



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

State Legends: A New Non-Conventional Type of Folktale

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Abstract:

This study delves into the exploration of State lore, a distinct category of folktales that are intricately tied to tangible objects or specific locations within the diverse states of the United States. State lore is meticulously collected and categorized as a unique tale type in 'The Rainbow Book of American Folktales and Legends', an extensive anthology by Maria Leach that encapsulates a wide array of American oral and written narratives. The primary objective of this paper is to scrutinize the defining characteristics and functions of State lore. These include its factual underpinnings, the creative embellishments that transform these facts into engaging narratives, and its profound cultural significance. Each tale serves as a narrative thread that weaves the social, historical, and cultural fabric of the state it represents. However, the study also acknowledges the inherent challenges associated with classifying and interpreting State lore. This is primarily due to its unique nature that does not conform to traditional typologies of folktales. It exists at the intersection of fact and fiction, history and myth, reality, and imagination. This duality presents both opportunities for rich storytelling and challenges for classification. To illustrate the diversity and richness of State lore, this paper draws upon examples from Leach's anthology. These examples serve as a testament to the vast array of narratives encompassed within State lore, highlighting its role as a vibrant form of prose narrative. They provide readers with a glimpse into the tapestry of tales that capture the essence of each state's unique identity. In conclusion, this paper underscores the importance of State lore as an integral part of American cultural heritage. It invites further research into this fascinating genre of folktales, encouraging a deeper understanding and appreciation of the stories that shape our collective identity.

Introduction:

In this anthology of folktales and legends, a section titled 'State lore' is included. Within this section, the compiler has gathered information and prose narratives from various regions across America. The section is divided into 48 parts, each dedicated to a different state of America, arranged alphabetically. The purpose of this section can be viewed from two perspectives. Firstly, it aims to systematically introduce readers to informative prose narratives that highlight the unique identity of each American state. Secondly, the vivid imagery of the states and their tales justifies the use of the adjective 'Rainbow' in the book's title. These prose narratives differ from the conventional understanding of folktales in several aspects. They are primarily informative in nature, providing readers with background information about the tales and explanations for their existence. This research will focus on the form of this particular type of narrative. It



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will explore its characteristics as a folktale type, the elements present in the tales, and the structural elements that define this type. These characteristics will be elucidated by examining their commonalities in the tales, supported by specific examples. Furthermore, a table will be included to showcase tales that share similar elements, with key elements being highlighted.

The subject of inquiry in this study pertains to the nature and attributes of 'State lore'. These narratives possess an informative quality, yet they do not possess the intention of imparting moral lessons to their audience. The informative nature of these narratives is limited to knowledge pertaining to a specific place or culture. This information regarding a particular region serves as the foundation for the listener's comprehension of the culture and living environment of said region. In most instances, these tales commence with an exploration of the indigenous population of the region and their way of life. Readers are able to trace the evolution of the region as a habitat from its inception. These informative tales also provide insight into the lifestyle of native tribes or early settlers, as well as the reasons behind their choice to inhabit a specific location.

Each entry within this section can be categorized into two primary streams. The first stream solely provides information about the region, while the second stream includes actual folktales. In terms of narrative structure, these tales adhere to a format akin to the 'tall tale'. They are succinct and straightforward in their narration, with the primary focus of the tale resting upon an incident that either resulted in a regional nickname or became a stereotypical belief held by the people. The culture and livelihood of the folk also assume a prominent role within these tales. The traditional occupations of the folk are contingent upon the natural resources available within the region. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of this tale type, it is imperative to grasp the common characteristics inherent within them. A list of these characteristics, derived from observations made within the tales, is provided below:

- **Structural elements of State lore narratives**
- **Etymological meanings in different languages**
- **Flora and fauna indigenous to the region**
- **Origins of regional nicknames and the tales behind them**



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The structural elements of narratives belonging to the category of 'State lore' encompass a wide range of folk literature. This sub-type of folk literature includes various forms such as rimes, riddles, jokes, ballads, folk songs, sayings, and tall tales. State lore, as a genre of folk literature, focuses on specific regions and incorporates all the aforementioned types of folk literature within its framework. However, it is important to note that this particular collection is classified as a compilation of 'folktales and legends', thus limiting the criteria of state lore to prose narratives. In certain instances, the collector may have included other forms of folk literature in these entries to provide a more comprehensive explanation.

Structural elements

The structure of these narratives bears resemblance to the sub-type of folktale known as the 'tall tale'. These narratives do not specify a particular time but rather make use of words denoting seasons, day or night, and vernacular measurements to indicate the passage of time. This characteristic aligns with the general features of a folktale, as explained in Chapter 1. Similar to tall tales, these narratives employ exaggeration as a prominent tool to captivate the listeners. The use of exaggeration serves to amuse the audience at the outset of the tale, after which the narrative unfolds. While these tales possess an informative nature, their primary purpose is not to impart moral lessons to the listeners, but rather to share information in an entertaining manner.

In the presence of characters embodying the indigenous inhabitants of a specific locale, a sentiment of pride in one's residency within that region emerges, accompanied by a nonchalant disposition towards the inherent challenges encountered in daily life. These challenges are often met with laughter, akin to the frontier spirit exemplified in American legends.

Etymological meaning in a different language

The section on etymological meaning in a different language begins each state entry by providing the name of the state and the information behind its name. Typically, this discussion commences with the mention of either the native tribe or the early settlers who first arrived in the area and established a colony. In most cases, the names of the states are derived from the native language of the tribes. The significance of the natural surroundings also plays a prominent role in the naming process. Additionally, the occupation of the people and the presence of flora or fauna in the state may also influence its name. For instance, the state of Alabama derives its name from the term "Alba amo" in the language of the Alabama Indians, which means



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weed gatherers. The etymological description of each state utilizes this information by providing the meaning of the native or another language word and its English transformation, resulting in the current name of the state. For example, the state of California derives its name from the Spanish word "Caliente fornello," meaning hot furnace, which reflects its weather. This interaction between the native population and outsiders offers insight into how a state's population evolves from its native tribes to the subsequent influx of civilized individuals from outside. This section of each entry exclusively focuses on the official names, while the discussion of their nicknames will be addressed later in this chapter.

For example, the state of Arkansas was originally inhabited by a Native American tribe known as the Sioux, who referred to themselves as the Quapaw, meaning "downstream people." This name was given to them by the Illinois Indians, who lived near the mouth of the Arkansas River. Eventually, the state itself came to be known as Arkansas. Similarly, the state of Illinois derives its name from the Illinois River, which was named by the French explorer Robert Cavelier de la Salle in 1679. The river was named after the native Indians who lived in the area and referred to themselves as the Illiniwek, meaning "Men, people, or folk." The state of Georgia, on the other hand, received its name from the king of England. In 1732, British officials established the colony under the leadership of General James Edward Oglethorpe, who had received a charter from King George II. Oglethorpe and his nineteen associates became the trustees of this new colony, which was named Georgia in honor of the king.

The origins of state names vary greatly, with some states having complex and ambiguous histories behind their names. Kentucky, for example, has multiple theories surrounding its name, two of which are widely accepted. One theory suggests that Colonel Richard Henderson, a pioneer of the state, purchased the land from the Cherokee Indians in 1774 and named it 'Cantuckee'. Another theory is based on the various spellings used by old historians, such as 'Cantucky', 'Kentuckee', and 'Kaintuck', which were used to refer to the word 'Cherokee', meaning prairie. This theory suggests that the name reflects the geographical structure of the region itself. There is also a lesser-known theory that proposes the name Kentucky comes from the word 'Kentake' used by the Iroquois Indians, which can mean bloody river, bloody ground, or pasture land. These meanings are believed to be a reflection of the conflicts between the Cherokee and Iroquois tribes. For a comprehensive list of all states and their name origins, including information about the native tribes or settlers associated with each state, please refer to Table 1.1 in the appendix.



Flora and fauna of the region

The State lore section of this research paper examines the flora and fauna of a specific region. These elements have had a significant impact on the community in various ways. Firstly, the community demonstrates acceptance and respect for these living organisms by considering them as defining features of the region. In cases where there are multiple animals, plants, or crops in the region, they are all celebrated and given significant roles in the community's lifestyle. Some are consumed as food during special occasions, while others serve as daily sources of sustenance, depending on their rarity. This cultural significance has shaped the rural way of life, which revolves around the harvesting, hunting, and utilization of these organisms in festivals and day-to-day activities. The presence of diverse flora and fauna has also facilitated the establishment of colonies by providing sustenance to the new settlers. In return, the settlers have shown respect for these organisms by incorporating them into their cultural identity. Birds, in particular, hold a special importance in comparison to other fauna. Each state designates a "state bird," which serves as a symbol of that state. Native Americans regarded these birds as sacred, and this reverence has been passed down to the new settlers. Hunting or killing these birds is considered a cultural crime and disrespectful to the community. The official designation of a state bird has also aided in their preservation, as national parks in America often implement programs to protect these birds from the adverse effects of deforestation and climate change.

In certain societies, certain animals and plants held such high value that they were used as a form of currency in a barter system, alongside traditional money. This practice persisted over time. As noted in David Crockett's account, "a coonskin was the same as money in those days and was accepted instantly" (Leach 42). Hunting challenging animals, such as deer and bears, was a widespread activity throughout America. A man's prowess was often measured by the number of bears he killed during a hunting season, and he was accorded respect accordingly. The direct and indirect influence of flora and fauna on culture and folk life is evident. Eventually, these specific animals and plants came to symbolize the unique identity of a region among others.

These are the basic elements consistently present in all the entries of the book. A closer look into the plot part of the tales, it suggests that *State lore* should be considered as Legends. A similar connection of geographical places can be found in other tale types called '*local legend*'.



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