

Literature-Oriented Multicultural Education in India

Children's Experiences with a Task-Based Folklore Lesson

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Introduction

In India, multicultural experience is represented by what is called a “unity in diversity” pattern. This includes the diversity of religious communities, languages, ethnicities, and the minority populations in each of the states and regions that comprise the nation. Thus theories of multicultural accommodation are one of India’s inherited features. Parekh (2000) remarks when describing India’s diversity and distinct way of life that “India has a common criminal [law] but not a civil law” (p. 191). To focus on the concept of “multiculturalism” is a matter of exigency for the harmonious and progressive future of India, as it is for global classrooms worldwide.

The goal of fostering values of multiculturalism in learners is often a part of school curriculum. However, whenever these values have been incorporated into learning materials, it is usually done in a conventional manner resulting in mostly inadequate outcomes. It is important that the young minds of our future citizens learn the rich values of multiculturalism.

This article illustrates a promising practice that seeks to teach these values through folktale-oriented task-based literature that focuses on the adolescent age group. The practice described here is based on the observational results from a field trial of this material that was a part of my doctoral research.

Adolescence: The Age of Concern

The teaching of multicultural values among adolescents should be a concern of

every educational system. Learners in this age group are transitioning toward becoming decision-making citizens of society. Thus it is even more appropriate that they gain familiarity with the fundamentals of multiculturalism and learn the values, attitudes, and moral beliefs that are desirable for living effectively in a multicultural society.

According to Bull (1969) in *Moral Education*, “late adolescence brings a more developed ability for abstract thinking, and the search for ideals to which to give allegiance and around which to organize and integrate the self” (p. 166). In this respect, education through literature can be a means to replace ignorance with multicultural values offering a positive direction toward a multicultural consciousness and perspective.

Literature: A Creative Way to Multiculturalism

Literature and storytelling have always endowed identity to life, either by way of creating it through storytelling or by interpreting the life stories that are told. Time and time again manifold endeavors to find and utilize the role of literature in human life have proved to have positive effects. Literature is a medium that provides a way to bring the universal and individual puzzlements of life back into order. It is an inherent role of literature to be a key element of education.

Literature, with its alluring forms, has long appealed to readers for social, moral, and individual edification. Frequent lack of tolerance and the rise of conflicts within multicultural societies urgently demand an enduring solution. Accordingly, literature, being vital in its ability to convey values that reach across communities, assumes a significant place in the fostering of multicultural values and offers tangible solutions to reduce conflict.

Literature Education in India and Multiculturalism

Literature has long been considered an essential part of the world’s social machinery. The use of literature in education has served as a traditional form of learning from ancient times through to this new century. In India, the transmission of cultural traditions, social norms, and morals is typically conveyed through literature. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, for example, are referred to as “grandmother’s tales” and are emblazoned in children’s minds from generation to generation. The *Panchatantra*, a collection of fables written by Bishnu Sharma sometime during the third century BCE, was once used to teach princes the practices of sociology and governance.

Now and in recent times, the education of children remains bound with literary pedagogy. The intent of placing English literature in the curriculum of school and university education helps to provide a value-based orientation to the academic, social, and aesthetic purposes of teaching. Literature courses, for example, hold accordance with the learners’ immediate environment. It is an environment that is physical, social, and cultural. Either as a part of a language course or as a special literature course, the position of literature education has secured a prominent place in India.

Folktales: A Form of Literature That Endorses Multiculturalism

Imagine a child, before starting school, being nurtured by listening to the folktales, fairy-tales, and fables of their culture. This might be the child’s first interaction with literature. While there are many genres of literature that have been included in classroom teaching, students find folktales attractive because of several fundamental features that have endured over centuries.

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The timeless qualities of folktales include their universality and infinite meaningfulness, their ability to represent a variety of different cultural aspects, the complex interplay of realism, fantasy, and symbolism, and the beneficial linking of popular culture with many academic subjects and skills that enhance the transitions from childhood to adult life.

Exposing learners to folktales is an ideal way to approach the teaching of cultural understanding and multicultural values. During adolescence, learners find themselves with a variety of opportunities to belong to many different groups while at school. Within these groups, each student is searching for personal identity while at the same time looking for guidance and direction to find the right path.

Stories such as those found in folktales offer these learners the freedom to use their imaginations to gain knowledge and experience that will help them deal with the various social and multicultural situations that will come their way. The opportunity to learn about other cultures will help make these learners well-rounded individuals, eventually leading to fulfilling the role of being a responsible citizen.

Folktales Uphold Values of Multiculturalism

As a main source of socio-cultural information, utilizing the multifaceted elements of folktales can help learners to understand the values of multiculturalism, as follows:

- ◆ Development of a sense of democratic citizenship with the ability to re-contextualize in the context of a multicultural society.
- ◆ Development of a sense of human rights with the intention of building interna-

tional cooperation that can sustain the idea of multiculturalism.

- ◆ Development of human values such as liberty, freedom, justice, and equality that are essential to the development of a multicultural perspective.
- ◆ Acceptance of cultural diversity for a peaceful co-existence.
- ◆ Development of decision-making skills, critical thinking, and moral reasoning, which enable citizens to make clear choices in their everyday lives.
- ◆ Development of RAAA: Recognition, Acceptance, Appreciation, and Accommodation of cultural/ethnic diversity.
- ◆ Reduction and removal of cultural, ethnic, and racial discrimination, conflict, prejudice, and bias stereotyping.
- ◆ Management of peace, harmony, and co-operative living.
- ◆ Development of sympathy and empathy skills.

In support of the above mentioned values, folktales can provide a basis for social, psychological, and cultural attitudes of multiculturalism that allow learners to engage in the following areas:

1. Cultural awareness.
2. Cultural studies.
3. The understanding and reduction of culture shock.
4. Intercultural communication/dialogue.
5. The development of intercultural competence.
6. Acculturation.
7. The abolishment of social distance.

Task-Based Folktale Material

The learning material that follows seeks to develop and enhance the concept of multiculturalism by using various interactive tasks that are integrated with the literary form of the folktale. I have several reasons to justify my use of task-based material.

First, it is very important to design and develop the folktale-oriented literature material methodically as a way to make it a learner-friendly lesson.

Second, developing materials that focus on task-based learning is supported by the argument that such an approach provides a purpose for the learning and the use of the content, and it is therefore more educationally effective. Materials developed using task-based learning allow for a learner-centered classroom situation.

Third, task-based learning facilitates learners to engage with cognitive and affective activities and procedures.

Fourth, this method encourages the attitudes, values, and skills necessary for multiculturalism by relying heavily on the learners' involvement and places emphasis on the experiences that the learners bring to the classroom. In task-based learning, the facilitator can make the most of each learner's involvement as a way to contribute to the teaching process. As a result, task-based material requires the organization of the literary text around various classroom tasks.

Categories of Task-Based Learning

Various classroom tasks can result in different outcomes by using a range of steps in the presentation of the material. I use six categories of tasks in the material development—predicting, listening, questions and answers, discussion, evaluating and analyzing, and vocabulary and language work.

Table 1

Categories of Task	Step in the Task	Function of Task	Expected Outcomes from Task
Predicting	Pre-task.	To anticipate what is to come.	Provides a lead-in towards task-preparation stage.
Listening	Pre-task. Task-preparation. Task-realization.	To receive instructions, ideas, and views.	Comprehension of instruction, ideas, and views.
Question and Answers	Pre-task. Task-realization.	To create information, and explore the theme and concepts of the text.	Understanding of the theme of the text. Ability to write and speak about personal opinions and decisions.
Discussion	Task-realization.	To narrate and to describe.	Sharing of personal experiences and opinions. Exploring and explaining attitudes. The exchanges of views.
Evaluating and Analyzing	Task-preparation. Task-realization.	To think about the given situation and problem, analyze hypothetical situations.	Strengthens decision making and problem solving skills. Encourages the development of moral reasoning.
Vocabulary and Language work	Pre-task. Task-realization.	To explore new words and phrases. To work with language exercises.	Increased vocabulary. Broader understanding of the meaning of words and expanded use of language.

ating and analyzing, and vocabulary and language work. These task categories are described in Table 1.

Method and Procedure

Following are the components and tasks that correlate with the material in this sample lesson.

Components

1. *Literature genre*: A Short Story (Folktale).

2. *Title of the folktale*: “One Man’s Pleasure.”

3. *Time*: 180 minutes.

4. *Age group*: Adolescent.

5. *Concepts taught*:

- ◆ That there are differences in language, culture, custom and religion. That physical characteristics are a natural phenomenon of the human race and are a fact of the world.
- ◆ How to respect another’s language, culture, customs, and physical characteristics.
- ◆ How to understand that foreigners and immigrants may face problems when abroad.
- ◆ The knowledge that Natives are often expected to understand them and help when needed.
- ◆ How to demonstrate sympathetic, and empathetic, and moralistic behaviors to foreigners and immigrants.
- ◆ How to develop attitudes, values, and skills necessary to be a responsible citizen, including the skill to comprehend and react to critical incidents.

6. *Summary of objectives*: Students will be able to:

- ◆ Identify and recognize the difference and similarities of cultures.
- ◆ Understand that every culture is unique.
- ◆ Compare and contrast different cultures.
- ◆ Understand that another’s way of life should also be valued and respected.
- ◆ Develop critical thinking and abstract reasoning.
- ◆ Use geographic themes of location, place and human-environment relations to describe the settings and cultures represented in folktales.

◆ Describe empathetic behavior towards a foreigner.

◆ Develop a deeper global understanding and appreciation for cultural differences as students study stories from around the world.

◆ Understand the value of being sympathetic, understanding, and helpful.

◆ Understand the spirit of citizenship.

7. *Note to the teacher*: First explain what a “folktale” is and what its characteristics are. Explain that reading folktales can be for both educational and entertainment purposes. Explain to the students that it is important to understand the particular people and environments represented when studying folktales, yet there are also universal themes about human nature, values, and morality that relate to all of humankind. Help the students locate the primary theme of the tale—that of being generous to the community. The learner should recognize an act of “giving” in the story, describe how the common good is enhanced through this act, and identify the main character’s motivation for giving.

Develop with the students the theme that it is important to understand people and their environment when studying folktales. In a brainstorming session, have the learners describe each location of Kabul and India by listing recognizable cultural features and human characteristics—landforms, culture, language, life-style, rituals, law and order, inhabitants, settlement patterns, religions, and ways of making a living. Keep in mind the values conveyed and the lessons learned in this exercise to guide the students’ actions and further develop their character.

Tasks

1. *Introduction*: We find people who are different from us in our everyday life. People are different in many ways. Some of these basic differences we find are:

- A different language.
- A different religion.
- A different way of life.
- Different physical characteristics.

Let us talk about differences in the languages. Here are some words that, when pronounced, sound the same in Urdu and English, yet have totally different meanings:

English Word	Meaning in Urdu
sir	head
so	hundred
rose	everyday

share
rub
cheese
jug
door
bus
chalk
goal
pass
suffer

lion, tiger, verse of poetry
God
a thing
world
a string
enough
junction
round
near
travel

2. *Glossary*:

sweetmeat—any sweet food or delicacy prepared with sugar or honey

to grab—to take or snatch suddenly

to gobble—to eat quickly

wander—to move or go without plan or fixed destination

to mount—to climb up on something; especially to get on the back of a horse, on a bicycle, etc. for riding

procession—the act of proceeding; a number of persons moving forward, as in a parade, in an orderly, formal way

lawbreaker—a person who breaks the law or goes against the law

pile—a mass of things bundled together

accompaniment—anything that accompanies something else; thing added with something

fall to—to begin; start

3. *Literary Text* (Folktale)

One Man’s Pleasure

A man from the city of Kabul in Afghanistan once visited India. Walking along an Indian street, he came to a sweetmeat shop where all sorts of sweets of different shapes and sizes were neatly displayed.

He knew only one or two words of Hindustani. He went up to the vendor of sweets and pointed at one particular kind that looked especially delicious. The man thought he was asking its name and said “khaja.” The word means both “sweets” and “eat it up.” The man from Kabul knew only the second meaning and so he fell to, grabbing handful of sweets and gobbling them up with pleasure.

The vendor of sweets asked the stranger to pay for them. But the visitor didn’t understand what he was saying and happily wandered away. The angry vendor complained to the police, who came and arrested the man from Kabul. The chief officer ordered that his head should be shaved clean and covered with tar, and that

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he should then be mounted on a donkey and run out of town in a procession to the sound of drums, so that everyone would know how a lawbreaker is punished in that part of the world. Though it is considered brutal punishment in India, the man from Kabul thought it was fun. He even felt charmed and honored by this treatment and the attention he got in the streets.

On his return, people asked him, "How was India?"

He answered, "Terrific! It's a charming country, and a rich country. You get everything for nothing there. You go to a shop and point to a pile of sweets you like, and they tell you to take all you want and eat it. Then the police come with drums and pipes, give you a shave, dye your head with hair-dye, and give you a nice donkey to ride through town to the accompaniment of lovely Indian music. And all for nothing! Lovely country, generous hosts, beautiful people!"

4. Understanding the Text: Answer the following questions based on the text:

1. Where did the man come from?
2. What do you understand by the line: "He knew only one or two words of Hindustani"?
3. The word "khaja" in the text has two meanings. Which are they?
4. Which meaning did the man know of the word "khaja"?
5. What did the man say to the people about India when he returned back to Kabul?

5. Analyze and Write: Analyze the following questions. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What were the reasons for the misunderstanding between the man and the vendor?
2. Do you think that the man from Kabul was really a lawbreaker?

3. Do you justify the punishment given to the man?

4. Do you think that the punishment given to the man was insulting?

5. Do you appreciate the man's answer about India?

6. Vocabulary: Here are some words that have similar meanings: to respect, accept, sympathy, help, and understand. Find the appropriate word for each and write it down under it in Table 2.

fellow
feeling
esteem
acknowledge
reverence
stand by
honor
accommodate
perceive
compassion
humanity
befriend
uphold
fathom
comprehend
recognize

7. Language Work: Here are some phrases that are used in the English language to indicate the attitude of and a sense of sympathy, help, and understanding. Consider each of them and make two meaningful sentences for each.

sympathetic attitude:

- ◆ live and let live

helping attitude:

- ◆ lend a hand

attitude of understanding:

- ◆ take one's meaning

8. What Should You Do? Look at the situations and the behaviors described below. Mark the appropriate answers. Note

that there may be more than one appropriate answer for each.

I. When people from different cultures meet, they may find it difficult to comprehend the characteristics of another one's culture.

This kind of situation is

- a. common
- b. problematic
- c. natural

II. When a person is unable to understand our language,

we should

- a. avoid the person
- b. try to make him understand patiently
- c. understand that the person is unfamiliar with our language.

II. When a person does not know our native customs,

we should

- a. make fun out of the person
- b. try to make the person aware of it
- c. be broad-minded and understand his/her ignorance

IV. If a person differs with our thinking,

we should....

- a. also try to understand the person's view point
- b. fight with the person
- c. try to talk and help the person understand our thoughts

V. When a person is of another religion,

we should....

- a. try to accept the difference
- b. try to create awareness about the person's religion
- c. hate the person because the person is from different religion

9. Discuss—Express Your Views: Read the following statements. Indicate whether you agree or disagree with them. Discuss your answers with your teacher and classmates.

Table 2

respect	accept	sympathy	help	understand

Table 3

name of the religion	name for place of prayer	name of the religious festival / celebration

a. Foreigners who go to live in a new country should give up their habits and adapt to the new country as soon as possible.

b. Minority members of any population should adopt the customs and values of the majority.

10. *Activity for a Bulletin Board:* Look around your school, you will see many students from different religions. Ask them about information related to their religion. Make a chart and fix it on the bulletin board. See Table 3 for an example of a chart.

11. *Design a Spin Wheel—Ring Around India:* Cut three large cardboard circles in three different sizes: the first should be 4 feet, the second should be 3 feet, and the third should be 2 feet. Now cut many oval shapes from cardboard. Fix the ovals on each circle. Fix a map of India at the middle of the smallest circle. Fix all three circles from their center in a way that you can spin them individually.

Now collect information about the different states of India. The information can include native language, fair, festivals, dance, attire, and craft. With this information you can paint, paste a picture, write, or make a collage with it. Add this information to each oval. Do not

write the information in sequence on the ovals rather make it random. Write the name of the state on the inner circle. For example: Inner circle 1 = state's name, middle circle 2 = native language, middle circle 3 = fair, festival, or dance, and the outer circle 4 = attire and craft.

To play the game: Mismatch all the circles and tell your classmates to spin the circles and match the ovals with the correct state. See Figure 1 for the layout.

Discussion and Conclusion

It has been observed during the field trial of my doctoral research that, in the practice of learning the values of multiculturalism, the use of literature in the form of folktales has received a positive response from students. Lessons of this type have been shown to inculcate the values of multiculturalism. This approach to learning has proven to be a fresh experience for students. The innovative method and the task-based structure of the material have helped the students construct their own creative inventions.

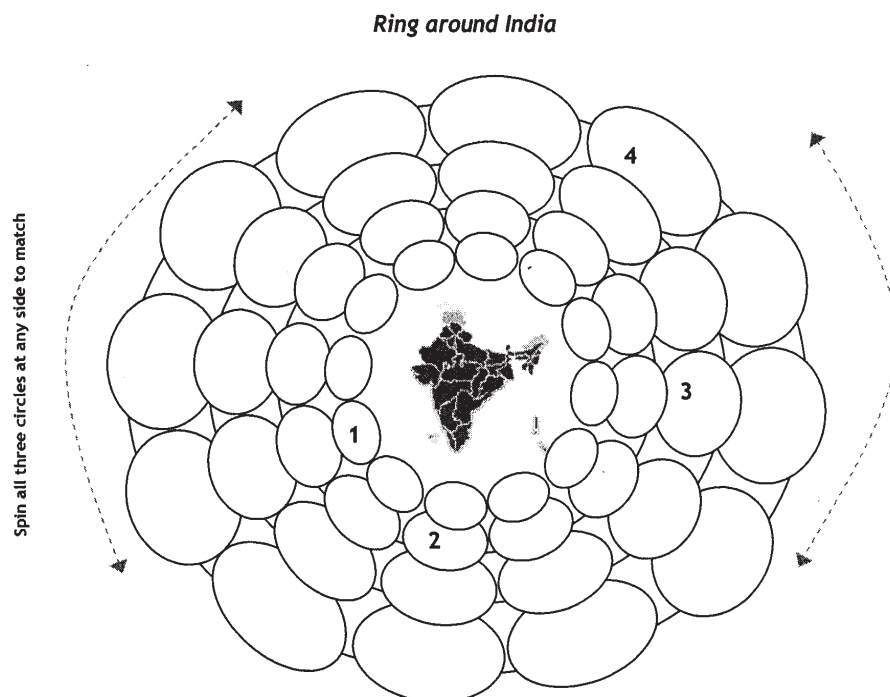
Folktales synthesized with task-based learning can achieve the goal of orienting young learners towards the concepts of cultural diversity and multiculturalism. The various tasks engender awareness of different cultural patterns and thus en-

able learners to develop a recognition of and respect for diverse cultures and the values of multiculturalism. This type of task-based lesson using folktale literature could well become a promising practice with worldwide benefits.

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Figure 1



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Appendix: Samples of Student Work

One Man's Pleasure

Understanding the Text :

Answer the following question from the text :

1. Where did the man come from ?

Ans. The man came from the city of Kabul in Afghanistan.

2. What do you understand by this line ? - 'he knew only one or two words of Hindustani.'

Ans. He knew only one or 2 words of the hindi language used in India.

3. The word "khaja" in the text has two meanings. Which are they ?

Ans. "Khaja" meant "sweets" and "eat it up".

4. Which meaning did the man know of the word "khaja" ?

Ans. He knew only the second meaning of the word "khaja" i.e., it "eat it up".

5. What did the man say to the people about India when he returned back to Kabul ?

Ans. He answered, "Terrific! It's a charming country, and a rich country. You get everything for nothing there. You go to a shop & point to a pile of sweets you like, and they tell you to take all you want & eat it. Then the police come with drums & give you a nice donkey ride through town to the accompaniment of lovely Indian music. And all for nothing!"

One Man's Pleasure

Analyze and Write :

Analyze the following question. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What were the reasons of the misunderstanding between the man and the vendor ?

Ans. The reason of the misunderstanding between the man and the vendor was that they both didn't know each other's language.

2. Do you think that the man from Kabul was really a lawbreaker ?

Ans. No, the man from Kabul was not really a law-breaker as he was not known to India's language, its customs & its rules. So that led to a mere misunderstanding.

3. Do you justify the punishment given to the man ?

Ans. No, it was quite a brutal punishment to a person ~~not~~ just because of a misunderstanding.

4. Do you think that the punishment given to the man was insulting ?

Ans. Yes

5. Do you appreciate the man's answer about India ?

Ans. Yes

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