

GOUR JAJABAR
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SYNOPSIS

Gour jajabar is a unique tale for children. It blends the reality and fairytale perfectly. Gour the poor orphan working as a cowherd for the zamindar Sahababu. He cries within himself for the paltry food that is given by the employer and thinks that the animal is happier who gets a better meal. He decides to leave the village. He is fond of a particular cow Budh and his unhappiness in his present state. The cow and the large banyan tree are the two things in this village that are tying him down. He is a boy of little expectation and is satisfied with very little.

It's already evening. The sun is about to set and the cattle have not been taken to the stable. He is apprehensive of the anger of the owner. Tears roll down his cheeks. The sun sets. The moon rises higher. Gour tore himself away from Budha. Bids her goodbye and then walks away straight ahead. He is walking as if in a trance, crosses the big meadow, the railway line in the moonlit forest. He crossed a village where people are preparing to celebrate holi and lit a fire. He arrives at a village near which is a pond. He was right. He crossed the pond and then he found a few huts as if waiting to welcome him. He heard an angry rough voice saying, "I'll kill Pocha. Papa, you take your lathi and come with me." Somebody asked, "Has he stolen again?" The rough voice said, "Yes dad. Just as the sun set he brought a gamcha, soap and full pant stolen from somebody." The other voice said, "this is his last holi, you go I'm coming." He heard a voice crying, "Forgive me papa. Brother take the ties off my hands. I'll never steal again." The rough voice said, "you'll live for another half an hour only. Whatever you can do in the half hour you may." Pocha then cried for his mother. The mother came back at some stage. Gour could not tolerate any longer. He came into the yard and shouted towards Pocha's father, "Please untie him for this time atleast. I'll sing to him the fable of Valmiki and I'm sure he will not steal again." But his father said, "who are you?" Gour told his name. "You have come to my home, Gour, in the evening before dol purnima. We should treat you properly." They were arranging for a treat for Gour.

Gour ate to his content and then sitting down under the moon in the yard he began singing how the robber Ratnakar became a great poet in a sweet voice. When he finished there was tear in everybody's eyes.

Gour had decided that he will not stay in a house more than a night. There is no dearth of shelter on this earth. So the next morning he ate his meal to his fill and went away to the jungle. Suddenly he is accost by Pocha, who said, "I don't like this petty thief home, I'll have a group of robbers. Will you join us?"

Gour told him, “you are very stupid. Why do you need so much money? Have a plate of hot rice, get into your bed and think of your parents. Is there anything better?”

Gour forwarded and saw the house from a distance. The front yard was full of flowers in a riot of colours. Gour went up and knocked in the door. “Alms please”, he said. There was no response. Then Gour heard the sound of wailing. He thought he could stay the night here but it seemed impossible. Then the door opened slightly and an old woman bend by her age said, “you go away today”. Gour said, “I’ll stay only the night. Can’t I.” The old woman said, “there is nobody here who can cook a meal for you” and she wailed profusely. Gour said, “tell me what has happened, may be I can help”. The old woman said that, “my older grandson has been bitten by a snake”. They have taken his body; they would put it on a float of banana trunks and put it into the river. The old woman couldn’t stop crying. Gour had seen many cases of snakebite. Most of them die of it some survive. He asked the old woman when did he get the snakebite. Last night. People tried their best. He didn’t open his eyes. His young wife cannot stop crying. Gour did not wait. He went towards the river. There were some people standing under a peepal tree. They were all preparing a float of banana trunk. Gour told the people that please make a larger float. I’ll go with the dead. The people were surprised and replied, “It is not possible.” Gour said, “in case he recovers while floating he will feel very lonely if he gets back his consciousness.” Gour asked for some muri chirey and patali. Also some green coconut. The float was ready. Some eatables were put on the float and some utensils and a knife. Then Nabin’s body was placed on the float and Gour joined. They were all crying and the float was moving fast in the current. Gour began rowing. The village was left behind and could not be seen anymore. The sun was also at the point of setting. Nabin looked very young, may be a few years older than Gour. He looked as if he had just fallen asleep. Gour was not afraid of loneliness. But he missed somebody whom he could talk to, so he began singing a few couplets on Ram. Gour’s trance was disturbed by little noise on the side of the float. A piece of water hyacinth was stuck with the float and a fish was entangled in it. Gour released the fish. Suddenly he heard a stout voice from the shore saying, “who is there”. “Bring the boat this side or I’ll shoot. Who are you?” Gour said, “I’m taking with me the dead body of a snake bitten man.” A couple of policemen were standing on the bank. They insisted that Gour bring the float to the shore or else they will shoot. The policemen examined them very carefully. They said, “who are you? Where do you come from?” Gour convinced them that Nabin was indeed dead and he is going with him in case he survives. The inspector said let him go and a policeman gave him a push. The float moved with the current. Gour began singing his own composition of a song based on the Ramayana.

He did not realize that he had fallen asleep until the early morning sun's rays came on his face. He found that Nabin's eyes were open and he was looking at him. Gour said, "are you hungry?" Nabin said, "what has happened to me? Where are we going?" "You were bitten by a snake but you are alright now. I'll take you to your house where your uncle, grandmother, your wife are all waiting for you." Gour took the float near a bathing ghat. They ate some food they were carrying. Had fresh coconut water and khoi with gur. He asked Nabin whether he could walk. He took some food with them. Gour told Nabin that he should take a bus and go home. "What about you? Won't you come?" Gour said, "no not today. I am wanderer, I must go."

They got a bus when they reached Grand Trunk road. The bus will take them to the village Roshpatali. Gour gave some food to Nabin and said, "This should look after your bus fare." Gour began walking away. Poor Nabin, how much he wanted he could not stop him." He was too weak. Gour was on Delhi road. He began walking in the direction of Delhi. Gour is feeling very relaxed and happy since the morning. The sun was about to set. Gour left the road and came into the fields. He entered the forest and was wandering how far he should go. Then he found a hut. Nobody was inside. The door was tied to a pillar with a rope. Darkness came. Gour did not know what to do. Suddenly somebody caught him with force and shouted for his elder brother. The two of them wandered who Gour was. Gour said, "I've come here to have shelter with you for the night." The elder man said, "How did you find our place? We have no rice at home to feed." Gour said, "I've some chirey, muri." They asked him, "where are you coming from?" Gour said, "I've no particular place to go. I take the road wherever it takes me to. I don't like to stay at one place like a prisoner. I lived at one place till 13 years of age. There was a cow whom I loved and there was a banyan tree." Suddenly the other man said, "I'll kill him. They have given me a good beating. I must take revenge on him." His brother stopped and told Gour that he was caught today for picking somebody's pocket and was thrashed badly by the crowd. So he wants to take revenge on anybody. He began crying from pain. Gour knew that some shrubs would relieve pain. He went outside and brought some leaves and pressed them in his hands. Then he put them in the wounds of the younger man. They began eating the chirey, muri etc which Gour had with him. Then Gour said, "Why do you take to picking pockets." They said, "then how else could we fill our stomachs." He asked them, "Can you sing?" The elder brother said, "Please don't talk of songs before us. Our father was well known mendicant. In my younger days people used to come from distant places like Saurapuli, Singur, Haripal to take my father for singing. But soon things began to change. People lost interest in such music. My father died of hunger. My mother died. This brother was then only 3 years old. Gour asked them if they could sing. Give up your job of picking pockets. When we do well on Sundays we eat to our fill. Join us tomorrow if we can get a good victim. We will have rice and meat curry. Gour said, "I'll go with you but not for

picking pocket but for singing to people. We will get enough money to buy or provisions for our meals.” When the brother woke up in the morning Gour was not there. Gour had left all his belongings and food behind. Then both of them got ready, went to the railway station. Suddenly the elder brother found Gour at a distance and said, “why did you leave like a thief stealthily.” Gour said that, “I didn’t leave stealthily. Didn’t you understand the signs I left behind? I left the food behind so that you don’t have to come out today. I also left my umbrella behind so that you know that I’ll come back.” Gour had a large bundle with him and the brothers asked him what was inside. Gour said, “I have all the vegetables, spices and oil. People won’t leave me.” “But what were you doing?” “I sang to them. You do not need to sing with me. I’ll earn for you.” The brothers consulted each other. Why not we join Gour and sing. We will get enough money to look after ourselves. Gour sang a song to them, which had been composed by Gour. Gour was ready to go out in the evening when the brothers were ready to join him. The three practiced singing chorus and they went towards the bazaar. They began singing in a little open place. A good number of people gathered around them. They gave them some money and said how much they enjoyed their singing. A man was closing his stall from where he sold flowers. Gour said he had promised him in the morning that he will go with him in the night. He gave all the money to the brothers and joined the flower vendor.

They took a train and arrived at the station near which the flower vendor lived. It was already dark and scores of fireflies were around. They were passing through an area with old broken down palatial houses. They reached the gate of a big house and the flower vendor opened the gate with his key. He looked at Gour and said, “Are you surprised? My son is very naughty. If I’m not here he will go out anywhere without telling me. So I go out locking the gate.” Gour heard somebody talking irrelevantly. The flower vendor said, “don’t reply, come quietly into the house.” “Is that your son?” The vendor said, “Yes. He was a normal boy, he was employed in an office, but suddenly something happened and he straight away went to Manali without returning home. He sent us a letter saying that he wants to go the way Yudhistir went for Mahaprasthan. We had to go and bring him back in chains. He had been to Manali when he was a child. There is a village called Jagatsuk. Legend has it that Yudhistir and his brothers went to heaven through this route. We brought him back, he was normal, graduated and was employed in a good company”. There was shouting, “open the door, I won’t stay here,” and he was battering the door. The flower vendor said, “Please sing a song and only that will compose him”. He further said that, “my son is completely mad and only music can quieten him. That is why I have brought you here.” Gour composed a song quickly and began singing. The raving stopped. Gour was fed by the vendor who cooked the food. He took no food to his son and said, “He would be better after sleeping. When he is normal he will be like you and me. He will go and swim in the pond, sit down near the

flower beds.” His son was called Bidhan. Bidhan’s door was unlocked and Gour went inside with his father. He was a handsome man. He wanted Gour to sing again. Gour said, “let us have our bath and food then I’ll sing for you”. There was a huge orchard with all kinds of fruit trees around. Bidhan and Gour swam in the pond to their hearts content. Then they went and had a sumptuous meal. The vendor was getting ready to go to the bazaar and found Bidhan missing. Gour assured him that he need not worry. Bidhan is somewhere around. Soon after the vendor left Bidhan came out from behind the tree. Bidhan said that he had been to the village Jagatsuk from where Yudhistir and his party went to heaven. He wanted to go to the route to heaven the Pandavas took. Bidhan said, “perhaps it took two or three months by road from Jagatsukh to heaven.” Gour asked Bidhan how did he plan to go to heaven. Bidhan said that he met a sanyasi at Jagatsukh. Then Bidhan narrated how he went to Jagatsukh, he had met a sanyasi on his way to Gangasagar in the maidan. He met a sadhu there who told him that the trucks bring apples from Manali come to Kolkata every other day. So he could reach Manali in those trucks and then to Jagatsukh and then from there en route to heaven. Bidhan said, “he was brought back from Jagatsukh.” Bidhan entreated to go with him to heaven. Gour said, “he would, but Bidhan’s information was wrong. It takes twelve years from Jagatsukh to reach heaven”. Bidhan doubted, “how you know it takes twelve years?” “Then you have to travel through snow and ice, so you must prepare yourself to bear the cold.” Bidhan was very happy that somebody believed his story and does not believe that he is mad. Gour lost count of the days he spent in Jalaghat. He built a mount inside the garden, climbed up it and sang. Then suddenly one morning Gour found that Bidhan was not there. Bidhan’s father began crying. Gour tried to console him. Let us go and try to find him. Bidhan’s father was un-consolable. Then suddenly a man came inside. It was Bidhan, clean shaved and looked different. Bidhan’s father got up and embraced his son. Bidhan said, “did your think that I had gone away again?” Gour said, “Bidhan looks like Ram. We must find a Sita for him.” Bidhan said, “I must work. It is no good remaining idle.” Bidhan’s father said, “You join my school as a teacher, which I named after your grandfather.” Gour said, “I had all along wanted to study in a school. If you become a schoolteacher, I’ll be a student under you. But let me go back for some time. I’ll certainly come back for I like to be in a school.”