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FABLES IN HUMAN LIFE

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ABSTRACT

Fables often characterize animals that are presented with anthropomorphic features such as the ability to speak and to reason with a basic intention to provide moral lesson. But beneath that there are several layers of intentions; which could be seen in the present paper. Famous fables in the western world include Aesop's Fables and Uncle Remus/Brer Rabbit series of stories by Joel Chandler Harris whereas in the eastern world especially in India, the most notable fables include the 'Panchatantra', the 'Hitopadesa', the 'Kathasaritsagara' and the 'Jataka'.

KEY WORDS: Aesop, Fables, purpose, moral lesson

Fable is a brief story intended to deliver a moral lesson. It is described either through animals, forces of nature, inanimate objects or plants by giving them human qualities. Fables were first invented with the intention that the languid minds of children could not be roused more quickly by any other way of speaking except it. This might be the reason the most serious and wisest of men have used this kind of teaching. The American psychologist Bruno Bettelheim argues that fables, myths and classic fairy tales such as Jack and the Beanstalk and Snow White deal with important human emotions and interminable ideas such as the battle between good and evil. Bettelheim also argues that children do not grow to maturity and understanding by accident - they have to be surrounded by stories and legends that teach the moral lessons as well as keep them exciting and entertaining.

Aesop is undoubtedly the most distinguished author of fable. His fables put prominence on the social communications of human beings and hence the morals he draws; deal with the realities of life. In Aesop's fables like 'The Ant and the Grasshopper', where the ant can survive winter because he has gathered food during the summer months instead of singing like the grasshopper, teach that hard work and planning ahead are better than being idle. Another tale, 'The Boy who cried Wolf', shows that if you lie and try to trick people, then when real danger arrives, you will suffer because nobody believes you.

An example from Indian fables is the story of 'The Glow Worm and the Daw' in which the Glow-Worm outwits the Daw and saves his life and gives the message that 'wickedness yields to wisdom'. Another fable, 'The Monkey and the Looking Glass' from the same anthology, moralizes that 'ignorance is bliss'.

The eventual purpose of a fable is to teach the reader a lesson or moral. Fables often use satire to get across or point out flaws in man or human experiences. Many fables rely on animals to tell their stories, and those animals usually symbolize a human trait the author wants to criticize for the purposes of teaching a moral.

In Chandler's trickster stories about Uncle Remus and Brer Rabbit, Brer Rabbit represents a weak slave from the South who is able to out trick his master by playing on the master's ignorance. It is a story with origins in Africa, and they chronicle lessons on how to survive in life. It is also a story about how even the weakest can out maneuver and manipulate those stronger through trickery.

The fables may not be recorded in the exact words as when they were first told. Over time the stories were re-told; words might have been changed or eliminated in order to fit the storyteller's purpose. Despite these changes, the basic lineaments remain the same; most of the fables share the role of animals in the stories, the animals display human qualities, especially the characteristics of speech and behavior and in effect, the stories are designed to mimic human life. Most of the fables are meant to highlight poor human decisions and behaviors.

The purpose of the fables was to serve as a form of children's' entertainment beyond being a simple teaching tool. The fables transmitted important life lessons while also describing the "world of childhood." The primary characters often acted in a child-like manner. The stories described the challenges of adulthood thus allowing young readers to engage with the characters and morals of adulthood at an early age.

Not only these; fables also served a multitude of additional purposes. Politically, the fables emerged in a time period when authoritarian rule often made free and open speech dangerous for the speaker. Here, fables served as *catharsis*; a means by which criticisms against the government could be expressed without fear of punishment. In effect, the stories served as a code by which the weak and powerless could speak out against the strong and powerful. The subversive nature of the tales allowed the lower classes in the society a means to escape from the real world.

Besides these, the stories also served to remind the weak that being clever could provide a means by which they could succeed against the powerful. The subversive nature of the tales allowed the lower classes of the society a means of escape from a society which was often oriented around the idea that "might is right." The fables were also considered as a valuable tool in speeches especially as a means to persuade others about this specific point.

The fables also provided an opportunity for a measure of self-reflection. At those moments when Greeks or Indians suspected their culture or civilization was not living up to expectations, the fables provided an opportunity for a degree of self-reflection.

Finally, Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*, argued that in the absence of any concrete evidence for proving one's point, a fable could just as well support one's argument.

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