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The world of Indian Stories: a teaching resource of folktales from every state
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Notes on Tale Types

As teachers, tellers, and scholars explore the world of storytelling and oral traditions, they often use several tools to explore story connections. Several of the books that list folk tale types and motifs do not include many stories from recent Asian collections; however, they still give us a comparative tool of some use. In this list, I've suggested types and motifs from the two references below, and shared some of the variants found. I hope this will help teachers to understand the "shared experience" of stories through the commonality of themes, motifs, and characters.

Aarne, Antti and Stith Thompson. *The Types of the Folktale*. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1960. (FF Communication 184). This classic collection of tale types (each type labeled AT below), lists hundreds of separate types of tales. In FF Communication 180, from the same Academia in 1960, *Types of Indic Oral Tales* are covered by Thompson and Warren E. Roberts. A supplement to that was published by the Academia in 1989 by Heda Jason, as FF Communication 242.

MacDonald, Margaret Read and B. Sturm. *The Storyteller's Sourcebook*. Two volumes are now published, both from Gale Group, N.Y. (The motifs used in this book come from Stith Thompson's famous, multi-volume *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, listing thousands of themes and motifs found in folk tales; labelled below with Motif before a letter and number.)

Andhra Pradesh *A Ruby Returned*

Although Indian tricksters like Birbal at Akbar's court, Gopal Bhand of Bengal and Tenali Rama of Vijayanagara have all solved problems and found culprits, this tale features a "true" judge who uses wit to solve many of his cases. The story illustrates tale type AT 926 C - The clever judge. Other famous judges in world folklore include Princess Learned-in-the-Law of Myanmar, Judge Ooka of Japan, Judge Bao of China, and Judge Rabbit of Cambodia.

Arunachal Pradesh *A Porcupine's Tricks*

The trickster tale is one of the most popular genres in Indian and worldwide folklore, known as type 1539 - Tricksters and their victims. Smaller, weaker animal tricksters (Motif J 1117) frequently outwit larger creatures in many cultures. However, the porcupine is not a common trickster figure, which adds interest to this tale. A few of the more usual animal tricksters include Coyote of Mexico, Kancil the mousedeer of Indonesia and

Malaysia, Raven of Northwest Native Americans, and the fox in much of Europe, China, Korea, and Japan.

Assam *A Fair Deal*

An arrogant ruler is humbled in this tale of animal teamwork (illustrating Motif L400 - Pride brought low, and B299.1 - Animals take revenge on man). The animal army is not a common theme, but the loyalty of the little animal (frog) to the old couple is more familiar. Similar tales of small animals helping humans can be found from the Northwest Coast of Canada where a tiny mouse helps a girl escape to the friendly bees that save a Balinese woman from an attack.

Bihar *Baawan Ganga*

Here is a tale with a rich range of themes and characters, one in which the humans and animals work in total harmony to defy even the heavens. The parrot often plays an important role in folk stories as a helper of humans, just as Puss-in-Boots does in a European Tale. The role of the clever woman is an important one, too (AT 875 - The clever peasant girl), and found in many cultures; this heroine impresses us not just with her wisdom but also with her kindness. Finally, the story ends with an origin motif - A910 (Origin of water features) - as it explains the origin of the small pool named Baawan Ganga.

Chhattisgarh *The Karam Story*

A very important theme for today is shared here: to hurt a tree is to hurt a human. Good fortune is tied to respecting Nature is seen as well in the rich tale, "A Flowering Tree," from Karnataka. The importance of honoring and caring for nature is a theme found especially among Native American and other indigenous peoples even today. Variants are found in other tribal traditions in India and in Hindi and Kashmiri. The tale reminds us that song and dance are vital to life, as it shares the origin of a special dance (Motif A1542 - Origin of religious dances).

Delhi *The Lost Camel / The Lost Money*

The first tale, of the camel, is not widely told, but there are many other tales of wisdom that remind us all to use our eyes to nurture our brains. The second tale is one of the many about Birbal, the beloved Indian trickster (related to Motif J 1124 - Clever court jester). There are several famous tales of both Birbal and the South Indian wit Tenali Rama as they expose court corruption; this tale seems to be less known. Birbal, as a court wit, bears a great resemblance to Trang Quynh of Vietnam and A-Chey of Cambodia.

Goa *The Foolish Farmers of Moira*

Towns of foolish people are found around the world: Gotham in England, Chelm in Poland, Lagos in Mexico, Schildburg of Germany, to name a few. Moira's inhabitants, like those in other towns named, try to move buildings by pushing them, plant and harvest in strange ways, make silly bargains, and do much more. The

unusual planting method in this tale resembles AT 1201 (The ploughing), one of the many such tale types. The more unusual tale of a language mix-up in church, however, reflects the faith and blend of cultures found in Goa.

Gujarat *The Wisdom Seller*

A shrewd young man doles out wisdom and lives by his wits (AT 1542: The clever boy) in a story echoed in Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Punjabi, Tamil, and Telugu. The giving of advice is a popular theme (AT 910 - The good precepts), whether the advice comes from a sadhu, a wise woman, a fellow traveller, or a young person. Three pieces of advice are often given (or sold) and they usually result in a fortune gained or a life saved.

Haryana *True Strength*

In an unexpected twist, quite by accident, the rakshas here imparts a lesson in family values. The importance of unity is stressed in tales from "Nyangara" of West Africa (where children unite to save their leader) to the story of the carpenter's fingers (that refuse to work together and thus harm the body) in Laos. The Indian rakshas is often a fierce creature, similar to the oni of Japan, the tokaebi of Korea, and the ogre of European tales; but all of them at times can be fooled or scared, and can show kindness, too.

Himachal Pradesh *The Hunt*

Another rakshas, or creature, interacts with a human here but must change her form to entice him, as in AT 424 - Youth wed to a she-devil. The foxes of East Asia are especially known for similar transformations into beautiful, but ultimately dangerous women. This story warns listeners not to trust appearances or strangers; such tales were often told to teenagers in Native American and African cultures, with a snake, monkey or other animal appearing as a handsome, yet harmful, stranger.

Jharkhand *The First Plough*

This tale reminds listeners of gender injustice and the power that male gods had (and still have) in some cultures. The story is also an origin tale sharing the invention of the plough, a variant of AT 1400 - Origin of human culture and, as such, can be compared with origin tales worldwide.

Jammu and Kashmir *Suyya and the River*

This story of a resourceful engineer moved from early writings in Kashmir into oral legends. The character has parallels with other early inventors and engineers: the Mayans of Mexico and the Egyptians who built amazing pyramids, the South Indian temple builders, Korea's Admiral Yi Sun Sin who invented the armored Turtle Boat to save his land from invaders, among many.

Karnataka *The Laughing Pearl Necklace*

One of countless quest stories found worldwide, this one follows AT 460B - The journey in search of fortune.

The decision of this hero to take books as a reward, though unusual, is certainly a wise one. The help of a supernatural being is also common in folklore, although most do not laugh in pearls. Similar tales of a quest are recorded in Assamese, Bengali, Gondi, Hindi, Kota, Punjabi, Santhali, and Tamil.

Kerala *The Guru*

A lesson in humility is very well wrapped in this tale of martial arts. Similar teaching tales used in martial arts training were found in Japan, Korea and China, and among the European knights of old. Qualities beyond valour were stressed in many such traditions. The motifs in this tale include Q66 - Humility rewarded, and Q86 - Reward for industry.

Madya Pradesh *Buying a Song*

A tale to remind us that anything is of use - even words heard accidentally. Similar tales include the American "Old One-Eye" where an old woman scares away a one-eyed thief, and "On Choro-Choro" from Japan about an old couple who chant words about a mouse and frighten a thief. Other tales are recorded in Bengali, Gondi, Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Punjabi, Rajasthani, and Tamil.

Maharashtra *Parvatibai and the Dacoits*

Tales of clever women are told around the world: some trick with words, some with strength and cunning, and some with kindness. The use of hospitality and gentleness to win over the robbers is wonderful indeed. A tale type would be AT 750B - Hospitality rewarded. Tales of hospitality are still told often in Japan, Korea, India, and in many non-Western countries.

Manipur *Journey to the Sun*

This elaborate story has several motifs and types flowing through it. The healing plant is found in other tales having AT 612 - The three snake leaves. The friendship between man and dog is related to a powerful theme in Korea and Japan folklore: a dog sacrificing himself for his master. The actual journey to the sun is a theme of the quest, while the chase scene is a form of Motif D672 - Obstacle flight. His happy return reminds us of Rip Van Winkle in the U.S. and Urashima Taro in Japan, who both return home to find much has changed.

Meghalaya *A Tale of the Eclipse*

Another rich story with many layers, this tale is as well an origin tale to explain the eclipse. But there are also the motifs of kidnapping, the escape from a monster by help of a small animal (AT 75 - Help of the weak), the transformation of the girl (Motif D 195.3 - Girl to frog) and the destruction of a disguise, similar to the famous Frog Prince of Germany and elsewhere.

Mizoram *The Munia and the Dove*

Chain tales are told and loved throughout the world; they are found under the category Formula Tales. This story is one of the variants with the theme: "Who's to Blame?"

Some such tales give an origin note at the end, as this does, others do not. Similar tales include a story of the otter seeking justice from King Solomon when her children are killed by weasel, the Filipino tale of the mosquito who causes destruction, and the Chilean tale of tenca the songbird who is hurt by the snow, all examples of AT 2042A - Trial among the animals.

Nagaland Of Two Worlds

This tale of love between two different worlds has variants abroad and even in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*. In Japan, the similar story of the sky-maiden and cow herder is celebrated on a special day in the Tanabata Festival. The motif of a magic object is also widespread, as is the theme of the human's search for his wife: AT 400 - Man on a quest for his lost wife.

Orissa Rani Shuka Dei

A simple legend that shares two important themes: the physical bravery and skill of the ruler (W 32 - Bravery), and the kindness and compassion that she showed (W11 - Generosity). Although there are tales of heroic or strong women, the added mercy at the end is not always found. And, sadly, there are still not as many stories, true or traditional, of female rulers. Ahalyabhai Holkar of Indore, India would be another worthy example of such a brave and enlightened ruler.

Punjab Very Hungry Man

Here is a 'fool tale', plain and simple. The foolish bridegroom (AT 1685) and son-in-law (AT 1685A) are extremely popular themes worldwide (more than the foolish daughter-in-law or bride!). Often, the 'fool' is given advice when he goes to visit in-laws. Usually, although he tries, things don't work out. In many tales, he gets into trouble through his stomach: stuffing raw eggs in his mouth (Sheikh Chili), getting covered with cotton in Nepal, hitting his father-in-law in a Tibetan tale.

Rajasthan Lightning Strikes

By a twist of fate, the outcome is the opposite of what is expected in this tale, with variants recorded in Hindi, Kashmiri, Punjabi and in much of Europe and North America. A motif would be N130 - Changing of luck or fate.

Sikkim Sweet Potatoes

Here is a tragic origin tale. Perhaps since a bird's cry often echoes a human voice, origin tales abound about birds (Motif D150 - Transformation of man to bird). Many such tales share sorrow: often the human becomes a bird because s/he is unkind, selfish, or disobedient. At other times, the human turned bird is the victim of cruelty and becomes a bird to haunt or torment. The theme of famine and great hardship also is found in folklore, often with unhappy endings, as in the Lao tale of children abandoned during a famine, who turn into monkeys of the woods.

Tamilnadu Kumanan's Sacrifice

The words in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* - "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" - seem suited to the envy and greed that threaten the land as the story unfolds. The theme of a feud and jealousy between blood brothers is an old one - from the Biblical Cain and Abel through the many folktales of brothers abandoned or hurt. The reigns of righteous rulers were often praised in older Indian literature and folklore; stories of just kings from Ashoka of India to Sejong of Korea have entered into the repertoires of storytellers and writers. But the clever, unusual trick of the banana stalk head could work only in the tropics.

Tripura Sacred River

In this tale of union between two worlds, the ending is happier than the one from Nagaland. Separation still occurs, as does misunderstanding and prejudice (Motif T97 - Father opposed to daughter's marriage), yet husband and wife remain together and help their relatives. The theme of the jealous wives who substitute objects for children to hurt the co-wife is also widespread. These several themes intertwine to create the story of Tripura's origin.

Uttaranchal A Learning Journey

Another quest tale: AT 460B - The journey in search of fortune. One man's quest soon turns into a search for several answers, as he collects questions from others on his way. When he faithfully asks and then receives answers, he is able to help both others and himself. Story quests can lead one under the sea, up to the heavens, across the ocean, but one of the most beautiful settings must surely be the Himalayas that form the backdrop for this tale.

Uttar Pradesh Sheikh Chili and the Khichdi / Going Shopping

Foolish fellows are loved everywhere; they make us feel so smart! Sheikh Chili is a most popular character in U.P., and his tales are enjoyed in much of North India. They often make mistakes in instructions or in words remembered, as Sheikh Chili does here (AT 1204 - Fool keeps repeating instructions), Elsewhere in Asia, a Chinese fellow ends up congratulating those at a funeral and offering sympathy to those at a wedding while Pak Pandir, the popular Malay character mislabels a tiger as a policeman and winds up in trouble.

West Bengal Strange Friends

People, animals, and objects often work together to outwit thieves and monsters in folklore, sharing Motif K1161 - Animals hidden in house to attack. In Vietnam, a long list of objects cause the death of an evil creature, and in Japan's popular "Monkey and Crab," the crab's children revenge their mother's death with the help of an egg, a mortar, a needle, and more. This tale is especially nice, however, because it ends with the woman's kindness and the raja's respect. ❖