

Folktales: A Moral Message from the Past to the Future Generation

Hikmat Dahal

MPhil Scholar, Graduate School of Education

Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu Nepal

hikmatdahal@hotmail.com

Balaram Bhatta

MPhil Scholar, Graduate School of Education

Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu Nepal

balaram.bhatta@gmail.com

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Abstract

Folktales are being told and heard from one generation to another generation more verbally than in written form. They are usually are short, imaginative narratives that usually use animal characters to convey folk wisdom and to help the reader interpret human nature and debate proper human behavior. The aims of this study were to analyze philosophical, sociological, cultural and educational perspectives of folktales in the context of Nepali community and to explore possible ways of incorporating folktales with classroom teaching for holistic well being of students. The study adopts a qualitative approach, telephone interviews where 6 distinguished personalities of the related field were interviewed. The data were analysed via thematic analysis and organized into four main themes: (a) 'They don't say but you understand' (b) 'Folktales are a mirror of society' (c) 'People make culture; culture make people', and (d) 'Going together, growing together'. The findings demonstrate that folktales carry untold messages that are implied in philosophical, cultural, sociological and pedagogical aspects, tell us about our history and anthropology and motivate us morally towards a prosperous future. Teachers' involvement is described as crucial especially in

understanding and interpretation of folktales in classroom. The study calls for awareness of how folktales can be transformed into classroom teaching, how proper and motivating morale can be drawn and how folktales can be interpreted for holistic allround development of an individual especially younger generation.

Keywords: *folktales, character, implication, moral, holistic, generation*

Introduction

This collaborative action research study describes the results of how folktales influence Nepali society in different dimensions especially in educational sector. Folktales represent common forms of literature that are used in the classroom as conscience stories to communicate behavioral expectations to youngsters. Folktales are being told and heard from one generation to another generation more verbally than in written form. Folktale are usually are short, imaginative narratives that usually use animal characters to convey folk wisdom and to help the reader (especially younger audiences) interpret human nature and debate proper human behavior (Young & Ferguson, 1995). These stories can be powerful tools for teaching children about diverse cultures, (DeVries & Zan, 1984; Lickona, 1992; Noddings, 2002) and the perceived heroes and heroines within them (Mello, 2001). Folktale as one of the genre included in the “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage” which was agreed in 2003 and entered into effect in 2006 is the concern of folklore and anthropology (Oguz, 2004). Yet, the subject is deemed valuable to be discussed and investigated in education as schools have a special position in the transfer of culture.

Folk tales are shared to entertain, educate people and protect the culture in every society. They are considered valuable both for national and universal culture. Folk tales should be regarded as good instruments for understanding and increasing the exchange between diverse cultures. There are basically four types of folktales classified as trickster tales, fables, pourquoi tales and fairy tales. Trickster tales are those in which one character is protagonist and clever that causes problems for the other characters and usually go unpunished. Fables are stories that teach a lesson which is never stated but needs to be interpreted by the readers and involve animals with human characteristics. Pourquoi stories including most myths and tall tales explain why something is as it is and how something came to be. Fairy tales include good and evil character, magic, hero or heroine in which conflicts are resolved through kindness, courage and intelligence.

There are similarities between folk tales of different societies. Folk tales always start by implying that a given event occurred in the past. Concordantly, all folk tales start with “Once upon a time...” Such time is uncertain. Armenian folk tales start with “Once there was and was not” and inform the listener or reader that they will take them to an unknown time, that the tale has a happy ending with “Sunne lai sun ko mala” and usually leaves the reader with an optimistic ending. In a classroom setting where the teacher is cast as the conveyer of

knowledge and the determinant of accuracy, the manners by which teachers interpret the social message of folktales may inform the student about the extent to which his or her approximations of the stories are valued. Thus teachers should exercise the professional diligence to research the origins of the folktales covered in their classrooms to ensure that they respect the original intention and purpose to assure cultural responsiveness and appropriate interpreted meanings on the part of their students. Remembering that each folktale will revolve around a moral being shared, such processes may facilitate a situation in which students learn the moral perspective of the source culture of the folktales, filter the meaning through their own moral schema, refine the meanings in consideration of shared ideas with classroom peers and learn to negotiate the source meanings within their daily experiences. A teacher who lacks knowledge of a story's origins or original intention may convey an improper interpretation of the tale and even validate student misunderstandings that may be inappropriate. This situation can greatly distort the meanings of folktales, which assign values to those characters who may challenge the established norm. Thus, in "traditional" classrooms that commonly portray behavior as either good or evil, teachers could misinterpret the social messages of a folktale that derives from a culture that recognizes the value of appreciating those who hold ideals that deviate from the social convention or satirize acceptable behavioral standards.

Problem Statement

Folktales are indigenous stories that are developed with social contexts and laden with moral lessons. They are intended to be told for moral discussions and showing what is right and what is wrong to the youngsters. They also help listeners to choose the correct way for positive living and be a 'hero' in life. But, a teacher who lacks knowledge of a story's origins, its philosophical, socio economic and educational aspects, may convey an improper interpretation of the tale and even validate student misunderstandings that may be inappropriate. This situation can greatly distort the meanings of folktales, which assign values to those characters who may challenge the established norm. To cope with these problems and bring adequate and effective uses of folktales in education, the objectives of the research are set as follows:

1. To analyze philosophical, sociological, cultural and educational perspectives of folktales in the context of Nepali community
2. To explore possible ways of incorporating folktales with classroom teaching for holistic well being of students

Research questions

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How do folktales influence Nepali community in philosophical, sociological and cultural aspects?
2. What is the educational implication of folktales?
3. In what ways do folktales contribute for holistic well being of students?

This research contributes to the literature by describing the responses of experts, educationalists, teachers and students to six folktales that existed in our community since very long. The relevance of this study lies within the preconceived notions about social morals and the challenges of socially contextualizing the meanings of the tales.

Literature Review

In the humanities curriculum, folktales represent a means of introducing students to many cultures. For social studies educators, these tales provide vehicles for communicating messages about citizenship and expectations for social behavior. As with other folktales, they contain references to societies' values: what people appreciate; what they laugh at; what they scorn, fear, or desire; and how they see themselves. Thus, it can be argued that reading folktales can promote student understanding of the personal dimensions and standards of behavior of another culture, while reducing stereotypes (Bosma, 1992). Furthermore, as a resource for student instruction, the multiethnic diversity of folktales and the analysis of their structures and characteristics introduce problem-solving techniques to students, since folktales rely on some action to resolve a problem (Young & Ferguson, 1995) or moral dilemma (Kohlberg & Turiel, 1971). Finally, to encourage the highest levels of intellectual and cognitive development, the climax of a folktale involves an unusual solution requiring admirable mental prowess and not a single solving of a problem (Kohlberg & Turiel, 1971).

Douglas Hill (1982) provides insight into the rich tradition of the folktale, "(who) can be noble, majestic, wise and godlike and he/she can be powerful, brave, knowledgeable and heroic" (Hill, 1982, p. 4). But at the same time (often during the same story), the folktale can be foolish and stupid, selfish, and vain, deceitful, and even cruel (Hill, 1982). This paradox is the most basic and important factor that lies within all the diverse folktales.

Folktales as a cultural object and design should be protected as a cultural heritage and communicated to future generations (Ekici & Fedakar, 2004). Instruments of folk culture should be taught and special importance should be attached to the learning so that traditional music will not disappear. Similarly making meaning out of a painting or figure in art requires being informed of the culture of its society; otherwise, an individual looking at the painting or figure would only see lines or patterns (Kodaman, 2014).

Khelef (2010) defines folk tales as a "type of narrative formed by the integration and narration of a real event with imaginative adventures." Foster (1967) says that it is sometimes better to listen to the books than read them. Tale tellers directly communicate with children. Their responsibility is to narrate the the book well and staying true to its original. Tale telling of old folktales should be preferred over reading them.

Gabara (2008) argues that folk tales which address many social problems and carry the culture, language and literature along should be compiled from the tongue of tellers and

classified and communicated into educational environments. Indicating that tellers of the folk tales are still alive, the research highlights the need for benefiting from this cultural asset through scientific methods. In the study conducted with French and Finnish primary school students,

Hynyen (2015) found that children learn words, apprehend the grammatical rules and use pronunciation rules and oral linguistic rules better and improve their reading comprehension skills in the courses using folktales. Folk tales should be first learned by teachers as they can have students learn about early humanity values, universal values that are unchanged and thought not to change, people of diverse cultures and recognize and know people of different culture from their own through folk tales of different cultures (Smith & Wiese, 2014). Children can understand different languages, dialects and how culture has changed globally and chronologically in folk tales using storytelling in children's education dates back very early ages (Smith & Wiese, 2014).

Children comprehend how to focus on time understand, keep what they learned in memory, and self-learning. Folk tales and tales are not written for children. But they are used in education; because they are fun and educational texts. On the other hand, there are many false beliefs, behaviors or habits that do not fit into the century we live in. So they need to be updated (Zipes, 2012). Content of pre-18th century (pre-French Revolution) texts might contradict the idea of enlightenment and fall insufficient in subjects such as democracy, equality, freedom, and social gender. However, these principles are valid in the texts of children's literature. On the other hand, inequalities, restrictions and gender discrimination are also mentioned in Nepali folk tales. Negative should be turned into positive when taking these texts to children.

Method

The context of the study was our own Nepalese society where all types of folktales are prevalent and popular. The exploratory goal of this study was to explore and study about the influence made by folktales in Nepali community in terms of philosophical, sociological, cultural and educational dimensions. Through qualitative methods, first we collaboratively analyzed different literatures on folktales, then reviewed their discourses, and finally discerned the pitfalls and promises of using folktales for education purpose. Researchers used telephone interview as the basic tool of data collection. Data were collected from the convenience sample of six personalities who have contributed in the field of folktales by means of their activities in media, community and university. Each one of them were interviewed in the context of one story each. They were pre informed and appointment was made for the interview. The interviews were unstructured, purposive and somewhat directive. The interview guideline was made but was very liberal and in loose structure. No specific set of predetermined questions were made although the interviews were focused on conversation aiming to gather data regarding different aspects of folktales.

Thematic network analysis was used to present, or re-present to be more precise, the co-constructed interviews. Researchers played an important role in the interview process and became an active presence in the text. The interviews were transcribed and further translated into English by the researcher. Specifically, the data interpretation process consists of three main stages. First of all, the researchers carefully reviewed and coded the interview transcripts, the bunch of codes with common themes were grouped into one and basic theme was created. Group of basic themes were compiled into organizing themes and group of organizing themes were grouped into global theme. As a result, four major themes reflecting the influence of folktales were identified, as (a) They don't say but you understand: Philosophical aspect (b) Folktale is a mirror of society: Sociological aspect (c) People make culture; culture make people: Cultural aspect, and (d) Going together, growing together: Educational aspect. Lastly, while the data analysis was conducted by the researchers, researcher triangulation was achieved through rigorous discussions and critical challenges among the three researchers, which facilitated the data interpretation.

Findings and Discussion

The six folktales selected for the interrogation were 'The tortoise and The Hare' (S1), 'Daure ra Bancharo' (S2), 'The Ant and The Bird' (S3), 'The lion and the rabbit' (S4), 'Kalu ra Bagh' (S5) and 'The Thirsty Crow ' (S6). All these folktales are very common and heard by almost all the people. We selected them because the teachers might not be aware of different aspects that represent by these tales and thus might be misinterpreted or misunderstood while bringing in practice in classrooms. The findings about those tales have shed light on the philosophical, sociological, cultural and educational aspects of the selected folktales.

'They don't say but you understand': Philosophical Aspect

The folktales are laden with philosophy however they sound simple and linear. The philosophy of these tales can be understood on the basis of their ontology, epistemology and axiology.

S1: We have to understand why the hare loses the race and why the tortoise wins it, in fact they represent two types of people and signify that hard work followed by continuity always results for the best and defeats the rest.

The ontological underpinning of folktales are based on searching for truth, self realization and character development. Idealism is employed in folktales, the mental work of experience is the foundation and for that matter all knowledge. It would be impossible to know anything apart from consciousness or experience.

The epistemology of folktales involves the study of our method of gaining knowledge. It tells us how knowledge is based on truth, belief and justification.

S2: Daure Doesn't say that he has done right and for this, he is awarded. He was not aware of being getting award, he was subconsciously crying for losing his axe. But the other daure perceived it in different way and he got punished.

In this story, the other daure perceives knowledge but the way he implements is not in correct pattern. Folktales give us knowledge even without stating anything but we need to find them out and associate in our real lives.

The axiological study of folktales centers upon ethics and aesthetics. A reader finds the concepts of what is right and good in individual and social conduct. Similarly, the concept of beauty and harmony beautifies our real world and the world a place worth to live with full satisfaction. The story S4 tells us that the evil will definitely end up and the story S6 indicates that hope and hard work is the basics of life to make it happy and successful.

Some theorists have said that for a deconstructive reading, first find the binary oppositions and the reverse them and interpret the text in the new light. In case of folktales, we have these binary oppositions: hare/tortoise, rabbit/lion, kalu/deceit. Can we reverse these binaries and if yes what can the outcome be? and who/what is the center here? Who/what is the periphery? Can we assume that the lion in some version has some rights for devouring the animals? The different philosophical perspectives thus can be drawn from the stories and we need to integrate them in our real lives, especially in classroom teaching by the teachers.

'Folktale is a mirror of society': Sociological Aspect

Folktales are part of the social and cultural capital. A holistic approach to personality and nation building is required to bring about sustainable development and national unity. Such an approach will not only take into account economic capital generated through national resources, but will also require other forms of capital.

S3: The ant and the bird reflect that there must be social harmony. Social harmony and friendship can defeat all sorts of problems that arise in the society. Irrespective of size and class, they help each other in extreme need and thus are able to save their lives. This is very important message to the entire humanity.

Bourdieu (1982:280) states that capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, as cultural capital, and social capital. These three forms of capital are interchangeable, that is, they can be traded for each other and actually require such trades for their sustained development.

S4: A society also contains a good and a bad. At some point of time, bad may dominate good but this is not ever lasting. A bad has to come to an end sooner or later. There is no provision that a society is locked up by evil thoughts. So, do good and be good, that is how a society runs.

Folktales play a role in nation-state building as they refer to the collective value of all social networks. It is therefore necessary to look at the structure of a society as a relation or set of relations between entities.

'People make culture; culture make people': Cultural Aspect

Everything from products, practices to norms of society constitute the culture. The social dynamics as well, play a significant role in shaping the culture in a way it gets shaped. The dynamics of societies have been formed over a period of time according to the need and circumstances. It includes the interactions that are carried out by individuals being in a society and the relationships which are formed as per the evolution of society.

S5: A person is made by his culture and vice versa. The boy has a very bad habit of telling lies. This shapes him into a protagonist character in society. People don't believe in his words and regard him as a faulty person. This results that all his goats are eaten by a tiger in reality.

Folktales continue to enchant people today for many reasons. They tell us our history, they describe where we live, what our values are and ultimately who we are. Children listen to folktales without prejudice. They don't care whether the story is from the eastern hemisphere or from the western hemisphere. They seem to be able to separate fact from fantasy, for the most part, and hear the underlying message of the story.

S6: The thirsty crow represents a hard working individual of a society. Our culture is that we need to believe in positive result and should continue our right work. Believing is an integral part of our culture. Our culture teaches us to be good and upright person.

The focus of folktales in classrooms will be to teach cultural understanding to students by reading, viewing and sharing folktales from a variety of sources around the world. It has become increasingly clear that many inner-city children don't have a sense of their own history. They do not know stories of their ancestry or their native homelands. So, the teachers need to teach these children about their own cultures, as well as those of their schoolmates.

'Going together, growing together': Educational Aspect

Folktales are very important tools for gaining knowledge for children. A child does not grow only by fulfilling his physical needs. To be mentally, morally and sociologically fit, folktales play an important role. Folktales teach literature of different community, context and history. With this, strong motivation is developed to be a good human being.

S5: A child will never tell a lie and entangle himself into problems. He will never lose his faith from people. He will always try to be lovable and cheerful.

The education obtained from folktales will be value for life and will be strong weapon to cope with difficulties in life. Slow and steady wins the race from S1, truth is immortal from

S2. help and cooperation for success from S3, there is an end to proud and unnecessary power showcase from S4, bad culture cultivates painful result from S5 and continuous hard work yields good rewards from S6 are the best lesson of life in young people. These folktales when incorporated in classroom teaching, will be very much supportive in molding a child in a desirable shape and fashion. Going together with folktales in the educational curriculum will definitely result in positive, cognitive and competitive growth of a young mind that can challenge every problem of the modern era.

Implication

Folktales are not only to be heard and enjoyed. They have strong message in them. The characters in the folktales resemble human characteristics and we need to learn the untold moral from those stories. The implication of folktales in different aspects are illustrated in the following points.

Philosophical Implication

Folktales are expressed in the form of different characters but the characters embed human characteristics. These characters and characteristics are guided over by different philosophies. As we study the folktales, we find they are laden with eastern as well as western philosophy. The message we get from these tales include there is victory of the right and final judgment will be in favor of the deserved one and that is righteous too. So, the philosophical implication of folktales gives us insight that we should also choose the correct path in life, it is obvious that truth will be as bright as the sun. They teach us how we perceive any happenings and any character, what their origin is and how we can gain knowledge from them. Folktales are originated from the base of culture and society. So, they help us to see the society through our own eyes. Culture and tradition can also be verified and chosen for life practices. Folktales give us insight about the structure of the society, values and moral. What things are prevalent in society that we need to carry on and what things are prevalent that we need to amend in course of time can be determined after thorough study of those stories. So, philosophically folktales play an important role in widening vision and developing concepts on things what, how and why they are as they are. Folktales serve a variety of functions. They afford an enjoyable escape from reality. Folktales even offer a legitimate way to exercise social control and to gain favor in one's community. They promote a group's feelings of solidarity and purpose, which makes it a natural means for social protest, also folktales aid in the education of both young and old, by sharpening the wits and disseminating the wisdom of past generations. We find a wonderful content and culture in folktales. We sometimes find thought experiments that involve physically impossible phenomena. But as long as such stories and examples are in and of themselves coherent—that is, they represent logically possible descriptions of the ways things might be—they can evoke a reaction, elicit an intuition, or even impart a moral.

Sociological Implication

Folktales have the magic to make a person socialized. This majorly affects the person positively by developing self-awareness, self-confidence, knowledge and a new way to look at life. Socialization links the new generation to the old and folktale is an effective tool for this connection. Folktale enhances one's perspective towards concepts and beliefs. Folktale enhances a person to understand his social roles and responsibilities. The person becomes more sensitive towards others. Folktale is an art and art itself is a medium of unity. Folktale has the ability to make people feel that they share common experiences and emotions. This in turn brings the people together, they become familiar with each other, making their bonds even stronger ultimately strengthening their community. This in turn creates a sense of unity and harmony within the group. Folktale reflects particular culture. It describes about various socially important and relevant topics. We can highlight sensitive topics through folktales. This can create awareness and realization without much hurting the sentiments. Many problems and social issues which have been neglected can be resolved. This makes way to reduce the social conflicts and problems prevailing in the society since long. Folktale also stresses on the facts about maintaining a balance between spiritual and materialistic life. Family unit should be considered an important unit of life. This becomes a strong foundation of a healthy society. Everyone is busy in their day to day course and activities to earn a livelihood. There has to be something which is worth inspiring to perform our duties more sincerely. Folktale is a way to give our lives a meaning and direction. It is not just a form of entertainment but also a way of living. One cannot imagine a world without art. As a canvas looks more beautiful when colors are added to it likewise folktale adds colors to life.

Pedagogical Implication

The role of folktale tradition in educating children has found its way in to new realms and is to be adapted in every classroom. The oral tale, which was a means of entertainment and educate, is now having its pedagogic, its ideological premises, and its socio-economic and cultural background explored more consciously and critically today than ever before. The importance and function of folktales especially in primary education, for the development of narrative skills, language learning, the access to literacy, strengthening of creativity, co-operation, and social awareness, initiation to one's own culture, and inter personal relation and intercultural understanding has been pointed out in numerous socio educational studies. Folktales are used in the classrooms for learning language. It involves various expressions and context. The students can develop their writing skills when they write the story they have heard with great interest. Folktales also help to teach moral values and lessons to the children. Introducing moral to children is an important but difficult task, but with the help of time-tested folktales it can be done with little contrivance, all the while presenting children with stories that are enjoyable, inspiring, and often rich in meaning. Folktales make children imagine and create their own mental pictures, and this mental exercise leaves the deepest impression on them, creating the folktales' rightful place in their imagination. A learner can transform the oral tale into a poem to be recited or a drama to be enacted and a simple saying

can be expanded to a tale by the learner. The folktales can be effective tool for developing multiple intelligence and intellectual processes of mind. The folktales enhance cognitive development of children concerned with how knowledge is represented in the mind, how language is understood, how images are comprehended, and what the mental processes underlying conferencing, learning, problem solving and planning are.

Cultural Implication

A community's culture is shaped by taking into consideration various factors like geographic region, climatic conditions, caste or community, language, etc. The culture of the community can be depicted easily by the folktales of that region which indirectly helps us to identify and differentiate the various communities. In this process positive factors of each community can be focused and learnt. Folktale contributes in maintaining an identity. Cultural values, traditions and practices of a particular community are safeguarded through folktales. This in turn results in the preservation of cultural heritage and ethical or moral values of that group or tribe. People are bound together under common moral values, language, religion, beliefs, practices, etc. Thus a group of people experience this shared bond of commonality. In every religion and culture there are certain values, customs and traditions which depict a virtuous conduct. Folktale is something through which we can carry forward this tradition in a more convenient way. It teaches us that the good is always rewarded and the bad is often punished thus giving us insights for maintaining a right conduct about making a choice between good and evil. Folktale is a source for describing the cultural beliefs and practices of a community or religion as a whole. As the years passed, the ancient beliefs and practices started to miss fit the society. Beliefs were mistaken to superstitions, blind faith and false practices. With the help of folktales, we can start to educate the common people about the exact and right meaning of religion and the associating cultural traditions and practices. Thus folktale consists of subjects that keep reconstructing ancient beliefs and practices.

Conclusion

Folktales represent common forms of literature that are used in the classroom as conscience stories to communicate behavioral expectations to youngsters. These stories can be powerful tools for teaching children about diverse cultures and the perceived heroes and heroines within them Folk tales are shared to entertain, educate people and protect the culture in every society. They are considered valuable both for national and universal culture. Folktales are not meant only for entertainment, they have strong message to the society. A cultural capital, as described by Bourdieu is laden in the folk tales which are also equally important for national prosperity and well being. A thematic analysis on the discussions with different personalities in this research revealed that folk tales play a significant role in philosophical, sociological, cultural and pedagogical aspects. Hence, they are the integral part of the society since long.

Folk tales are delivered in classroom teaching by the teachers. Thus teachers should exercise the professional diligence to research the origins of the folktales covered in their classrooms to ensure that they respect the original intention and purpose to assure cultural responsiveness and appropriate interpreted meanings on the part of their students. A teacher who lacks knowledge of a story's origins or original intention may convey an improper interpretation of the tale and even validate student misunderstandings that may be inappropriate. So, it is important to empower teachers with the essence and originality of folktales by which accurate and effective meanings can be drawn and by which students get motivated for holistic well being in life. Folk tales should be regarded as good instruments for understanding and increasing the exchange between diverse cultures. For this purpose, tradition of folktales should be more emphasized in school education, included in curriculum and a separate space should be made amidst modern and technological chaos in children circle.

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