



## Traditions of Comics in India Jataka Tales With Reference To The Modern Times

### KEYWORDS

Comics, Jataka Tales, Moral Values, Buddhist Idealism, Modern Times.

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**ABSTRACT** Indian Comics and Amarchitrakatha go hand in hand with respect to Panchathantra Tales, Folk Tales, Hithopadesha, etc., One among them is Jataka Tales, which preaches the Buddhist Idealism. The belief of Hinduism in rebirth is mainly reflected in Jataka Tales. Here, Gautama Buddha takes birth as Bodhisatta or in the form of animals in his previous births and preaches morals through the stories. During the olden period, personal and social problems were same as the modern days. When human beings feel disturbed, they yearn for some solace, which soothes their mind. The scriptures in all religions preach the same notion of coming out of the problems in different ways. In Jataka Tales also, the same thing is reflected. This paper focuses on the stories, which evoke moral feelings such as consequences of Revenge, Greed, Misunderstanding, Miscommunication, Bad Company, and Foolishness. It also throws light on the issues like Women's Emancipation, Environment and Education. Independent thought, Creative thinking and Learning to Survive are the needs of the Competitive Era. These stories act as a guiding factor in the modern world, where the moral values are not much concerned. Today's youth lack the above mentioned values. Comics through visual aid and books could reach the people, because of its simple form. The values of life are hidden as treasure in Jataka Tales. When it is exposed and imparted in recreating aspect in the form of comics, it helps the mankind to face challenges, develop optimism and cultivate morals. It will make tremendous changes in the mindset of today's youth to move ahead in right path, which is the utmost need of the hour in our country and the world over.

### INTRODUCTION

Jataka Tales, which was written in 300 BC for the mankind to impart the ethics of life, consists of more than 500 stories. It was originally written in Pali language and translated in languages such as Chinese, Sinhalese, Burmese etc., Many of the tales are set in or near Varanasi, where the sacred Ganges flows. These stories preach the values exhibited in Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Jainism, besides Buddhism. In the age of technology, human beings get distracted by various media such as the internet, cinema, television etc., as they show interest in entertainment. The same technology is beneficial too in many aspects. Besides the form of books, comics flourish in the form of technology. Though it is meant for children, it attracts the elders also. In this paper a collection of stories from Jataka Tales is taken, in which Buddha in his previous birth, addresses the mankind on the essentials of reasoning before doing an act.

### BETRAYAL

The theme of betrayal is reflected in the stories "How an ungrateful Son Planned to Murder his Father", and "The Monkey's Heart". The above stories portray how the trust in blood relationship and friendship get shattered. In the former story, there lives a man by name Vasithakka with his father, wife and son. Since the wife wants to get rid of Vasithakka's father, she tells him to kill the old man. Even he hesitates at first; he yields to the words of his wife and accepts to kill his father. This could be rightly compared with Shakespeare's "Macbeth" in which Lady Macbeth poisons Macbeth's mind to kill the king Duncan, who trusts Macbeth. In Act-I, Scene VII, Lady Macbeth motivates Macbeth to commit the deed when he fears of being caught by the noble generals.

LADY MACBETH. Who dares receive it other,

As we shall make our griefs and clamour roar,

Upon his death?

3 MACBETH. I am settled and bend up

Each corporal agent to this terrible feat

Away, and mock the time with fairest show.

False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

The persuasion of Lady Macbeth changes the mind of Macbeth, who at first refuses to kill the king. Later he commits the sin and fails to be trustworthy to the king. Likewise, Vasithakka, who is responsible for taking care of his old father, gets ready to kill him for the sake of his wife. He fails to be a responsible son. Here the modern perspective is that most of the youngsters don't care about their parents by living apart from them. Our country had a heritage of living together with elders. During the olden days, younger generation at home, used to inculcate moral values from their grandparents and parents. Today the system of joint family is totally collapsed due to urbanisation. Most of the youth from villages migrate to cities or abroad. B.Sivakumar, in Times of India, shares about the condition of elderly people in Tamilnadu, that "There are many such pensioners in poor and middle class families, who live alone though their children may be living in the same city. A majority of 'single senior households' are in TN's rural areas". Though some of the elderly people state that they wish to give space to their children by leading a secluded life, there is a vacuum in their hearts and that can only be filled by togetherness with their children and grand children. There is a slight difference between the story and real life of modern age. In the former one, the son tries to bury his father physically, whereas in the latter, the feelings and longings of the elders are buried. When Vasithakka digs the land to bury his father, his son also does the same for him to make Vasithakka realise mistake. It also proves the proverb "As you sow, so you

reap". Before doing a deed, we never think about the consequences, since we lack reasoning. Vasithakka also does the same, but fortunately realises his mistake, before committing a sin, unlike Macbeth and Lady Macbeth who suffer and face a tragic end in their life.

4 In "Monkey's Heart", through the personification of a crocodile, the theme of betrayal in friendship is exposed. Here Buddha comes to life in a form of a monkey, which becomes friendly with the crocodile. The crocodile's mate wants to eat the heart of the monkey and so it urges him to plot and kill the monkey. Though the crocodile thinks about the impossibilities of killing his friend, it surrenders to its mate. It breaks the trust in friendship. But the monkey escapes from danger by using his presence of mind.

### GREEDINESS

Desire for material pleasure is an evil, which collapses the human bondage, love and affection with one another. The story "Sulasa and Satukka" reveals the theme of greediness and desire for money. It also talks about Women's struggle to overcome the male domination. Sulasa, a beautiful woman in Benares falls in love with a thief, Satukka and gets married to him. But Satukka wants to abduct the jewels of Sulasa by planning to kill her. He even goes to the extent of pushing her from mountain. Alladi Mahadeva Sastry, in "The Bhagavad Gita, with the COMMENTARY OF SRI SANKRACHARYA" expresses that "when a man thinks of objects, attachment for them arises. From attachment desire arises, from desire arises wrath" (73). Here, apart from greediness the theme of betraying the wife is pictured. Sulasa fails to reason the pros and cons of marrying a person without knowing his true nature. In today's modern world, the youngsters take hasty decision in selecting their life partners before analysing each others' positive and negative aspects. Like Sulasa in this story, most of the women make a wrong choice in their life, due to lack of reasoning, though they are educated. There are modern Satukkas, who want their wives to be money yielding machines. When women come to know about the darker side of their life partners, most of them psychologically get collapsed. In the story, inspite of her wrong decision in marrying a thief, Sulasa safeguards herself by killing her husband. She asks permission to Satukka to worship him by kneeling down and pushes him from the mountain. The act of killing depicts killing the ego of the male counterparts in the modern world. There are very few Sulasas, who take bold decisions to move forward in their life by shattering the impediments from their husbands.

Likewise, in the story "Golden Mallard", the theme of greed and its consequences is reflected. Bodhisatta lives with his wife and three daughters and dies at young age. He takes rebirth as a Golden Mallard. On seeing the suffering of his wife and daughters, he decides to give a golden feather every day. The wife, who is greedy, plucks all the feathers at a time, but for her shock all the feathers become white. Even she knows that the mallard was her husband in its previous birth, she troubles the bird to acquire money. This story could be compared to today's humans, who are greedy to earn quick money without being honest. They involve in corruption, looting, and smuggling and go to the extent of committing murders to earn a lot. Most of them are well educated and they use their technological knowledge to go in a wrong path. It ruins their career and life. They fail to reason the results of their vicious deeds, as the wife in the story. Adharya Mahaprajna rightly states in "The Quest for Truth" that "Bhagavan experienced that the root cause of sorrow is karma and seed

of karma lies in attachment and aversion. Violence (himsa), untruth (asatya) and possessiveness (parigraha) are the result of attachment and aversion."(11).

### MISCOMMUNICATION

Miscommunication and Misunderstanding lead to chaos. Human beings are prone to listen and believe the words of others without analysing the facts. In the story "The Timid Hare and the Flight of Animals" the same notion is depicted. Bodhisatta takes the form of a lion in this story. When a timid hare thinks and runs that the whole world is going to end, on hearing the sound of a vilva fruit fallen on a palm leaf, other animals also run behind the hare with panic. The lion makes the animals to understand the real situation. This story could be related to the prose "The Lion and The Lamb" written by Leonard Clarke, in which the villagers tell different stories about a lion which escaped from a menagerie. Leonard Clarke portrays the fear of the villagers, "Shortly after breakfast mother's neighbour, Mrs. Whittle rushed in to say that Mrs. Cox had just heard from Mrs. James next door that six lions got out of Bostock and Wombwell's and already eaten a whole sheep on Pope's Hill. Later it turned out that it was't a sheep but a baby."(89). This could also be related to the reaction of the people on hearing about the 'Dooms day in 2012' according to Mayan calendar. Even scientists from Nasa explained through the media about the facts and asked the people to think rationally, the panic among the people did not get reduced. This shows the attitude of humans, who believe and follow other's words blindly without reasoning.

### SURVIVAL

"The Tortoise loved his Home Too Much" depicts the theme of overcoming homesickness and vague sentiments, which are obstacles in improving ourselves in life. Bodhisatta takes the form of a potter's son in the story. In this story, a tortoise refuses to leave its home, a lake, even during the period of drought. When other tortoises and fish move to the nearby river, it digs a hole and stays in the pond itself. This leads the tortoise to face a fatal end, when Bodhisatta cuts its shell by mistaking that to be rough clay. This story teaches the importance of learning to survive in the competitive world. Moreover, there is a teaching that, if we get a chance to move ahead for our improvement, we should not hesitate to change our mind set. Dr.A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, states about his homesickness in his autobiography "The Wings of Fire", when he was about to leave his home town for higher studies. Arun Tiwari expresses the words of Dr.A.P.J. Abdul Kalam regarding his father's advice to move ahead in life. "Abdul! I know you have to go away to grow. Does the seagull not fly across the Sun, alone and without a nest? You must forego your greater desires; our love will not bind you nor will our needs hold you". (10).

### LEADERSHIP

Bodhisatta takes birth as a king's adviser in the story "Talkative Tortoise". There lives a talkative tortoise, which is friendly with two geese. The two geese carry the tortoise with a help of a stick by making the asking the tortoise to bite it. They also put a condition to him that he should not open his mouth and talk. Though the tortoise agrees at first, he cannot

control his excitement to talk. When he opens his mouth, he falls down and breaks into pieces. The king, on seeing the condition of the tortoise enquires Bodhisatta. Bodhisatta has waited for the opportunity to teach a lesson to the king, who is always talkative and never allows anybody to

talk or share their views in the court. Bodhisatta explains to the king that, one who cannot control his tongue faces the fatal end and ruin. On hearing this king realises his mistake. Acharya Mahaprajna in "Mind Beyond Mind" explains "Padastha Dhayana refers to meditation on spoken words. The aim of this meditation is to control words. No one can continuously remain tongue tied, nor can one go on speaking endlessly. But if we choose to speak, we must first understand what words mean. We should also try to season words". (23). This can be perceived in the modern days' aspect that a good leader should be a good observer. The work atmosphere in today's corporate scenario aims at team building and team spirit. Youngsters should foster such qualities as respecting and considering others' views, perseverance and be a good observer. These traits will guide them to improve the potential of the team as well as the individuals as good leaders. Unlike the king and the tortoise, they should think constructively.

### CONCLUSION

These stories preach the importance of sense of reasoning. Though man hood is bestowed with the sixth sense, most of the time man loses the ability to think, analyse and act. The stories also motivate the humans to get rid of their desire for material pleasure and stress the Buddhist Idealism that "Desire is the Cause of Destruction". The law of karma is rightly emphasised in these stories that every being is responsible for the consequences of his or her act. The Eight fold path as explained by Buddha, Right Perspective, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration are reflected in these stories. These stories will act as a beacon to the society, which is decaying in the aspect of moral values and guide the humans to lead their life by following the virtues.

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