

Dream of Downtrodden as Reflected in Bengali Folktales

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Abstract:

Folktale is a kind of story usually anonymous, handed down orally, passed down verbally from generation to generation. Folktales are the stories about everyday life and day to day issues of mankind. Sometimes the stories involve supernatural elements like the ghost story but they usually happen to common people. Other kinds of folktales involve animals, but the animal characters behave like humans, with realistic emotions, flaws and fallings. Listeners can relate to the characters in the story and imagine what they'd do in the same situation. Different incidents of ancient life of a nation are narrated in folktales. Its dream, its tradition, memories of struggle of its past life; everything can be found in folktales. Nothing is grown automatically in human mind but in contrary, human mind is formed from his life style. The society consists of high and low, rich and poor, powerful and weak. The weak, poor and low are always suppressed by their counterpart. They wish to be free from suppression. This happened in the past time also. The dream to be free from suppression is generally not fulfilled. In the world of folk tales people fulfilled their dream. In the world of folktale, the weak, suppressed, marginalized people win over the powerful. Thus the common people get a mental satisfaction. The paper will deal with the struggle of the down trodden people as reflected in the folktales. 'TuntunirBoi' by Upenra Kishore Ray Choudhury'. Though folktales are stories in structure but these cannot be ignored as a simple imagination. The story tellers never ignored the real life. Different issues of ancient life of a society are associated with folktale. One can find hard fact in the tales behind the curtains of fantasy. If one uncovers the imagination, hard fact will be visible. The paper will deal with the struggle of the down trodden people as reflected in the folktales. 'TuntunirBoi' by Upenra Kishore Ray Choudhury'. In the story 'TuntuniarNapiterKotha', we see that the struggle of down trodden was successful only when they fight united. In the story 'TuntuniArBiralerKotha' the bird showed honour to the molly not out of respect but out of need. When she escaped the evil design of the molly, she showed her leg. In the story 'Narhari Das', the kid goat fooled the jackal and the tiger and saved itself. In this story, the jackal fooled the tiger and was searching the scope for revenge. The jackal was successful. He made the tiger to be caught by the crocodile. In the story 'DustoBagh', the tiger wanted to eat the Brahman. The brahman was saved by the jackal's intelligent design.

Key words: Folktales, society, struggle, down trodden people.

Introduction:

Folktale is a kind of story usually anonymous, handed down orally, passed down verbally from generation to generation. English word 'folk' means people. So we can say that folktales are the stories about everyday life and day to day issues of mankind. Sometimes the stories involve supernatural elements like the ghost story but they usually happen to common people. Other kinds of folktales involve animals, but the animal characters behave like humans, with realistic emotions, flaws and fallings. This makes folktales so enduring and appealing. Listeners can relate to the characters in the story and imagine what they'd do in the same situation. These stories are shared among the generations as a way of presenting everyday life lessons and useful information in an easy-to-understand format. They also help connect listeners to common cultural values of a particular tribe, ethnic group or culture. They are part of an oral tradition, stemming from a preliterate age before the invention of writing. Today folktales are easily accessible in

book form. But listening stories to a storyteller hasn't lost its interest. Hearing a story from an elder (the traditional form for folk tales) brings it to life in a special way. Different incidents of ancient life of a nation are narrated in folktales. Its dream, its tradition, memories of struggle of its past life; everything can be found in folktales. Nothing is grown automatically in human mind but in contrary, human mind is formed from his life style. Karl Marx's well known comment may be quoted here:

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness." (Marx: 1859)

Marx used folktales and mythology in his writings. Though the stories were not history but Marx got comparative relation in history. Marx was aware that the details of folktales and myth are not historical facts but he analysed very intelligently these narratives in socio-economic perspective.

The narrative of folk tale can be used as the source of fact and truth. We know that the society consists of high and low, rich and poor, powerful and weak. The weak, poor and low are always suppressed by their counterpart. They wish to be free from suppression. This created a tug of war relation in the society. This happened in the past time also. The dream to be free from suppression is generally not fulfilled. In the world of folk tales people fulfilled their dream. We see this clash/tug of war relation in the world of folktales. In the world of folktale, the weak, suppressed, marginalized people win over the powerful. Thus the common people get a mental satisfaction.

In the narrative of the stories:

In the story 'Tuntuni Ar Napiter Kotha' (Roy Choudhury, Upendra Kishore: 1317 Bengali Era), a tailorbird gets hurt on the thorn of a brinjal plant and develops a boil. He requests the king's barber to cut the boil. The barber hates to cut the boil as he was the king's barber. Then the bird goes to king. He gets no response. Then the bird requests the rat to make hole on king's belly. The rat opposes. The bird now goes to the cat to kill the rat. He does not agree. Then the bird goes to stick to bite the cat but it does not agree. Then the bird goes to fire to burn the staff. Fire does not agree. Then he goes to the sea to extinguish the fire but the sea does not agree. Then the bird requested the elephant to drink all the water of the sea and make it dry. This time also he gets no response. Now he goes to the mosquito. All the mosquitoes come out to bite the elephant. The sky becomes full of mosquitoes. Now the bird gets the result. The elephant agrees to drink the whole chunk of water. The sea agrees to extinguish the fire. The fire agrees to burn the staff, the staff agrees to bite the cat, the cat agrees to kill the rat and the rat agrees to make a hole on the belly of the king. The king says that he will cut the throat of the barber. The barber then comes to remove the boil and requests the bird to save him. Thus the bird gets relief of his boil.

In the story 'Tuntuni Ar Biraler Kotha' (Roy Choudhury, Upendra Kishore: 1317 Bengali Era), a tailorbird makes its nest on a brinjal plant. She hatches three chicks. The chicks cannot fly or see. There's a very notorious molly in this household. It wants to eat the chicks. One day the molly comes near to the bird's nest and asks the bird what she is doing. The bird addresses her as queen and bows. So the molly becomes pleased with the bird and goes back. The molly comes every day and the bird does the same trick. She waits until the chicks can fly and see. At last the chicks grow up enough and can fly. The bird asks its chicks to fly and to sit at the palm tree. The chicks do accordingly. The molly comes as usual. This time the bird shows its legs.

In the story 'Narhari Das' (Roy Choudhury, Upendra Kishore: 1317 Bengali Era), there's a kid goat lives with its mother in a hole in a forest. Mother forbids it to come

out of the hole and scares it of tiger, lion and bear. So when the nanny goes out in search of food, the kid stays inside. One day it comes out and sees an ox eating grass. The kid is impressed by the ox's large size. The kid asks the ox how it has become so large. In reply the ox says that it eats better grass. It takes the kid to a far distant place to show better grass. The kid eats so large quantity of grass that it cannot walk in the evening. So the kid enters into a hole for that night. It was a jackal's home. The jackal returns after attending the dinner of its uncle tiger. When the jackal understands some creature in its hole, it thinks that the creature may be an ogre. When he asks who is in the hole, kid replies that he is Narhari Das, maternal uncle of lion. He eats fifty tiger in one gulp. Hearing such a comment, the jackal runs as fast as it can and reaches tiger's lair. Jackal narrates the incident. The tiger becomes very furious and wishes to face the creature. The jackal requests to tie his tail with his (tiger's) tail. Both the animal reaches to the hole. Now the kid plays another trick. Addressing the jackal, it says that he has given the price of ten tigers and the jackal has brought only one. The tiger thinks that the jackal has brought him to give him to the hand of Narhari Das. So the tiger jumps and runs. The jackal gets hurt in such a speed. It searches the scope to punish the tiger. He now lives in another hole. He invites the tiger at his new home. There was an old well near the hole. The jackal puts a mat covering the hole. The tiger sits on the mat and drops into the well. The jackal runs away. The well is not so deep and the tiger comes out of the well. The jackal searches a new hole and lives in it but it cannot come out of the hole in search of food out of tiger's fear. At last he goes to the tiger. From far distant he bades Namaskar, offers Pranam and says that tiger is tired of searching him. So he comes to the tiger. Now the tiger can easily kill the jackal. The tiger does not kill him. He says, 'You unlucky idiot, why have you put me into the well?' The jackal replies, 'The earth was very soft the tiger jumped and thus made a hole. I haven't seen such a hero like you.' The foolish tiger becomes very pleased. Now the jackal is free to move anywhere. One day the jackal saw a crocodile lying on the river bank. He went to the tiger and told that he had bought a boat. He requested the tiger to see it. The tiger went to see the boat. As soon as he jumped upon the crocodile, he caught hold of the tiger and dived into the water. Thus the jackal punished the tiger.

In the story '*DustoBagh*' (The Wicked Tiger) (Roy Choudhury, Upendra Kishore: 1317 Bengali Era), there was a tiger in a cage. The cage was kept in front of the main gate of the king's palace. The tiger always requested the people to open the door of the cage but nobody responded. One day the king arranged a big feast. He invited many Brahmin in that feast. A Brahmin was entering the palace through the gate to attend the feast. The tiger bowed the Brahmin when the Brahmin was far away. He was very pleased with the tiger. The tiger requested him to open the door of the cage. He opened the door. The tiger came out and told the Brahmin that he would eat him. The Brahmin was very surprised. He argued that nobody harmed the person who had done his good. The tiger argued that everybody uses to do such. The Brahmin told that let they would have asked three witnesses. They asked a small dam about the matter. The dam said that he preserved water in two pieces of land but the unlucky farmers always cut him with their *langal* (plough). Then they asked a large tree. The tree told them that people took rest under him but they cut its branch. Then they asked a jackal. The jackal heard the matter but he pretended that he had not understood the matter. He started to ask bogus questions. At last the tiger got bored of the jackal's questions. He entered into the cage to imitate the incident. As soon as the tiger entered the cage, the jackal closed the cage and thus he rescued the Brahmin from the tiger.

In another story, '*BaghKhekoSheyalerChhana*' (Tiger-Eater Kid Jackals) (Roy Choudhury, Upendra Kishore: 1317 Bengali Era), the jackal couple had three pups. They had no den of their own. When the rainy season came they were in trouble. They had to search a hole to save the pups from rain. At last the jackal found a tiger's den. They had no way other than getting into the hole. After two or three days, the tiger had returned back to his den. The mother jackal pinched the pups and they started to cry. Then the father asked the jackal why they were crying. The jackal replied that they were crying to eat the tiger's meat. The father said that he had already killed all the tigers. No tiger was available nearby forest. Mother said that it was not possible to quite the pups without tiger's flesh. Then the father said that a tiger was coming. He would have killed it. Hearing this conversation the tiger thought that there must have been a *rakshas* (ogre) or *khokshas* (demon) in his den. He ran away as fast as he could. A monkey noticed the tiger running away. He asked the matter. The tiger narrated the incident. The monkey convinced that he knew that no animal could be able to eat the tiger. At last the tiger agreed to return only in one condition that if the monkey accompanied him. The monkey said that he could go only if the tiger took him on his back. The tiger agreed accordingly. When they reached nearby the den, the jackal saw the monkey and the tiger. Seeing the tiger and monkey, the mother jackal pinched the pups. They cried loudly. The father said that he had sent their uncle to bring a tiger. He said that the uncle was returning taking a tiger with him. 'Give my *jhapang* (a nonsense word), I will do the *bhotang* (a nonsense word).' The tiger thought that *jhapang* is a special type of weapon whereas *bhotang* is a special art of killing. So he ran for three days without break.

Discussion: In the story '*TuntuniArNapiterKotha*', we see that the struggle of down trodden was successful. The struggle of down trodden people was successful only when they fight united. But agents of the upper class were there among the down trodden people. So no body agreed to help the tailorbird against the barber and the king. At last all the mosquitoes came out and fought united. At the consequence, the barber was bound to cut the boil of the bird. In the story '*TuntuniArBiralerKotha*' the bird had to pay honour to molly only for a limited period to save her chicks from the molly. Sometimes a marginalized person alone cannot fight against the powerful. The bird paid its honour to the molly not out of respect but out of need. When she escaped the evil design of the molly, she showed her leg. In the story '*NarhariDas*' the kid goat fooled the jackal and the tiger and saved itself. In this story, the jackal fooled the tiger and was searching the scope for revenge. The jackal was successful. He made the tiger to be caught by the crocodile. In the story '*DustoBagh*' The tiger wanted to eat the Brahman. The Brahman was saved by the jackal's intelligent design.

Conclusion: In folktales ancient people fulfilled their dream. The story may be of human being, demon, ogress, or animal, but the characters represent human beings. In *TuntuniArNapiter Katha* the king and the barber represent the upper class of the society; the rat, the cat, stick, fire, sea, elephant are agents of the upper class; the *tuntuni* and the mosquito represent the down trodden class. The intermediary class never goes against the power. When the down trodden people fight united against the power, they win. They always see the dream of winning over the powerful, they fulfilled their dream by defeating the powerful.

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Roy Choudhury, Upendra Kishore: *TuntunirBoi*, Kolkata, First pub, 1317 Bengali Era, Digital Version by Society for Natural Language Technology Research, 2015 C.E.