

Integration Of Indigenous Knowledge System; A Study On Selected Villages Of Birbhum, West Bengal

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Abstract

Local history is the great source of information about the traditional knowledge system of communities. Especially in a former colonial nation like India, it is even more important to preserve every bit of our culture, given the unrequited love we have for the West and its modernization. Traditional knowledge system is struggling with other popular dominating cultures. Few villages of West Bengal, indigenous people have managed to continue their traditional cultures. As part of the study, two tribal populated villages Nityanagar and Baromesia in Rajnagar block, Birbhum of West Bengal were chosen. They are close to the Jharkhand borders. So, there has been a significant mixing of people through migration, marriage, and other social parameters. This gave a unique sample to interact with. In these areas tribes are mainly represented by Kora, Murmu, and Marandi. Most of them are involved in agriculture in one way or the other. Some work in quarries and mines. Even fewer people work in nearby towns. The primary objective of this paper is to establish the relationship between local tales, riddles that have been passed down orally over centuries with the traditional knowledge system like livelihood, farming etc. This study highlights how local people use folktales, riddles in managing and conserving natural resources. With the help of a local NGO and SHGs, I talked with village elders, working men and women to collect and record stories, riddles and later those folk tales, collected riddles and pieces on local history have been documented. This study is also an attempt to incorporate of references of one's own tradition in our education system to increase student retention in Government schools.

Key Words: *Traditional knowledge system, Oral stories and riddles, local NGO, public education system.*

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I. Introduction

While walking with the rural marginal people, especially the tribal population across India, it has been realized that the tradition of oral storytelling is being preserved graciously in those areas. Stories and Myths handed down over generations are still part of their lives. Folktales are not just a story, but also a lively history, representatives of cultures and traditions of society. The power and pleasure of oral tradition are one of the best ways to move students beyond the literal and figurative bindings of written text. Therefore, it has a unique significance in early childhood education. They identify their surroundings, ponds, temples, etc. These could make the school environment more child-friendly. The inclusion of oral stories in early education ensures the acceptance of differences in history, culture, and others. This will be a tool of acceptance of social justice. Although many people have begun to pay attention to national folklore, few have chosen these for early education.

“Folklore can lessen the bridge between home and schools” (Studies of Tribes and Tribals · December 2016, Exploring the Role of Teaching Using Folklore in Developing Grade R Learners’ Mother Tongue Jabu Mzimela University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.)

This study has been conducted in two villages of Birbhum, West Bengal, where the culture of oral tradition is rich and is still going strong. These two are mainly inhabited by tribal people. They are mainly associated with the agriculture sector, while some work in brick kilns. In spite of the heavy workload, they have a routine exercise of Adda, when in their leisure time they gather, and chat among themselves. Elderly men and women sit together, tell old stories, solve different riddles, in the local language which is called Bhangani. A few stories and riddles were collected from these Addas and later documented. It is believed these will be necessary, important history for the next generation and could be used as pedagogical tools.

Objectives

The objectives behind this work are as follows

1. to collect oral stories and riddles from a group of elderly people.
2. to document the collected stories.

3. to find out the narratives behind the stories.
4. to discuss with them the importance of these oral traditions in the early education system.
5. to find out the importance of teaching good virtues, moral values, and cultural-historical heritage, using oral traditions.

Study Area and research questions

The study was carried out in Nityanagar and Baromesia village of Birbhum district of West Bengal from March 2020 to May 2020 and June 2021 to Aug 2021. That was the Covid period. Birbhum is primarily an agricultural district with around 75% of the population dependent on agriculture. It is called the land of red soil. Selected villages (Nityanagar and Baromesia) for this study are situated at the western part of Birbhum district, near the Chotonagpur plateau. The study area is located around 5 km away from Jamtara district of Jharkhand. The soil is red and hard and the region is uneven. This type of climate has a direct influence on their life and livelihoods. This region has been the habitation of different tribes for a long.

There are around 52 Households in Nityanagar village, of whom 12 are Santhal, 3 Dhobars and others are Kora (total population around 320). In Baromesia, there are 48 households, Marandi, Murmur and Kora are the main clans of this village (Total population of around 280).

Research questions

- 1 How far do folktales depict the true history/picture of society and vice versa?
2. Whether quality education can be achieved in early childhood through the inclusion of folktales and riddles in the school curriculum.

Methodology / study tools and descriptions

The present study is mostly hybrid type. Primarily data has been collected from a group meeting of village elderly. Then there was a group discussion with open ended questionnaire. The informal nature of chatting made the informants feel free to express themselves. This work was carried out under covid situation. Hence the survey could not be done in the schools of that area. It is sourced from chatting and loosely structured interviews with a group of eighteen women and seven men and a girl in Nityanagar village and twelve women and eight men in Baromesia village. Finally collected data have been examined for validity and reliability to explore them as a more authentic source of information.

Key Question for Interview

Quality education can be achieved in early childhood through the inclusion of folktales and riddles in the school curriculum.

Thirty percent of the respondents said it would be good if these stories were included in the school curriculum. Our children will know our traditions. Forty percent said these are very ordinary stories, why will children read those at schools? ten percent of respondents said today's kids don't like these stories. The remaining twenty percent did not give any opinion about this respect.

Narratives of Collected Oral Stories and Riddles

It is observed that no one in the group told these stories alone, someone started, later many joined in telling this story. Most of the stories are tied deeply to the roots and cultures of people. For instance, the story of Basumata. A simple story about the necessity of loving and respecting nature. According to the story, there used to live seven farmers, their wives, and a sister called Basumata in Nityanagar. Mother Earth has been metaphorized as a simple village woman. Only one among the seven wives treats Basumata fairly and ultimately gets rewarded. These stories have striking similarities with stories from Thakurmar Jhuli or Aesop's Fables. But what strikes a chord is the characterization. The protagonists are not kings or queens, but peasants. They live simple lives; they speak the local language and they are far more relatable than majestic royal robes. Ethnic people worship Marangburu - a goddess who lives in a famous Shaal tree. According to beliefs, her wrath leads to severe famines and drought in the village. The second story is about this type of incidence.

Most of these stories have the potential to foster love and respect for nature, which might play a huge role in protecting our ecosystem. In another instance, there is a story about Baba Baghraj, a deity form of tiger worshiped by the people of this village. The story is intertwined with the local geography. For example, Baba Baghraj lives high up in the Malancha Hills - a moderately tall hill station near Jamtara surrounding Nityanagar. He comes down to the village to bless people. There's no mention of some land far far away. Rather they are based in their own familiar territories. You won't find mention of these places in regular geography books, which brings up an important debate - what's the use of knowing the latitudes and longitudes of New York unless we know our geography first?

Women of a Self Help group in Baromesia village have been using the local Bhadu songs and stories for several campaigns to promote organic farming, rainwater harvesting, polio vaccination, etc. Local schools in Nithyanagar have been using riddles to foster logical thinking and analytical ability among children. These riddles have references of local forests, birds, and food.

II. Conclusions

Oral tradition is the way of looking inward. The presence of digital technology is a reality, it cannot be denied. As time goes on fewer parents maintain storytelling habits. The Tribal Knowledge System is often disregarded as primitive and backward, so its relevance in contemporary policy-making and governance remains minimal. (The essence of the traditional knowledge system in Indian knowledge system; Dattaniranjan Nandikolmath Ph.D. Scholar, Dr. Aruna S Hallikeri Dept of Studies in Anthropology, Karnatak University Dharwad, Suodh Drisht! (An International Peer Reviewed Refereed Research Journal), Vol. 14, No 5 1, May 2023. Initiatives are scattered, the efforts need to be brought under one umbrella to reap the benefits of these. It is very important that folktales need to be preserved as historical artefacts for their importance in enduring and employing moral and social-cultural values, as well as cultural tolerance and accepting the 'other' too.

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