

## BOOK REVIEW

### ***What a Song!***

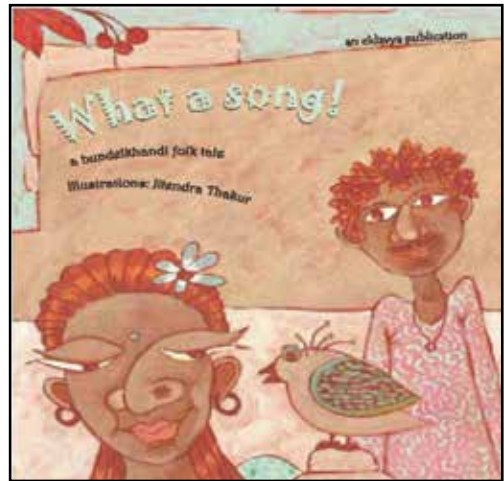
Ujjwal Banerjee\*

**Name of the Book** : *What a song!*  
**Publisher** : Eklavya  
**Illustrator (Author)**: Jitendra Thakur  
**No. of Pages** : 40  
**Language** : English  
**Price** : ₹120.00

At the very outset, it may be mentioned that the illustrator, who also wrote the storybook, took a conscious decision not to have his name printed as 'author' as he believes that folktales belong to a community and cannot be treated as the property of a single individual, and that, collectively, they are part of an area's literary tradition.

The roots of a country's literary tradition may be traced to its rich oral literature that has managed to survive for generations.

It is important to immerse children in timeless stories, which they may come across in oral or written form, or on digital platforms. In doing so, they



would gain valuable insights about different cultures, and related values, traditions and beliefs. This not only broadens their view of the world but also makes them more appreciative of their own culture and heritage.

The storybook, '*What a song!*', captures the readers' attention right from the beginning. The opening paragraph of the storybook reads, "There once lived a woman, who never sang.

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The other woman, who lived in the same village, would sing while grinding or going to the well, but this woman always stayed quiet. She also wanted to sing, but just didn't know any song." Once, she innocently asked her neighbour where she got her songs from. The neighbour jokingly replied that she had bought them from a market. The woman, then, sent her husband to the market to buy a song for her. He went shop-to-shop looking for a song but in vain. The struggle to find a song for his wife, finally, turns into a phase of creation, where weaves a song based on what he sees while on his way back home. The song is simple, with plenty of onomatopoeic words. For example —

A rat burrowing a hole inspires him to weave the following words.

*Khode kharar-kharar* [meaning,  
It (the rat) digs *kharar-kharar*]

Similarly a slithering snake makes him say the following.

*Sarke sarrar-sarrar* [meaning,  
It (the snake) creeps *sarrar-sarrar*]

A few more such lines are included and the song is complete.

The story proceeds as the woman is delighted on receiving the song. She starts singing it late into the night. Coincidentally, thieves were stealthily digging a hole to break into their house while she was singing. Thus, there is a synchronicity between the lines of the song and the actions of the thieves

— they are digging and creeping into the hole. Hearing the song, the thieves become alert of someone keeping an eye on them and run away without breaking into the house.

When the couple wake up in the morning the next day, they realise how miraculous the song had proven as their house was saved from getting burgled. They enjoy the moment over a cup of tea.

The book also carries vivid illustrations, which depict the rural backdrop of Bundelkhand (the hilly region divided between the States of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh), where the story is set. One can see the care that has gone into making the three-dimensional illustrations — the rough texture of the mud walls, the thick curly hair, the fur of the rat, etc., which attract the attention of the readers.

The narrative uses simple language with a lot of repetition of onomatopoeic words. The cadence of the story is smooth and every page seems to invite the readers to find out what happens next.

Since the story is based on a song, it consists of lines that rhyme, offering the joy of both listening and reading to the audience. Young students, when introduced to the story by their teachers or parents, may also enjoy singing the song imbued in the story. The book, thus, would be an invaluable addition to any school library, particularly, for the primary grades.