

The Eminent Children's Folktales of Asia and Their Teachings

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Abstract

Folktales form the core of any culture and tradition. They help us peep into the wonderful world of tradition and beliefs followed by the people of each country. They even help in teaching life lessons to the children and the future generations of each nation.

Keywords

Folktale, Asia, children, teaching

Introduction

The Asian culture is also full of folktales of myriad hues. The Folk Tales revolving around children are especially important as they perform the task of teaching them lessons of life on a regular basis. Many of them are narrated orally from one generation to another and because of the strong lessons that they imbibe to the children, they are taught these folktales as a part of the country's school curriculum too.

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One of the eminent Folktales of Japan, which is popularly read by children is " The Two Frogs" The Two Frogs narrates the story of two frogs. One of them lived in a ditch near the town of Osaka. The other lived in a stream in the town of Kyoto. Although both lived far apart, both had the same idea at the same time. They wanted to travel around the world. The Frog who lived in Osaka wanted to visit Kyoto and the frog who lived in Kyoto wanted to visit Osaka. Both reached on a mountain top and decided to touch each other, while they stood on their hind legs. They felt that by doing so they would be able to see, the towns that each wished to see. But unfortunately, the foolish frogs did not realize that

they were looking at their town and not the other one. It was because, when they stood up their large eyes were at the back of their heads.

Yet they felt extremely happy with the thought that they had seen the other town and moreover it was similar to their own town. " Dear me ! " cried the Osaka frog. " Kyoto looks exactly like Osaka. Why then make such a long journey? I might as well go home!" The Kyoto frog too felt the same and returned home and they still believe that both the towns appear the same.

Thus, this folk tale teaches young learners never to assume things before seeing the conclusion or the complete story.

The Folk Tales and legends of Thailand were often used by elders to instill beliefs in the children. Most of these stories contain a moral lesson and teach young children the importance of following traditions and displaying reverence to parents and superiors.

One of the eminent folk tales for children based in Thailand is " The Girl Who Wore Too Much". It happens to be a cautionary folktale based in Thailand. It is told by Pu _ Thai of northeastern Thailand. It imparts the value of staying away from vanity and gives more importance to the value of friendship.

The story surrounds a girl who is spoilt and too greedy. She is taken by the beauty of her clothes and she wears them all at once. In the original story, she dies due to excessive heat but in the version, which is retold by Margaret Read MacDonald, she collapses due to wearing excessive clothes and misses a dance performance, where she was to perform with all her friends.

It's after, she collapses that she learns to appreciate the company of her friends, who forgive her. Slowly she learns to take pleasure in wearing one set of clothing at a time. The readers sympathize with the girl and realize, why she finds it so difficult in choosing what not to wear.

The teachers could add up discussions surrounding the questions like " Why are Chinese people in Thailand?" " Why do Thai Men dress that way? "etc.

The Chinese Folktales are aimed to teach children, the core cultural beliefs and practices of the Chinese people. In an article written by Howard Giskin (A professor of English at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina), with the title" Using Chinese Folktales in Classroom", he has highlighted that" Teaching Chinese Folktales is challenging but ultimately rewarding activity, that can be a way to teach students core cultural beliefs and practices of the Chinese people."

The eminent Chinese folktale with the title " The Magic Kettle", stresses the idea that no matter where you are, or who you are, when you are blessed with good fortune, it is your responsibility to share your luck with others.

It is set in the middle of Jinagxi Province, high in the mountains where an old man lived in his little wooden house. One day he spotted an old rusty iron kettle, which he had never seen in his house. As he cleaned it and poured some water to boil in it, he saw it taking the form of a fox. The old man then took his friend's help and kept the fox inside a wooden box. He was afraid that the fox might attack them. Finally, they decided to sell it to Wang, a tradesman.

Wang arrived and later bought the old iron kettle and later at night, he realized how it could turn into a fox. By the next morning, he too wanted to get rid of the kettle but on a friend's suggestion, he set a booth, near his house and invited people to witness the most amazing sight. He allowed people to touch the kettle and feel it and soon commanded it to turn into a fox. Then he would ask the fox to dance, all this amused the spectators and soon he made a lot of money.

It was at this point that he decided to share his treasure with the old man from whom he had bought the kettle.

Bhutanese folktales involve a mission of cultivating Buddhist values and virtues in the common man's life and for this very sake, they involve the common man's life. Folktales in

Bhutan have a mission to transfer knowledge along with entertainment. It has been a tool to transfer ideals and values from one generation to another.

The Story of Raven and the Owl is a popular Bhutanese folk tale retold in simple English by Rinzin Rinzin. This folktale comes with a lesson of how jealousy can ruin a friendship forever. The story is about two friends, a raven with beautiful, colorful feathers and a Mountain Scops owl with dull gray feathers. One day, the owl requests the raven to paint its feathers and make them beautiful. The raven agrees to do so on the condition that the owl paints its feathers too. The raven paints his friend beautifully, but on the contrary, the Owl feels jealous of the raven and paints it completely black. Its after this incident, that the owl hides throughout the day in the hollow trunk of the walnut tree and his friendship with the raven has been ruined permanently.

The folktales of India are full of wit and wisdom and many of them impart the knowledge of using ones presence of mind judiciously during difficult and challenging times. The Story of The Old Humpback is one such folktale written in Bengali by Upendra Kishore RayChoudhury and later translated by Paushali Ganguli. In this folktale, the Old Humpback, who is on the way to reach her granddaughter's house is confronted by a fox, a tiger and a bear. Each time she uses her presence of mind skillfully and avoids being eaten by them. She assures them that on her return they could eat her, for she will be " all fattened " by then.

Similarly, while returning, she asks her granddaughter to put her inside the shell of a large gourd, so that none of the animals can eat her up. The rhyming song of " Gourd a _ rolling, gourd a _ rolling, Eating flattened rice and tamarind..." makes it an interesting read for the children, while they associate themselves with the important lesson of using the presence of mind and overcoming challenging situations.

Conclusion

Thus, the eminent Folktales of Asia are not only entertaining but impart great valuable lessons for generations making it a must-read for children. As they read the folktales of the

Asian countries, they take a peep into the culture and traditions of each Asian country and learn to implement similar values in their day-to-day life too.

About the Author

Aditi Lahiry is an English and French Language trainer. She is passionate about writing poems, Short Stories and articles. Her works has been published in various anthologies including " Shakti:The Epitome of Power published by Asian Literary Society and compiled by Manoj Krishnan Sir. She presently stays in Hyderabad with her family.

