

Research Article

# The Question of Moral Education: Reading Selected Bangla and English Folktales

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## Abstract

Moral education is a type of education that distinguishes between right and wrong and determines human behaviour. In other words, moral education is an educational programme that focuses on moral and ethical values. The folktales' moral education aims to prepare the audience to be responsible, respectful, and resilient citizens who will contribute to the development of society, the nation, and the world at large. This study classifies moral themes and investigates their educational impact by conducting a qualitative content analysis of selected Bangla and English folktales. The study finds that each folktale incorporates some moral education, which is necessary in all aspects of human society. Folktales from the oral literary tradition play an important role in imparting moral education that includes historical, cultural, and religious ideologies and values. Folktale performances convey the moral values imbued in folktales to both children and adults. Folktale performance has been a part of human culture since time immemorial. The stories told in a pleasant ambience not only entertain, but also teach children moral lessons and values that will help them become better members of society. The folktale genre aims to educate children by instilling moral values, socialisation, behavioural changes, psychological development, and spiritual upliftment. The study concludes proving that these folktale-based lessons teach children human qualities like hard work, courage, love, sympathy, forgiveness, respect for elders, patriotism, tolerance, heroism, truthfulness, fraternity, and religiosity, among others. Furthermore, these folktale performances also highlight social vices such as pride, envy, wrath, theft, hatred, wickedness, ingratitude, injustice, disobedience, and dishonesty, which typically lead to retribution and nemesis.

## Keywords

Folktales, Oral Tradition, Human Behaviour, Moral Education, Ethical Values

## 1. Introduction

The word 'moral' derives from the Latin word 'mores' which means 'customs' or 'habits'. Morality and ethics are interconnected. 'Ethics' derives from 'ethos', which means 'custom' or 'conduct'. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines morality as 'principles of right and wrong behaviour' [14]. The same dictionary defines 'ethics' as 'a science that deals with morals' [14]. Thus, "the concept of morality

lies in being good, thinking good, and doing good; this 'good' means good for all, that is, good for oneself and others as well. 'What one should do' and 'what one should not do' distinctly clarify the line of demarcation between morality and immorality" [21]. Moreover, from an ethical point of view, moral education is a kind of education that synthesises knowledge and values negotiated within the concept of mer-

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it. In other words, it is a study of the way of knowing oneself, others, and social obligations [1]. Indeed, moral education deals with morality and ethical values, instilling goodness and humanism to manifest in human will and activity. Moreover, every society has a moral code, and the concern and responsibility of the adults of that particular society is to insert this code into the minds of its young generation. Also, most educationists, thinkers and parents admit that the young need the guidance of the adults so as to learn how to live in a harmonious society. So, it is imperative that children should read more and more folktales for their grounding in wisdom and ethical principles. Precisely the main purpose of this research is to develop in the young both the intellectual and moral virtues of folktales such as integrity, responsibility, respect, compassion and the like for their becoming true human beings.

### 1.1. Moral Education in Bangla Folktales

The folktales contain moral lessons that require exploration and discovery. They symbolize virtues and vices that receive appropriate rewards or punishments. In order to illustrate moral values from folktales, it is imperative that we begin with Dakshinaranjan Mitra-Majumdar's tales of *Thakurmar Jhuli (A Bag of Stories)*. There is a folktale here named "Kolaboti Rajkonnaya" ("Princess Kolaboti") that addresses moral issues like tolerance, brotherhood, love, abuses of power, deprivation, jealousy, and ingratitude. The story "Ghumonto Puri" ("The Slumbering World") focuses on moral issues like heroism, love, and affection. The tale "Kakonmala-Kanchonmala" highlights moral issues such as friendship, love for husband, aestheticism, betrayal, falsehood, and greed. Similarly, another famous tale in Bengali culture, "Sat Vai Champa" ("Champa and Seven Brothers"), stresses moral issues like brother-sister relationships, tolerance, jealousy, abuses of power, and cruelty. The story "Sheit-Basanta" also highlights moral issues like kindness, heroism, forgiveness, envy, and cruelty. Likewise, "Kironmala" deals with moral issues such as affection, kindness, heroism, tolerance, abuses of power, envy, lying, and cruelty. Aside from this, the tale "Patal Konnaya Monimala" ("Princess Monimala of the Underworld") also highlights moral issues such as heroism, love for husbands, and greed.

Now we shall deal with *Folk-Tales of Bengal* by Lal Behari Day. It is a remarkable work that adds a glorious dimension to Bengal's rich heritage. Most of the tales in this collection provide moral lessons that are important in our real lives. Let us explore the moral values attached to each of the folktales. Firstly, the tale "Pran Kothai" ("Life's Secret") deals with moral issues like friendship, love for husband, and envy. Similarly, "Gorib Brahman" ("The Indigent Brahman") is a tale that entails moral issues such as religious faith, sympathy, mercy, forgiveness, greed, and abuses of power. The tale "Rakshasir Golpo" ("The Story of the Rakshasas") imparts moral issues like brotherhood, heroism, hospitality,

religious faith, and greed. The tale "Swet O Basanta" ("The Story of Swet-Basanta") emphasises moral issues such as empathy, financial greed, discouragement, and suicide. The tale "Rajputra Sobur" ("The Story of Prince Sobur") highlights moral issues like pride, injustice, envy, love for husband, and forgiveness. Another important tale, "Duie Chor" ("The Adventures of Two Thieves and of Their Sons"), imbibes moral issues like exploitation, inequality, and theft as crimes. The religious tale of this collection, "Brahmadaityar Golpo" ("The Story of a Brahmadaitya), focuses on traditional issues like boldness, change of attitude, and religious faith. This tale especially deals with three important factors of religion—sin, penance, and salvation. In this tale, we see that a Brahman dies unmarried, and as a result, he becomes a ghost. After having endured a Brahmadaitya life for many years, the Brahman is absolved of his sin and reaches heaven. The folk artist writes: "The Pushpaka chariot (the chariot of Kuvera) had been sent to him from heaven, and Brahmadaitya was taken up into heaven" [10]. Again, "Chandrachur" ("The Boy with the Moon on His Forehead") is a story about moral issues like envy, lying, sympathy, and heroism.

*Tuntunir Boi (A Collection of Folk Tales)* is a collection of folktales compiled by Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury. These folktales are written by illiterate common people in lucid language that is comprehensible to children. Though a children's book, it replicates the life and soul of eternal Bengal. These tales, so to speak, entail lofty social values that help form child psychology. Let us now deal with some of the folktales from these collections that convey a moral lesson. To begin with, the story "Chorai O Bagher Kotha" ("The Sparrow and the Tiger") imparts the moral lesson that sometimes the weaker can defeat the stronger with wit. Likewise, the most famous tale "Hatir Bhitore Shial" ("The Fox in the Elephant") gives the moral lesson that wit is necessary to continue efforts in order to overcome adversity.

### 1.2. Moral Education in English Folktales

*English Fairy and Other Folk Tales*, compiled by Edwin Sidney Hartland, is a monumental work in English literature. This collection of folktales imbibes moral values that are necessary for individuals, communities, and the world at large. Now we shall make an attempt to identify the moral values in some of the important folktales in this collection. The tale "The Princess of Colchester" conveys the moral lesson that envy is a grave sin. The story "Mr. Fox" moralises that love is divine, but exploitation is a crime that must invite suffering in the long run. The story "Wild Edric" teaches us to always keep our secrets and to be true to our promises. "Bomere Pool," the religious tale in this collection, focuses on the religious belief that God's path is the right path. In a similar vein, the story "The Two Serving Damsels" imparts the lesson that patience can be bitter, yet its rewards can be sweet. Put simply, patience is a valuable attribute that consistently yields rewards. And "The Fairies' Caldron" is a

tale that inculcates that honesty is the best policy and that one should be true to one's word.

*Grimm's Fairy Tales*, compiled by Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, is a collection of timeless stories that are popular the world over. Some of these fairy tales are so famous that they seem to have always been with us. These stories carry the inquisitive readers into their enchanted world, but at the same time, they imbibe moral teaching for the readers. Now we shall try to find out the moral values that Gimm's collection imparts to us. Let us start with the tale "Cinderella," which is well known by western and eastern readers alike. This tale focuses on some important moral issues like envy, endurance, sympathy, and love. Another famous story all over the world is "Beauty and the Beast," which entails moral issues such as crime, curses, redemption, and love. Grimm's collection also includes the popular story "Little Red Riding Hood," which teaches us that justice always rewards innocence and justice punishes evil. Indeed, "The Sleeping Beauty" is also the most famous story among both western and eastern readers. This tale bears the moral lesson that love is the best remedy and that love can win the world. However, "The Juniper Tree" is a fairy tale that highlights moral issues like envy, greed, love, and exploitation. Furthermore, "The Water of Life" is a story that conveys moral issues such as truth, honesty, kindness, plot, wickedness, and fraudulence. Another popular tale is "Hansel and Grethel," in which we find that the witch represents evil, whereas Hansel and Grethel represent innocence. Of course, this tale instills the concept of punishment for evil and reward for innocence. Finally, "Rapunzel" is a story that, similar to its predecessor, juxtaposes good and evil. This story reveals that Rapunzel's parents honor their commitment, the witch faces consequences for her malevolent actions, and Rapunzel receives a royal title as a reward for her genuine affection for the prince. Thus, this story imparts the lessons of keeping promises and the triumph of love over all obstacles.

## 2. Methodology

Through a qualitative content analysis of selected Bangala and English folktales, this study seeks to understand the function of folktales as moral education tools. The information came from a wide range of places, such as books, online databases, and folklore archives. Renowned writers like Dakshinaranjan Mitra-Majumdar, Lal Behari Day and Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury penned the Bangla folktales. Edwin Sidney Hartland's *English Fairy and Other Folk Tales* and The Grimm Brothers' *Fairy Tales* were the primary sources for the English folktales.

This paper used qualitative content analysis to classify the moral themes in the selected folktales. The theoretical frameworks put forth by Bohlin [6] and Lillie [16] formed the basis of the analysis. Plato, Aristotle, and more contemporary philosophers and thinkers like Bentham [3] and Mill [20] and Marx [18] all contributed to the study's theoretical

framework, which centres on ideas about moral development and education.

In order to ensure that the results were accurate and consistent, professionals who specialise in folklore studies and moral education participated in peer debriefing sessions. To back up the interpretations, we compared the folktales' moral themes with those of other published works. The study recognises that cultural bias and subjectivity are limitations of moral interpretation. Nevertheless, its primary goal is to enrich the larger conversation about literature and education's ethical principles.

## 3. Discussion

### 3.1. Moral / Ethical Interpretations of Folktales

The folktales present moral issues in the binary opposition paradigm. For instance, there are lessons on perseverance against sloth, love and kindness against jealousy and cruelty, hospitality against rudeness, trust and loyalty against treachery, equality against exploitation, forgiveness against envy, contentment against covetousness, generosity against greed, heroism against callousness, oneness against disorganization, sacrifice against abuses of power, discretion against simple-mindedness, compassion against apathy, frugality against luxury, gratitude against ungratefulness, tolerance against prejudice, courage against cowardice, truthfulness against falsehood, diligence against laziness, self-control against self-indulgence, security against anxiety, reverence against disrespect and the like. Some folktales perform the function of inserting moral values in children, ensuring an amiable upbringing. These tales focus on the formation of attitude and character. For instance, stories such as "Kakonmala-Kanchonmala," "Sat Vai Champa" ("Champa and Seven Brothers"), "Sukhu and Dukhu, Pran Kothai" ("Life's Secret"), "Phakir Chand," "Cindrella", "The Old Grandfather and the Grandson", "Hansel and Grethel", and "One-Eye, Two Eyes, and Three Eyes," among others, impart morals that shape children's behavior. These stories demonstrate the appropriate rewards for good behaviour and the appropriate punishments for bad behaviour.

The folktale performances also highlight social vices such as pride, envy, wrath, theft, hatred, wickedness, ingratitude, injustice, disobedience, and dishonesty that generally lead to retribution and nemesis. For instance, the folktale performances portray the envious queens in "Kolaboti Rajkonnaya" ("Princess Kolaboti"), the treacherous king in "Kakonmala-Kanchonmala," the cruel and greedy merchant in "Swet O Basanta" ("The Story of Swet-Basanta"), the arrogant and unjust father in "Rajputra Sobur" ("The Story of Prince Sobur"), the envious and coarse queen in "The Princess of Colchester," the merciless prince in "Beauty and the Beast," the evil wolf in "Little Red Riding Hood," and the treacherous brothers in The folktales make the children aware of the

dreadful consequences of social evils and convey some lessons as to how to combat these social vices. In the age of moral degradation, the oral tradition's moral education is indispensable for children's positive psychological construction and behavioural change. Pop culture today immerses the young generation in armed robberies, rapes, kidnappings, forgeries, sodomy, hijacking, exam malpractices, drug addiction, cultism, pornography, and nudity. If the thirst for these is not resisted, the young generation will be lost in a pit of moral decadence. In this regard, Karen E. Bohlin's teachings about applied virtue ethics and character education may, to a substantial extent, save the young generation from moral disintegration. Because she stresses the importance of moral excellence for the moulding of human character, Karen E. Bohlin suggests in her book *Teaching Character Education Through Literature: Awakening the Moral Imagination in Secondary Classrooms* that moral imagination and freedom are more important than adherence to the rules and regulations of the law, and moral principles are very much imperative in the classroom for the character education of the students [6].

Hence, it is high time parents, society, and government took effective steps to promote folktales to lead all children towards their moral development. Still, we have scope to regain the moral health of our nation. We argue that the curricula of primary, secondary, and even higher levels should incorporate oral traditions of literature, especially folktales. We firmly believe that teaching moral issues to the younger generation in schools can significantly reduce the current world's degeneration.

The folktales not only convey moral teachings to the children, but they also offer the "collective wisdom" of a nation. They stimulate the listeners' wit and talent. The folktale performance is fundamental in embodying societal and material culture, as well as codifying beauty and truth that glorify a nation's image. We can attribute the folktales to a "set of moral standards" or a discipline of "moral philosophy." So, folktales, like ethics, "judge the social conduct of human beings to be right or wrong, to be good or bad, or in some similar way [16]. Furthermore, folktales aim to create a well-organized, disciplined, and regulated moral society. Therefore, all spheres of society should uphold the collective ethical standards, the all-encompassing life-training, and the highest ideals that oral literature imbibes. Let us now interpret our chosen folktales in terms of how they function to uphold ethical values for building a happy and prosperous society, state, and world at large.

### 3.2. Philosophical / Didactical Interpretations of Folktales

If we analyze the folktales from an ethical standpoint, we observe that the folktales entail those ethical values that all philosophers, from Buddha to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Russell, Karl Marx, and others, highlight as pre-

requisites for a good social life. Gautam Buddha (600 B.C.) is the first philosopher who focuses on morality for establishing a peaceful society. In this respect, equality, fraternity, humanity, and non-violence remain his focal points. The Buddha's philosophy is "May all creatures—higher or lower, visible or invisible—be happy and secure; may they be happy-minded." The Buddha conspicuously accentuates Ahimsa's morality. He preaches four noble truths: (a) the existence of suffering; (b) its cause; (c) the possibility of its cessation; and (d) the existence of a method to end suffering. Nirvana, or the extinction of suffering, is life's goal. The Buddha affirms the eightfold path as the way to the attainment of nirvana, consisting of right belief, right speech, right conduct, right resolve, right sight, right effort, right livelihood, and right concentration [22]. Buddhism emphasises brahmavihara, which enunciates meditation on friendship and love for all beings, sympathy for the destitute, joy for the pious, and compassion for the vicious. So, philanthropy is Brahmavihara's motto. Likewise, Jainism also preeminently enjoins ahimsa because it puts stress on truthfulness, non-covetousness, sex-restraint, non-stealing, and non-injury [22]. Mahatma Gandhi is also an advocate of ahimsa. He emphasises the cultivation of truth and social service for humankind. To him, "God is truth, love, and light." Similarly, our folktale collections inculcate contemplation of some virtues such as truthfulness, friendship, love, tolerance, forgiveness, sympathy, and abstention from social vices such as pride, envy, sloth, exploitation, fraudulence, greed, abuse, hatred, and other evil passions. So, Buddhism, Jainism, the Yoga system, and the folktales highlight the importance of moral virtues.

Let us now cite the moral virtues that our selected folktales embody. Tolerance is a noble virtue that "Kolaboti Rajkonnaya" ("Princess Kolaboti") reflects. The king and his five other queens dehumanise the fourth and youngest queen, as well as their sons Bhutum and Buddhu. They endure untold suffering with great patience, and finally, with the help of Princess Kolaboti, they regain royal glory. Similar rewards await the characters representing tolerance in "Sat Vai Champa" ("Champa and Seven Brothers"), "Kironmala," "Sukhu and Dukhu," and "The Two Serving Damsels." Love is a divine virtue. The folktales "Kolaboti Rajkonnaya" ("Princess Kolaboti"), "Ghumonto Puri" ("The Slumbering World"), "Kakonmala-Kanchonmala", "Patal Konnaya Monimala" ("Princess Monimala of the Underworld"), "Cinderella" "Beauty and the Beast", "The Sleeping Beauty," and "Rapunzel" articulate that love can conquer all. Love is a prime factor in bringing peace and happiness; love integrates, but hatred disintegrates. According to Gandhi, love is God, and God is love. Therefore, if universal love, mercy, sympathy, cheerfulness, and good will permeate the world, all evils will vanish from the earth.

Friendliness is a great virtue. The folktales highlight the importance of friendliness and brotherhood in familial and communal life. Such a kind of interpersonal relationship is



also indispensable in every sphere of life. The tale “Pran Kothai” (“Life’s Secret”) narrates that Dalim’s intimate friend, the minister’s son, remains with him all the while during his “life-in-death” in the desolate garden. “Rakshasir Golpo” (“The Story of the Rakshasas”) tells that Sahasra Dal and Champa Dal, two stepbrothers, are bosom friends who kill their Rakshasa mother and other Rakshasas at the risk of their lives.

The folktales emphasise some other human qualities, such as truthfulness, faithfulness, loyalty, kindness, and forgiveness. “Faithful John” exhibits the best example of faithfulness and loyalty as the king’s servant. John has been faithful to his master throughout his whole life. Regarding John’s loyalty and faithfulness, the king himself acknowledges, “He is my most faithful John, who knows what it may be good for [12]. Even after the death of the king, John has remained loyal and faithful to the prince, even at his life’s cost. It has a prophetic quality. Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (Sm.) possessed this virtue, for which he was called “Al-amin” (the truthful). Some folktales exhibit the greatness of the hearts of the executors. In “Sheit-Basanta,” the executor does not kill Sheit and Basanta; rather, he saves the two brothers. The executor, with his eyes full of tears, utters, “Dear princes! It is royal ordain; what I’d do; I’ve nurtured you with great affection; how I’d put a sword on your golden throats! I cannot do that, dear princes, whatever is in store for me—go away, princes, wearing the barks so that none can recognise you” [17]. Likewise, “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” manifests the kindness of the huntsman, who, defying the unscrupulous command, does not execute Snow White.

The folktales teach us to discard social evils such as pride, avarice, envy, sloth, ingratitude, hatred, fraudulence, theft, lying, and so on. Pride is the vilest of the seven deadly sins. “Rajputra Sobur” (“The Story of Prince Sobur”) illustrates that pride goes before fall. The rich merchant falls from grace for his pride and injustice, and as such, he works as a day labourer for existence. Satan falls from paradise only for his pride. Shakespeare also demonstrates in Macbeth that King Macbeth meets his tragic end for pride, for “vaulting ambition.” Indolence is also a grave sin. Moral life does not support it. Idleness is the root of all moral maladies. The stories “Nababer Alshae” (“The Idle of the Nabab”), “Brahman and Brahmani,” and “Mother Carey” illustrate the pathetic end of the characters representing sloth. The holy books also direct us to abandon indolence and cultivate hard work. In this connection, we can quote from the holy Quran, “God does not change a people’s lot unless they change what is in their hearts” [9]. Hatred is another evil impulse. According to Buddhism, “There is no shark like hatred.” “The fields are damaged by weeds; mankind is damaged by hatred” [22]. Thus, the folktales encourage virtues and discourage vices. In this regard, we observe that the moral standards of folktales, to some extent, conform to the ethical view of Confucius (551-471 BC). Confucius, in his famous book *The Analects*, philosophises that morality and society are interde-

pendent. He explains ‘moral society’ in three terms: ‘Jen’, ‘Li’, and ‘Tao’. ‘Jen’ is a virtue that implies “courage, generosity, humanity, good character and good conduct” [19]. ‘Tao’ entails “such a stage of human civilisation that inculcates cultivation of equality, fraternity, and good moral character in society, and refrains from beastliness, stealing, sexual abuse, and jealousy” [19]. According to him, ‘Li’ is a path that helps build up an ideal society and good government.

The folktales emphasise the importance of justice, heroism, and wisdom. Each tale ends with the poetic justice that virtues are rightly rewarded and vices are duly punished. The moral principles of folktales can be interpreted with Plato’s (417–447 BC) ethical thoughts. In his immortal books *The Laws* and *The Republic*, Plato makes an elaborate discussion on “Society and Morality.” By ‘morality’ he refers to ‘modification of laws’. To him, ‘morality’ is synonymous with ‘justice’. He asserts that justice is to be cultivated in individual as well as social life. He expresses his view that justice is the ‘soul’ and society is its ‘body’. As the soul and body are interdependent, so are justice and society. Regarding Plato’s emphasis on the social importance of justice, we can quote: “It is a conception of social ethics, which, no less than law, is the basis of social relationships. The essence of social ethics and justice lies in the conception of ‘may station and its duties’” [4]. Hegel also supports Plato’s thought in another way, where he means ‘reality’ by society and ‘soul’ by justice or morality. To Hegel, society and justice are two different forms of the same entity.

In this connection, Bhandari and Sethi comment:

“Society and justice—the two blend in one and cannot be separated. Justice is the order which means the true condition of the state, and the ideal state is the visible embodiment of justice. The one is the soul, the other is the body—fair mind in a fair body” [4].

Plato instills in the social people the discipline, restraint, and endowment of moral virtues, as laws and moral virtues can guarantee liberty, unity, universal love, and brotherhood among the citizens. If each individual is virtuous, society will be virtuous as a whole. Every virtuous person, as Plato emphasises, should embody three qualities: heroism, courage, and wisdom. The illiterate folktale composers also stress these virtues for a virtuous society. Tales like “Ghumonto Puri” (“The Slumbering World”), “Patal Konnaya Monimala” (“Princess Monimala of the Underworld”), and “Rakshasir Golpo” (“The Story of the Rakshasas”) highlight the importance of heroism, valour, and strength. And the tales “Brahman and Brahmani,” “Norohoridas,” “Chorai O Bagh” (“The Sparrow and the Tiger”), “Hatir Bhitarae Shial” (“The Fox in the Elephant”), “The Tomtit and the Bear,” and “Tuntuni O Rajar Kotha” (“The Tuntuni and the King”) exhibit the application of wit and wisdom in social life. For example, the tale “Tuntuni O Rajar Kotha” (“The Tuntuni and the King”) illustrates Tuntuni’s wit, with which she is able to cut off not only the king’s nose but also the noses of seven queens. Then the tuntuni recites in a joyous mood,

“One tuntuni showed her feats and got the seven queens cut off their noses” [7]. In fact, Plato refers to a virtuous society as one that specifies the respective duties of each group and community. If each group and community performs their respective duties properly, society or the state would be a virtuous one. Plato dreamed of a virtuous society based on justice, as did the folk artists in their writings.

Aristotle (384 BC) also agrees with Plato’s ethical view and conceives of society as a moral institution. According to him, society serves as the ideal platform for enhancing the moral qualities of each individual. So, he opines that a person of moral excellence should lead the nation. As a result, he emphasizes moral education in order to build up a harmonious and disciplined civil society in which citizens have good character and conduct. Like Plato, Aristotle too identifies morality with justice. He, in fact, explains ‘justice’ in two terms: (i) absolute justice, which embodies moral virtues, firm character, and mutual equality among people. (ii) Particular justice, which emphasizes each individual’s due reward. Aristotle classifies particular justice into two categories: (i) distributive justice and (ii) remedial justice. Distributive justice enunciates rights, liberty, and equality for citizens as social human beings [5]. Aristotle, in his discussion, mainly envisioned a virtuous state that ensures the proper rights of its citizens. The citizens of such a state would be virtuous, dignified, and endowed with moral wit, military valour, wealth, and leadership capability. Indeed, Plato and Aristotle dreamt of a society that is a ‘virtuous society’. They both emphasise the contemplation of morality and moral education for social development, progress, and achievement. However, Plato regards ‘moral hierarchy’ as the standard of moral justice, and Aristotle regards ‘honesty’ as a moral standard that must have social function. According to Aristotle, morality necessitates human responsibility through action, as nothing can be considered good unless it functions [23]. The folktale composers are in agreement with Aristotle in the sense that they emphasise reward for honesty and good work and punishment for evil deeds.

If we interpret the folktales from a modern ethical point of view, we observe that the moral standards of the folktales conform to the ethical thoughts of modern philosophers like Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Emanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Bertrand Russell, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Bentham and Mill’s utilitarianism stresses the importance of morality in society. The utilitarian philosophers uphold the principle of maximizing happiness for the maximum number of people. Utilitarianism, one part of ethical hedonism, postulates that the work that can generate maximum happiness is a good one, whereas the work that cannot generate maximum good is a bad one. According to Bentham, all men should do well for the betterment of society, reducing its sorrows and sufferings [3]. Both Bentham and Mill emphasise universal happiness, not individual happiness. In fact, we can refer to utilitarianism as ‘universal hedonism’ or ‘altruism’. To them, ‘impartiality’ is ‘justice’. We observe that injustice, inequality, violence, and

so on prevail in our contemporary society because of the lack of impartial justice. In his book *Utilitarianism*, Mill acknowledges that two factors control moral justice: (i) the rule of conduct and (ii) the rule of desire. Emphasising the importance of these two rules, Mill mentions, “The first must appear to be common to all mankind and intended for this good. The other, known as the sentiment, expresses a desire for those who violate the rule to face punishment” [20]. The utilitarian believes that men should have moral virtues such as continence, duty, sympathy, and belief. The folktales also stress these moral qualities for ensuring maximum happiness and delight for society. The tales “Gorib Brahman” (“The Indigent Brahman”), “Swet O Basanta” (“The Story of Swet-Basanta”), and “Chandrachur” (“The Boy with the Moon on His Forehead”) embody sympathy; “Pipra O Piprir Kotha” (“The Story of an Ant Couple”) and “Mother Carey” testify duty; “Rakshasir Golpo” (“The Story of Rakshasas”), “Brahmadaityar Golpo” (“The Story of Brahmadaitya”) and “Bomere Pool” reflect religious belief; and “Kolaboti Rajkonnaya” (“Princess Kolabot”), “Sat Vai Champa” (“Champa and Seven Brothers”), “Kironmala” and “Sukhu and Dukhu” stress continence. The folk artists concur with utilitarian thinkers that applying moral desire and justice, and cultivating moral virtues in society, can significantly control socio-cultural decay.

Some folktales comply with the standards of deontological ethics. Deontological principles, as we scrutinise them, aim at creating mutual understanding, brotherhood, and human welfare. It also inspires man as a social being to follow the principle ‘to be true to his word’. This theory upholds a work’s internal virtues as moral standards rather than its aftermath. Emanuel Kant’s ethical thoughts are harmonious with deontological principles. This theory evaluates David Ross’s principle of ‘prima facie duty’ as a universal law. For instance, we can consider noble deeds like ‘serve humanity’ or ‘keep your promise’ as moral duties if we regard them as obligatory works [5]. The folktales “Wild Edric,” “The Fairies’ Caldron,” “The Frog Prince,” and “Rapunzel” underscore the moral duty of upholding promises. Similarly, “Pran Kothai” (“Life’s Secret”), “Rajputra Sobur” (“The Story of Prince Sobur”), and “Lady Godiva” emphasize the principle of ‘serve humanity’. For instance, Lady Godiva, a devotee of God, shows her strange performance tactfully only to save the common people from the oppressions of her husband, Earl Leofric. Hartland writes: “Earl Leofric freed the town of Coventry and its inhabitants from the aforesaid service and confirmed what he had done by a charter” [13]. Therefore, adhering strictly to the universal law of deontological principles, also known as Ross’s ‘prima facie duty’, can lead to ethical achievement.

Karl Marx, of course, propounds humanism as the moral standard of life. According to Marxist ethics, “The criterion of rightness is the promotion of humanity’s welfare, of the maximum realization of the possibilities of a full life for all” [22]. Marx here differs from other thinkers and advocates

that moral standards like hedonism, utilitarianism, perfectionism, or rationalism cannot eradicate human suffering. He observes that only humanitarian thoughts can exterminate the injustices, inequalities, and exploitations that are prevalent in society. He emphasizes the need to rouse humanism among people in light of equality, unity, and liberty. Kazi Nazrul Islam, the national poet of Bangladesh, also articulates this philosophy of life in his poem.

I sing of equality.

There's nothing greater than a human being,

Nothing nobler!

Caste, creed, religion—there's no difference.

Throughout all ages, all places,

We're all a manifestation

Of our common humanity [15].

Indeed, Marx tries to establish humanism on the premise of logical, scientific, and historical truth. Marx actually dreams of an exploitation-free society that ensures the harmonious development of all people. In this context, Marx aligns himself with the Hegelian concept and declares:

The outstanding thing in Hegel's phenomenology is that Hegel grasps the self-creation of man as a process, and that he, therefore, grasps the nature of labour and conceives the object of man as the result of his own labour [18].

Marx tends to solve the social crisis through his dialectical materialism. The folk artists illustrate various forms of exploitation, deprivation, injustice, and abuses of power in their stories like "Kolaboti Rajkonnaya" ("Princess Kolaboti"), "Kironmala", "Sukhu and Dukhu", "Duie Chor" ("Adventures of Two Thieves and of Their Sons"), "Mr. Fox," and "The Juniper Tree." Unlike Marxist philosophers, the folktale writers simply depict the scourge of exploitation in social life, without proposing any theory of dialectical materialism or theory of praxis as moral standards. In fact, the folk artists envision an exploitation-free, classless, and equitable society.

Bertrand Russell (1872–1971), no doubt, has made a great contribution to the principles of ethics. His ethical view is characterised by three sources—*inherent instincts, senses, and mind*. If these three sources of mutual unification guide a person, he might live a moral life. Russell, in fact, accepts the principles of utilitarian philosophers in the sense that moral work is that which creates more benefits than others. Russell refers to "good work" as the work that helps make a man happy and sensible. Conversely, we can regard as immoral any work that renders a man unhappy and insensible. He defines "morality" in terms of love and obedience. Russell asserts that love has the power to resolve social feuds and conflicts, stating that "love inspires the good life and knowledge guides it" [5]. Like Emanuel Kant, Russell's ethical view is rationalistic. So far as ethical principles are concerned, Kant places stress on 'autonomy of the will or Kantian autonomy' and Russell on 'intellectuality'. These two standards play a positive role in maintaining a person's dignity as a social human being. Of course, Russell identifies two conflicting impulses in man—'social intention and alienation'

and 'solitude' [5]—that contribute to social morality. He believes that in this society, all men are occupied with their work as a means of overcoming solitude, and in fact, performing relatively good work is considered a moral deed. Emphasising goodness as a moral standard, he says, 'Love is knowledge'. In this connection, Russell refers to the Biblical dictum, "Love your God and love your own neighbor" [5].

Some folktales in our selection highlight love for God and love for man. For instance, the tales "Gorib Brahman" ("The Indigent Brahman"), "Rakshasir Golpo" ("The Story of Rakshasas"), "Brahmadaityar Golpo" ("The Story of Brahmadaitya"), and "Bomere Pool" focus on religious faith. "Gorib Brahman" ("The Indigent Brahman") elucidates the Brahman's profound love and devotion to the deity Durga; "Brahmadaityar Golpo" ("The Story of Brahmadaitya") underscores three crucial elements of religion—crime, punishment, and salvation; and "Bomere Pool" narrates that God's path is the correct path. So, fear of God translates to love for God and His creatures. Therefore, we assert that religion and morality have a close relationship and collaborate to foster social evolution. S. T. Coleridge's poetry best expresses the intimate association between religion and morality.

He prayeth best, who loveth best

All things both great and small;

For the dear God who loveth us,

He made and loveth all [8].

French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism also echoes ethical values. His humanitarian thought reflects that when a man chooses something for himself, he chooses not only for himself but for the whole mankind. So, he is responsible not only for his own individuality but for all human beings. In this society every man is floating in the whirlpool of care, anxiety and intoxication. Therefore, in our practical life, crisis, sorrows, sufferings and pains, says Sartre, are the hardest hurdles to man's choice. Sartre does assert:

"Even though we create our own values and thereby create ourselves, we nevertheless create at the same time an image of our human nature as we believe it ought to be. When we choose this or that way of acting, we affirm the value of what we have chosen, and nothing can be better for anyone of us unless it is better for all" [23].

Hence, Sartre's view of individual responsibility is identical with Kant's categorical imperative. Sartre, in fact, establishes his moral thoughts on the deep sense of human responsibility. The folktales also encourage doing our duties properly. If the people from all walks of life do their respective duties scrupulously, wisely and honestly, there will be no exploitation, no injustice in the society. Therefore, the ethical values of folktales more or less conform to Sartre's ethical thoughts.

From the above discussion, it is now clear that the moral teachings of folktales are universal and perennial. Needless to say, the modern age is characterized by scientific and technological development. Notwithstanding scientific advances, this age suffers from the social, religious and moral

decay. The whole world is ravaged by anarchy and antagonism. This moral decadence is vividly portrayed in 'Dover Beach' by Mathew Arnold:

The Sea of Faith  
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd,  
But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
Retreating, to the breath  
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear  
And naked shingles of the world [2].

And this devitalized world is projected in "The Waste Land" by T.S. Eliot. Eliot finds that the bond of humanity has been loosened. All people are caught in their selfish whims:

We think of the key, each in his prison  
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison  
Only at nightfall, ethereal rumors  
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus [11].

In this crucial juncture folktales may sustain people with the message of peace, harmony and brotherhood. Furthermore, while the racial conflict is rampant in the modern world, the folktales appeal to the non-communal consciousness. The folktales teach us to promote universal brotherhood and religious harmony. The folktales are composed by authors from different Faiths, and people irrespective of caste and creed enjoy these very much.

## 4. Conclusion

To conclude, we can opine that the folktales are not merely a source of delight and entertainment but also a 'collective knowledge' that teaches the children history, culture, principles of the community, an ethical code of life, and the existing social issues of the human world. In some cases, they function as oppressive tools to combat all sorts of disparity and injustice prevailing in society. The folk artists, in the real sense of the term, envision a world where people are liberal, broad-minded, non-sectarian, and free from all prejudices, dead customs, and religious dogmas. In the modern age of disintegration, the folktales carry the message of LOTS, signifying L=love, O=oneness, T=tolerance, and S=sacrifice. Real love manifests itself by being true to the absolute truth and compassionate to all living creatures on earth. Oneness means unity. Unity is strength; collaboration is power that can generate a common platform of shared interest. Tolerance is a wonderful virtue. Individuals who master the art of tolerance in various challenging circumstances are considered to possess exceptional personalities. Combining these virtues into one creates beauty, just as all musical instruments together produce a sweet symphony. Peace and harmony illuminate this beauty. The folktale corpus is not a religious scripture, but if properly followed in practical life, the moral teachings that the folktales offer can make the world a better human habitat.

## Author Contributions

Md. Habibur Rahman is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

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