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ETHICAL VALUES IN J. K. ROWLING'S *THE TALES OF BEEDLE THE BARD*

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Abstract:

*Fairy tales, which are basically the outgrowth of oral stories, are of course part and parcel of all cultures of the world. They play an important role in inculcating moral principles in the young minds of the children which are definitely essential for leading a virtuous life. These stories undoubtedly occupy a significant part in the holistic development of the children. Though the various cultures and geographical regions have different sets of folktales, the themes of all these tales are mostly the same. These stories deal with the conflict between good and evil usually in which good succeeds and virtue is rewarded in the end. In India, the Panchatantra and other folktales are in great numbers which are the representation of Indian moral values. Likewise, there are many fairy tales in English such as Cindrella, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Little Red Riding Hood etc. The celebrity English novelist J. K. Rowling, the creator of the fictional wizarding world in the pages of the famous Children Literature Harry Potter series, must have felt the need for incorporating fairy tales into the wizarding culture as well. Probably that could have resulted in penning the book *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*. In this collection of short stories, moral lessons are richly found which are beneficial not only to the children, but also to the people in general.*

Keywords: *Fairy Tales, Wizarding World, Moral Lessons, etc.*

• Introduction:

Fairy tales, which are basically the outgrowth of oral stories, are of course part and parcel of all cultures of the world. They play an important role in inculcating moral principles in the young minds of the children which are really essential for leading a virtuous life. These stories undoubtedly occupy a significant part in the holistic development of the children. Johnson observes, "Based on Jungian interpretation, fairy tales teach children how to deal with basic human conflicts, desires, and relationships in a healthy way; acquiring these skills can ultimately impact a child's health, quality of life, or even influence it's values and beliefs in the future" (Johnson, 77).

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penning the book *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*. In this collection of short stories, moral lessons are richly found which are beneficial not only to the children, but also to the people in general.

• **About the Author:**

The most famous novelist J. K. Rowling has achieved worldwide popularity owing to her Harry Potter series. And she is also said to be the world's highest-paid author. Besides, she is a film producer, television producer and screenwriter and philanthropist as well. She has won many awards for her Harry Potter novels such as 'Children's Book of the Year' for *Philosopher's Stone* and *Chamber of Secrets*, World Science Fiction Convention's 'Hugo Award' for the fourth book *Goblet of Fire*, and 'The Book of the Year' for her sixth novel *Half-Blood Prince*. Many academic institutions, including her alma mater, the University of Exeter, and Harvard University conferred honorary degrees on her.

• ***The Tales of Beedle the Bard:***

The name of this book first appears in the final volume of Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. The headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry Albus Dumbledore bequeathed his copy of this book to Hermione Granger in his will, with the intention of providing Harry Potter with the knowledge of the Deathly Hallows - Elder Wand, Resurrection Stone and Invisibility Cloak through one of its stories 'The Tales of the Three Brothers'. This book consists of five short stories along with the notes of Dumbledore for each story. Rowling presents this book as a translation by Hermione Granger from the original runes. Beedle is mentioned in the introduction of the book as a writer of the fifteenth century. Being a collection of wizarding Children's fairy tales, the book is full of ethical values.

• **The Wizard and the Hopping Pot:**

This is the first story of the collection that advocates the moral lesson that the ability of a person must be the source from which others could also benefit, and it is everyone's crucial responsibility to aid the people in need.

There is a compassionate old wizard in this story who employed his magical power for solving the maladies of muggles (non-magical people). He is in possession of a cauldron which he uses for making potions and antidotes for curing muggle patients. After the death of this old man, his son inherits the cauldron. The son is, unlike his father, a hard-hearted person who has no magnanimous qualities. Also he considers muggles as worthless. When people with different issues like crop of warts, stolen donkey and grievous illness approach his doorstep requesting for remedies, he refuses to help them doggedly. But his father, knowing about the son's foul disposition, cast some magical spell on the pot before his death. He charmed the pot to make noisy disturbances to the son if he denies help to others.

Within a few days, it was not only braying and groaning and slopping and hopping and sprouting warts, it was also choking and retching, crying like a baby, whining like a dog, and spewing out bad cheese and sour milk and a plague of hungry slugs (Rowling, 8-9).



Unable to withstand the extreme annoyances of the pot, the son gives in. He runs up the street screaming, “Bring me all your problems, all your troubles and your woes!...Come! Let me cure you, mend you and comfort you! I have my father’s cooking pot, and I shall make you well!” (Rowling, 9-10). Kusuma makes a comment on the pot: “...the pot plays a role as fabulous creature that has great power to resolve every problem that society and the son have” (Rowling, 103).

The son’s change of heart occurs not out of his wish. He is forced to help people by the pressure of his father’s enchantments. It is unavoidable sometimes that wickedness is to be handled unceremoniously as done by the father. Hence, this story comprises the moral that one’s endowments, whether it may be power or skill or knowledge or wealth or position, should be used for common benefit benevolently.

• ***The Fountain of Fair Fortune:***

It is a fairy tale that indicates the powers of unity, selflessness and faith. In this story, one unfortunate person gets a chance once a year to find the Fountain of Fair Fortune and bathe in it for gaining fortune forever. Three woeful witches - Asha, suffering from incurable illness, Altheda, robbed of all her possessions, and Amata, heartbroken due to her departed lover, decide to unite and find the fountain together if anyone of them gets the opportunity. Asha is chosen to enter the garden, and she takes the other two witches along with her; a luckless knight, who is a muggle, also joins them accidentally.

They manage to pass through the tricky path to the summit of the hill, where the fountain is located, by paying the proof of pain (tears of Asha), the fruit of labours (sweat of Altheda), and the treasure of past (Amata’s happy memories of lover). After reaching their destination, Asha is cured of her chronic disease by Altheda using the herbs grown there. Altheda plans to collect those herbs for healing people by which she can make money. Amata was already freed from the tormenting memories of her lover as she disposed of them in the stream for the sake of crossing it. So the luckless knight is given the chance and after bathing in the river, he feels confident about himself. Then he proposes to Amata and she readily accepts to marry him. Then they all leave the place together and live long happily. “...none of them ever knew or suspected that the Fountain’s waters carried no enchantment at all” (Rowling, 35).

Thus, by their combined efforts, these afflicted people have achieved what they sought. None of them is greedy that they do not desire to bathe in the fountain for deriving more than they required. This selfless tendency of them obtained happiness for self as well as for others. The luckless knight, who bathes in the fountain, turns fortunate only because of the faith. Another moral value that could be perceived in this story is that it encourages intermarriage (between superior witch and inferior muggle) which could pave the way for the end of racial differences and discriminations prevailing in the world.

• ***The Warlock’s Hairy Heart:***

This story is about a warlock who is of the conception that being controlled by romantic emotions is a weakness. So he takes some magical measures to prevent himself from falling in love. But when he comes to know that he is pitied and ridiculed by his servants for not having a wife, he decides to find a



woman who deserves to be his wife and also succeeds in finding one. Though he speaks loving words, borrowed from a poet, to court the maiden, he sounds artificial as he does not feel the true meaning of the words. Perplexed, the woman replies, “You speak well, Warlock, and I would be delighted by your attentions, if only I thought you had a heart!” (Rowling, 50)

As a response, the warlock takes her to the dungeon of his palace and shows his beating heart placed inside a crystal casket. The woman, terrified, requests him to put it in its original place. The warlock, in the attempt to replace it, kills the woman and also loses his own life. Dumbledore, in his notes to this story, writes about this tragic end: “... in seeking to become super-human this foolhardy young man renders himself inhuman. The heart he has locked away slowly shrivels and grows hair, symbolising his own descent to beasthood. He is finally reduced to a violent animal who takes what he wants by force, and he dies in a futile attempt to regain what is now for ever beyond his reach - a human heart” (Rowling, 59).

This ghastly story is intended to warn the wizarding children not to involve in the dark arts of magic. It can also be taken as a moral lesson for all people that it advises not to involve in unlawful, immoral or evil activities. And it also puts forth the presumption that a human cannot forsake love; if attempted, he may turn inhuman.

• **Babbitty Rabbitty and Her Cackling Stump:**

In this story, there is a foolish muggle king who wishes to become a unique wizard by learning magic and disposing of all the witches and wizards of his kingdom. He forms a team of witch-hunters armed with packs of hounds to track down the magicians. As he is in need of a person with magical abilities to teach him magic, he calls for an instructor in magic. A charlatan, who is a muggle, schemes to gain wealth by cheating the king, and so approaches the king proclaiming himself a wizard. The king appoints him as the instructor and starts learning magic from him. King’s washerwoman Babbitty, a real witch, laughs at the king’s vain attempt of learning magic from the charlatan. Feeling undignified, the king decides to perform magic in front of the people and declares that his failure would result in beheading of the charlatan.

The frightened muggle, who finds out the washerwoman being a witch, asks for her help. Babbitty agrees to help him out, and as assured, she performs magic from a hidden place while the king is giving a magical display. When the king is requested to bring the dead dog back to life, Babbitty stays still as no magic could raise the dead. The king is furious about his inability, and the muggle, to save his own skin, charges that Babbitty, the evil witch, is blocking the king’s spell. When Babbitty is chased by King’s hounds, she disappears near a tree. The charlatan fabricates that Babbitty has turned into a tree and asks for it to be cut down. After the tree is felled, there comes a cackling sound of Babbitty from the stump declaring, “Fools! ... No witch or wizard can be killed by being cut in half! Take the axe, if you do not believe me, and cut the Grand Sorcerer in two! (Rowling, 74)

Consequently, the muggle admits that he is a fraud, since there is no other way to escape from being cut. Then Babbitty tells the king that he is cursed because of his mistreatment of magicians, and so he would feel axe stroke on his body whenever a witch or wizard is harmed. Panicked, the king announces that no magician will be hurt thereafter. Then Babbitty, in her animagus form Rabbit, leaves the kingdom.



The moral of this story is that one cannot achieve everything by using authority. The king misuses his powerful position for fulfilling his selfish desire, and he even goes to the extent of distressing innocent people just because of their possession of magical knowledge. The story has another message as well that sometimes this sort of stupid people have to be handled in a clever and deceitful way just like Babbitty dealt with the king. And from observing the experience of the charlatan, one could realise that falsity cannot hold a permanent place; one day or the other it will surely face exposure.

• ***The Tales of the Three Brothers:***

This final story of the book has a lot more significance than the others stories. Though it is said to be a fairy tale, it turns out to be a real story as far as the fictional wizarding world is concerned. And it occupies a crucial part in the seventh part of the Harry Potter series. It is a story about three brothers who set off to travel together. During journey, they come upon a river, and since they are wizards, they conjure a bridge over the lake. While crossing it, Death appears in front of them. Though he is inwardly angry about losing his three victims, he pretends to be impressed by their cleverness and offers a prize for each one. The elder brother asks for an unbeatable wand, and the middle brother, a resurrection stone and they receive them at once. The last brother, who does not trust Death, requests for a means to stop Death following him. And Death gives him his invisibility cloak reluctantly. Then the brothers proceed further in different ways. The elder brother, who bragged about his unbeatable wand, was robbed of it and murdered during sleep. The second brother uses the resurrection stone to bring back his dead lover. Though she comes alive, she is sorrowful as she does not belong to this world. So he kills himself to unite with her. Thus, Death has taken its toll on these two. As the youngest brother mindfully stays hidden under the invisibility cloak, Death is unable to find him. After living to a ripe old age, the last brother decides to die; so he removes his cloak and hands it over to his son. Then he greets Death as an old friend.

The message one could receive from this tale is that Death cannot be escaped even by the mightiest. Dumbledore rightly states this truth in his notes: “human efforts to evade or overcome death are always doomed to disappointment” (Rowling, 94). Birth and death is the law of Nature that cannot be rewritten, and so humans must prepare themselves to encounter it. Further, the case of the elder brother conveys the precept that lust for power will always land one in danger. It is an undeniable fact that power is one of the basic human desires; yet it should be kept in check so as to avoid miserable consequences. The second brother’s experience points out that defiance of Nature could not derive fruitful result and therefore one should learn to cope with the loss of loved one. From the last brother, one could learn worldly wisdom that the words of others are not to be trusted blindly as there are many treacherous people in this world, and also that one needs to use his wit to defend himself from such crafty folks.

Thus, to conclude, J. K. Rowling, by writing this book, proves herself to be not only an outstanding entertainer, but also a moral educator. She has satisfactorily fulfilled her responsibility as a writer of Children Literature by educating moral lessons to the young ones and imparting ethical values at their early stage of life.



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