

# Folktales from India

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# Objectives of the Sub-Unit

- To introduce some of the basic learning methods; the folktales were narrated not only for entertainment purpose, but also to educate people. For example, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih writes that there was always a story to “explain the inexplicable. ... Young Khasis were instructed in this way by the elders, and their school was always the hearth around which they gathered after a day’s labour, entertained by both fire and tales.”(Nongkynrih x)
- To create awareness among the students about the rich heritage or oral traditions of our country.
- To allow students to share opinions on the importance of folktales in the present world.
- To generate interest among the students for folktales, so that they would still see it as a living tradition.

# Introduction

- Folktales are read not only for entertainment but also to learn about morals and values.
- The musical and melodious rhythm of the folktales make learning easier, and interesting.
- It also allows the reader to exercise his or her imagination.
- It may also allow the reader to locate possible answers to their experiences in the real world.
- Sharing of folktales create strong family or community bonding, and also bridge the gap between different social classes.
- Folktales offer simple human values and ethics, which may also be used to counter the ills of the present world.

# What is a folktale?

- An oral narrative passed down from one generation to another generation.
- Circulated and shared since times immemorial, even when there were no written means of communication.
- Folktales grow out of the community's ways of living and imagination.
- It is one of the genres of folklore among many others like folk song, folk art, legends, myths, fairy tales etc.
- It may comprise of trickster tales, fables, moral tales, tales of valour.
- Folktales have been documented over the years for fear of being lost altogether.

# Indian Folklore

- In their “Introduction” to the edited volume *Another Harmony*(1986)Stuart H. Blackburn and A.K Ramnujan identified five periods in the history of Indian folklore.
- The first period saw the growing interest in Indian folklore in the nineteenth century with the publication of Jacob Grimm’s work *Deutsche Mythologie* in 1835.
- In the second period, the publication of William Crooke’s two volume work *The Popular Religion and Folklore of North India* in 1894 and R.C Temple’s four volume work , *Legends of the Panjab* (1884-1900) created an awareness of India’s rich oral traditions.
- Philology and collections made during fieldwork shaped the research in Indian folklore during the third period.
- The study of Indian folktale made by Sarat Chandra Mitra and Indologists like M.B Emeneau and Verrier Elwin in the fourth period led to a publication of many oral tales.
- During the fifth period, starting from the 1970’s till date, many scholars like J.D Smith, Claus, Blackburn and many others have rendered many rare oral traditions into textual forms.

# Tejimola -Assamese Folktale

- First published in 1911 in *Burhi Aair Sadhu* also known as *Grandmother's Tales*, which was compiled by Lakshminath Bezbaruah.
- It is a story about a girl called Tejimola, who is mistreated and later on killed by her step-mother during her father's absence.
- She is buried in the backyard, but each time, Tejimola survives to take up a non human form.
- From a gourd to a plum to a bird, we see Tejimola changing into different forms. This is suggestive of Tejimola's desire to be free herself from the societal constraints.
- Tejimola is also representative of nature. The injustice she receives at the hands of her step-mother is also evocative of the injustice that human beings perpetrates on Mother Earth.
- Through this story, we also learn about Tejimola's courage. Tejimola's resilience helped her become a brave girl, and someone who could also choose her freedom.

# Two Friends-Sikkimese Folktale

- This story has been taken from George Kotturan's *Folktales of Sikkim*, first published in 1976.
- There were two friends from different villages called Karlyong and Sabeun, they would go together to the forest to play and hunt.
- One day, they decided to go separately to the forest; the devil learned about it and decided to kill both of them when alone.
- The friend from Karlyong reached the forest and without wasting any time, he climbed the trees to set the traps.
- After killing the young man from Sabeun, the devil went to the forest to kill the man from Karlyong as well.
- The young man from Karlyong somehow saved himself from the devil and reached home, but he died soon after narrating about what had happened in the forest.
- The story end on a tragic note with the death of both men. And they are blamed for bringing about their own death because they were careless and should not have discussed to meet at a distant place.
- A lesson of this kind is also taught or told to keep the children away from the dangers of the forest.
- To also stop children from taking decisions on their own without adult supervision.

## Luri Lura, the Animal Fair: How the Dog Came to live with Man- Folktale form Meghalaya

- Selected from Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih *Folktales of India: Around the Hearth, Khasi Legends*.
- During the Luri Lura Animal fair, all the animals would come and sell their goods, the bear would bring honeycomb, the monkey would bring fruits, the deer would bring amla and so on.
- Only the dog did not have anything to sell every time. But one day, he got hold of tung rymbai (fermented bean sauce) favourite among the humans and took it to the fair to sell.
- The dog attracted a lot of attention in the fair, but when the other animals came to exchange their goods for tung rymbai, they were suffocated with its smell.
- Since, the tung rymbai is fermented, it gives a fetid smell. The dog was thrown out of the fair by all the animals for defiling the marketplace.
- The dog approached the humans for help, and also promised to be loyal always. Since that day, the dog became man's favourite animal and accompanied men especially during hunting trips.
- This story reminds the readers of Khasi culture, food and tradition. There is actually a village called Mawlyngba in Meghalaya, where the imprints on the sand resemble animal hoofprints, thus giving credence to the tale of Luri Lura fair.
- An entertaining tale like this one, may also be an answer to some of the curious questions raised by children, especially regarding the origins of nature, or functioning of the ecosystem.



# Conclusion

- The popularity of folktales be attributed to publication of the tales in print form.
- Adaptation of folktales into movies and popular songs. For example the folktale of Tejimola, which is sung by Joi Barua, famous Assamese singer has made the tale more popular among wider audience.
- The re-telling of the folktales by the prominent writers or even members of the aristocratic society have also revived interest in folktales.
- It teaches human behaviour, modes of survival, and values, the contemporary society can acquire some basic learning from the folktales.
- The contribution of folktales towards educating a person is unimaginable and therefore many folktales have been included in the curriculum as well.

# References

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