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Digital Narration of Mizo Folk Stories

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Abstract

The Mizo tribe, nestled in the southernmost tip of North-East India, have numerous tales and lores which are infused with the wisdom, beliefs, values, and traditions of its culture and society; and these values and beliefs are transmitted from generation to generation, originally through oral presentation. Since the 1980s, when the written script was introduced by the Christian Missionaries, a large number of oral narratives have been documented and analysed and the Mizo society and culture have also undergone a huge transformation. In recent time, the advancement in digital technology has somehow shifted the art of storytelling; from a person next to us to a voice that is heard and seen through digital devices. "Digital storytelling" is a relatively new term which describes the new practice of everyday people who use digital tools to tell their story. The use of digital devices for storytelling has seen a rapid rise within the Mizo society in the past years. Using captivating animations, vibrant colours, and engaging sound effects, the digital narrations captures the essence of Mizo culture and storytelling. This paper aims to present a study of the rise in digital creators within the realm of Mizo folk lores and tales, and their impact on the society.

Keywords: Folktales, folklores, myth, oral narratives, digital storytelling, digital narrations, culture and society

Introduction

Folk tales or folk stories has an important place in every tribal culture, serving as a medium to transmit its cultures, values, beliefs, traditions, from one generation to another. They are mostly oral narratives that do not have an identifiable single author. Expanded and shaped by the tellers over time, and passed down from one generation to another, and cannot be viewed with scientific measurement and accuracy. This ancient form of narrative communication for both education and entertainment, not only offers a window into other cultures, but also can be a revealing mirror of the comedy and pathos of our lives (Dr. KC Lalthlamuani & Lalruatmawii 2019) [6].

Like any other people or community not only in India but also in the outside world, the Mizo people also have numerous tales and lores which are orally passed on from earlier generations. These oral tales and lores aid in the formation of customary laws, in the understanding of one's cultural history, and can be identified as 'Myth', 'Legend', and 'Folktales'. Folk stories represent the ideals, dreams, and traditions of a particular society, as mentioned, and they provide a great opportunity to study the past which is undeniably linked with the present (Dr. Laltluangliana Khiangete, 2008) [3]. Though there are certain variations from region to region, there are found genuine resemblances among the tales which have been told by different groups of Mizo who are living in different region, country and administrative areas. There is a saying among the Mizo that a tale narrated even by two brothers can sometimes be different in its narrative. Therefore, groups of

people of different dialects have had genuine resemblances in their tales, however, the title of the stories vary owing to possession of different dialects by these different groups. As such, different groups of Mizo community who are living in different states of India and elsewhere in Myanmar or Bangladesh have folktales which must have originated from the same place and same time. Similarities of folktales among the different groups of Mizo who are speaking different dialects can have better bond of relationship, say, integration amongst them on the basis of the folktales which have been passed on from generation to generation (Lianhmingthanga 2006) [8].

Narration and Narrative Technique

Cambridge Dictionary defines 'narration' as 'the act of telling a story', and *Wikipedia* defines it as 'the use of a written or spoken commentary to convey a story to an audience'. Mizo folk stories are orally transmitted from generation to generation, and it is only in the past few years that written form of oral folk stories are seen and published which has tremendously helped in the preservation of these folk stories. Before development in the form of information technology reached Mizo society, storytelling was a useful tool for creating family bonding as well as a means of recreation; story time was essentially one of the most favourite times for the children. Grown up reminisce on the times spent on listening to their favourite stories from their childhood; where grandparents would tell stories to their grandchildren and thus pass on the tradition and culture of one's community. It was

essentially a time where families get together, huddled in front of the fire-place or in bed, and children eagerly listening to the narration from the elders. The art of narration depended on the conveyor of the stories, and the interests invoked would naturally be determined by the creativity of the storyteller.

In recent times, the advancement in digital technology has somehow shifted the art of storytelling, from a person next to us to a voice that is heard from digital media. Digital narrating is storytelling that uses digital technologies. "Digital storytelling" is a relatively new term which describes the new practice of everyday people who use digital tools to tell their 'story'. Digital stories often present in compelling and emotionally engaging formats, and can be interactive. The term "digital storytelling" can also cover a range of digital narratives (web-based stories, interactive stories, hypertexts, and narrative computer games); it is sometimes used to refer to film-making in general, and as of late, it has been used to describe advertising and promotion efforts by commercial and non-profit enterprises (Trevor J.Blank 2014) ^[1].

Digital Narration

One can define digital storytelling or digital narration as the process by which diverse peoples share their life stories and creative imaginings with others. This newer form of storytelling emerged with the advent of accessible media production techniques, hardware and software, including but not limited to digital cameras, digital voice recorders, iMovie, Microsoft Photos, Final Cut Express and WeVideo. These new technologies allow individuals to share their stories over the Internet on YouTube, Vimeo, compact discs, podcasts, and other electronic distribution systems.

Trevor J. Blank, an Assistant Professor of communication at the State University of New York at Poledam, in an interview on "Understanding Folk Culture in the Digital Age" held that since 2007 he has seen definite shifts in how folklore and various elements of folk culture are created and transmitted online. He emphasised that there has been a greater shift towards "visuality"-tending to have some kind of eye-catching component in the content and what we often see are people adapting to the new expressive tools they have at their disposal.

One can think of digital storytelling as the modern extension of the ancient art of storytelling, now interwoven with digitized still and moving images and sounds. Thanks to new media and digital technologies, individuals can approach storytelling from unique perspectives. In this context, narration of folk stories has seen a paradigm shift in the Mizo contemporary society as well. The years 2019-2021 witnessed a rapid rise in the creation of Mizo folk stories narration channels on Youtube, one of the easiest and most affordable digital innovation and easily accessible form of media channel. These channels have seen an undeniable popularity, a spike in their viewers and subscribers as well. The first Mizo folk story adapted into a digital form of narration on You tube, created by the name of "azassk", "Tlingi leh Ngama" in 2013, has no more than 17k viewers, while "Mauruangi" digitally narrated by Pc Hras in his You Tube channel, uploaded on 5th July 2019, has more than 1.1million views. There are, at present, a number of digitally narrated folktales, lore and myths of outstanding amount of viewership and channels.

Challenges and Impact

Digital narration, however, is no easy task which can be produced by just anyone who has the urge and enthusiasm. Vanlalhruaia, the creator of Pc Hras channel is a cartoonist by profession and has utilised his creative talent to create a visual form of narration. In preparation for creating digital storytelling channel, he surfed the internet, got hold of all the books on Mizo folk stories within his reach and listened and stored the narratives of the elders. Producing visual narratives demand creativity as well as familiarity of digital technology and a five minute digital narration video could take up to more than five hours of editing and narrating. These digital narrations present a shift from an inanimate storytelling towards visual art, and interweave eye-catching components in their art of story-telling, therefore creating a platform for the rise in their number of audiences in the digital space.

Vanlalhruaia, in a telephonic interview commented that when he first started digitally narrating stories in his YouTube channel on the 3rd of November 2018, there had been other channels but of very few viewerships. A spike in viewership happened drastically from the year 2019, as well as a rise in the creations of digital storytelling of Mizo folk and contemporary stories' channels. Pc Hras alone has two YouTube channels 'Pc Hras-Mizo' with 288k followers and 'Pc Hras-Thu Ngaihnaawm Huang' with 586k followers, more than 50 folk stories, a number of short horror incidents and stories of popular interests digitally narrated in his channels. "Aizawl Radio" and "ZOFLIX" are two upcoming popular YouTube channels with a rise in their viewers and subscribers. Channels like 'Mizo Tualchher Cartoon', 'Mizo Cartoon', 'Monalisa Mizoram' are also on the lists. These channels bring the traditional stories to life in a new and exciting way.

The art of narration in digital storytelling somehow differs from the traditional form of story-telling. Their eye-catching components and visual renditions of the stories narrated triggers interests in the viewers and listeners, in people of different ages. Digital narrations of Mizo folk stories, lores and myths essentially heighten and increase knowledge, and somehow, an understanding of the values, beliefs, traditions of Mizo culture and its ethos. However, as is with any form of technological development, there are obvious areas where the pros and cons of digital storytelling are recognized in the society. Contemporary 'story time' is no longer a time where members of a family huddle together to listen to the voices of the elders. Gone is the era where a sense of communion and bonding between family members could be accomplished from a simple act of storytelling.

Conclusion

Easier access to means of communication paved way for a 'change' in Mizo society; a kind of vacuum in the close-knit communitarian society, a change which disintegrates rather than unite. Gradual change in individualism is slowly being witnessed. Another concern which could arise from digital narration of folk stories is with the issues of traditions and time. One questions whether the instantaneous creation, dissemination, and consumption of online content is conducive to cultural growth.

But, an argument equally imperative here is that every society undergoes gradual changes with the passage of time. The folk attitudes regarding social structures, gender relations, spiritual beliefs and practices which are at the core of these tales and lore are at some level disseminated and sustained through digital narrations. Digital narration of Mizo folktales not only

entertain but also teach valuable lessons. The animations in digital narration videos vividly showcase and emphasize the importance of kindness, respect, bravery, environmental awareness which are intrinsically connected to the beliefs and values of Mizo culture, the consequences of actions leaving lasting impressions on the viewers as well. Through these digital narrations, the fascinating world of Mizo folktales become accessible to people of all ages, bouncing beyond man made boundaries through digital devices. The audiences can immerse themselves in the rich cultural heritage of Mizo people, appreciating the traditions and values passed down through generations. The digital narrations of Mizo folktales presents the captivating tales to life in a modern and engaging format. Through the use of animation, sound effects, and narration, these digital adaptations captivate audiences while preserving the essence of Mizo culture and its beliefs, values, traditions and all its valuable lessons.

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