UNIT 2 EDITING MYTHS, LEGENDS, FABLES, ADAPTATIONS AND ABRIDGED VERSIONS

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 Introduction
6.2 In search of editing well
   6.2.1 Editing the dramatic content
   6.2.2 Editing dialogues
   6.2.3 Characterization
   6.2.4 Editing plot and theme
   6.2.5 Maintaining suspense
6.3 Let us sum up
6.4 Check your progress: possible answers
6.5 Activities
6.6 References and further readings

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will specifically look at the skills needed by an editor to edit legends, myths and fables. He will become equipped to understand:

- the meaning of legends, myths and fables;
- what goes into its design and production; and
- the needs of the publishing industry and children.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Legends, myths, tales and other related stories are an essential part of folk narratives. Prose narratives are capable of intense communication as it found in several regional languages and in the local history. Children also respond well to such stories. Therefore, it is important to know how to edit such stories specifically. Let us now analyze what each category of these narratives mean. Legends are short, oral prose narratives, created by the people and passed from one generation to another. The stories are rather unusual, extra normal, fantastic or metaphysical. The bearers of such legends identify them as an account or a chronicle. The Grimm brothers collected several legends.

The **legend** has no definitive text and is often a part of informal communication. They often are ordinary situations with an extraordinary twist. They emerge out of social contexts and interactions and their themes are varied such as murder, violence, revenge, warnings, pleasant surprises, embarrassing situations and practical jokes. They have no single meaning and can be informative and entertaining.

A **myth**, on the other hand, is a narrative defining cultural and religious beginnings. These refer to the beginnings in a sacred sense. Myths have heroes and archetypes and are often coded with metaphors. Myths are often held as true by the members of the society. They are also often sacred and follow a mystical and poetic language.
Popular myths in India are divided into three categories. They deal with mythical gods, goddesses and sages. Many of the myths of our country are about the Gods like Shiva and Vishnu. We come across many accounts about the marriage of Shiva or the birth of his sons Ganesha and Kartikeya. Many stories about the goddesses Lakshmi, Parvati and Saraswati are popular. Many popular myths also refer to the Saptarishis or the seven sages. Many narratives pertain to the origin of towns and places. For example, the town of Meerut refers to the Demon Mai and Mandodari, the wife of Ravana and the daughter of Mai. Meerut is closely connected with the Mai Rastra (kingdom of Mai). The place of Kurukshetra is associated with battle field where the Kauravas are said to have fought with the Pandavas.

There are many myths connected with places of worship and religions. Many pilgrim spots are said to cure and reward persons. For instance, it is popularly believed that the Dargah of Kwaja Mouninuddin Chisti at Ajmer cures illnesses. There are many narratives regarding historical incidents like that of the Mughal King Akbar and Aurangzeb. The adventures of Jhansi Rajni Laksmi Bai and Haadi Rani are very popular.

Another popular form of narrative texts is folk tales that can be described to be a narrative plot that presents an outline of events. There are many variations found in the plot which have many genres like animal tales, magic tales, romantic tales and humorous tales. The tales do not rest on a single plot and have many episodes and sequences of events.

The folk tales are popular and they serve the purpose of entertainment and amusement. They deal with various and problems of human life, social customs and traditions, taboos and sanctions, folk beliefs (omens and superstitions) blessings and curses. The fables reflect upon the morals and characters of human beings, behavior patterns, tact and wisdom and the ideals of life.

A large number of sayings and proverbs are also found in the tales and some reflect upon social and familial relations like between parents and children, husband and wife and in-laws. The characters in the folk tales include both animate and inanimate objects. Often we see stories that deal with material objects such as water stone, trees clouds and sticks.

The panchatantra is an example of very popular form of folk tale and it has traveled endlessly all over the world. We often find humorous stories about Akbar and Birbal, Tenali Ram in southern India and Mulla Nasrudin. Many narratives popularly called the Tota Miana ke Kisse depict stories about wives and husbands.

One can add another very popular genre here which is ballads. Ballads are a narrative song that characterize on a single episode and has some elements of dialogue and action and is rooted in repetitions. They often tell a story, legend or tale. They are often set in meter and poetic form and have certain melodies and rhythms. They are often sung and sometimes have little to do how the story is shown. They are often descriptive and have narrative images and heavily rely on repetition. Ballads greatly depend on style and they tend to be descriptive. Ballads use descriptive imagery and they also have several metaphors. There is also a deep interaction between the community, ballad story and the performer. The interaction between the story and the action of the ballad carries the story further with its stylistic form of narration.

The Mahabharata and the Ramayana are two very famous epics. Ballads form a part of the popular literature. There are many ballads that emphasize bravery and these are known as “panwara”. Usually a ballad starts with an invocation to the
gods and goddesses. Many of the regional folk theatres of northern India such as 
Nautanki and Saang use folk ballads that also frequently use the film tunes in the 
form of parodies.

Ballads reflect the thinking about gods and goddesses and also many stories of 
myth and romanticism are linked with it. Historical components also form the basis 
of the texts. Local regional ballads of India are combined with the story of bravery 
and romanticism. Many emotions such as love, jealousy, hatred, envy, sacrifice and 
sympathy are displayed in them.

We need to thus keep specific points in mind while editing such stories. One important 
thing to be considered right at the onset is that such stories are different from 
fictional tales as they are based on some historical, religious or cultural fact. An 
editor has to realize this. He has to understand that the reader of such tales might 
have heard about such stories from his surroundings like grandparents, parents and 
schools. The known familiarity to such stories has to be considered by the editor. 
Let us now look into the specifics of editing such stories discussing each component 
in specific.

### Check your progress 1

**Note:**

1. Your answers should be about 30 words each;
2. You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the 
end of the Unit.

1) Define legend.

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### 6.2 IN SEARCH OF EDITING WELL

Editing is a deliberate choice in vocation. It involves expenditure in time and 
energy and the sacrifice of many small and big pleasures of life. You may feel like 
reversing your decisions but the result can be always rewarding. The preoccupation 
with editing can become a mania that it will become a steady preoccupation.

It is a good exercise before starting on editing to start by reading books so that 
one is induced in learning the skills needed for it. One has to understand that one 
needs to keep his originality intact especially while editing legends and myths. Let 
us now look at certain traits that an editor needs to possess:

1) He should be disciplined. The editor needs to constantly keep himself in check 
and work steadily in a constant pace.

2) He should be fearless in a sense that he has to often suggest his own view 
points. Therefore he must be open to new ideas and should avoid clichés and 
repetitions.

3) The editor must also keep his personal emotions in control. While a writer is 
often guided by his emotions and psychological requirements, the editor on
the other hand must be balanced. This is specifically true while editing myths and fables as content is well known.

4) The editor must possess the ability to communicate well. The narratives reveal the textual qualities of the prose, the editor, should know how to translate his knowledge well.

5) The editor must be specific and precise and must avoid generalizations and vague abstractions.

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<td>2) Discuss any three qualities that an editor must possess.</td>
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6.2.1 Editing the dramatic content

As we have already discussed legends, fables and myths are constructed within some set historical, social or cultural fact. What make the story interesting for any reader are its dramatic qualities. This holds good especially for children. A sense of mystery and wonder makes any story interesting. The editor has to be concerned with the dramatic quality of any text.

The editor must make sure that the story has a correct climax and a culminating point. The narrative structure must move towards the climax. For example, in a famous fable of Cinderella, the story revolves around the climax of who can fit in the slippers that Cinderella leave behind at the ball. Fables, for children, should be simple and straight forward. The editor should make sure that there is a single climax in children's stories. A well written story having too many subplots might confuse the reader particularly children.

The story must also not have too many flashbacks and points of retrospection as they might confuse the reader. They must be used sparingly. A good example of this is in the story Sleeping Beauty, the anger of the wicked step mother is explained well with a help of a single anecdote of how she was not invited when Sleeping Beauty was born. This simple yet effective anecdote carries the story forward and helps explain the spell cast on Sleeping Beauty.

A good editor must ensure that too many details are not provided in the story. A bad writer in his weakness often tries to inform the reader with every detail that relates to his character, background, occupation, his children and marriage. The editor must know how to select the material and slant it properly. The editor should also make sure that a long exposition must not be written in the beginning. In this regard we see that most children's stories start with, 'a long time ago' or 'once upon a time'. These kinds of introductions are very effective for children.

In this we can see that the story avoids burdensome analyses and overloaded explanations. The editor can reduce this by effectively incorporating the details in
the body of the text and inserting it as the action proceeds. This will create an effect of dramatic immediacy. Sometimes, details can lead to the dramatic content, like the description of the pumpkin being turned into a carriage in Cinderella or the description of Akbar's court in his tales.

The editor must make sure that the reader can actually have a physical experience of things. He must make sure that the children like to feel the imaginative experience. This can prove to be anomalous as we see that most fables and legends are fantastic and based on supernatural elements like witches and demons. The story must appear as believable to children. The editor should not dismiss such stories as being irrelevant or absurd since most children believe in fairies, goblins and demons.

The editor has to streamline a frame of action and has to know what to select and what to omit. This can be done by establishing a sense of reality, for example, description of the greenery of the forest in which Rama and Laksmana were banished or a description of farm, sea or river. This will manage to convince the reader that the action has taken place in front of him. Here we see that the atmosphere is well created with the help of words.

The editor has to make sure that the readers feel about the plot and to participate in the story. What distinguishes a story from an essay is that the plot grips the reader in its action while an essay just corroborates facts. Most children get so engrossed in fables that they do not forget their plot even several years later. For example, most readers can easily recollect the stories of Red Riding Hood and Birbal despite the passage of years.

Once the story has been set, the editor must make sure that the story is well situated in space and place. This can be easily done with the help of illustrations. The editor has to suggest illustrations where it is considered appropriate. For example, pictures of a castle or a jungle can make reading very interesting for the children. For older children the written word must evoke the sense of place in the minds of the reader.

The background details must be well balanced and the editor has to see that it is consonant with the general mood, theme and plot of the story. One way to do this is to describe the place from the view point of the characters in the story. For example, the court of Akbar can come alive only because of his courtier like Birbal. The background should be cleverly enmeshed within the story and must be pervasive throughout.

Check your progress 3

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

3) How can the editor establish place in the story?
6.2.2 Editing dialogues

One of the most important technical aspects of writing fiction is dialogue. No story can be complete without its presence. This is one of the most important aspects of a story and writing it is not easy. It is hence even more difficult to know how to edit them. An editor can do this by keeping certain points in mind which will be discussed below:

1) Dialogues must reveal character. The reader can understand the person by the manner in which he speaks and his conversations will communicate information about him and show the relation he has with others. A very good example of this is in the story of Jack and the Beams Stalk, the giant roars out, “FEE FI FO FUM, I smell the blood of an Englishman” This dialogue well establishes the anger and the veracity of a wicked person.

2) The dialogue must also accentuate the conflict in the story. The editor has to suggest the qualities of a characters speech.

3) Dialogues can be repeated in children’s stories as they reinforce the story further. For example, in the story of the Red big hen (a Russian folk tale), the red hen goes to her friends and asks them to help her plant the wheat, her friends refuse her by saying “NOT I”. This phrase is effectively retold by the author time and again that makes the story interesting to read. The editor can therefore suggest such phrases.

4) The editor should make sure that the dialogues are authentic and resemble the way the real people talk. However, one has to keep in mind that while editing myths and legends, honorifics are used like, “Oh king, dear sire etc” The talk must be significant, selective and representative. It should not sound trivial or useless.

5) The dialogues should be appropriate to the story and skillfully be placed in the situation. Dialogues should best suit the context.

6) The editor should make sure that no profanities are used and that the dialogues are age appropriate. It should also be culture tolerant. As legends are based on the local history and culture the editor should make sure that stereotypes are avoided at all costs.

7) The dialogue must also suit the action. For example, if the princess is being attacked by a witch then the dialogue must be “Save me”.

Check your progress 4

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

4) Explain dialogues should resemble real life situations.
6.2.3 Characterization

Despite the representation of people in a fiction as scrupulously being honest as possible, the art of delineating persons into characters in legends and myths is a little complex. This is essentially because most of the characters are well known, for example Rama, Ravana or Akbar are well known figures. Yet these are resembled caricatures and have a unified dimension.

The editor has to keep certain points in mind while looking at the characterizations.

1) The characters should be fixed and stable. The wicked step mother, for instance, should remain wicked till the very end. Tenali Ram should often get into trouble but must be witty enough to get out of it and Birbal must be humorous and yet intelligent.

2) The editor should make sure that the characters must resemble types. They should be wicked, cruel, humorous, dumb, brave etc.

3) Characters must be situated within a particular place and setting. They cannot exist without fabric of the plot. The actions should emphasize the characters. The background will help establish the persons involved in the story.

4) An editor should make sure that the characters are not abstract and vague and they do not appear general. They must be given specific physical and cultural traits. For example one can strongly associate Hanuman with the monkey god and in the story Hunch back of Notre Dame the protagonist has a hunched back.

5) The characters, however incredible, must appear true and authentic to the reader. For example a talking fish cannot exist in daily life but it will capture the imagination of the child making the child believe in its existence. The difficulty lies in making these appear creditable.

6) Each character must have strong motivations and emotions that carry the story forward.

7) The editor must remain impersonal while editing the characters. They should be allowed to speak, think and act for themselves. In children’s stories, the characters need to be straightforward and they should not demarcate through hints and suggestions. The characters have to be understood straight away without much background being provided for them.

8) In legends and myths for children, the characters are important but the plots carry quite a lot of weight. The story must grasp the attention of the reader immediately and the description of the characters hence has to be brief and incisive.

Check your progress-5

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

5) Explain any two points to be kept in mind while editing characters.

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6.2.4 Editing plot and theme

Every story has a meaning and this is what we call a theme. The theme is not explicitly stated but is inherent within the text and emerges through indirectness of the action, dialogue, atmosphere, characters and background. Most fables and legends have universal themes such as love, honesty, sacrifice, and good over evil, bravery and valor. An editor must keep certain elements in mind while looking at the theme.

1) Themes for children should be positive and reinforce strong moral values.

2) Negative themes or those that emphasize horror and violence must be avoided at all costs.

3) Since the sources of the fiction are well known, the editor should not tamper with them. He should pay close attention to the cultural codes and values that are being portrayed. However, legends can carry their own fragment of imagination.

4) The editor should allow the story to have its own inner twists and turns. He should allow the retelling of popular myths in an original and new manner.

5) Children respond well to humor. The editor must think and edit keeping in mind the tastes and the preferences of children in specific. Children love jokes on what is considered disgusting for adults like toilet jokes. The editor should be liberal in allowing such jokes.

6) The legend should be short and crisp. As the attention span of the child is limited, the plots should be narrated well and strongly cutting out any superfluous details.

7) The plots should progress well without confusing the reader. Enough details must be provided to the reader that arouses the interest of the reader to a point to what is to happen.

8) The editor has to choose those episodes that heighten the climax and lead to logical outcome. He should thus eliminate all irrelevant materials.

9) The story should maintain conflict well and the two antagonist forces should be of equal force.

10) There should be an underlying progress and unity in the story.

11) Conflicts in children’s plots should be simple and they should be well defined.

Check your progress 6

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

6) Discuss any three points the editor will keep in his mind while editing plots.
6.2.5 Maintaining suspense

A legend or a fable will not serve its purpose if it does not captivate the imagination and the interest of the child. The child can be engrossed with the text for sometime but if it is not enthralling the purpose can be defeated. One major way in which the editor can make sure that the interest remains within the text is by highlighting the suspense in the story. Once the interest of the reader is quickened, and he is curious to know what will happen next the story will capture the child.

The editor has to know where the story is going to culminate. It becomes easier in the context of legends and myths as most of the time the story line is well known. The editor hence always has the ability to use cross references when he wants to have a check on the plot structure.

Suspense can be maintained by delaying the inevitable outcome. The editor should make sure that the reader does not realize the end too soon. It is quite correct to say that in most fables and legends for children, the outcomes are well known. Here the editor should make sure that the ends do not come in too early even though being predictable.

If the events go along fast, then the editor will make sure that the suspense fails in the plot. The plot should draw the reader towards the plot and create some kind of thrill. Some additions to features in the text like pull outs and adding of different materials (paper or others) can add to the excitement of the child. For example, the story of Ramayana can have a huge pull out of battle scene between Rama and Ravana that will heighten the interest of the child. The editor can, hence suggest these technical features that might make reading interesting.

Check your progress 7

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

7) How can the interest and suspense in the texts for children be added?

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6.3 LET US SUM UP

The editor begins his job in great hope that his work will be well understood. Editing for children is certainly not an easy task and when one has to specifically look at legends, fables and myths the editor has to be more than careful. As legends, myths and fables are constructed on some historical and cultural facts they have to be dealt with carefully. It will be thus useful for the editor to keep the religious, social and cultural traditions of any region and community in mind before embarking on his task.
6.4 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check your progress 1

1) Legends are short, oral prose narratives, created by the people and passed from one generation to another. The stories are rather unusual, extra normal, fantastic or metaphysical. The bearers of such legends identify them as an account or a chronicle. The Grimm brothers collected several legends. The legend has no definitive text and is often a part of informal communication. They often are ordinary situations with an extraordinary twist. They emerge out of social contexts and interactions and their themes are varied such as murder, violence, revenge, warnings, pleasant surprises, embarrassing situations and practical jokes. They have no single meaning and can be informative and entertaining.

Check your progress 2

2) The editor must also keep his personal emotions in control. While a writer is often guided by his emotions and psychological requirements, the editor on the other hand must be balanced. This is specifically true while editing myths and fables as content is well known. The editor must possess the ability to communicate well. The narratives reveal the textual qualities of the prose, the editor, should know how to translate his knowledge well. The editor must be specific and precise and must avoid generalizations and vague abstractions.

Check your progress 3

3) Once the story has been set the editor must make sure that the story is well situated in space and place. This can be easily done with the help of illustrations. The editor has to suggest illustrations where it is considered appropriate. For example, pictures of a castle or a jungle can make reading very interesting for the children. For older children the written word must evoke the sense of place in the minds of the reader.

Check your progress 4

4) The editor should make sure that the dialogues are authentic and resemble the way the real people talk. However, one has to keep in mind that while editing myths and legends, honorifics are used like, “Oh king, dear sire etc” The talk must be significant, selective and representative. It should not sound trivial or useless.

Check your progress 5

5) The editor must remain impersonal while editing the characters. They should be allowed to speak, think and act for themselves. In children’s stories the characters need to be straight forward and they should not demarcate through hints and suggestions. The characters have to be understood straight away without much background being provided for them.

In legends and myths for children, the characters are important but the plots carry quite a lot of weight. The story must grasp the attention of the reader immediately and the description of the characters have to be brief and incisive.

Check your progress 6

6) Children respond well to humor. The editor must think and edit keeping in mind the tastes and the preferences of children in specific. Children love jokes on what is considered disgusting for adults like toilet jokes. The editor should be liberal in allowing such jokes.
The legend should be short and crisp. As the attention span of the child is limited, the plots should be narrated well and strongly cutting out any superfluous details.

The plots should progress well without confusing the reader. Enough details must be provided to the reader that arouses the interest of the reader to a point to what is to happen.

Check your progress 7

7) Some additions to features in the text like pull outs and adding of different materials (paper or others) can add to the excitement of the child. For example, the story of the Ramayana can have a huge pull out of battle scene between Rama and Ravana that will heighten the interest of the child. The editor can, hence suggest these technical features that might make reading interesting.

6.5 ACTIVITIES

1) Discuss any one plot of a famous epic that you have heard, it can be the Mahabharata or the Ramayana.

2) Analyze any local legend that reinforces the history of your place.

3) Analyze the dramatic content of any folk tale that you have heard or read.

6.6 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

