

Oral Narratives As A Pedagogic Tool For Language Learning In Indian Context

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In the introduction to structural analysis of narratives, Barthes points out that, “narrative begins with the history of mankind ...no nation is without narratives: all social classes, all human groups have their own narratives, and very often they bring equal enjoyment to people of different cultures. Narrative is international, trans-historical and transcultural. It is in the world like life.” There is narrative in myth, legend, fables, fairytales, novellas, novels, history, novel, epos, tragedy, drama, comedy, pictures, comics, events and conversation. In these almost infinite forms, narrative exists at all times, in all corners of the earth, in all societies. Narrative begins with the history of mankind. Human beings are brought up and are living in a world of stories. It is in a way imagination is constructing world around him. He shapes the world according to what he has heard and lived. In other words they analyze the past from the stories they hear and enter the present world. So here past experience is making them to live a meaningful present life. Narrative experience focuses on the past, whereas narrative inquiry focuses on the whole phenomenon of living. The stories they heard in a way fulfill their world and assist them in framing societies.

Folklore is the amalgamation of what mankind has experienced learned, and practiced across the ages. It touches every dimension of human life by analyzing it we can get a deep insight of artistic, cultural, psychological aspects of the life. It reveals how people make identity and transmit the knowledge. Folklore is informally learned and becomes part of everyday life. It can be considered as an integral part of an individual's life. We grow up listening to lullabies, stories, riddles, proverbs and so on. We can understand and analyze our relationships without a

structural study. We inherit occupational skills through word of mouth. We practice rituals, customs and traditions by observation. All the above said things are transmitted orally. Oral tradition plays a major role in folk lore studies. Jolles mentions that, “oral literary forms as simple, spontaneous products originating in the spoken language as opposed to complex, consciously created literary forms” (53). Oral literature is the repository of knowledge and wisdom of non-literate societies. Through tales, songs, poems, proverbs and rituals it gives us an insight about the life of a society at that particular point of time and the changes and challenges they have faced. Oral literature withholds traditional knowledge and sets the norms for a moral conduct in the society and tries to establish an individual’s relation with the society around him. It also serves as the artistic expression of a society. Its beauty stretches across cultural frontiers. Oral literature is a response to the universal human instinct to find balance, harmony, and beauty in the world and the need to understand pain, suffering, and evil. It explains the causes of human suffering, justifies them, and suggests ways of mediation and the healing of suffering. Oral literature also functions to fulfill the need for religious belief and spiritual fulfillment necessary for human existence. This universal human realm, peopled by spiritual beings and their personalities, is revealed through stories, tales, songs, myths, legends, prayers, and ritual texts. Oral literature serves to communicate ideas, emotions, beliefs and appreciation of life. This literature defines, interprets, and elaborates on the society’s vision of reality and the dangers in the world. It deals with the human adventure and achievements against odds. They are created by the people owing to the situation and context. It reflects creative, expressive and artistic dimensions of the society. The artistic creative part is deliberately highlighted at times to give it a function and form.

Owing to the oral existence, narrative genres have unlimited variants with limited number of plots. Folk narratives are adaptable and modified according to the culture of the people. They have the trait of auto correction according to the situations. Inconsistency of a narrative increases with the popularity. So in folklore ‘text’ is given a very prominent role. The concept of genre is created by creating the concept of any folklore form, and then by taking into account of such folk forms on the basis of similarity. Here the abstract is created from the concrete, and from many

such abstracts yet another abstract is created. For example if we observe genres like tales, songs, myth, legend and so on. The above genres have many sub genres in them. In tales we have folktales, fairytales, animal tales, comic tales and so on. Same is the case with songs in songs we have ballads, epic songs, war songs, heroic songs and so on. These genres are classified on the basis of their structure and function. However function helps a folklorist to understand how a community functions and retains its identity. By focusing on the oral literature of a particular community or a society we get a holistic idea of the norms on which the society is set up and gives us a brief outlook of their customs and traditions. Some of the genres of folklore are myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, songs, folk dance, folk games and so on. The distinction between genres of folklores very minute what may be a legend for a community may be a folk tale for another proverb for one community can be a fable for another community. So the context in which a lore is brought plays a vital role in analyzing the meaning of the genre. From time immemorial several communities are preserving their cultures through their rich oral traditions. They are passed down to generations through a group of narrators. Narrator here plays the role of a custodian of that particular community. The narrators can be mother, grand parents, teachers or elders of that particular community.

The idea of tradition is essential to the process of folklore. Here by means of tradition we refer to several interlinked ideas. It indicates orality of group as well as the process of communicating it. The process of continuity plays a vital role in withholding a tradition. It reinforces the group's identity and establishes a value in the society. By the advent of industrialization and impact of globalization the sense of continuum is missing in the traditions. Urbanization has reduced the gaps between rural and urban spaces. The technology has started entering into the lives of individuals. In this process the flavor of oral narratives is ignored for a time and digitality has started influencing the people. Rural areas represent tradition, social conformity and continuity, and a stability in human roles and relationships whereas the city offered heterogeneity, social change, a complex division of labor, and fragile human relationships. Most of the urban narratives are personal and work space narratives with a bit of exaggeration added to it. Urban folklore gained its momentum because of its easiness to access

and ability to locate it on various social sites. In present language learning scenario in India for most of the learners L2 acquisition becomes a difficult task. With globalization there emerged lot of urban lore and it is given more prominence and at times it is taken as example in handling class room situations. The question arises here with regard to certain oral cultures. As most of the learners are native speakers representing particular culture if their oral cultures are placed in present curriculum it will enhance their language learning to a greater level.

Classroom is a socially constructed space where multiple negotiations exists between teacher and learner and in between peer groups. Classroom is a heterogeneous space where learners with different learning capacities share the same platform. The challenge here lies with the teacher in facilitating the learners with various learning capacity. The advent of technology has brought lot of change in the classroom scenario. With the increase of digitality in class rooms teacher at times has to play the role of a facilitator in enhancing language learning. The availability of abundant materials at times is deviating the minds of the young learners and the sources from which the learning process is happening is completely aloof to him. It completely places the rural learner in a strange context and at times it is hindering the process of language learning to a greater extent. For example the tales like Rumpelstiltskin, Snow white, Little Red Riding Hood they are completely out of context for a rural learner from Indian context. The landscapes and the culture reflected in the tales are completely out of context for him. The learner faces a great difficulty in personally identifying the tale to his culture. Personal cultural identity of the learner plays a key role in language learning. Reading must have background or previous knowledge. It enables the learner to create a context. Learning in an isolated context makes the whole process of learning as a tiresome activity and ends up as a burden on the learner's mind.

By employing oral narratives in language learning we can at a time develop multiple skills in the young learners. Children tend to hear a lot of tales in the initial stages of learning it in a way sharpens their creative thinking and helps them to imagine. Young learners usually don't have a serious tendency to learn foreign language they need serious motivation and direction to acquire a new language. In this context tales and songs comes in aid to the teacher

and makes the learning a happy experience. By employing literature based language teaching in the initial stages of language learning we can aim at developing oral and written skills of the learner. In this method initially the teacher has to narrate stories. He can employ traditional lecturing method in doing so. Slowly he can take the learners from known to unknown. Folktales, in particular, bring a holistic approach to foreign language teaching and learning. Through stories, learners acquire not just language knowledge they acquire usage and have opportunities to hear and use language in meaningful, engaging ways. Story-based teaching helps children develop appreciation as well as enjoyment of literature and supports the development of literacy, oral and social skills at the same time. Children learning through folktales can also develop their imagination and can make use of their creativity. They learn about negotiations and life values through the interactions and behavior of characters. Stories from different contexts introduce learners to different cultures and the learner can also understand how their own culture is unique from the other cultures. It transports him to a particular time and introduces him to a local culture at that particular point of time. It introduces him how different people handled conflicts in their own ways. For example teacher can initially give an example of The mother who married her own son and later Oedipus story. This will introduce learners to two different contexts.

Another method which can be employed by using oral narratives is problem solving method using folk tale plot. Through this way it develops thinking ability and increases the creative output of the learner. For example in a tale there is a daughter-in-law who is ill-treated by mother in-law. She goes to mother goddess sanctum and does something. Seeing the action of daughter in law the mother goddess keeps her finger on her mouth. In this context questions could be posed to learners what provoked the goddess to keep her hand on her mouth and how it could be removed.

Oral narratives can also be employed to develop vocabulary in children. Proverbs and riddles have greater system of knowledge embedded in them. They convey broader meanings by usage of smaller words. It can develop the ability of using one-word substitutes and glossing

abilities of the learner. Adding to the injury and adding salt on the wound has same references. For example, a house full, a yard full, couldn't catch a bowl full.

Oral narratives serves as a rich and authentic materials to teach foreign language to the learners. By careful employment of similar structures in native and foreign language the learner can easily grab the content and can pick up foreign language with great ease. They broaden the thinking ability and enhances language learning skills. Moreover by employing examples from his own culture the learner finds the learning process very interesting and entertaining.

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