

GRANDMA'S WEAPON

HOW FOLKTALES PASSED DOWN REVOLUTIONS

~ Abhilipsha Behera (X-K)

“And when the mighty lion thought he had caught the clever rabbit, the rabbit smiled and said...” Grandma's voice wrapped around me like a soft quilt in a quiet room, yet my eyes stayed open—too restless for sleep.

“Grandma,” I whispered, “why do you always tell me these kinds of stories? They are fun...but do they mean anything? Why do they matter so much?”

Her smile deepened, her eyes whispering untold secrets. “Because, *beta*, these stories aren't just tales—they're the weapons our ancestors wielded, weapons without raising swords. They're the way revolutions began, one story at a time.”

Back then, I didn't fully grasp what she meant, but those words lingered within me, and I began to perceive the world more clearly. Such stories weren't merely about animals or princesses; they conveyed profound messages. In India, change didn't always begin with the sound of war drums; sometimes, it began with news of a village fire, a tale of cunning sparrows, or brave, mighty princesses. These weren't just fables lost in time—they were invisible treasure troves for young minds. And these treasures were guarded not by kings or generals, but by grandmothers, puppeteers, village dancers, and travelling bards. They carried tales that taught individuals how to truly think.

For example, let's take the *Powada* ballads of Maharashtra. The *Powada* ballads weren't just songs—they were folk epics sung by folk poets and *Gondhals* (Marathi ritualistic folk performances) in praise and celebration of *Shivaji Maharaj's* heroic deeds against oppressive ruling regimes. From one village to another, *Powadas* spread stories of heroism and resistance, encouraging commoners to resist even when rebellion was perilous. The singers, often ordinary villagers or grandmothers, used rhyme and rhythm

to convey powerful messages and instill in people a sense of empowerment. With every verse, they armed their listeners with not merely words, but hope. These were Grandma's weapons—stories and songs fought silently while the whole nation battled wars, sung by those who dared to dream of freedom.





Now, another example that lies in the heart of Odisha is the *Dasakathia tradition*. Two storytellers, the *Gayaka* and the *Palia*, with wooden clappers (*Kathia*) in their hands, narrate stories that blend mythology with the effects on daily life. Their verses range from scenes of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* to societal topics on caste, corruption, or even the cost of rice. Each tale is wrapped in melody and humor, allowing performers to question injustice without ever lifting their voice. And somewhere in the crowd, perhaps, a grandma beams warmly, proud that stories are still the quiet warriors.

So, the next time a story is whispered beside candlelight, don't just drift off—listen closely. It might not only lull you to sleep but also quietly ignite something within you.