

Orchids Series Classes III–V

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The roots of all Indian literature can be traced to the rich oral literatures of various primitive societies. The oral narratives, transmitted from generation to generation, have survived for centuries. Folktales is our legacy from the past, what we live today and what we pass on to future generations.

Folktales, generally traditional oral narratives, are an important facet of tribal identity. As emphasised in the UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), folktales reflect indigenous wisdom, knowledge, notions of justice and social obligations, embodying the hopes and aspirations of a tight-knit group.

The preservation of tribal identity, culture and values remains a point of concern in today's world. Changing developmental paradigms such as exposure to science and technology, globalisation and floating population has resulted in a widening of horizons; unfortunately, it has also paved the way for gradual and often

intangible erosion of identity, culture and mother tongues. There is a need to familiarise young learners with folktales that represent the enormous wealth of oral tribal literature.

Arunachal Pradesh is home to twenty-seven major and minor tribes, each with its own distinct language with vocabulary, syntax and grammar at wide variance with each other. English, thus, serves as a *via media*; indeed, it is the official State language.

Arunachal Pradesh has been the first state in India to work on a series of folktales in English, titled 'Orchids'. Initially, a set of thirty tales from sixteen major tribes, had been placed in reading corners in Classes I and II across the state, not as prescribed texts, but meant to supplement reading. The success of this endeavour resulted in the development of tribal tales for Classes III–V. Orchids not only represents a significant landmark in safeguarding the cultural heritage of the region, but also meets the twin

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goals of quality education and the perpetuation of Indian ethos.

The project reflects continued collaboration of both State and centre levels: the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) Arunachal Pradesh, with inputs from the various cultural and tribal societies, with academic support from the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi, funded by the MHRD.

The folktales for Classes III-V were chosen from the tribes that were spread across eleven districts of Arunachal Pradesh: Tangsa, Singpho, Adi, Mishmi, Khamti, Wangcho, Apatani, Nyishi, Nocte, Galo, Miji, Tagin, Monpa and Sherdukpen.

These folktales existed originally in the tribal languages. The effort made in translating them into English, choosing only those tales that have relevance to school students in the twenty-first century, has naturally brought about some loss of the original flavour and spirit. However, a sincere effort was made to minimise the loss, by involving members of the Cultural Society of various tribes. Moreover, if it were not for such efforts, these folktales would have diminished into nothingness.

The story 'A Wise Judgement' is based on the gap and the social positions between the rich and the poor, and how it affects the judgement of the people around about the same. It also highlights the concept of righteousness and morality.

The story 'The Mithun and the Tiger' cautions people of the necessity

of keeping secrets, or at least to think before speaking.

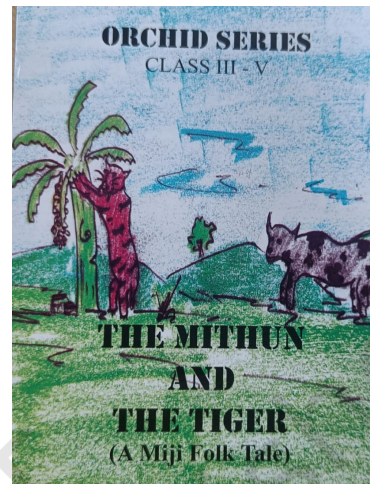


Figure 1: *The Mithun and The Tiger*

The story 'Twin Suns and Twin Moons' highlights the courses of day and night and the relationship of it with the routines we follow. The concept of having one sun and one moon ensures discipline in the lives of the native people.

The story 'Palo Talo and Arii Miidi' highlights the concept of moral and

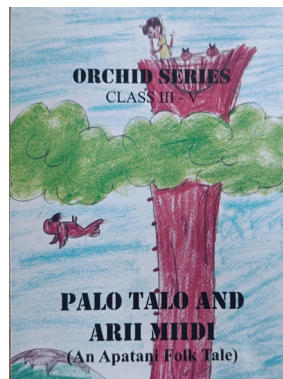


Figure 2: *'Palo Talo and Arii Miidi'*

physical strength in coordination with nature. Amidst the diversity of flora and fauna, it is about devoting one's effort in protecting the right and killing the evil.

The story '*Boum Ka-Kir*' and '*Nanyi Ga-Gi*' indicates a specific ethnobotanical knowledge and cultural practices. It also highlights the significance of values in living with a family. It highlights love and belongingness.

The story 'How the Owl Got the Sunken Eyes' recognises the learning embedded in local living traditions and how the concept of day and night came into being; along with that it also addresses why and how the owl sleeps during day and is awake during night

The story 'The Man Who First Tamed the Buffaloes' bears testimony to the way of life that prevailed in the region after man could tame the otherwise hyperactive buffaloes and immortalise the sanctity of the union between nature and man. Wherein, if nature or animals can damage, they can protect too. It also signifies that the world of tribal imagination is very different from that of the modern society.

The folktales reflect the tribal imagination which fuses the natural

and the supernatural, the animate with the inanimate. In tribal folktales, animals and birds speak to humans, or the sun and stars may visit the earth. This is not to say that tribal folktales have no rules, but merely to emphasise that the principle of association of human emotion to nature is very strong. Thus, stars, sky, trees, humans, and gods can experience fear, joy, sorrow and jealousy.

Teachers may emphasise that literature is not only written texts, but should be widened to include all oral narratives. The illustrations are deceptively simple, with short dark lines that, almost miraculously, create an ambience of sky, fields, houses and people. They also appear to be easily comprehensible and relatable to the children for them to draw and picture stories without using the language, necessarily. The use of varied colours also makes it attractive for children to read and understand the context, and thereafter, the entire story.

This series presents the diachronic study of orality and literacy which encompasses not only pristine orality and subsequent chirographic in these folk tales, but also the print and later electronic media, which build on oral and writing cultures.