

## Exploring Moral Lesson and Aesthetic Joy in the Selected Folktales of Manbhum

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### Abstract

Folktale or Lok katha is an inherent part of a community's culture taking its origin from all spheres of common life. In the pre-digital era people love to listen stories from their elders lovingly called 'Galpo dadus' (community storytellers). Within this limited canvas the storytellers through folktale tried to instill morality, social and cultural values to make the listeners morally upright. With their sheer brilliance, wit, humour and skill they provide intense aesthetic joy and emotional fulfillment. The performance is going through thrill, mystery, laughter, magic along with a moral teaching. Folktales provides a large number of moral and social values associating with kindness, honesty, bravery, heroism, perseverance, magical events, consequences of good and bad deeds. Locally known as '*kahnis*' these folktales manifest a timeless wisdom and cultural fragrance of the region. The selected Three folktale of Manbhum namely "*Jeman ke Teman*", "*Karo Ash kari nai*", "*jaler kadi jalei gelo*" will explore the aesthetic pleasure, moral lesson, social values from various perspective.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic, Culture, Folktale, Joy, Manbhum, Moral, Value

Folktales are an inseparable and integral part of a human life. Everyone loves to listen stories in this world. They are passed down orally from generation to generation to illuminate human life from various perspectives. It is said that folktale change every time they are told. The charm and attraction of its appeal never fade since the stories are told in the regional dialect. The smooth flow of local vocabulary and glossaries makes them comprehensible. To tell the truth

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the moral lesson embedded within these folktales plays a crucial role in building the character and personality of man in life. Through the folktale people come to know the consequences of good and evil, theory of reward and punishment, harmony, power of unity, empathy, reverence to parents and elders, sense of obedience, issues related to ecology.

‘Manbhum’ was one of the districts of East India during the British era. After Independence this district became a part of Bihar state. Upon the state reorganization of the Indian states on mid-1950s, this district was partitioned based on language (1st November, 1956). The Bengali speaking areas were included in West Bengal while the rest were kept with Bihar (Present day Jharkhand). (Wikipedia) A part of the Chotanagpur Plateau, the land is rich in its natural resources as well as its rich folkloric tradition. In every step of the rural life folk culture, folk life is predominated. The folktale locally known as ‘kahni’ is tinged with indigenous moral wisdom, passed down orally over the years. These ‘Kahnis’ depict rural life, moral values, cultural practices, ecological knowledge, Ethics, philosophy of life etc. These tales tried to maintain the ‘poetic justice’ i.e. good is rewarded and evil or wicked is punished at the end. Apart from literature, folktales are also the mirrors of the society, showing joys, sorrows, and innumerable issues of life. According to ‘Merriam Webster Dictionary’ a folktale is “a characteristically anonymous, timeless and placeless tale circulated orally among a people.”

Before the digital era folktales are told in entertaining way for aesthetic pleasure, with a soul intention to spread moral, social and cultural values, and obviously to pass the time smoothly when people were less occupied. Community elders with their sheer performance lured the attention of the listeners. Often time such tales play a vital role in character and personality building and elders tried to refer the actions of the characters concerned in the tales associating with their daily life. The folktales or ‘*kahnis*’ are transmitted orally in local dialect of Manbhum.

The following ‘*kahnis*’, emerging from the backdrop of Manbhum’s life and culture, impart various important life lesson along with deep aesthetic joy.

The story entitled “Jeman ke Teman”<sup>1</sup> (Treat everyone according to their Nature) is a significant one, talks about the idiomatic expression of ‘tit for tat’. The title of it, is relating with the Bengali proverb ‘*jeman karma teman fal*’ which in English goes “As you sow, so shall you reap”. It is about the story of young orphan boy named Madan aged thirteen or fourteen. The narrator shows how Madan, the protagonist is being exploited by his master and eventually his master got punishment as a consequence of his own actions. He revealed the true nature of the miserly rich man.

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<sup>1</sup> This folktale was narrated by Gagan Ganguly, Jambad, Kenda, Purulia (W.B)

Madan had been working under some condition in his master's house. The condition is to maintain the account of expenditure of every single paisa without any discrepancy. But unfortunately, one day Madan made a discrepancy of three paisa. He pleaded repeatedly, insisting that he had not stolen anything or possibly it had simply fallen out somewhere. As per the condition due to discrepancy his master paraded him in bald head to the entire village without paying any wages and drove him out. It was the trick of the master to misuse and exploit such helpless needy boys.

In a revengeful ire against his master due to the accusation of theft and slander, he made a trick to punish him. He exaggerated that he got the formula of recovery from illness owing to the magic the miraculous power of the amulet made of from the hair of his master. With the help of his cunning intellect people tore out of the hair of his former master, rendering him completely bald. Madan's remarks at the end tinged with moral implication tit for tat or "as you sow, so shall you reap". According to Madan

"keman acho gala?chinte parcho na nai? Mane ace na ? amar matha kamai diya karai gota gaon ghurai chile . Dekha amar chul ghure bairainche . Jao e janame ar tumar chul bairabek nai . Tumi kama karai chile ;ami Chira karali . ai ja tafat . Jao mathay hat bulay bulay ghar jao . Sodh bodh haye gelo ." (Mahato, Sristidhar 156)

#### English Translation

How are you, Master? Do you Know me or not? Do you Remember? After shaving my head paraded the entire village. Look, my hair has grown again. Go, hair will not grow again in this lifetime. You had shaved off my hair; I had torn out your hair. That's the difference. Go, go to your home gently stroking your head. The balance has been settled.

Though initially the tearing of hair seems to be fictitious and unbelievable but there lies the laughing material tinged with moral wisdom. The tale shows the utility of the proverb "tit for tat" or "as you sow, so shall you reap". One must be ready for punishment if they will do any wrong things.

Another folktale namely '*Karo Ash kari nai*'<sup>2</sup>(Didn't expect anything from anyone) tells about Jabani Burhi, a helpless woman who leads her life in extreme poverty on the edge of a village. Her story portrays a rich landowner named Mahindi's unruly treatment in her utter need as a neighbour. As per the story one day she was unable to pick up a bundle of wood in the jungle and seeks help of Mahindi who was passing through that way with a herd of buffaloes. She humbly requests him to help in picking the burden assuring him that sooner or later she would be of use to him. He remarks tauntingly " ja, tui

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<sup>2</sup> This folktale was narrated by Karmabir Mahato, Jambad, Kenda , Purulia(W.B)

ar amar ki kaje lagbis ? tor ash ami kari nai.” (Mahato, Sristidhar 158)(What use could you possibly be to me? I never had any expectation from you.) In course of time one day Mahindi feels the need of Jabani Burhi for rice husks during the time of Bengali Bhadro(August- September) while it had been raining continuously for more than seven days. The cowshed must be kept warm at night in order to take proper care of the buffalo and baby buffalo taking birth few days ago. Jabani Burhi caught Mahindi red handed while he was trying to steal the rice husks from her small hut. Jabani Burhi reminds him the previous event regarding the picking up the burden in the jungle. “Tai naki tui karo kichu libis nai . karo kono asha karis nai . abar mane raibek?”(Mahato, Sristidhar 160), (Is that so that you did not take anything from anyone? You didn’t expect anything from anyone? Now you will remember this time, won’t you? Finally, she taught a lesson by kicking him that we must help each other despite of any social status whether it is strong and weak. The story reminds the fable of the *‘Mice and the Lion’* where the mice freed the lion by cutting the hunter’s net as a reward of saving his life. The story also makes a similar meaning in regard to the Bengali rhyme “*Sakaler tare sakale amra, pratteke amra porer tare*” which in English it means we human beings are dependent on each other. We should help and cooperate each other whenever we will be in need. There lies the aesthetic beauty of the story that ultimately justice had been done and audience felt a sense of deep satisfaction.

Last tale of the selection *‘jaler kadi jalei gelo’*<sup>3</sup> talks about the unity of two brothers Renga and Bhadora and their happy family life with their wife and children. They lived together in perfect harmony and whatever work they undertake leads to success. The elder brother takes the responsibility of cultivation, merchant related issues, and maintain the kith and kin while the younger brother looks after the domestic animals cows, goats and sheep. Gradually progress and prosperity attains the family.

One day the younger brother Bhadora was misguided by his wife under some of evil thoughts. They also used to sell milk and again under the trick of his wife Bhadora mixes water in the milk. Under the guidance and instruction of his wife Bhadora had been trying to hide some money from the total family income by selling milk. With the passage of time misunderstanding between two brothers leads to separation. Ultimately their plan to a buy cow out of hiding money proved futile. At the end of the story after heaving a deep sigh he remarks to his wife “ar gai kineci!tor sob jaler taka jalkei gelce” (Mahato, Sristidhar 71) which in English it goes the money earned by mixing water in the milk are gone to the watery grave. While he was taking bathe in the pond on his way to the market, a monkey took his money bag and threw it into the pond, thinking there might be food inside it. The tale nicely maintains the ‘poetic

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<sup>3</sup> This folktale was narrated by Charian Mahato, Fusrabad, Para, Purulia(W.B.)

justice’, leaving the listeners with a sense of relief and a moral note ‘As you sow, so shall you reap’. Apart from enjoying aesthetic pleasure the listeners felt that none can enjoy the money earned through dishonest means. Along with they must keep in mind the misguidance by family members hinders progress and prosperity of the family.



Images: Title page of the selected folktales

All the three tales are almost dealt with the simple poor folk from rural life. Along with moral lesson the tales also depicts the typical life, aspiration of the common people of Manbhum. Through the actions of the characters concerned audience can both enjoy aesthetic beauty of the story and gain moral awareness. According to the tales wicked people or evil doers inevitably face punishment by the very norms of nature. In addition to, the tales advocates for a peaceful society where people live with happiness and dignity by nurturing unity, empathy, kindness, mutual understanding and other social values regardless of the social position.

### Conclusion

Folktales or ‘*kahnis*’ of Manbhum are chiefly meant for entertainments, aesthetic pleasures, education, moral lesson, social values especially for children to show them the right direction in life. Within the entertaining process the tales are imparting moral and social values. Aesthetic enjoyment arises when good is rewarded and evil is punished, giving the audience a sense of relief that at least justice has been maintained. Owing to their maturity level often time audience like illiterate people and children burst into laughter upon hearing such stories. Folktales also develop the imaginative powers of the children as their mind is absorbed in the world of magic, ghosts, witchcrafts, fairies etc. Such folktales are also a historical document through which people of Manbhum find their tradition, root, identity, culture and belongingness. The personae of the above-mentioned stories are just typical representative of the common people hailed from the region. These tales also indicate the cultural richness, essence of the oral tradition of Manbhum. By delving deep into the

characterization and their activity people can easily understand what is right and what is wrong. Folktales are the intellectual asset of our society and we must preserve them for the next generation to come no matter how we live in the digital age.

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