

IMPORTANCE OF FOLK NARRATIVES AND THE ART OF STORYTELLING IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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Folk narratives represent a major part of the domain of folklore. The term 'folklore' is used for the verbal, spiritual and material aspects of a culture that are conveyed verbally, by observation, or by imitation. It is significant as an academic discipline, in the fields of literature, anthropology, sociology, art, music, history, linguistics, philosophy, mythology and so on. Specially, in the context of anthropology, folklore is an important means to study of man related matters. As pointed out by Bascom (1953), the relation of folklore to culture is highly concerned in anthropology because folklore cannot be fully understood without thorough knowledge of their culture. Folklore belongs to one branch of cultural anthropology and anthropologists consider it as a part of culture but not the whole of culture.

One definition on folk narratives describes them as stories with a patterned series of episodes including a beginning, middle, and end, and told in particular situations for particular purposes by a folk group (Glassie, 1982). Generally, folk narratives refer to any traditional literature that has been passed on by word of mouth and they include all traditional literature; myths, legends, and folktales that tells a story, appeared as in prose or in verse. Further, narration is considered as a "mode of communication, like all human activity, [it] is situated, its form, meaning, and functions rooted in culturally defined scenes or events – bounded segments of the flow of behavior and experience that constitute meaningful contexts for action, interpretation, and evaluation" (Bauman, 1986, p. 3). The purpose of narratives is generally understood in a classic sense as "equipment for living, art forms like 'tragedy' or 'comedy' or 'satire' would be treated as equipments for living, that size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes" (Burke, 1973, p. 304).

In the context of Sri Lanka, the terms 'folktale' and 'folk stories' are used for folk narratives. The terms in Sinhala Language "*Jana Katha*" and "*Jana Kathandara*" are commonly used for any kind of folk stories. The term "*Jana*" means "folk" and "*Katha*" and "*Kathandara*" mean "tales" or "stories".

The way of use folk narratives is named as the art of storytelling. According to Egan (1995), storytelling is one of the oldest method of communicating ideas and images. Further, it is considered as a linguistic activity that is educative because it allows individuals to share their personal understanding with others; thereby creating negotiated transactions. (Hartland, 1891) has described that the art of storytelling has been cultivated in all ages and among all nations of which we have any record; it is the outcome of an instinct implanted universally in the human mind. Therefore, the interrelationship between folk narratives and the art of storytelling is inseparable.

Child development is the process that makes children with required physical and mental qualities to be competent with their own society. Sociologically it relates with the child socialization process because the ultimate result of the socialization is development of children as an active member of the society. Socialization is one of fundamental sociological concepts and it is generally concerned as the learning and acquisition process of culture. According to Arnett (1995), socialization is the process by which people acquire the behaviors and beliefs of the social world—that is, the culture-in which they live. It refers to the whole process of learning throughout the life course and also it is a central influence on the behaviors, beliefs, and actions of adults as well as of children.

On the other hand, socialization is the procedure whereby, through contact with other human beings, the helpless infant gradually becomes a self-aware, knowledgeable human being, skilled in the ways of the given culture and environment, because socialization links new generations to older ones, it allows social reproduction, the process whereby a society provides structural continuity over time. Children learn about social roles, socially defined expectations that a person in a given social position will follow, through the process of socialization and interaction with others. The development of a social identity, the characteristics that other people attribute to an individual is one significant result of this process. While social identity marks ways in which individuals are the same as others, self-identity sets people apart as distinct individuals. The concept of self-identity refers to the process of self-development through a unique sense, which people formulate on themselves and our relationships to the world around them. Thus, individuals are continually altering their expectations and orientations

as they respond to the changing conditions in their physical and social environment through socialization as a lifelong process.

Although socialization is a life long process, it is generally divided into two parts as primary and secondary. Socialization that takes place early in life, as children and adolescents, is considered as primary socialization, and socialization that occurs throughout one's life, both as a child and as one encounters new groups that require additional socialization is considered as secondary socialization. While some scholars who argue that only one or the other of these occurs, most social scientists tend to combine the two, arguing that the basic or core identity of the individual develops during primary socialization, with more specific changes occurring later, secondary socialization, in response to the acquisition of new group memberships and roles and differently structured social situations. The need for later life socialization may stem from the increasing complexity of society with its corresponding increase in varied roles and responsibilities (Ellis, Gary & Larry, 1978).

Socialization is, of course, a social process. As such, it involves interactions between people. Socialization, as noted in the distinction between primary and secondary, can take place in multiple contexts and as a result of contact with numerous groups. Some of the more significant contributors to the socialization process are: family, peers, schools, siblings, and co-workers etc. Each of these groups includes a culture that must be learned and to some degree appropriated by the society in order to gain admittance to the group.

The family and the school are significant as two of major socialization agents. In the family "Parents are the most influential agents of socialization," (Zigler, Lamb & Child, 1982, p. 78). In the extended family system, grand parents, siblings and other adults also important in child socialization. School is important as the next socialization agent as the place, which develops various skills and capabilities of children through formal trainings.

Socialization paves the way to assure a personality for every member in the society. A 'good life' is the same as living with a high quality (Soren, Joav, & Neils, 2003). It relates with the concept of quality of life (QOL). QOL is a new name for an old notion which refers to a

good life or the concept. It is a subjective name for the "well being" of people and the environment in which they live. For any individual, QOL expresses that set of "wants" which after being supplied, when taken together, makes the individual happy or satisfied. However, human wants rarely reach a state of complete satisfaction, except possibly for a very short time: As one want is satisfied, another pops up to take its place. As a result, the concept of quality of life varies not only from person to person, but also from place to place and from time to time (Ben-Chieh Liu, 1975). Thus, QOL levels depend on socio-cultural environments in each society. Here, it is needed to adapt to the social and cultural system to have life qualities that accepted by the society. It relates with socialization because socialization makes individuals, as qualified members for their own society and unsocialized individuals can never acquire any status of life as well as QOL.

In favour of this, folk narratives as well as other folklore components are significant as a media of connection between older and new generations. When children are joining folk narrative activities, they mingle with cultural values, historical events, their heroes, famous characters, environmental factors, geographic matters etc. while they getting entertainment from the plots, characters and incidents included them. This process influences in building up children's personality to act as compatible members into their own social system. It paves the way to build up their life quality when they become young and old.

One of the main kinds of Sinhalese folk narratives is that the stories woven round ancient kings and significant characters. They include biographies on heroes and heroines that provide important ensamples about factors of chivalry like braveness, strong powers, unique abilities and better achievement of goals, etc. to children who listen or read such stories. For instance, many Sinhalese heroic narratives about Prince Dutugemunu, Viharamaha Devi, Ten Giants, Prince Madduma Bandara, etc. are useful for children to attribute positive factors and qualities of characters and learn important lessons.

Another kind of folk narratives is satirical and humorous stories on popular characters. They satirize human's bad habits, bad qualities and stupidities. For instance *Andare, Gamarala,*

***Mahadenamutta, King kekille, Raigamaya and Gampalaya* etc. have many lessons about failures due to poor qualities, bad habits, stupidities and inelegant behaviours. After the reading or listening of such stories children can identify the futility of bad qualities and take thought to relinquish them.**

The religious stories which communicate religious factors, are also important for children to acquire the spiritual qualities and moral development. For example the Jathaka Stories have many lessons and admonitions for children to develop the spiritual qualities. In addition, there are various folk narratives valuable in child development process.

In the traditional Sri Lankan society, folk narratives have been used as a tool in communicating and educating children as well as adults. In ancient times, there were no printed or electronic media as today, and also there was not any systematic education system benefited every strata of the society. Therefore, folklore was the major tool used for the process of communication and entertainment needs specially, for the process of transmitting their traditional knowledge to new generation. Accordingly, folk narratives have facilitated children in acquiring process of cultural factors in the past. It has influenced on assuring child socialization to build up their personality. Socialized children were able to form their life in virtuous approach since the birth. Thus, traditional communities had been organized as a unique society making good relationship within the family and the society.

As a result of various inventions and rapid development of technologies, passing of folk narratives from generation to generation and surviving solely by memory have become less important in modern society. Thus, there are many recessions in using folk narratives at present but the use of folk narratives has not been totally diminished in modern age because the vast entertainment industry is built upon a foundation of sophisticated multimedia storytelling.

In the context of education process, the importance of folk narratives in child development process through socialization has been ascertained by the educationists. As a result of that some provisions in school education system for children to practice folk narratives. The

main provision is that many folk narratives are recommended to read and practice in school syllabuses and hence, various kinds of folklore like folk songs, folktales, proverbs etc. are included in school textbooks and other recommended extra readings with narrative activities.

Nevertheless, there are many reasons that limit folk narrative practices among school children. Mainly, children always face the problem of absence of leisure for extra activities such as practicing folk narratives due to competitive education system and electronic media. Most of children have to spend free hours after school and weekends for tuition classes. In addition, most of them spend time on watching television. Even though, there are some television programs of folk narratives, children are mostly attracted by other popular programs.

Another main point in favour of this is that the contribution of grand parents in telling folk narratives to children is also going down in the trend of declining extended family system. Parents are also unable to tell folk narratives to children due to their tight work schedules. Some parents have not in a positive sense on the importance of folk narratives. Contribution of teachers also has been limited to cover folk narrative practices in school syllabuses. Due to this scenario, the knowledge on folk narratives among children is not at a satisfactory level.

In conclusion, the purpose of folk narrative practices has to be expanded beyond to the aim of fulfillment of limited learning requirements in the school syllabuses enabling children to be practiced folk narratives as other valuable realms of education as an essential process towards child development through socialization process. Taking into consideration this condition, it is suggested to establish a proper mechanism to improve folk narrative activities as a compulsory process in child education.

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