to the other. However, it is interesting to note that good natured banter on each others food habit continues to circulate amongst the students, with the vegetarians often called the ‘ghas-phus walas’ (Hindi slang meaning grass and shrub eaters) and the non vegetarians called the ‘gosht walas’ (flesh eaters).

Folk Narratives, Cultural Interaction and Effective Learning

Folk narratives are an effective pedagogical tool that can supplement regular methods and also awaken the curiosity of the learners. Children love hearing stories and discussing them. They get so involved with the overall structure and language of the stories that students start using vernacular idioms, thereby also imbibing features of a third language,
and associating vocabulary to context clues. They enthusiastically share similar stories from their own cultures. Their new knowledge is constantly reinforced by carrying the mutual narrative transaction beyond the formal learning time and space to informal time and space. During the course of field investigation, it was found that story telling is in practice in primary sections. One teacher, who was basically substituting a regular teacher, adopted a more informal approach in the class, which not only came across as interesting to both the taught and the teacher, but also a very effective mode of dealing with young learners. She narrated a story named ‘Cinderella’ to primary students. The teacher being a native of Assam, asked local students about the Assamese version of the same story and went on to present this folktale through group discussion. There was lot of excitement, especially among the local students when Tejimala (an Assamese variant of the Cinderella theme), a folk tale of Assam was narrated with lot of enthusiasm. Other students of the class also participated in the discussion. The teacher helped the students to evaluate the structural similarities and differences between the two versions of the same story. However she stressed more on the similarities.

The students from Assam found it easier to connect with their own folk tales and also it gave an insight to fellow friends’ culture by way of discussions in the classrooms. Through folktales children can experience other cultures and understand the diversity of cultures around the world. The positive effect of the use of folklore in the above example clearly points out to the potential efficacy of the method. Perhaps the teacher hit upon the method accidentally and it perhaps had nothing to do with her professional training; but in an informal situation, like a substitute class, a teacher has more opportunity to improvise. Folktales appeal to the mind and heart and generally fascinate the students and they love
hearing them, reading them, and discussing them. They enthusiastically share similar stories from their own cultures. Their knowledge increases their vocabulary not only from the books but from effecting language use outside the classroom. At the same time, it reinforces positive values and shows how such values are held sacrosanct across cultures. Folktales throughout the world share common need for love, hope, security and possess same feelings like happiness, anger, pride and loneliness:

The universal use of humor provides funny and exciting tales, such as the animal tricksters and the silly but resourceful folk hero like the Russian Ivan, English Jack, and German Hans. At the same time, the reader becomes sensitive to the differences between cultures. The folk stories show how different peoples respond differently to emotional and environmental conditions (Bosma 1992: 04).

Folktales when shared together help in understanding and respect towards other cultures. They can help children to develop analytic abilities as in most of the tales they show and use problem solving structure. The folk tale generally begins with a problem and slowly and gradually the problem is solved in the end. This problem solving plot structure can be used as the pedagogical strategy by the teachers (Bosma 1992: 06). Some folk stories are witty and humorous and they depict human nature and behaviour. Folktales thus appeal more to children and they are all in one and include “proverbs, poetry, riddles, rhymes, ballads, beliefs, customs, festivals, songs, superstition, drama and dance” (McFadden 1991:1097). Folk tales sharpens the mind of the children as they increase the imaginative capacity of a child and listening to folktales not only help in gauging the culture but also help in connecting the folklore world to the real world that they would face as adults. This is how they understand and link these two worlds which
help them in “their interactions with man, animals, physical world and spirits” (Penjore 2005: 54). These wisdoms are time tested and passed on from generations to generations through many years of interaction and experience with the real world and so children are exposed to knowledge through these tales. Folktale narration is the “replication of what elders are experiencing” in the outer world, thus preparing children to face the life portrayed in stories as adults (ibid: 55).

According to A.K. Ramanujan, Indian stories for small children convey different messages. He mentions the story of “Sister Crow and Sister Sparrow”. The story is as follows:

Sister Crow and Sister Sparrow are friends. Crow has a house of cow dung, Sparrow one of stone. A big rainstorm washes away Crow’s house, so she goes to Sparrow and knocks on her door.

Because she is feeding her children, Sparrow makes Crow wait at first. When Crow knocks again, Sparrow is feeding her husband. When Crow knocks a third time, Sparrow is putting her children to bed. Finally, she lets Crow in and offers her several places to sleep. Crow chooses to sleep on the chickpea sack.

All night long, she munches on chickpeas and makes a katum-katum noise. Whenever Sparrow asks her what the noise is, Crow says, “nothing really. Remember you gave me a betelnut? I’m biting on it.” By morning she has eaten all the chickpeas in the sack. She cannot control her bowels, so she fills the sack with her excrement before she leaves.

Sparrow’s children go there in the morning to eat some peas and muck their hands with what Crow has left.

Sparrow is angry. She invites Crow again to visit, and when she is about to sit down, puts a hot iron spatula under her and
brands her behind. Crow flees, crying Ka! Ka! in pain
(Ramanujan 1989: 256).

Children find this story very funny but at the same time the story is
about toilet training, as he says “the typical audience for this kind of
story consists of children who are just being toilet trained” (ibid: 257).
These tales can be told informally and generally speak about all those
things “what cannot be usually spoken” (ibid: 258). Thus this not only
provides humour to children but also is indirect instructions and
education to them.

It is interesting to note that more and more folk narratives are being
incorporated into the school curriculum. However, its effective use
depends a lot on the attitude of the teacher, and for a folk narrative to be
effective, the teachers should also be imaginative, interactive and at
times go beyond the text to link up the prescribed narrative with those
outside the text in the familiar familial and social environment. During
the course of fieldwork, a teacher was teaching a lesson called the “The
Scholar’s Mother Tongue”, which is an adaptation from the familiar
‘Akbar and Birbal’ repertoire of Indian folktales, that narrates humorous
anecdotes on the Mughal emperor Akbar and his Hindu courtier Birbal.
The narratives usually end with a moral like those in Aesop’s Tales.
This folk narrative is from the text book Marigold prescribed for
standard IV students by the National Council for Educational Research
and Training (NCERT):

A learned Pundit once visited the court of Akbar. He told the
King and his courtiers that he had mastery over many different
languages. The Pundit could speak many languages fluently.
He was so fluent that no one could find out what his mother
tongue was. He challenged everybody at the court to name his
mother tongue. When everyone failed, the challenge was taken
up by Birbal. That night, Birbal went quietly to the Pundit’s
room when he was asleep. He whispered into the Pundit’s ear and tickled it with a feather. The Pundit, half awake, cried out suddenly and shouted out words in his mother tongue. Birbal came to the court the next day and told everyone that the Pundit’s mother tongue was Telugu. The Pundit was surprised and accepted the truth. King Akbar then asked Birbal, “How did you find the truth?” Birbal answered, “In times of difficulty, a person speaks only in his mother tongue.” He also told the King how he had gone to the Pundit’s room at night to find out the truth (NCERT 2007: 118-119).

The teacher asked the students to read the above mentioned story one by one and he kept on correcting students’ pronunciation and explained few words in Hindi. He made all the students to read the story in this period. The next day he continued with the written exercises of asking questions like- Who came to Akbar’s court?, What did he claim to know?, How did he challenge everybody? All these questions were written in the exercise given at the end of the chapter. There was another column of exercise of Let’s Talk, where the questions were as what is your mother tongue? Tell the class a joke in your mother tongue; do you know any other language? Do you know a joke in English? Tell your friends. The teachers skipped this column and continued with ticking the right answer from the blanks and match the columns. The next column was of word building, where again the assignment was on making a class dictionary with words from the story and to find suitable words for them in their mother tongue, to be spoken aloud and then from these words make the sentences with those words in class dictionary. This again was skipped by the teacher. It was found from the students that these types of columns are generally not covered in the classroom as these questions do not come in the exams. Thus it is clear that ineffective and disinterested pedagogic approach on the part of the
teachers often defeats the very purpose of introducing such humorous folk narrative. It is disheartening to note that the sections which would have linked up the text with the social and linguistic environment of the learners, and promoted an effective cultural dialogue amongst the students are skipped. The teacher's rationale that such approaches or exercises are not relevant for examination points out the failure of some of the teachers to come out of the confines of a learning mode directly linked with the reward mode, which is often seen in terms of grades or marks. Such example abounds, and the researcher came across many such instances during the course of field investigation.

**Prejudice and Pedagogy**

In another interesting instance from the field, a group of students from class I were given blank sheets and the teacher asked them to draw their favourite food item. Soon they all got busy; some were peeping in others' sheets and others were busy drawing their favourite fruit, vegetables and other food items. After a while students were called one by one by the teacher to submit their sheets. Mostly children had drawn mango, apple, carrot and cake. The teacher was polite to everyone and was responding encouragingly to those with familiar food items. One girl got up and went up to the teacher very excitedly and showed her drawing. The teacher looked confused and asked, "What is this"? The girl replied that it was "kali daal", her favourite dish. She had drawn a bowl and coloured it brown and had put black dots in that. The girl was from north India, where this dish made of a particular kind of pulse, is very popular. But the teacher, who was from south India, and perhaps unfamiliar with the food item depicted, did not find the drawing worth putting in her academic record file and politely commented, "O.K. fine! You take another sheet and go and draw a mango or an apple on it". It
could also be that the child’s sketch did not fulfill the teacher’s expectation of a ‘favourite’ food item that can be sketched by a student. Whatever be the reason, it is clear that the teacher’s lack of sensitivity, in spite of her mild manners, reflected a lack of knowledge about the child’s cultural conditioning and a curbing, even if unintentionally, the child’s imagination and creative abilities. Similar incidents have been narrated by Hector Sueyo in his “Educational Biography of an Arakmbut”, where he narrates that when he was

... only seven years old, the teacher called me to the blackboard to draw an apple and divide it into four pieces. I drew a papaya like those I knew from my father’s garden. The teacher thought I was making a fool of her and slapped me on the back of the head. I didn’t want to go back after that (Sueyo 2003: 193).

Teacher’s perception and assumption about children and their activities at times can hamper their growth. This was an example which not only deals with micro aspects but also touches the macro issues of culturally relevant pedagogy. When a child enters the formal education system through schooling, it is important to know that she has been already educated in the family too. The child brings along with her own cultural moorings from her home. Within culture, one includes all the customs, traditions, beliefs and form of behaviour which is acquired through learning and which is patterned in conformity with certain approved norms. In a culturally plural society, it is very important to understand the cultural differences as different students from different cultural backgrounds inherit their cultural knowledge and values. Guoping Zhao mentions this as “what is actually delivered in student’s real life in the classroom is the outcome of the deeply embedded cultural assumptions” (Zhao 2007: 04). Some of the above examples depict the cultural incongruence between the teacher and the student. The teacher has her
own cultural conditioning which serves as the ideological basis from within which she approaches the teaching learning experience. The teachers who are trained to be alive to cultural variation and by nature less prejudiced are more effective because they base their decisions on students' needs rather than their own cultural and moral beliefs (Matczynski et al.2000: 355).

At times teacher's pre conceived opinions about particular students can also affect the pedagogical process. It is very important for a teacher to be aware of the culture specific body gestures and verbal behaviour. In an important example from the field, a teacher called out the name of a particular student to which the students response was “haan sir” (yes sir), a common response in Bihar, Haryana and the Punjab, but also considered crude and informal in parts of Uttar Pradesh, and often used as a rebuke directed to a younger person. The teacher rebuked the student and started considering the student as “ill-mannered and disrespectful” towards the teachers. But on further enquiry, it was found that the student was from a place, where in their culture, they call everyone as “tum” (the lowest ‘you’ in the formal Hindi honorific hierarchy, but also a term of endearment and closeness in certain social situation) and answer in “haan” to all, irrespective of age or status. Often the verbal behaviour and gestures of students are misconstrued by teachers and lead to formation of strong opinions on the manners and behaviour of a particular student. It is seen that “teachers frequently treat their beliefs as knowledge and the teachers’ beliefs about subject matter powerfully affect their teaching in the same way as the relationship between subject-matter knowledge and pedagogy” (Ellison 2006:134). Teachers also “interpret experiences through the filters of their existing knowledge and beliefs” (ibid).
It is inevitable that effective teaching is bound up with the subjective orientation of the teacher, and in the following case, the positive role of an effective teacher is highlighted. A Hindi teacher was explaining grammatical terms to a group of twenty-four students of class X. While explaining *Sankar Shabd* (hybrid words) and other word formation concepts, he also discussed the *Muhavare* (Proverbs), *Vilom Shabd* (Antonyms) with lot of examples. The class was very interactive. He asked students to speak in Hindi about English proverbs as well as local students to identify similar variants in Assamese language. The classroom was in total dialogue and the students were interacting informally and the teacher and the students also used examples from Bollywood movies. Thus, English and local variants of proverbs like ‘*Jo garajte hain, voh baraste nahin*’ (Thundering clouds seldom rains) were enthusiastically discussed by the learners and idiomatic equivalents in Hindi and Assamese were identified. The English equivalent mostly mentioned was ‘Barking dogs seldom bites’ and amongst the Assamese equivalent, the interesting variant was ‘*Mukhe tom tom, dingeli puthi*’ (the loudmouth is like the fish with the elongated neck). Another interesting Hindi proverb was ‘*Ab pachataye kya hot, jab chiriya chug gayee khet*’ (it is no point regretting after the birds have pecked away at grains). The most common English equivalent was ‘No use crying over spilt milk’ and the Assamese variant most commonly agreed upon was ‘*Sur gole buddhi, barusun gole japi*’ (Ideas after the theft, umbrellas after the rain). It is interesting to note that *japi* in Assamese does not mean umbrella and is from the realm of folk culture and would roughly mean a indigenous straw hat. A very important cultural symbol, non-Assamese learner also gains the knowledge of such culture specific items. The teacher made the learning experience interesting and innovative, thereby increasing the efficacy of the whole process. As
Tagore had mentioned in his ‘Siksa’ (Education), it is the teacher who matters the most:

… we must come to the inevitable conclusion that education can be imparted only by a teacher and not wholly by a method. Man can learn better from a man. Just as a water tank can be filled only with water and fire can be kindled with fire, life can be inspired with life (Mukherjee 1970: 76).

The enthusiasm and involvement with teaching is indeed very important, and no one can deny the validity of the age old truism that teaching is a calling rather than a profession. The love for one’s profession is a very important aspect in the makeup of a teacher, and a teacher has to instinctively reach out to the students. Krishnamurti feels that “only love can bring about the understanding of another. Where there is love there is instantaneous communion with the other, on the same level and at the same time” (Krishnamurti 2008: 24) as love for students, teaching and profession help in making the pedagogical process interesting and meaningful both for the teacher and the student. This aspect is directly linked to an effective teaching learning process.

Gendering the Classroom

While interacting and observing this aspect in the field, it was observed that a few teachers, in this case all male, in the primary sections (PRT) are not very comfortable with their primary teacher (PRT) status. Few of them are highly qualified and are working as PRT teachers not out of choice but out of compulsion. The teachers opted for this government job for the time being and are trying for PGT category through the qualifying evaluative process and other competitive tests. While talking to them one of the teachers accepted the fact that though he has “adjusted to his destiny to be a teacher”, he is not happy with his present status of a PRT. It is generally observed that the low self esteem is seen especially in male primary teachers. It is interesting to note that behind
such attitudes are age old social and cultural conditioning of gender roles, whereby primary teaching is seen as the natural domain of the women teachers and higher classes at the secondary and senior secondary level as the natural domain of the male teachers. Such prejudices and idea of social hierarchy often acts as hindrance for a male teacher to develop affinity and professional dedication for the job he is supposed to do. On the other hand women teachers have also internalised such social hierarchy generated by age old patriarchal structure, and often subscribe to such viewpoints. Teachers of primary classes, quite a few of them women, feel that the there should be women teachers for the lower primary classes as the students of these classes have to be looked after in a different way, which male teachers are not very adept at. It is seen that the students of class I and II often join school for the first time. They undergo lot of emotional and physical changes. According to one male teacher:

Ladies can handle all these problems easily as sometimes the child needs to go to the toilet and the children come and ask to tie their laces, their bags have to be opened and shut and all these things are the ladies’ jobs so, they should be given these classes we cannot handle all these things. However we should be given only IV and V classes.

Even the head mistresses of primary sections of two schools too felt that male teachers generally lack interest in younger children and they are not as “soft” at heart as the lady teachers are. According to one of them:

From my twenty three years of teaching experience and out of which from the last nine years as head mistress by now I have observed that the lady teachers are much better that male teachers and we try to select very special teachers for class I and II. For me special teachers are those who have lot of patience to deal with the children of this age group and who
are by nature loving and who actually enjoy teaching the children of class 1. In class 1 even the experience does not matter but what matters is how much you love teaching because children are only looking for acceptance and love for them in this class. The teacher should be motherly towards the children.

Head Mistress of the other school was also of the same opinion as she said, “lady teachers are "soft-hearted" and can handle children of junior classes very well; so preference are given to them for junior classes”. They both were also of the opinion that if the class is given to the teachers who are disinterested, the teaching learning process gets affected. Similar opinion was also articulated by a male teacher:

As I am involved in my own studies for other competitive tests, I do feel that I do not pay attention to my teaching job as PRT teacher as I feel that for teaching lower classes I do not have to prepare, however if I am given higher classes I would enjoy more because I do not feel satisfied teaching junior classes. More over that status of PGT is always higher in the school and we as PRT teachers are always made to realize that we are inferior to them which further demotivate.

Gloria Ladson Billings in her study had shown similarity and differences in the approaches of the teachers whose methods came across as culturally relevant pedagogy. She mentions that love for their profession was the most striking feature in the teachers who effectively mediated the teaching learning process; “both Ann Lewis and Julia Devereaux are proud to be teachers. They see their work as worthwhile and gratifying” (Ladson Billings 1992: 317):

All of the teachers identified strongly with teaching. They were not ashamed or embarrassed about their professions...The teachers saw themselves as a part of the community and teaching as a way to give back to the
community. They encouraged their students to do the same. They believed that their work was artistry, not a technical task that could be accomplished in a recipe-like fashion. Fundamental to their beliefs about teaching was that all of the students could and must succeed (ibid 1995: 163).

It is imperative that a teacher should emerge from the confines of cultural prejudices and gender stereotypes to graduate into an effective teacher, and folklore can play a crucial role in such reorientation of the pedagogic process.

The Folk Idiom and Effective Teaching

According to Mahendra Kumar Mishra, riddles and other common idiomatic usages can be used for even basic mathematical instruction to young learners:

One hundred legs and seventy two eyes
How many hens and how many elephants
(22 hens and 14 elephants)
Can you say?
Wife and husband have twenty two ears
(Ravana and Mandodari) (Mishra 2009: 68).

The above riddles are deep rooted in Indian Culture. The first one is related to Indian forest and rural life. Since the childhood children are exposed to life around them which include flora and fauna. Most of the rural occupation is agricultural and farming. If the pedagogy is related to their community knowledge, the learning is easier and effective. The second riddle is picked up from one the great Indian epic Ramayana. Legends in these epics serve as the vehicles from which local history and social norms are passed from generation to the next generation. These traditional stories are meant basically to instruct both young and old persons in India. Indian children are exposed to the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata through multiple modes. Earlier it was through the
tales at home and now through comics and cartoon networks. Ravana, who is the villain in *Ramayana*, is supposed to have ten faces and Mandodari is his wife. That’s how wife and husband together have twenty two ears.

Sabina Magliocco too privileges proverbs and riddles as effective pedagogical tools as they are used in daily conversation and are integrated into the everyday speech of the learners. Proverbs and riddles can be used in the introductory levels of language instruction. Sabina Magliocco considers them as “one of the most useful genres in gauging what folklorists call “worldview”-the popular attitudes towards certain subjects”:

I type the proverbs on a ditto sheet and let the students try to figure them out, offering suggestions and help when appropriate. We talk about similar proverbs in English, and then we discuss the values reflected in the proverbs; for instance, notice how many Italian proverbs have to do with wine. What do they communicate about Italian attitudes towards drinking, and how do these differ from American attitudes... These attitudes, reflected in proverbial folk wisdom, communicate important differences in the two worldviews and provide a good starting point for a discussion on cultural values (Magliocco 1992: 456).

Joyce Penfield and Mary Duru through their essay suggest “how the metaphorical and quotative nature of proverbs contributes to the process of child development in daily interaction in oral societies” (Penfield and Duru 1988: 119). Proverbs serve as the tool of both cognitive and social development along with the aspect of communication in children of African societies. Here Joyce Penfield and Mary Duru argued that “abstract thought is developed in a folk society with a strong oral tradition is through the metaphorical language of proverbs” (ibid: 127).
This metaphorical way helps in understanding the abstract thoughts and norms of the society in a “natural, culturally relevant interactional context”. Proverbs help in developing the faculties of reasoning and thought development among the children through culturally relevant use of language. This type of development is spontaneous and informal. Thus it becomes important to realise the cultural strengths and the styles of the children’s “social nature of speech and thought implicit in the use of proverbs” and utilise these aspects in the teaching learning process (ibid). There are many proverbs which are similar in different cultures and many directly contradict one another illustrate the multivocality of folk wisdom. Proverbs and Riddles also have metaphoric nature can also be used in pedagogy. They are interesting ways of teaching. Proverbs with its related forms of maxim and traditional metaphor helps in unlocking the world of imaginary writing (Hood 1967: 971). Hood used proverbs for teaching literature to her students. The students were asked to collect different proverbs and then through the collection of these proverbs they were made aware of the grammatical and literary approaches. Hood described these proverbs as the “seeds of literature”:

I can say that my classes worked with keen interest...Certainly they had acquired some philosophical, stylistic, and linguistic concepts basic to an appreciation of works of the imagination; they had also mastered a precise vocabulary around which to organize their responses to literature...they accumulated a store of cultural treasures, minds full of “lucky sixpences” (Hood 1967: 975).

Riddles and proverbs are didactic in the sense that they are inclined to teach and also morally instructive. Most of the times they are used with the tales to increase the knowledge. Riddles are generally stated in the form of questions to which listeners are supposed to guess the answers. Riddles help in improving vocabulary and in training of the mind of the
children. **Riddles have educational value and on the basis of their educative value** Majasan divided them into five categories. They are:

- **Riddles that increase children vocabulary** for example in Yoruba riddles there are words which are long and difficult, through riddles children not only understand these words but also learn to pronounce those words.

- **Riddles help in increasing general knowledge** as they help children in storming their brains and develop the analytic power by trying to solve those riddles.

- **Riddles help in improving the memory.** Riddles refer to the social norms and habits of particular culture. The children not only learn from the traditional habits of the culture but also train the memory to put the riddle in a particular order.

- **Riddles that reflect culture** like who is that drinks with the king? The Fly. Who is that goes past the king's house without greeting the king? The Torrent. Such riddles show the respect Yoruba have for their king and that is why children are also educated in the similar manner.

- **Riddles that are for relaxation.** Riddles are narrated and asked generally in the evenings in the relaxed atmosphere. This is also like a source for entertainment and to have informal communication. This is also a way of using tabooed words (Majasan 1969: 50-51).

Proverbs in Yorubaland are mainly used by adults and adolescents. Adults generally use proverbs when they have to scold the younger generation or used as an advice. Proverbs in Yoruba serve three main functions in education. They are of literary significance, are considered as the storehouse of ancient wisdom and they help in putting restraint on the younger generation and help them to develop self control (ibid: 52-53). T. J. Farr too stressed on the importance of proverbs and riddles in language development and on its literary significance. As T. J. Farr remarked on the using folksongs in the classroom for educational point
of view as they can be used in the classroom for tunes and texts. Popular songs can be used to illustrate grammatical points. Folk songs and ballads have special and specific qualities of composition and sentiment and "their simplicity and directness, their treatment of heroic themes, and their strange repetitions and refrains appeal to students and help them understand and appreciate artistic literature" (Farr 1940: 261).

In the above illustrations, the cultural and social requirement of the children was kept in mind and a relevant approach implemented that made it culturally sensitive. Culturally relevant pedagogy is a mode where a teacher:

...must acknowledge how deficit-based notions of diverse students continue to permeate traditional school thinking, practices, and placement, and critique their own thoughts and practices to ensure they do not reinforce prejudice behavior. Second, culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes the explicit connection between culture and learning, and sees students' cultural capital as an asset and not a detriment to their school success (Howard 2003:198)

Howard believed that critical reflection is a personal and challenging look at one's own identity and is a process of improving practices, rethinking philosophies and becoming effective teachers (ibid :201).

Community Knowledge and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In the following case in a Class VIII situation, the teacher was taking a class in Social Studies on agricultural practices. The teacher did not consult the text book throughout the class. English was the medium of instruction; however the teacher was encouraging the students to speak in the language they were comfortable with and most of the students were replying in Hindi. There were twenty nine students in the class room. The teacher hailed from the state of Uttar Pradesh of India. The students were very attentive and were participating actively in the
classroom. The classroom atmosphere was very informal. The students were answering and participating without being asked by the teacher. The teacher covered the topics like types of farming, major crops of India, and geographical conditions required for different crop seasons. The pedagogic strategy was 'inter-textual' in the sense that he related the topics with similar topics in the Science textbook from the previous year. The teacher discussed the agricultural crops of different states and one of the local student mentioned about the Bamboo plants in Assam. The discussion took off from this point in the class as one of the student commented that this particular crop is not used for eating, and then the teacher started asking about the uses of the bamboo plant. Students who were not locals were actually amazed when they got to know how the particular plant is being used not only for garden furniture, (that is only what students from outside Assam knew about), but for textiles, medicines, for food, and also for jewellery. The class was a real example to believe that the students do carry the knowledge from the community and that:

The local environment is thus a natural learning resource, which must be privileged when making choices regarding what should be included, what concrete examples should be cited in planning for their transaction in the classroom...Inclusion of the local context in classroom transaction would imply a serious attempt by the teacher to make choices in a manner that is pedagogically imaginative and ethically sound. When children living in Kerala are introduced to the habitat of the desert in Rajasthan, the descriptions must be rich and detailed so that they can get a feel of the natural world there... The local environment consists not only of the physical and natural world but also the socio-cultural world. All children have a voice at home, and it is essential for the school to ensure that their voices to be heard in the classroom as well. Communities
also have rich cultural resources: local stories, songs, jokes and riddles, and art, all of which can enrich language and knowledge in schools. They also have rich oral histories. By imposing silence we stifle children (NCERT 2008: 31-32).

The class had more or less followed the above mentioned pedagogic practice in the class room. The environment of the classroom was very casual and students were comfortable at the conversational level with the teacher and they could openly and frankly put forth their views in front of the teacher and the class without hesitation. Later on, discussion with the teacher found that the teacher had not only covered the topics of science but also touched the aspects of class X syllabus. As the teacher had two continuous periods in the class, he utilised the substitute period very effectively. The teacher also mentioned that he had consulted and read very thoroughly NCF (National Curriculum Framework) guidelines for his tests (the tests were conducted for teachers and Principals of Kendriya Vidyalayas in 2009 to evaluate the knowledge of teachers and Principals regarding NCF content). He was of the opinion that though initially he found it a “pain” to study for the test, yet later he found it quite “useful and apt”. The teacher was culturally relevant in his own way, as the classroom style was not very formal. The local students felt a sense of pride in mentioning their rich cultural heritage and at the same time the other children also gained the knowledge not only from the textual and fixed perspective, but a living and active context, that inculcated an awareness and sense of respect towards the ‘cultural other’. The students were found to be keenly enquiring about ‘Sunga Shaul’ (rice cakes baked in the bamboo tubes), which also made them aware of the cultural space and time when such traditional delicacies are prepared. They could also infer that climatic conditions and agricultural crops and eating habits all are interrelated. It may be inferred from the above example that the cultural diversity and plurality definitely help in
enriching the cross cultural knowledge. The students were animated in this class and the teacher helped in keeping the relations between him and his “students fluid and equitable” and also encouraged the students “to act as teachers, and they, themselves, often functioned as learners in the classroom”. This kind of fluidity in relationship thus extended beyond the classroom into the community as the students learn “collaboratively, teach each other, and be responsible for each other’s learning” (Ladson-Billings 1995: 163).

Community knowledge in the different forms provides information and an understanding of not only a particular community, but when shared together in the classroom, help other children also to understand the rich community based knowledge. Ladson Billings in her study has also shown that community knowledge can enhance competence. One of her teacher Gertrude Winston, involved parents of the children so that the “students could learn from each other’s parents and affirm cultural knowledge” (Ladson Billings 1995: 161). She invited baker, carpenter, professional player, nurse, and church musician to enrich the learning process:

All of Winston’s guests were parents or relatives of her students. She did not “import” role models with whom the students did not have firsthand experience. She was deliberate in reinforcing that the parents were a knowledgeable and capable resource. Her students came to understand the constructed nature of things such as “art,” “excellence,” and “knowledge.” They also learned that what they had and where they came from was of value (ibid).

Thus, it is clear that folklore genres not only help teachers to understand the cultural diversity of the students, but also helps in finding new ways of effective teaching and learning. As Elizabeth Radin Simons mentions:
Normally in school the teacher is the source of knowledge, but I wanted to reverse this. As much as possible, I wanted the content to come from student memories and from interviews with friends and family. I wanted it to come from the lives of the students so that they, not me, would be the experts. I would learn about their folklore from them (Simons 1985: 32).

A teacher, in the true nature of a folklorist can also draw meaningfully on the knowledge base that the students bring from an informal knowledge environment to a formal learning environment, the school and the class. Instead of the formal pedagogic process being one of erasure of the ‘irrational’ and the ‘informal’, it can double up as a reinforcement of what already exist within a learner, and how that can be effectively marshaled into mutually enriching and socially relevant experience:

...as participant-observers- as a “student” to a community member who “teaches” them what he or she knows by employing traditional pedagogic methods such as story telling, singing, or other forms of dramatic performance...If we approach the educational institution as another community setting, instructors may employ teaching methods learned from community models in their classroom, thereby engaging another form of applied folklore as pedagogy (Shuldiner 1998: 192).

Thus the pedagogy should be, as Gerald V. Mohatt terms it “built on relationships” as kinship teaching, where “all parts are related and taught in context” (Mohatt 1994: 177).

One of the most oft repeated insinuations against the role of folklore in pedagogy is that it reinforces irrational and unscientific through genres like origin myths and legends. However, such apparently irrational an unscientific genres can be used as what can be termed as contrapuntal pedagogic devices where by the evolutionary process of human
knowledge and the gradual grounding of natural phenomena in to a rational and empirical epistemology can be highlighted:

The child is the result of both the past and the present and is therefore already conditioned. If we transmit our background to the child, we perpetuate both his and our own conditioning. There is radical transformation only when we understand our own conditioning and are free of it. To discuss what should be the right kind of education while we ourselves are conditioned is utterly futile (Krishnamurti 2008: 27-28).

The merit of the imaginative and the negotiative where by our ancestors had learnt to come to terms with their ecological and environmental milieu that is so intrinsic to folk narratives can only enrich the mental vistas of the learner.
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