

Folk Songs as a Tool for Teaching EVS in the Context of Assam

Tulika Dey*

Abstract

Music can be used to provide an introduction to, and stimulate interest in, subjects across the curriculum. There is a growing need to integrate arts in the education system and this has been repeatedly debated, discussed and recommended as we face the danger of losing our unique cultural identity and it also helps focus a learner's attention. In this endeavour, in the State of Assam, an exercise was done among a group of students to generate awareness on issues of environmental degradation and ways to tackle these problems through folk songs. They could relate to the cause and effects of the environmental degradation much easily and were sensitised.

Introduction

The need to integrate art education in the formal schooling of our students requires urgent attention if we are to retain our unique cultural identity in all its diversity and richness (NCF-2005). For decades now, the need to integrate arts in the education system has been repeatedly debated, discussed and recommended and yet, today we stand at a point in time when we face the danger of losing our unique cultural identity. One of the reasons for this is the growing distance between the arts and the people at large.

It has been observed and established that music is an enjoyable way to provide the base of prior knowledge that is so critical to learning. Music can be used to provide an introduction to, and stimulate interest in, subjects across the curriculum. The use of music in the classroom is consistent with theories of multisensory learning. There is a growing interest in music integration, as published studies show the positive effect of music on the mind. Studying music is said to be able to raise students' test scores, improve their grades, and make them better people (Peterson, E., 1998).

*Assistant Professor, NERIE, NCERT, Umiam, Shillong

Research suggests that the more senses we use, the deeper and broader the degree of learning. Teachers are encouraged to use auditory, visual, kinesthetic and tactile modes to supplement the learning experience. While music is obviously an auditory activity, the kinesthetic, visual, and tactile modalities can be activated via clapping, dancing, and instrument playing. Music can help focus a learner's attention. It is easier, and a lot more fun to rehearse song than text! Music and song stimulate creativity and foster a positive attitude towards school (Harris, 2002).

Folk music can be a tool to teach young minds content areas as they participate freely in their multi-coloured expression. The teaching then is indirect, it is completely non-threatening, and in fact it is fun; and students seem to learn best in that context anyway. Folk music can use in almost any area of the curriculum without ever mentioning its name.

Folk music spans the entire range of human experience, emotion and expression. People are united by its simple ability to 'strike a chord' of common feelings. It allows us to share our good times and our hard times, our pleasures, joys and sorrows, our deepest concerns and our most light-hearted frolics. Folk music was the first music, and has always been a necessary ingredient in our lives. It serves to excite us, to anger us, to make us laugh and to make us love.

In the State of Assam, an exercise was done among a group of students

to generate awareness on issues of environmental degradation and ways to tackle these problems through folk songs. Various popular folk song tunes were taken and lyrics written to create awareness on these issues. These made the students carefully listen to the original folk song to follow the rhythm and tune and sing the folk songs. This exercise in a way helped the students to be acquainted with their own culture and rehearse them and in the process keep their cultural identity intact. The second benefit derived was that, they could relate to the cause and effects of the environmental degradation much easily and were sensitised. This also generated in the children an interest to listen to the folk songs and bring out their creative minds to write lyrics for other issues related to environmental degradation.

Methodology

To try this out, find a song or a tune which relates even just a little to your subject, and just start singing. A few ideas are floated in this regard, where one might integrate folk songs with the curriculum, which one can implement in their own context. Do this regularly and then wait and watch the benefits: give your students a few minutes of folk music every day, let them get accustomed to it, go exploring with them, find out how rich and full and varied and moving their own cultural identity can be, watch how they relate to some things and not others, how they learn to love it and reflect on

it and express themselves through it; and then you'll see them doing better in math, reading, science, relationships, whatever.

Write the lyrics to a favourite folk song on a big chart and after singing it, have the students point out certain words. Let the students sing the tune several times while the students follow the lyrics on repeated readings. Simply using a lighthearted folk song as your reading text will encourage the child to engage in the classroom. Then very

cautiously put the key concepts of EVS in the lyrics and try singing in the same tune. Following is an example of Assamese devotional folk songs based on teachings of *Quran Sharif*, 'Zik'r songs'. *Zik'r*s are melodious combination of Sufi and Vaishnavite culture. (How *Zik'r* is sung? It is like a *qawaali*. There is a lead singer and chorus. The chorus party echoes the lead singer and refers to him as 'saheb' in the song). The concept to be transacted is 'Use of Water'.

<i>Original folk song</i>	<i>The contextualised song</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>Saheb jai agate</i>	<i>Paniye pranir pran</i>	Water is the life of living beings
<i>Hoi saheb hoi! (2)</i>	<i>Hoi saheb hoi! (2)</i>	Yes Saheb Yes!
<i>Bhakat jai pasote</i>	<i>Panit hol pradushan</i>	Water is polluted
<i>Hoi saheb hoi! (2)</i>	<i>Hoi saheb hoi! (2)</i>	Yes Saheb Yes!
<i>Hai Hai ooi Sonai</i>	<i>Hai Hai ooi</i>	Alas Alas o dear!
<i>nui parote Gharei</i>	<i>Pani bine aai jibon</i>	Life without water
<i>Alla rahamar</i>	<i>Nimishate nirbapan Tumi</i>	Will perish in a moment
<i>girihot</i>	<i>amar jibon ooi Tumi</i>	You are our life
<i>Tumi allahar saheboi</i>	<i>amar jibonor dhan. Pani</i>	You are the wealth of our life
<i>Jodi kora dariya paar</i>	<i>thake aakashat</i>	Water is in the sky
<i>Hoi saheb hoi!</i>	<i>Hoi saheb hoi!</i>	Yes Saheb Yes!
<i>Sukur baarar beliya</i>	<i>Pani thake batahat</i>	Water is in air
<i>Hoi saheb hoi! Hai</i>	<i>Hoi saheb hoi! Hai</i>	Yes Saheb Yes!
<i>Hai ooi</i>	<i>Hai ooi</i>	Alas Alas o dear!
<i>Dupar chai dariya</i>	<i>Pani thake bhugarbhat</i>	Water is at the interior of the earth
<i>Saheb dhukal buli ulal</i>	<i>Gos-birishar patat Hai</i>	Water is there in trees and leaves
<i>Hai Hai ooi</i>	<i>Hai ooi</i>	Alas Alas o dear!
<i>Allaher rahamar girihot</i>	<i>Tumi amar dehat ooi</i>	You are in our bodies
<i>Tumi allahar saheboi</i>	<i>Tumi baaru nuhuwanu kot?</i>	Where you are not there?
<i>Jodi kora dariya paar</i>	<i>Paniye pranir pran</i>	Water is the life of living beings
<i>Hoi saheb hoi!</i>	<i>Hoi saheb hoi!</i>	Yes Saheb Yes!

<i>Ulambare kapur</i>	<i>Panit hol pradushan</i>	Water is polluted
<i>Hoi saheb hoi!</i>	<i>Hoi saheb hoi!</i>	Yes Saheb Yes!
<i>Hai Hai ooi</i>	<i>Hai Hai ooi</i>	Alas Alas o dear!
<i>Gate meli dile</i>	<i>Panit hol pradushan</i>	Water is polluted
<i>Hoi saheb hoi!</i>	<i>Hoi saheb hoi!</i>	Yes Saheb Yes!
<i>Hai Hai ooi</i>	<i>Hai Hai ooi</i>	Alas Alas o dear!
<i>Saheb mur</i>	<i>Pani bine aai jibon</i>	Life without water
<i>biheste gole</i>	<i>Nimishate nirbapan Tumi</i>	Will perish in a moment
<i>Allahar rahamar girihot</i>	<i>aamar jibon ooi Tumi</i>	You are our life
<i>Tumi allahar saheboi</i>	<i>aamar jibonor dhan. Hoi</i>	You are the wealth of our life
<i>Hoi saheb hoi!</i>	<i>saheb hoi!</i>	Yes Saheb Yes!
<i>Hai Hai ooi</i>	<i>Hai Hai ooi</i>	Alas Alas o dear!
<i>Jodi kora dariya paar</i>	<i>Paniye pranir pran</i>	Water is the life of living beings.

(The contextualised song has been coined by Mr. Netra Gogoi, DIET, Sonari, Assam during a workshop for development of such materials)

Following is another example of an Assamese Goalpariya Lokageet from the erstwhile Goalpara District of Assam. The concept to be transacted is 'Soil Pollution and Plastic Pollution'.

<i>Original folk song</i>	<i>The contextualised song</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>Diine Diine</i>	<i>Diine Diine</i>	With every passing day
<i>Khasia paribe</i>	<i>Baribha lagise</i>	there is increase of
<i>Rangila dalaner maati</i>	<i>Maati pradushanar matra he</i>	level of land pollution
<i>Gosaiji kon ronge</i>	<i>Sunachun moinahat</i>	Listen o children
<i>Bandishen ghar misa</i>	<i>Bajarrar kirtim saar,</i>	artificial manure from market
<i>Misa danda bade</i>	<i>Kit nashak aaru</i>	Pesticides and
<i>Gosaiji kon ronge</i>	<i>Acid barashunar paara</i>	From acid rain
<i>Haarer ghar khani</i>	<i>Plasticar begburu</i>	the plastic bags
<i>Chamer chauni</i>	<i>Aati anisthakaari</i>	Are very hazardous
<i>Bande bande taar jora</i>	<i>Maatite milieu najay.</i>	They do not mix with the soil
<i>Aar tahar tole</i>	<i>Saa nijut basar dhari</i>	For 100 million years
<i>mayura mayuri</i>	<i>Biyojan nahay</i>	it does not decompose
<i>Shunye uraye taala</i>	<i>Tenekoie paari roy he</i>	It lies as it is
<i>Gosaiji kon ronge</i>	<i>Sunachun moinahat</i>	Listen o children
<i>Baalya na kaal gelo</i>	<i>Aai bidh padartha</i>	This thing

<i>Hasite khelite</i>	<i>Bababar karute</i>	while using
<i>Joubon kaal gelo ronge</i>	<i>Sabadhan hoba nischoy,</i>	be careful
<i>Aar bridho na kaal gelo</i>	<i>Dustbinat bharai</i>	Put them in a dustbin
<i>Bhabite bhabite</i>	<i>Ekeloge jamai</i>	together
<i>Guru bhojibo kun kale</i>	<i>Duroit puti pelaba</i>	in faraway place, put in a pit
<i>Gosaji kon ronge</i>	<i>Sunachun moinahat</i>	Listen o children

(The contextualised song has been coined by Mrs. Charu Devi, Teacher, Mangaldoi Town Girls' H.S. School, Mangaldoi, Assam during a workshop for development of such materials. Visit www.evsandassam.org for the video of the contextualised song.)

Similarly, other folk songs can also be used for different concepts in EVS, viz. solid waste management, bio diversity, natural resources, etc.

Conclusion

It only takes doing these and other activities once, and then they will always be a part of teaching; and the real beauty of it is that many skills are being developed simultaneously. The important trick is to find good songs, good materials which are stimulating for the students. The good stuff is there. It will take a little effort to find but once you find the jewels, they are there forever! Students in turn can add to this Pandora's Box.

REFERENCES

- HARRIS, S. RUTH. 2002. Song as a Tool for Content Area Learning. (www.SongsForTeaching.com).
- NCERT. 2005. *National Curriculum Framework, 2005*. pp.140.
- PETERSON, E. 1998. Music for every classroom: Listening with a purpose. (www.theinspiredclassroom.com)