



Research Paper

## Examining the Sociological Aspect of Luck in Select Kashmiri Folktales: A Study of *Shikaslad* and *Zinnimozour*

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**ABSTRACT:** Kashmiri folktales are versatile in depicting various aspects of the Kashmiri social world, including the concept of luck. This study aims to explore luck beyond its typical view as chance events. Michael Sauder's article, "A Sociology of Luck," highlights the neglect of luck in sociology. He argues for a comprehensive understanding of luck to better portray the social world. This paper draws from Sauder's ideas to examine luck in folk literature, humanity's earliest literary form. Analysing two Kashmiri folktales, "Shikaslad" and "Zinnimozour," from Onaiza Drabu's collection "The Legend of Himal and Nagrai" (2019), this study investigates luck's role in understanding Kashmiri society of the past.

**KEYWORDS:** Kashmiri folktale, Luck, Michael Sauder, Sociology of Luck

### I. INTRODUCTION

Folklore, an ancient and integral part of human culture, traces its origins back to prehistoric times. It has served as a means for humans to convey their experiences and shed light on the tangible world around them. The term "folklore" etymologically encompasses a reservoir of traditions and knowledge within a specific group (folk), traditionally transmitted orally from person to person. Within the realm of folklore reside an array of elements such as legends, superstitions, songs, tales, proverbs, riddles, spells, nursery rhymes, and more. Research indicates that beyond its role as one of humanity's oldest sources of entertainment, folklore also operates as a retelling of historical events. Delving into folklore is, in essence, an exploration of a region's historical narrative. Consequently, folklore stands as the social chronicle of Kashmir, with its storytellers assuming the mantle of the earliest historians. Anthropologist Onaiza Drabu aptly underscores the significance of storytelling by asserting, "Our identity is intricately woven through both the stories we are presented with and the stories we craft ourselves." Within this context, the genre of Folktale emerges as a distinctive and extensively studied facet of folklore. Beneath the surface of entertainment, it fulfils a diverse range of functions, all encompassed within its encompassing embrace.

Archer Taylor, an American Folklorist, has defined Folklore even though not completely but to a great extent as,

"The material that is handed on by tradition, either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folk songs, folk tales, riddles, proverbs or other materials preserved in words, it may be traditional tools and physical objects...; or traditional symbols... All of these are folklore." [1]

Saihanjula He, a scholar of Chinese folk tales asserts that folktales "carry historical truths, stir up political undercurrents, and reveal social facts that official history books will not and cannot tell. In a time when writing was a privileged form of expression, the oral folk tale popularly communicated the injustices committed by the upper class, and gave the powerless voices of their own." [2]

Kashmiri folktales make a multifunctional genre of Kashmiri folklore. Kashmiri folktales are replete with themes and characters that do not exist in void, rather they have a function to perform. One such function is to represent the social world. Kashmiri folktales are a potpourri of customs and traditions as well as the social setup of Kashmir of past. However, the present paper explores the role of Kashmiri folktales in the expression of luck, a concept not given much importance in the study of folklore. Moreover, there is no literature on luck, there are very few articles that mention the word *luck* in their title or abstract, and only a handful of articles discuss luck at all. This paper studies how people used luck as a way of relief from their bogus life. For this purpose, this paper examines two exemplary Kashmiri folktales titled *Shikaslad* [3] and *Zinnimozour* [4], from Onaiza Drabu's collection *The Legend of Himal and Nagrai* published in 2019. The two tales are studied to demonstrate how themes, narratives, and characters employ the idea of luck, and how in turn the social setup of Kashmir is traced.

## II. ANALYSIS OF SELECT FOLKTALES

"Shikaslad" is a term native to Kashmir, embodying the essence of extreme misfortune, destitution, and ill luck. Within the realms of Kashmiri folklore, the tale of "Shikaslad" unfolds, painting a vivid picture of two siblings residing side by side in a quaint town. Amidst them, stark disparities existed: one sibling basked in opulence, reaping the bounties of prosperous business and abundant harvests, while the other, a shikaslad, found himself ensnared in the clutches of impoverishment. This beleaguered pauper tirelessly toiled day and night, only to find his efforts perpetually unrewarded, as if thwarted by a cosmic force.

Bitter envy corroded the heart of the pauper, leading him down a treacherous path of attempted thievery against his affluent sibling. In the midst of this fateful act, a mysterious figure materialized before him, an embodiment of his brother's luck. When questioned about his identity, this enigmatic presence identified himself as the guardian of his brother's fortune, proclaiming his role to shield all possessions from harm's way. Thus, the pauper's nefarious intentions were thwarted, leading him to kneel in submission, his hands humbly clasped in entreaty. Gazing upon this destitute figure, the pauper beseeched, his voice quivering with desperation, "My brother's luck! My confidant! I implore you, extend your compassion. Extend your aid. Reveal to me the whereabouts of my slumbering luck, and elucidate the reasons for his prolonged absence, unlike your vigilant presence." In response, the mysterious entity disclosed a disheartening truth – the pauper's luck lay dormant in an extended slumber, a state induced by none other than the figure before him.

Intrigued by the prospect of reawakening his dormant luck, the pauper prepared a meagre collection of essentials, embarking upon a journey ablaze with newfound hope. As he traversed through time and terrain, his path converged with those of others, each bearing their own burdens of ill fortune. A fallen lion, a downtrodden villager, and a beleaguered king all shared tales of their unfortunate encounters, eliciting a promise from the pauper to intercede on their behalf.

Ultimately, after enduring trials and tribulations, the pauper arrived at the dormant dwelling of his luck, witnessing him in a state of sombre slumber. With fervent pleas and gentle touch, the pauper managed to rouse his luck from its deep repose. Tearfully, he beseeched, "O, my luck! Why hast thou slumbered for so long? Stir from thy rest, that the course of my destiny may shift. Walk with me, and be my constant companion through life's intricate tapestry." Stirred from its protracted slumber, luck yielded to the pauper's impassioned pleas. "Very well," it acquiesced, "cease your tears and lament. I shall remain by your side, an unwavering presence at each crossroad. Yet, heed my counsel, for my guidance alone shall not suffice. Depart now, and do not return to me again."

Radiant with elation, the pauper embarked upon his return journey to the village, a renewed vigour coursing through his veins. Armed with luck's guidance, he encountered once more those who had crossed his path prior – the lion, the villager, and the king. Sharing the wisdom imparted by his reawakened luck, he facilitated their reconnection with their own dormant fortunes, breathing new life into their beleaguered existences.

However, fate took a capricious turn when the pauper faced the lion once more. Unveiling the tale of his rejection of kingly wealth and treasure, the pauper recounted the lion's previous offers of sustenance and grandeur. Misinterpreting the lion's actions, the pauper unwittingly stepped into the beast's trap, drawing near as the lion feigned deafness. In a swift, unanticipated onslaught, the lion lunged, devouring the pauper whole, thereby ending the saga of *Shikaslad* in a chilling twist of irony.

*Zinnimozour* is a Kashmiri word that translates to woodcutter. The tale *Zinnimozour* opens with the description of a woodcutter struck by extreme poverty. Every day he would go to the jungle, gather firewood and sell it to feed his family. One day while wandering in the forest he saw King Solomon doing the rounds of his land. He rushed up to him expectantly, kissed his hand, and asked for help. The woodcutter narrated his plight and King Solomon simply handed him a jewel and told him to go home. He said that he would be able to feed his family for many months now. The Woodcutter could not believe his luck! Without a care in the world, he went gallivanting about the forest free at last from the need to search for firewood. He grew tired and fell asleep with the jewel in his pocket. Two Arabs who had been tracking him stole the jewel. He woke up and began searching his pockets. When he found it missing he started slapping his forehead with his slippers.

What terrible misfortune! He had no choice but to gather whatever firewood he could before sunset and sell it for a low price. His wife however convinced him to go in search of King Solomon the next morning the woodcutter found King Solomon again and told him that he was misfortunate and in his carelessness, he fell sleep and the jewel got stolen from him. King Solomon handed him another Jewel and asked him to keep this safe and told him if you lose this then you lose not just the jewel but your luck because that would reveal that you are truly a badbakht and badnaseeb. Determined not to lose it The Woodcutter put the Jewel into the folds of a turban and wrapped it around his head. However, who can change the destiny of the unfortunate? A bird circling in the wood swooped down on him, grabbed his turban in its claws, and flapped away with it and the Jewel!

When the wife heard about this, she was furious and threw him out of their home. He was too ashamed to go back to King Solomon and he had no option but to wander in the Jungle. A week later, the king saw him again. He said, 'O woodcutter, you are still wandering the Jungle like a minstrel? What happened to the Jewel I gave you?' 'You were right, my lord. I am the unfortunate one, the second jewel was taken away by a bird. My

wife threw me out of our home.’ Hearing this enraged the King. In a fit of arrogance, he said things he should not have said, that broke the woodcutter's heart. His words were a slap across the woodcutter's face. The king said, take this man out of my sight. I gave him not one but two jewels. He is truly a shikaslada.’ King Solomon's power was in his ring. One day while drinking water from a river, a fish came out and took his ring. In that instant, he realized all was lost. It was the ring that gave him the power to command the jinns and speak with animals. It was the ring that gave him a Kingdom. His arrogance had led to his downfall and suddenly luck turned on him. He lost all control over his Kingdom and his army abandoned him.

For months he wandered around as a beggar, in punishment for his arrogance over his wealth and good luck. He tried town after town searching for the woodcutter to apologize to him but with no luck. He could not find him anywhere. Walking one day he reached the town where he met a fisherman. He was a kind man and he listened to Solomon's tale. He said, 'I would help you if I could but I don't know how.' Solomon said to him, 'take me in your service, O fisherman.' The fisherman offered King Solomon to marry his daughter. This is what he did and he lived with them month after month till three years Passed. He tried his hand at growing crops. Unfortunately, whatever Solomon touched did not bring them luck or harvest. The father and daughter were patient with him until one day in a marital tiff, the wife angrily made a remark and called him a shikaslada. He had worked hard and his hands had blisters. How it broke his heart! This was the word that had started his downfall and it sent him spiralling into the past. With a broken heart, he fell asleep crying. The next morning, the fisherman went fishing as usual and caught a fat Fish. He thought to himself that instead of selling it he would give it to his own children for a change. He brought it home and gave it to his daughter who began to clean and prepare it. Slicing through the fish, she found a ring. It was not just any ordinary ring but the seal of Solomon that he had lost. She rushed and took it to her husband, to whom she thought it was most befitting. He was still asleep and to surprise him she put it into his hand. his heartbreak had turned his luck around! His Badshahi came back. An old Wazir came to take him home. jinns and birds followed him. He took the fisher girl back to the palace to install her as his new wife.

On the other hand, the zinnimozour was still wandering, singing of his troubles somewhere in the forest. The day after he left King Solomon he went back home to tell his wife of his broken heart. She refused to let him in without food. Deeply upset, he took his children to hunt for some food. They spotted a beautiful bird that didn't look like it was from there so they thought it might be an easy target. The children laid a trap and caught this bird. Once caged they found the bird had a human tongue to speak with. It is said that the bird was from a place called Misr. Oh wood cutter, it said, how will I satiate your stomach and those of your children? let me go and I will guide you to greater Treasures. The family listens intently. The bird said, go under a tree where you caught me. There are seven treasures buried in the ground. Take these and you will lose your poverty. I was merely the guise your luck sent to lead you to this. The woodcutter and his children rushed to the place, found the treasures, and rejoiced. The wife didn't believe him when he went back to her. She thought he had stolen this wealth in desperation and only more misfortune would come their way now with the Treasures but both of them now live lavishly. Didn't she know that heartbreak can spin your luck around?

The socio-economic landscape of Kashmir was predominantly characterized by a population entrenched in poverty, grappling with a scarcity of resources that hindered any upward mobility within the societal hierarchy. This stark contrast in wealth distribution was a breeding ground for exacerbating disparities, where affluence flowed disproportionately into the hands of the already rich, while the underprivileged found themselves slipping further into the abyss of destitution. The lamentable state of the lower strata of Kashmiri society is recounted by various travellers who documented their experiences within the region.

Intriguingly, the observations of Francis Younghusband serve as a poignant testament to the toils of the Kashmiri peasants, who, with unwavering dedication, toiled relentlessly day and night. However, their labour was exploited, as their hard-earned efforts went unrecognized, and their rightful remuneration remained elusive. This exploitation of the hardworking labour force stood as a grim reflection of the societal injustices rampant in Kashmir.

The very fabric of Kashmiri culture and tradition holds within its folds a collection of folktales, such as those depicted in the narratives of *Shikaslada* and *Zinnimozour*. Within these tales, a vivid tableau emerges, unveiling the lives of individuals who were ensnared within the web of resource scarcity, unable to catalyse any notable financial progress. These stories, while offering a temporary reprieve from the drudgery of their everyday existence, simultaneously provide a mirror to the larger societal tapestry woven from the threads of financial inequality. These tales extend beyond mere portrayal of predicaments; they delve into the core of the human spirit, unravelling the intricate interplay between adversity and the unwavering faith in supernatural forces. In a landscape where viable alternatives to their plight were scarce, the denizens of Kashmir turned their gaze towards the realms of the supernatural. This pervasive belief in otherworldly interventions manifested as a lifeline, a beacon of hope in the midst of darkness. It became a coping mechanism, a source of solace for the marginalized, offering a semblance of compensation for the tangible material and social rewards that remained frustratingly out of reach.

The concept of luck emerged as a central tenet within this belief system, an ethereal force that held the potential to transcend the shackles of poverty, ushering in a future brimming with prosperity. Within the hearts of the underprivileged, luck became synonymous with a lifeline, a glimmering ray of optimism that promised to elevate them from their current circumstances and set them on a trajectory towards a better life.

In essence, the Kashmiri people's belief in the supernatural, exemplified by their unwavering faith in luck, served as a testament to their resilience and enduring spirit. This belief was born out of necessity, a response to a world plagued by socio-economic disparities. It not only provided them with an outlet for hope but also encapsulated the broader narrative of their struggle for a more equitable existence. Through this lens, luck transformed from a mere abstract concept into a powerful symbol of determination, a testament to the human capacity to find solace, inspiration, and the potential for change even within the most challenging of circumstances.

Webster's dictionary defines luck as "a *force* that brings good fortune or adversity". This definition corresponds to lay understandings that portray luck in a personified form as Lady Luck, Karma, or Fate. It is also related to the view of luck as a characteristic, either good or bad, inherent to particular people or objects. Michael Sauder in his research paper "A sociology of luck", says that Luck is not an abstract concept but a real social phenomenon. He considers lucky event or occurrence as one that involves chance, is consequential (either beneficial or harmful), and is at least partially outside the control of the person or people affected by it. [5] Our lives, as the philosopher Bernard Williams (1976) wrote, "are saturated with luck." [6] People are constantly subject to events that are outside of their control that have positive or negative effects on their life experiences and life chances. Another argument for studying luck is that it is a concept people regularly use to make sense of their own and others' achievements, failures, life chances, and trajectories.

When considering the intricate dynamics of luck, a deeper exploration of Kashmiri folktales reveals that this concept extends beyond a mere ethereal abstraction. Rather, these tales offer a nuanced perspective, shedding light on the conditions necessary for luck to exert its influence, effectively intertwining with an individual's actions and choices.

In the narrative of *Shikaslal*, the pauper's misfortune is underscored by his lack of pragmatic judgment and the inability to harness his intellect at critical junctures. Despite dedicating himself to toil akin to his prosperous sibling, his efforts are met with a lackluster outcome. His quest to awaken his dormant luck unfolds as a journey through various strata of society, ranging from humble farmers to kings. This thematic progression not only captures the breadth of societal classes but also serves as a testament to the unifying power of the belief in luck, bringing disparate segments of society onto a shared platform.

A parallel illustration is presented in the tale of *Zinnimozour*, where a fortuitous encounter with King Solomon bestows a jewel upon a poor woodcutter, promising respite from his economic woes. However, the woodcutter's subsequent negligence and arrogance result in the theft of the jewel, signaling a crucial lesson on the transient nature of luck when coupled with recklessness. A pivotal shift occurs when both King Solomon and the woodcutter recognize the value of industriousness and perseverance. Their subsequent efforts are rewarded not solely by luck's whims, but rather by a synergy of hard work and determination.

Indeed, these narratives underscore that luck, while influential, is not a passive force. Rather, it intertwines with human agency and endeavor, accentuating the idea that success is a delicate balance between the cosmic threads of luck and the deliberate choices of individuals. The woodcutter's tale teaches that even the loftiest of monarchs can be humbled by arrogance, illustrating the impermanence of luck's favor in the face of unchecked hubris. As these tales unfold, they illuminate a profound truth: the tapestry of luck is woven intricately with human actions and attitudes. It acts as a dynamic force that responds to diligence, perseverance, and humility, while evading those who succumb to complacency and arrogance. The narratives ultimately remind us that the tapestry of life is a collaborative creation between the threads of luck and the yarn spun through our own choices and endeavors.

### III. CONCLUSION

In the realm of scholarly inquiry, the lens of functionalism affords us a unique vantage point through which to unearth the intricate cultural codes embedded within the textures of folk tales. This analytical approach unveils hidden dimensions, providing a gateway to the depths of meaning enshrined within these narratives. In the journey of exploration, the concept of luck emerges as a pivotal theme deserving of deliberate contemplation. Delving into this realm not only enriches our understanding of folkloric narratives but also yields tangible benefits for the academic domain.

Drawing these threads together, it becomes evident that a conscientious exploration of luck carries practical implications for the field at large. A robust examination of luck's role in folk tales engenders a plethora of unexplored avenues, brimming with questions and hypotheses that beckon both folklorists and sociologists to delve deeper. The conspicuous absence of luck as a focal point in previous discourse has left an expansive terrain ripe for investigation, a fertile ground that awaits scholarly scrutiny.

Furthermore, this discourse contends that a rigorous analysis of luck holds the potential to catalyze a paradigm shift within the very fabric of our field. Fundamental dualities, such as the interplay between structure and agency, the dialectic between individual endeavor and structural determinism, and the convergence of individual quandaries with overarching societal concerns, are all subjected to a transformative lens through the prism of luck. By engaging with this multifaceted concept, we are empowered to reevaluate and reinterpret these foundational dualities, thereby enriching our understanding of their intricate interplay and yielding novel perspectives on their implications.

Beyond the theoretical discourse, this paper serves to underscore the profound significance of folktale scholarship. By navigating the nuanced contours of luck within folklore, we gain not only a deeper understanding of societies like Kashmir, but also recognize the broader implications that extend across diverse cultural landscapes. Through this lens, folklore-based research emerges not merely as an academic endeavor, but as a dynamic conduit that enriches our intellectual tapestry, fostering a deeper appreciation for the myriad complexities inherent in the human experience.

In summation, the functionalist approach illuminates the hidden dimensions of cultural codes enmeshed within folk tales, inviting us to traverse the uncharted territories of luck. Embracing this journey offers not only a treasure trove of scholarly inquiries but also has the potential to reshape the very contours of our field's discourse. Through this comprehensive exploration, we unearth the transformative power of luck, reshaping our perceptions of key dualities and reinforcing the profound value of folklore scholarship in deciphering the intricate narratives that shape societies and individuals alike.

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