



Pedagogy of Learning, Volume-1, Issue-4, pp. 15-27, Oct 2015
(International Journal of Education)
ISSN: **2320-9526** (Print), ISSN: **2395-7344** (Online)
Website: www.pedagogyoflearning.com

Recommended Citation:

Dey. T. (2015). Folk tales of north east India: a relook for environmental studies classroom transaction. *Pedagogy of Learning*, 1 (4), pp. 15-27.

Folk Tales of North East India: A relook for Environmental Studies Classroom Transaction

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Article Received : 25-08-2015
Article Revised : 12-09-2015
Article Accepted : 17-10-2015

Abstract: The Folklores and folk tales have been an eternal part of every community culture since ages. It can be used to provide an introduction to, and stimulate interest in children to understand how close human beings are to the nature and need for its conservation. Folk tales help us to discover the roots of distinctive communities, our past, the commonality of varied cultures and of course our ethnic identities. They are therefore a very rich treasure to understand the environment around us. The paper witnesses a variety of folk tales of North East India and how these are reflected in Environmental Studies classrooms.

Keywords: Folk tales, North East India, Environmental Studies, Classroom Transaction

Introduction

Arts are as old as mankind and therefore have history; they are region specific and therefore are connected with geography; they are expressions of the complex web of socio-developmental structures on The Arts as Education which human society functions and are therefore integrally linked with sociological study; they are expressed through sound, word and script, and are therefore linguistic manifestations; they are mental images, which are given physical expression through a psychological process; converting what is concealed within into visible outer images through psychological and physiological acts involves scientific analysis; drawings are geometrical impressions; colours are the play of light and shade; and the aesthetics of colour, sound and form give the arts an enhanced status that actually makes them unparalleled (Puri, 2007).

Storytelling as an art form has been with us for centuries. Maintained by the oral traditions of ancient cultures, stories were passed down through generations by tribal elders, pundits, itinerant preachers, minstrels and shanachies; thus in part has constructed our present knowledge of history. Many of our most basic and archetypical values are still passed on

through the collection of myths and stories which we hear as youngsters. (Teacher Curriculum Guide, by Timmy Ebell; <http://www.timmyabell.com/curriculumguide.pdf>.)

The telling of stories is something that we all do; especially our grandmothers/grandparents. They weave dreams; inculcate moral values through these tales for the young ones. Almost all communities in India have folk tales associated with their grandmother. To name a few, in hindi, its *Dadima ki kahani*; in Bengali, *Thakurmaar jhuli*; in Oriya, *Budhi Maa Kahani*; in Assamese, *Buri Aair Sadhu*; in Manipuri, *Phunga Wari* and so on. These folktales allow for the blending of social and aesthetic impulses of culture and represent a positive understanding of culture and nature.

The folktales are generally oral that are handed from one generation to the other. On one hand, it is remembered and repeated, preserving its ancient core. On the other hand, additions, changes, and embellishments are part of the storytelling tradition. Tales transmitted by word of mouth through a community, in time, develops many variants, because this kind of transmission cannot produce word-for-word and note-for-note accuracy. Indeed, many traditional story tellers are quite creative and deliberately modify the material they know. The literary or written folktale has been easier to be transferred from one country to another, mostly in the forms of collections used for education, perhaps preserved by priests, and for entertainment, collected by writers and travelers. These written tales had also been altered by the various cultures that took them and made them their own.

The North Eastern region constitutes a very important part of our country. This region is important because of its strategic location and the homeland of a vast multiplicity and rich socio-culture heritage of the country. This region comprises of eight states and has the second largest concentration of tribal population in the country. The tribal groups, of the region are colourful. Each tribe has a distinct identity of language, culture and way of life. All tribes together present a scene of wider socio-cultural diversity and a unique cultural mosaic which is a most attractive feature of the Indian culture. The people are great lovers of songs and music and because of their intimate relations with the nature as they have sense of colour and beauty. Dance and music are not only the characteristic features of tribal life of North Eastern region; they also create things of beauty like textile, handicrafts, wood carving, etc. (Dabi, 2004)

The folk tales of NE India represents its social, cultural as well as the pristine natural beauty of the region. This part of India is often referred to as the 'Paradise unexplored'. The NE India is blessed with a wide range of physiographic and eco-climatic conditions. The immense variety of climatic, edaphic and altitudinal variations in India have resulted in a great range of ecological habitats for which North East India takes the pride of place. This region represents an important part of the Indo-Myanmar biodiversity hotspot, one of the 25 global biodiversity hotspots recognized currently (Baruah and Dey, 2005). Owing to its nearness to nature, the folk tales are entwined with nature. They reflect people's understanding of nature and close relation to the nature and need for its conservation since ages. In North East India, the community living is somewhat exemplary and their shared

wisdom on issues of culture, environment and livelihood is a heritage which needs to be not only conserved but further built on. Children should be made aware of the eco-friendly practices of the communities and folk tales are the best medium to disseminate the ethos of conservation and eco friendly life styles.

Stories may also be used across the curriculum to teach content subjects. The present paper examines the use of stories and storytelling as a vehicle for the teaching of EVS at primary level. It addresses the rationale for stories in EVS lessons and illustrates the various ways in which stories can be exploited in order to help young learners to conceptualize and personalize the concepts of EVS.

Folk Tales/Stories for Classroom Transaction

Listening to and telling stories in the classroom could be a constructive technique for enlivening the classroom. All children love to hear stories.

Take a lesson in Environmental Studies, for instance, and tell a story related to the theme (say, Wild life conservation). After you start a story you will find many students are keen to take the story further as they must have already heard it from some elders at home. Each student can add two sentences to the previous student's contribution, and watch how the story of 'Conservation of wild life' makes its way to the classroom. You will be fascinated to see how the story changes from student to student and how the creative mind works.

A little research in the library will turn up stories relating to almost any subject, but remember that reading them is not telling them. We could first read a story to the class and then have them re-tell it in their own words. Notice how it changes, and how you are then living the folk process, and how they are learning by doing. This is such an effective way for students to master certain subject matter because the learning is again "indirect". They absorb information as "storytellers", not as "students" (Teacher Curriculum Guide, by Timmy Ebell; <http://www.timmyabell.com/curriculumguide.pdf>.)

A review of the Folk tales of NE India was done by the author and the details region-wise are presented below:

FOLK TALE OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

SINGPHO – Imbu, Tirap

At first there was no earth nor sky, but only cloud and mist. From it a woman called *Khupning-Kuam* was born, and since she came from the mist she was a sort of cloud. In time she gave birth to a girl called *Ningon-Chinun* and a boy called *Tung-Kam-Waisun*. They had the appearance of snow. When they grew up they married each other and from them were born a girl called Inga (Earth) and a son called *Mu (Sky)*. Inga was mud and Mu, a cloud. These two also married and had a boy called *Imbung*, the Wind. When he was born, he blew so strongly that he raised the cloud, his father, into the sky and dried up his mother, the mud. In this way heaven and earth were made.

This story is taken from the book “*Myths of the North-East Frontier of India*” authored by the renowned anthropologist Dr. Verrier Elwin, first published in the year 1958.

The above folktale deals with the theme of creation of the world. The story narrates how Earth and Sky was evolved from snow. Consecutively the birth of wind takes place. The story moves further and separates heaven from Earth. This story shows the belief of some tribes of Arunachal in this phenomenon. Each folktale of Arunachal Pradesh belongs to one specific tribe or the other. The name of the concerned tribe along with the name of the Frontier Division to which it belongs has been given in the form of the title of the story.

FOLK TALE OF ASSAM

River Dolphin and Crocodile

A long time ago, in a village there lived a beautiful and efficient young girl along the banks of Subansiri River. Her name was ‘*Tamang*’. As ‘*Tamang*’ grew up, her parents decided to marry her and started with the preparation. As the day of wedding came nearer, she was very worried, because she had a lover and she did not want to betray him or her parents.

She then decided to end her life in the river bed of *Subansiri*. But she thought to herself ‘even if I jump into the river, I shall not die, as I know how to swim’. She thought and thought over it and then she tied a pestle (*the ‘ural rod’*) around her neck and the mortar to her stomach and decided not to look at any human being and jumped into the river. But still she did not die. However the ‘mortar’ took her to the bottom of the river, but she lived below the river. But gradually her body transformed to a dolphin. Because she tied pestle to her neck so the mouth of the dolphin became long and because the mortar was tied to her stomach so the stomach of the dolphin became big.

As the news of Tamangs’ jumping into the river spread her lover ran to the banks of the river Subansiri. He shouted ‘*Tamang, Tamang*’ and ran on the banks as a mad person. But when he received no response, he tied a big stone on his back and thorns all over his body and jumped into the river. The boy too did not die and transformed into a crocodile in due time. The stone tied at his back became the hump on the crocodile’s back and thorny body. *That is why Mishing people of Assam never kill dolphin or crocodile.*

The above folktale deals with the theme of conservation of wild life and indigenous conservational practice of endangered and unique river dolphins of Brahmaputra River among the Mishing community people of Assam. The river dolphins are found in the river Brahmaputra and their tributaries. It is commonly known as “*Hihu*” in Brahmaputra. They are aquatic mammals. They were found in large numbers before a few years. But now their number has come down considerably due to various human activities like fishing (gillnetting), poaching, damming, sand mining (in Kulsri river of Assam) and deforestation. The river dolphins are included in the schedule 1 of Indian Wildlife Act 1972. The population of the river dolphins is about 400 in Brahmaputra (Assam). It is a very thin population for a species with low reproductive rate. Though they are dispersed in the river, they are found concentrated more at the confluences of the rivers where the water current is strong. A few

residential populations are found in the tributaries like Kulsi and Subansiri of Brahmaputra. Indigenous people respect these endangered species and follow conservational practice in their traditional way.

FOLK TALE FROM MANIPUR

The Egotistical Elephant and praying Pebet

A long time ago, at the edge of a big forest lived a *Pebet* with her tiny brood. It was a happy nest indeed complete with some eggs waiting to be hatched.

One day a herd of elephants was advancing towards the bush on which her nest lay. As the herd headed precariously near the nest the baby pebet begin to panic and addressed their mother thus "Mother we are afraid lest the elephants crush our nest along with us and the eggs, please request them to be cautious". So the pebet mother approached the herd and addressed the leader " O handsome leader of the herd and dear friends, just a little ahead lies my nest along with my young ones and my precious eggs, dear friends please tread carefully and save us from danger".

Each elephant in the large herd heeded to her humble request and avoided breaking the nest. But the last of the herd was a young and arrogant elephant who took great pride of his gigantic body and enormous strength. He trumpeted "Ha Ha, you tiny bird, why should I obey you? Who told you to make your nest on our path? And he crushed the nest along with the young ones and the eggs with his huge feet. The mother pebet cried bitterly over her dead young chicks and her broken eggs. She flew to the rogue elephant and spoke with great rage "You think we are small and powerless and so you crushed my nest and destroyed everything I had with impunity! I will teach you a lesson. You will pay dearly for killing my young ones so mercilessly". The rogue elephant didn't pay any attention and continued to walk nonchalantly with the herd.

The mother pebet in great grief prayed to Mother Leimarel. She prayed day and night for a whole week and one day in a flash the enchanting form of Divine mother materialized in a mellow light and spoke with great Love. And after whispering some motherly advice and blessings, her divine form dispersed into the ether with a faint crackling sound.

The pebet's heart was filled with peace and courage. She was determined to obey Ema Leimarel's advice. With her strong beak she pricked the elephant right in the middle of his spine. She struck at the same spot again and again with all her might. The thick hide eventually gave way and blood oozed out in a red torrent.

She then invited a group of flies to feast on the blood and lay eggs on the wound. In a week's time the eggs hatched on the wound giving rise to maggots which caused deep festers. Day by day the condition of the elephant worsened and finally the huge elephant dropped to his knees and requested the pebet to spare his life.

At this moment the pebet remembered Ema Leimarel's advice of forgiveness "Not to take life, wantonly; but to forgive those who repent." Solemnly the pebet exclaimed "In your

rashness you killed my children and now you are praying for your life- If you truly feel repentant and promise to respect life, however small they may be- I will spare your life and bring back your health."

The elephant said in a relieved yet repentant voice "As I have learnt the pain of injury and impending death, I promise to respect the value of life and renounce my violent ways- please forgive me." Tears ran down his eyes. In the days to come the pebet applied healing herbs from the jungle on the elephant's sores. Eventually he regained his health and came to be known for his gentle manner all throughout the jungle. The pebet and the elephant remained very good friends all throughout their lives.

The above folktale deals with the theme of love for other creatures and 'Live and let live'. This tale reflects many good practices of life viz., love for young ones, repentance, forgiveness, value life, renouncing the path of violence, etc. It also reflects the knowledge of healing herbs from the jungle and the concern for others and living harmoniously with each other. This story is taken from the *E-Pao Manipur* authored by the Naosekpam (2012).

FOLK TALE FROM MEGHALAYA

When the Earth was formed to its Present Shape

They say that in the beginning the earth was just one flat, vast stretch of land. There were some forests and rivers but no mountains, no valleys, no gorges existed.

It so happened, that, one day, during this period, the mother of three goddesses *Ka Ding* (Fire), *Ka Um* (Water), *Ka Sngi* (Sun) came down from heaven to visit her daughters. During her sojourn on Earth she suddenly fell seriously ill and passed away. The three goddesses stunned and grief stricken were, therefore, faced with the unhappy task of disposing off their mother's mortal remains.

As was, and is, the custom among matrilineal Khasis, the responsibility first fell on *Ka Sngi*, the youngest daughter. So the Sun set forth her mighty rays to expend her mother's body. All the trees and bushes, the grass and weeds were reduced to ashes and the rivers and streams dried up and disappeared with this powerful heat. To the dismay of the daughters, however, their mother's body remained exactly as it was. So next, it was the second youngest daughter's turn to take over. *Ka Um*, anxious but determined, set forth with all her might and poured incessant rain upon the earth for many days. Everything everywhere lay submerged under this immense flood. When the endeavour was over and the water subsided, however, the body was lying in the same state, as if unhampered. Finally, it fell on the eldest daughter, Fire, this arduous and joyless task. Anguished and worried for she knew that she had to succeed, *Ka Ding* deployed great sweeping flames across the earth. For days on end they glowed and flared, blazed and smouldered with fierce, unyielding incandescence. Then, finally, when the fires abated, the three goddesses discovered, to their great relief, that their mother's earthly remains were gone, the last rites performed.

It was from that day onwards that the vast plain that stretched monotonously on and on vanished and in its place, a new earth surface emerged. There came into being, mountains

and valleys and deep gorges from where blue mists floated up to the sky. Trees and shrubs, grass and flowers appeared again to clothe these new and beautiful contours, and besides rivers and streams, silver flecked waterfalls were also seen leaping, flowing from these new found heights. It was into this resplendent land that, later on, mankind came to dwell.

Folk Tales by Bijoya Sawian

From *Khasi Myths, Legends and Folk Tales*, 2010 by Bijoya Sawian Published by Sanbun Publishers, p. 124.

The above folktale deals with the theme of creation of the world. This tale show the belief of some tribes of Meghalaya who believe in the supernatural power of Sun, rain and fire. The story further goes and depicts the creation of mountains, valleys and deep gorges. Besides these, trees and shrubs, grass and flowers, rivers, stream and waterfalls all being created and making the earth a livable place.

Before 18th century people believed that the physical features of the Earth were a result of catastrophic events. But in modern times we say, Mountains are formed due to different causes, but one cause is that Dome Mountains are pushed up by hot spot in the mantle of that region. E.g. The Black Hills of South Dakota and that is why the story as it proceeds concludes that fire (hot spot) was responsible for the formation of mountains. Again the valleys are the most common landforms on the surface of the Earth. They are carved by the flowing water or flowing ice through the process of erosion, which is the gradual wearing a way of Earth's surface through the action of wind or water.

Similarly, gorges are narrow valleys with steep rocky walls located between hills and mountains. Erosion due to streams or rivers, geologic uplift or both together also form gorges and movement and melting of glaciers form gorges and so on. Thus, there are so much of environmental concerns in folk tales.

FOLK TALE FROM MIZORAM

Chhura and the Beautiful Fly

Once upon a time, *Chhura* caught a very pretty fly in the countryside. He was delighted, for its wings were like the colours of the rainbow. He said to himself contentedly. "I'll sell this fly and become a rich man in the world." So he started along the path leading to *Mawngping* village to sell his captive for a reasonable price. In the *Mawngping* village *Chhura* shouted aloud, "Hey folks, come and see this pretty fly. The most beautiful fly that ever lived in this universe! And who will buy my pretty fly, pretty fly?"

Some men who heard the shout came to him and asked, "Where is it? Show it to us. We would like to see it first and then we may purchase it." However, *Chhura* replied to them, "O you, foolish people, how can you see the fly before you buy it. If I show it to you now it will fly away." Then they said, "Where is it?" "It's in my hand." He replied. "But how can we buy it without seeing it?" they continued. "Alright," said he, but "If it escapes from my hand when I open it, you must pay me." They remained silent.

“I’ll show it to you but you’ll have to pay me if it flies off,” said he and then he opened his hand and showed them the so called pretty fly. As soon as the little insect felt its freedom it spread its wings and flew away while all the villagers looked at it open mouthed. Chhura then stared at them accusingly as if demanding the price for his pretty fly. However, the villagers’ willingly promised to give a grand feast for him and they all lived happily as before.

Reflections from the tale

The folktale as narrated depicts the love for other creatures living in this earth along with the Mizo people. When Chhura caught the beautiful fly and wanted to sell it, the villagers very cleverly insisted that they want to see the fly before buying it. On their repeated insistence when Chhura opened his hand and the fly flew away in the lap of Mother Nature, the villagers promised to have a feast in happiness and lived happily. This is in tune with the belief of ‘Live and Let Live’

FOLK TALE FROM NAGALAND

The story of Raja Mircha

Once upon a time there was a man by the name of *Panmei*, who was hunting for food in the deep jungles. He happened to come across a particular Chilly plant, that we call the *Naga King Chilly* today, in its full ripened stage. Taking it to be a fruit, *Panmei* plucked one of the ripened chilly and, driven by acute hunger, ate the whole chilly at once in spite of the terrible burning pungency. In no time it seemed as if his mouth and stomach were on fire. The man crawled and rolled in the jungle; tried eating whatever was within his grasp, but to no avail. At last with no other alternative, he lay there in the jungle facing up toward the sky, writhing in pain and almost at the point of fainting. The story goes on to say that precisely at this grave moment a bird called *Roingau* flew over the man carrying a bunch of paddy and drop it onto his stomach. Surprised, he took the paddy bunch and extracted a few grains and started chewing on them raw. In a matter of seconds, the burning pain in his mouth and stomach vanished. *Panmei* believed this to be a miracle sent by God. He carefully collected the bunch of paddy and the chilly plant and took possession of them. As the story goes, thus began the cultivation of paddy and the *Naga King Chilly*. The story further states that since this miraculous incident, the *Panmei Clan* by *Gena*, (a bounden village ritual/custom) were forbidden to neither kill nor eat the bird called *Roingau*. This prohibition of *Gena* is still being observed and practiced by the *Panmei Clan* of the *Zeliangrong Naga Tribe* till this present day. (Source: Mr. Akhang Kamei, President of the *Zeliangrong Baudi*, Nagaland).

The folktale as narrated depicts the belief of the *Zelian* tribe and how the bird saved the life of *Panmei*. This also is a mark of fellow feeling among the creations of God. The experience of *Panmei* with the red fruit and rice in jungle facilitated the cultivation of the rice as well as chilly. Thus, the process of cultivation of crops and settled life came to the Naga community. When the Clan as a mark of respect to their savior do not kill or eat the bird they actually facilitate the conservational practice of the bird.

FOLK TALE FROM SIKKIM

Teesta and Rangeet

Once upon a time, there were two rivers namely *Teesta* and *Rangeet*. In Lepcha they are known as *Rongnew* and *Rongeit* respectively. Teesta was a girl and Rangeet was a boy. Both of them lived happily in the Himalayas. They were in deep love. They wanted to get married and move towards south. Hence they decided to move out and meet at a certain place called *Pozok* – a forest now known as *Pesok*. Unfortunately both of them did not know the exact direction to their meeting place. So, each of them moved out from hamlet taking a guide with them. Teesta took a snake as her guide and Rangeet took a bird called *Dafe Munal*. The snake guided Teesta to reach the appointed place in the scheduled time but Rangeet was unable to reach in time because the bird was flying here and there during the journey. Teesta had to wait for a long time and she was upset and angry. At last Rangeet reached and enquired from Teesta as when she had reached. But she would not talk to him. He asked pardon and explained the difficulties he had to undergo during the course of his journey, but she did not pay any attention to him. She remained silent and adamant. So, Rangeet decided to go back to the Himalayas. As he was moving up, there was storm and flood. This brought lots of sufferings and dangers to the people. Seeing these, Teesta went and asked pardon from Rangeet. Hence, once again their lost love was found and they lived happily thereafter.

Folktale by Abraham Lepcha

The folktale was narrated by Mr. Abraham Lepcha, of Kalimpong, Darjeeling on 15th February 2009 and published in *Folktales of North East India* by Betty Laloo and a DBCIC Publications, Shillong in 2011 P. 211.

These two rivers (Teesta and Rangeet) exist even today. One can see two colours at the meeting place of these rivers, which made the *Lepcha* believe that the incident really took place. They are holy rivers for the *Lepcha* because they originate from *Kanchanjunga* which, for them, is a holy place. This folktale is one of the most popular folktales of Lepchas. This folktale reflects the close link of the *Lepchas* of Sikkim with the Mother Nature. They worship nature in all its forms, rivers, lakes and mountains. The legitimacy of this story lies in when the story moves on saying that ‘the two rivers decided to move towards south’. South of Himalayas (*Kanchanjunga*) is the low lying plain land. It is the general tendency of the rivers to flow from the high mountains to low lying areas. It then further says ‘they will meet at a certain place called Pozok’ meaning the confluence of the river. Further mention of ‘The snake guided Teesta to reach the appointed place’ reflects the meandering course of the river Teesta as it was guided by a Snake to move down. Towards the end, it says, ‘Rangeet decided to go back to the Himalayas. As he was moving up, there was storm and flood. This brought lots of sufferings and dangers to the people.’ It means changing of river course and occurrence of flood due to change in the river course and devastation associated with flooding.

In this tale the two rivers are the signs of God's blessings for the people and they manifest true love and purity. The Lepcha consider the origin of these rivers as holy because they were created by a holy God, and so, they perform sacrifices and worship in the banks of these rivers even today. It reminds the Lepcha that they are holy people for these holy rivers touch their lives.

FOLK TALE FROM TRIPURA

The Old Lady and her Iguana

It's a story of long past. There was a prosperous village. Almost all the villager owned some land in that village. Those who did not own any land used to work as daily labourers in other's land. They maintained their livelihood earning wages as labourers. So, none of the villagers suffered from any crisis.

In this village an old lady lived in a small hut built on a small tilla (hillock) in the corner of that village, she had none of her own. Every day she used to go out at break of day for begging. But every day she would beg only in three houses.

There lived a big iguana in a hole beside the courtyard of the house of that old woman. The old woman loved that iguana very much. Every day after her begging she would scatter some rice at the courtyard for that iguana. Till the iguana ate the rice the old lady would not start cooking. One day on the occasion of a marriage of the daughter of a rich man of the village, all the villagers were invited, no one was omitted. Even the father of the daughter had personally invited the old lady. The father of the daughter had brought all the youths of the village to work and distributed duties among them accordingly. The day before the wedding all the villagers assembled at the wedding house.

Sitting on the verandah of the house the old woman was thinking on the previous day that the next day was the wedding day. But to attend the wedding what clothes she would wear! Only two Rignai (garment) were there in the house. These were also dirty. Some places on the rignai were torn due to displacement of the fibers. Would it be wise, she thought, to go to the wedding wearing this type of cloth? At this time the iguana had come out to take his meal. But towards him she paid no attention; she did not go to beg that day. She was thinking and thinking. At last she decided that she would bring a good rignai from a known house situated down the tilla and would return the rignai after the wedding day. She therefore thought not to go out to beg on the day. The day would somehow pass with the remaining rice at the house. Thinking so she stood up from the verandah. All on a sudden her eyes fell on the iguana. She saw the iguana entering the hole, only the tail of it came to her sight. Seeing so, the old woman brought some rice from the house and scattered them while she remained standing nearby. But the iguana did not come out from the hole to eat. At this her mind was upset. Today she had no scope to cook, because if the iguana did not eat she was also to remain unfed. After standing there for some time, she went back home with sorrow. The old woman peeped at from the house whether the iguana had taken its food or not. But

she found the rice scattered on the same spot. The iguana had not taken anything. That meant that at night also she was to remain unfed.

On the other hand the boys of the village had settled that they would make the altar of the marriage all through the night. So at night all had began to work for alter. As night passed a bit, the father had sent wine and pork for to eat at time of working. In the midst of these, a boy told "We will not take drinks only with pork as it is a day of pleasure. I will eat a meat of the sort that I have not taken for a longtime. Is there anybody else amongst you who can provide us with this type of meat meant for? Having heard his word all had started thinking. What type of meat was this that they had riot eaten for long! All were drowned in thinking hut nobody could find the type of meat meant for. Suddenly one of them shouted in pleasure 'Yes, Yes! I can recall! Many days are gone we have not eaten any iguana's meat. Let us have some iguana's meat today" Another boy told-"but at dead of night from where will we have iguana"? The one, who spoke first, told this time-"If you are able to catch and kill, then I can say the whereabouts of that iguana". Then all had cried out in chorus. 'Alright, alright, you tell us where that iguana resides; we will catch it and kill it for the purpose.

The boy told then-"Beside our village where an old woman lives on a small tilla (hill), their lives an iguana in a big hole beside the courtyard of her house. That one is big in size and if you desire you can kill and have that one. But beware the old woman by no means should get a hint of it. If she comes to know there shall be no way. The old woman keeps watch over it like the wealth of yakshas". Then another boy told-"Is it wise to kill the iguana when the old woman takes so much care of it and loves it so much".

All the other then told-"It is only an iguana. What is the harm done to the old woman if the iguana is killed? Let us kill and bring that silently". It was dead of night. At a distance the foxes were yelling, it was pitchy dark. One was going ahead showing the path with a bamboo made burning flambeau. When they reached the house of the old woman then an owl had hooted harshly. They had found out after much searching, the hole of that iguana. Thereafter one of them had started piercing in the whole with a long pointed bamboo. After a while the iguana came out from the hole full of cuts and wounds. And as soon as the iguana came out they beheaded it with a chopper. All left the place then with the iguana. The next moment the owl had hooted again in a rough tone. With that hooting the old woman woke up from her sleep with an alarm. With an unknown fear her mind crumbled. A pernicious fear had occupied her mind. But she did not get a smell of the misdeed that took place outside her house. Again she fell asleep.

The boys then cut the iguana into piece and after roasting it in fire began to eat with wine in delight. As they had become intoxicated with wine, they drooped down gradually at their places. They were no longer in a condition to work. Gradually the night advanced toward day break.

While the operation, to kill the iguana took place the old lady was in deep sleep. Now the old woman had suddenly waked up at a call as if somebody was telling her-"Old women, old woman, get up quickly and run away from here". The old woman got up from sleep

horrified and looked all around to find nothing of the kind. She was wondering as to who could be there to call her that way. "May be I was dreaming"-she thought but she could not drive away fear from her mind. Who might have called her in that fashion! Tossing on her bed in anxieties over the matter she finally fell in sleep again. But after a while the same thing happened. This time as if telling with hot haste--"oh; old woman are you still sleeping? Get up quickly, Runaway, hurriedly; half part of the village has almost come to an end

If you like to survive' run away at this moment". Again the old woman got up and was frightened. The same thing in exactly the same way cannot be repeated - she thought. "What an inauspicious word; what does it mean, that half part of the village has almost come to an end? No, this time I will sit up late at night. Let it be observed. Whether same thing happens again or not? The same thing again happened. This time she had heard it distinctly as if somebody was telling her "old woman, Oh old woman are you sitting still? Don't you have any love for life? Do you want to die? Your entire village is going to be destructed. Your house too will be washed away. If you like to save your life then run away at this moment from here. Are you not hearing the roaring sound which is approaching fast? Run away, run away quickly". The old woman then exclaimed as she was startled with fear-"Who are you to frighten me in this way? Are you man, or ghost or a god? Who are you?"

The old woman heard the reply "I am not a man, nor a ghost or a god, I am your that iguana. The boys of the wedding house have killed me this night and they have eaten my meat along with wine with pleasure. For that very reason the entire village will be smashed by my curse within this night. I will immerse the entire village under water. Hence forth a big lake will appear here instead of the village. Only a post of this house will stand above the water as if to remind others of the existence of it one time. So you run away this very moment".

At that moment the old woman heard a big roar. As if the sea was rolling fast towards her. What a big roar. Hearing this, the old woman became very much nervous. Instantly without further delay, the old woman began to man through the rear passage of the house. It seemed to her as if a huge cobra was running behind her raising its hundreds or thousands of heads. Running at a great speed she reached the adjacent village at the dead of night and no sooner had she entered the veranda of a house she fell down unconscious. At dawn when the householder opened the door he saw this old lady lying in unconscious state. He brought her in and had her nursed with much care. After a while, for intensive care of that householder, the old woman recovered her senses. She, still then panicky narrated to him in a frail voice of the havoc that took over. The householder then along with the villagers set out for the spot to ascertain the matter which he learnt from the old woman. The spot bore the evidences to testify the report of that old woman. They all became astonished, and alarmed. There was no Sigh of the village nor the dwellers only unfathomable water spread all around. They became surprised. Nothing was visible except the top of a post which remained erected a little higher than the level of the water. The post was of that house where the work was going on in connection with the daughter's marriage of a rich person.

Reflections from the tale

The above folktale deals with the theme of love for other creatures in this world and wrath of nature in the event of an imbalance. This story shows how sensitive the old lady is towards the iguana and treats it as a companion by not having food without giving him. At the same time when the spirit of iguana warns the old lady to leave the village and save her life it reflects how the iguana too was sensitive towards the love and compassion shown by the old lady. Furthermore, when iguana talks of engulfing the village with water it shows the wrath of nature when the equilibrium of nature is destroyed. The story depicts the belief of the Tripura people to live in harmony with nature.

Conclusion

Children while listening or telling a story become active participants in the construction of meaning. On repeated telling or listening a folk tale / story the children develops a personalized vision of the characters, scenes and actions in the story. They connect to the moral values entwined in it. As all folk tales are weaved around the elements of nature viz., animals, birds, water, forest, kings, priests, they are the best way to connect a child to his / her own culture and relate them to Environmental Studies. A direction on how to interpret folk tales has been put up here. One can extend the interpretations more in the line of respecting environment, living in harmony with nature and arouse curiosity in the minds of children which is one of the major objectives of education.

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