



A CBT PUBLICATION



INDIAN FOLK TALES







INDIAN FOLK TALES

Illustrated by
Prithvishwar Gayen



Children's Book Trust, New Delhi

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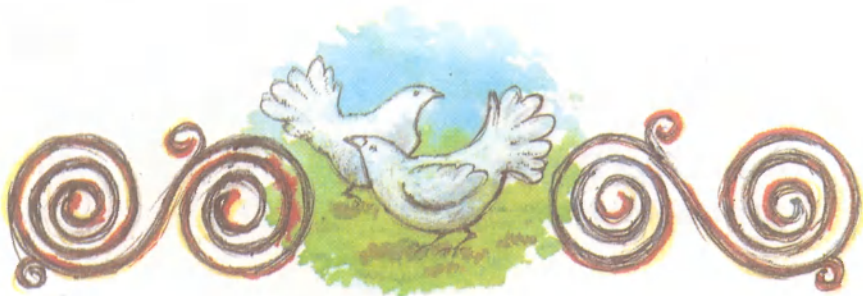
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Barber Shamlal

Rajeshwari Prasad Chandola

Barber Shamlal was a great saint and man of religion. During those old days when he lived, a barber was considered to be a person of low birth. Shamlal believed that men took birth in low castes on account of the foul deeds they did during their previous birth. Only the worship of God could free them from worldly misery, just as a touchstone could turn iron into gold. With this thought in his mind, he spent most of his time in prayers.

In his house there was a beautiful idol of Lord Krishna to which he was extremely devoted. Each morning, after taking his bath, Shamlal would worship the deity and only after this take to his routine work.

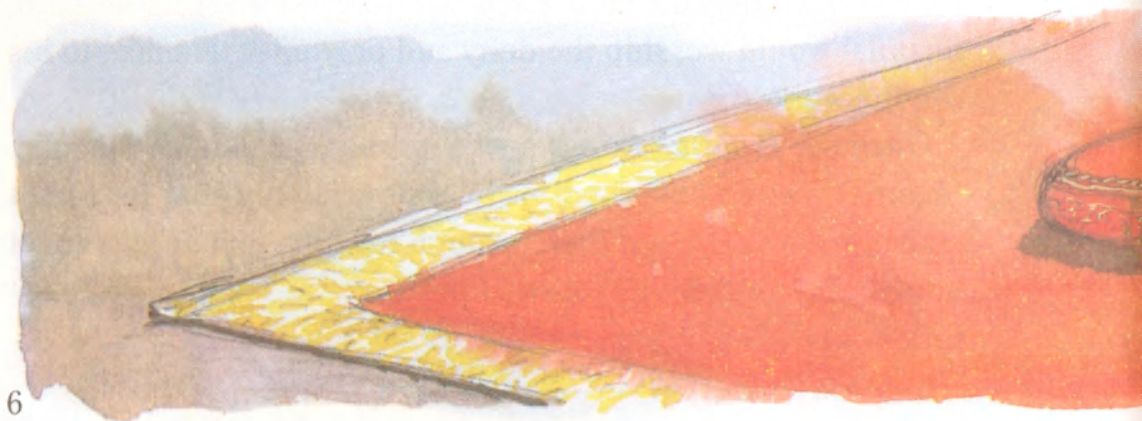
Once the *Badshah* (king) sent a messenger to fetch Shamlal. Shamlal was so absorbed in his daily worship that he had it conveyed to the messenger, through his wife, that he was not at home. The messenger called at his house four times and each time Shamlal's wife answered the same way.

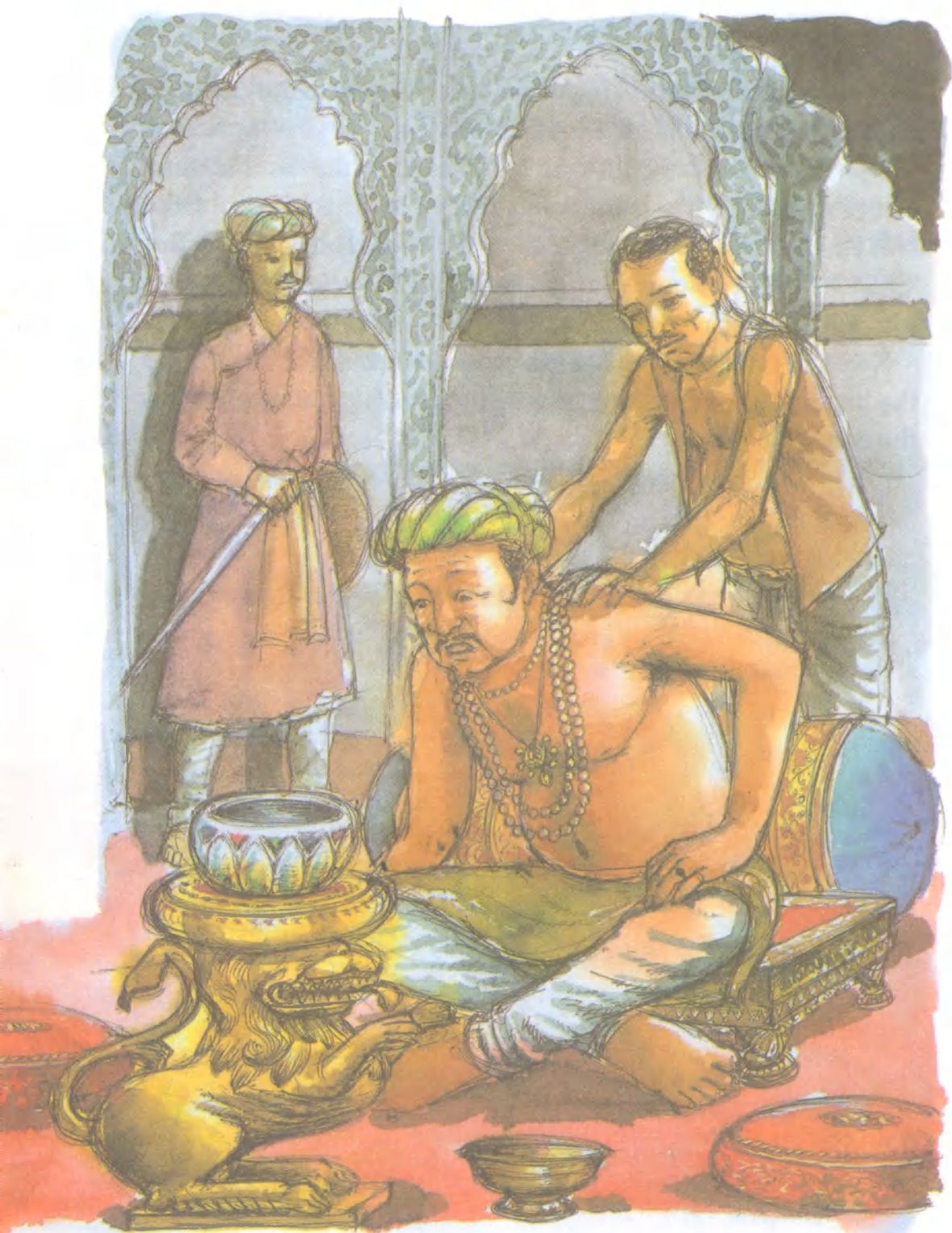
One wicked neighbour of Shamlal, who bore a grudge against him, reported to the *Badshah* that Shamlal had been at home doing his worship, every time the messenger had called at his house. The arrogant *Badshah* flew into a rage and ordered his soldiers that Shamlal be caught and thrown into the river to die.

Before the order could be carried out, Krishna took the guise of Shamlal and came to his rescue. Carrying Shamlal's bag of instruments of work on his shoulders, Krishna arrived at the *Badshah's* door. He stood before the *Badshah* and bowed in an act of reverence.

At the sight of 'Shamlal', the *Badshah's* anger disappeared at once. Seating the *Badshah* before him, 'Shamlal' shaved him and shampooed him. Happy with the job, the *Badshah* then ordered that fragrant oil be anointed on his body.

As the *Badshah* sat on the square sandalwood seat, 'Shamlal' rubbed oil on his body. The beautiful cup containing the scented oil was studded with jewels and was placed in front of the *Badshah*. When he looked into the cup, the *Badshah* saw to his amazement, a reflection of Krishna with his dark complexion and yellow robes, with a golden crown shining on his head. Stupefied, he looked up





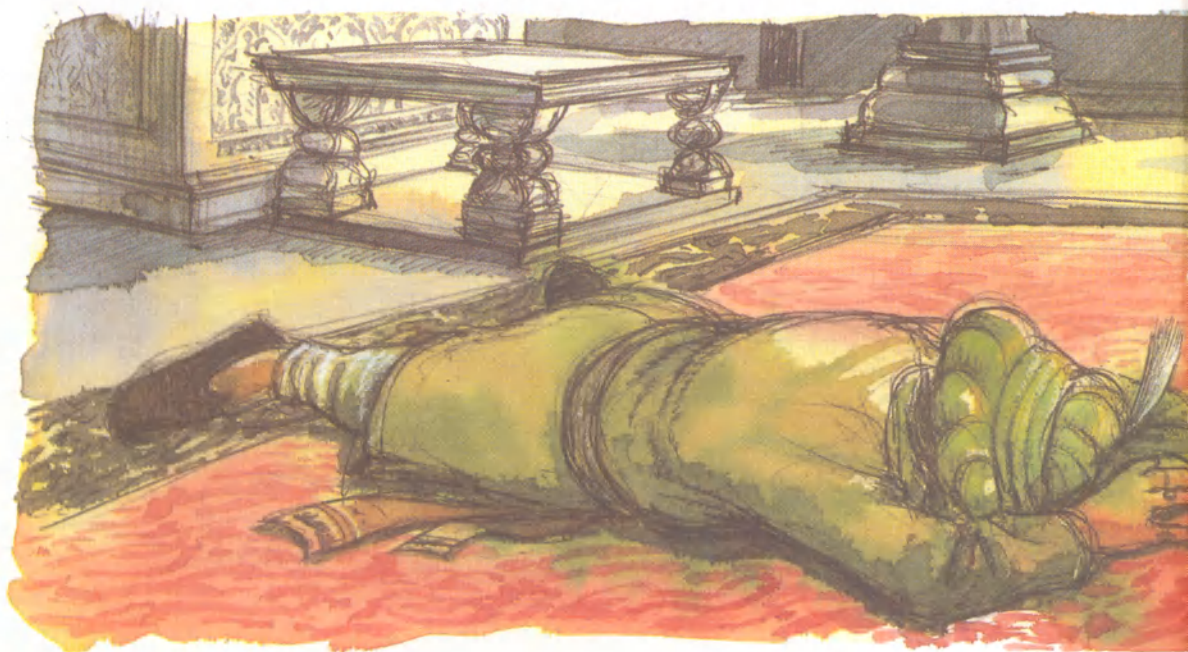
only to see 'Shamlal' rubbing oil on him. Turning to the cup once more, he again saw the reflection of Krishna.

Dazzled by the brilliant figure of the Lord, the *Badshah* lost consciousness. When his servants rushed to the scene and woke him up, the *Badshah* requested 'Shamlal' to stay on with him. But 'Shamlal' said he would return a little later. The *Badshah* offered a handful of gold coins to 'Shamlal'.

Krishna, in the guise of Shamlal, went to Shamlal's house, hung the bag of working instruments on a peg and put the coins into the bag.

After this incident, the *Badshah* became restless and nothing gave him peace of mind. He ordered his servants to fetch Shamlal immediately.

Shamlal was very nervous at the sight of the messengers because he thought that the *Badshah* must be very angry with him and must have planned a severe punishment for him.



As he went to the palace with his bag of instruments, Shamlal was surprised to see the *Badshah* walking down to greet him. His courtiers were also shocked to see such an unusual behaviour on the part of their monarch.

Falling down at Shamlal's feet, the *Badshah* said, "This morning you showed me your true form in the cup of oil. Kindly show me the same form again."

As the *Badshah* brought the cup of oil and made Shamlal look into it, he could not see anything except Shamlal's face!



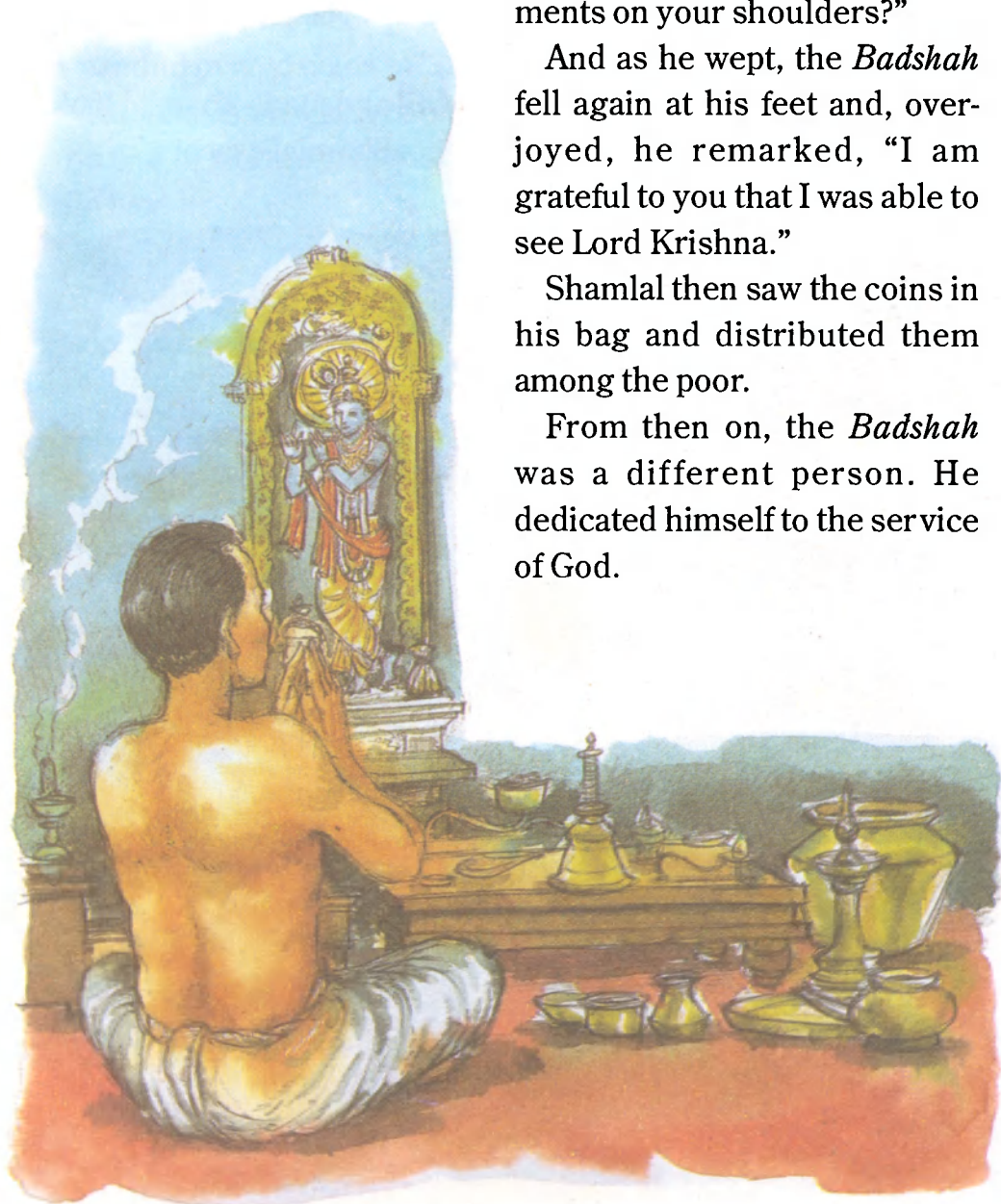
Shamlal got confused at such turn of events. After a little while he could guess what might have happened. Breaking into loud sobs, Shamlal said, "Oh, dweller of Vaikunth, oh, Narayana, what an unworthy task you performed for my sake! Why did you take

the bag of a barber's instruments on your shoulders?"

And as he wept, the *Badshah* fell again at his feet and, overjoyed, he remarked, "I am grateful to you that I was able to see Lord Krishna."

Shamlal then saw the coins in his bag and distributed them among the poor.

From then on, the *Badshah* was a different person. He dedicated himself to the service of God.





The Indigent Brahmin

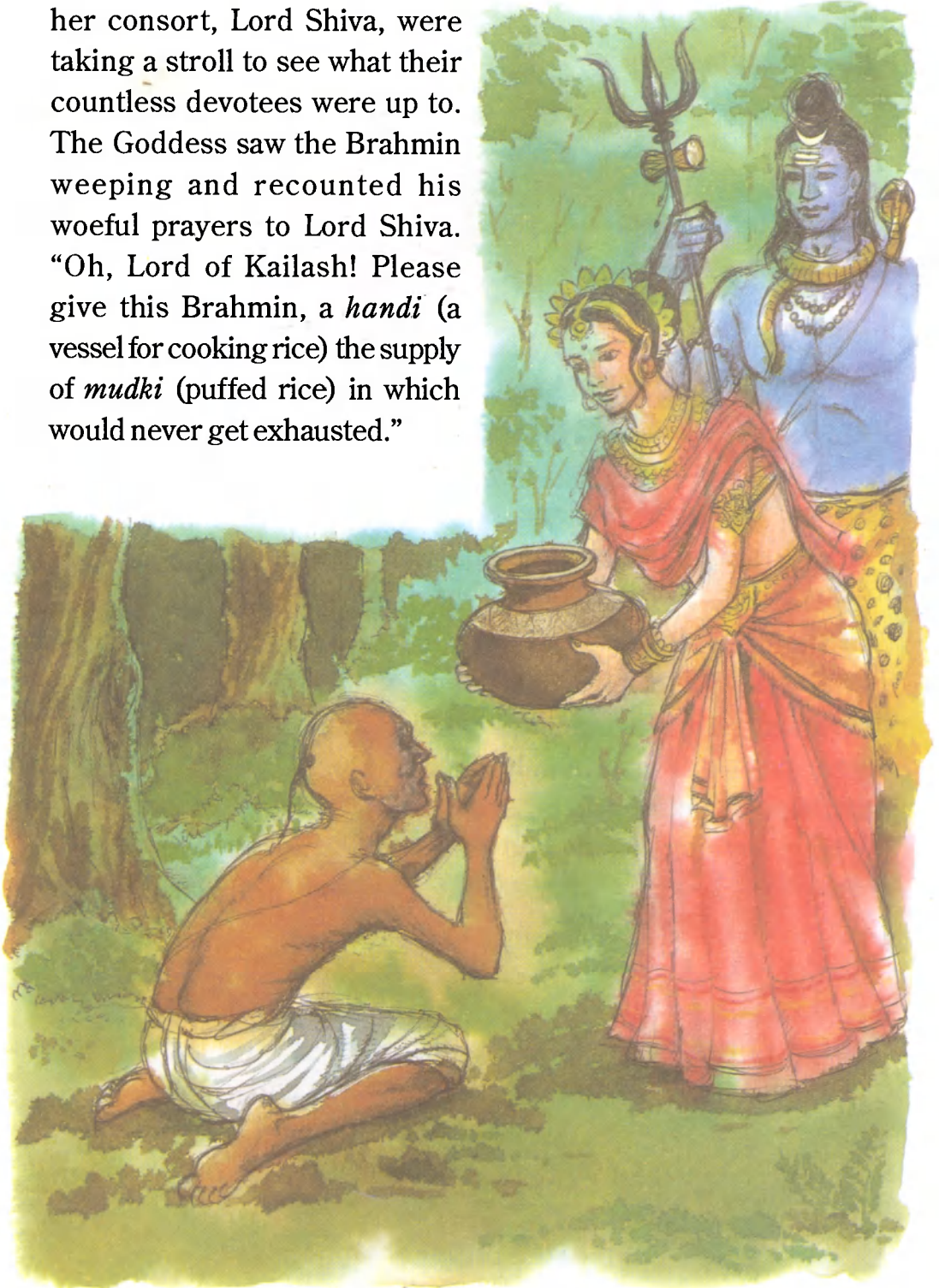
Subir Ghosh and Richa Bansal

Long, long ago there lived a poor and pious Brahmin in a small village. A great devotee of Goddess Durga, this simple man took neither a sip of water, nor a morsel of food before writing the name of the Goddess 108 times every morning. His only source of income was when a marriage or a funeral ceremony was performed in the homes of the rich. These did not happen in the village everyday. Life was tough with his meagre earnings for he had his wife and four children to take care of. He often lamented to the Goddess, “Oh, Durga! Have mercy on me!”

Once, when some days had passed with them having barely a meal a day, the Brahmin went deep into the dense forest near his village and wept in agony. “Oh, Durga! When will you end my misery? I cannot bear to see my family in so much pain because of starvation! Help me feed and clothe them, oh, Durga!”

Now, just as the Brahmin was praying, Goddess Durga and

her consort, Lord Shiva, were taking a stroll to see what their countless devotees were up to. The Goddess saw the Brahmin weeping and recounted his woeful prayers to Lord Shiva. "Oh, Lord of Kailash! Please give this Brahmin, a *handi* (a vessel for cooking rice) the supply of *mudki* (puffed rice) in which would never get exhausted."



Lord Shiva agreed and placed a *handi* in front of her. The Goddess then called the Brahmin and gave it to him with a blessing, "Oh, Brahmin. Your prayers have moved me. Take this *handi*. Whenever you are in need of food, turn it upside down and shake it. You will have the best quality *mudki*, till you restore it to its proper position. You can feed your family and also sell it for a livelihood."

The ecstatic Brahmin bowed to the Goddess and hurried back home to show his family the boon he had received. Just after running a short distance, he wondered whether the *handi* would actually work. So he turned it upside down and, to his great delight, he saw the finest quality *mudki* pouring forth. He tied the *mudki* in his *gamcha* (a towel made of thin cloth) and continued his journey back.

The Brahmin was very hungry and it was already noon. He had not yet had his bath or said his daily prayers. Besides, the thought of all that *mudki* hanging by his side made him hungrier. He entered a nearby inn, requested the innkeeper to take care of his *handi* and rushed for a bath.

The innkeeper wondered why the Brahmin was being fussy about an ordinary *handi*. He had entertained many odd customers; no one had ever pleaded to him to keep a *handi* safely. The curious innkeeper examined the vessel, and was dismayed to find it empty. Puzzled, he shook the *handi* around and just as he turned it upside down, he was surprised to find a lot of *mudki* coming out. He called his wife and three children and within a few minutes all dishes and jars of their inn were full of *mudki*. The greedy innkeeper wanted to keep the magic *handi* for himself. So he replaced the divine *handi* with a similar, ordinary one.

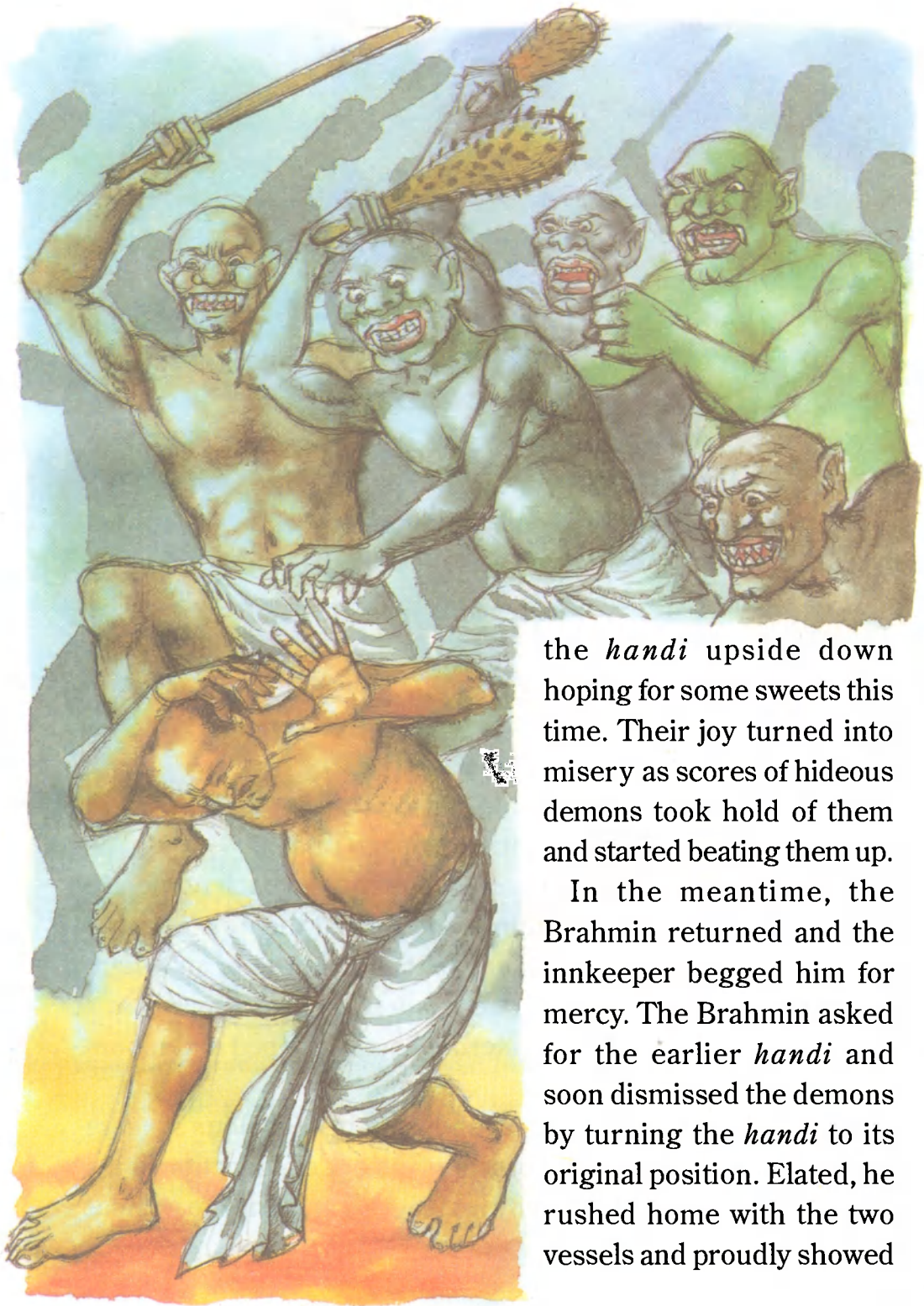
In the meantime, the Brahmin had finished with his ablutions and prayers. He broke his fast with the soft, flaky *mudki* tied in his *gamcha*. He then joyously started on his way home, after unsuspectingly taking the wrong *handi* from the innkeeper. On reaching home, he summoned his wife and children and told them of the boon of Goddess Durga. The wife and children did not believe him and they thought that poverty had driven the Brahmin mad. When no *mudki* came out of the fake *handi*, they were sure he had indeed gone mad.

The heartbroken Brahmin realized that the innkeeper had fooled him. He rushed back to the inn. But the clever innkeeper pretended ignorance of the whole thing and drove him away. The Brahmin went back to the forest and again prayed to Goddess Durga. "Oh, Durga, I have been robbed of your blessings. Your devotee has been looted. Help me please!"

Both Goddess Durga and Lord Shiva blessed him again and on hearing his tale of woes, gave him another *handi* saying, "Make good use of it and be careful."

The Brahmin started on his way back home. In between, he stopped to turn the *handi* upside down, to see what this *handi* was about. But to his horror, instead of any kind of food, a lot of terrible looking demons jumped out of it and started raining blows on him. The bewildered Brahmin realized the gods' purpose behind giving him the vessel and quickly turned it back and headed for the inn.

The innkeeper was very happy to see the Brahmin. The Brahmin gave the overjoyed innkeeper the *handi* and told him to keep it carefully till he returned from his bath and prayers. No sooner had the Brahmin left, the innkeeper and his family turned



the *handi* upside down hoping for some sweets this time. Their joy turned into misery as scores of hideous demons took hold of them and started beating them up.

In the meantime, the Brahmin returned and the innkeeper begged him for mercy. The Brahmin asked for the earlier *handi* and soon dismissed the demons by turning the *handi* to its original position. Elated, he rushed home with the two vessels and proudly showed

them to his wife and children. All of them ate the delicious *mudki*.

The next day they opened a *mudki* shop. Within just a few days, the Brahmin's *mudki* shop became famous. He became the proud owner of a brick house as well. The days of poverty and starvation seemed to be over at last.

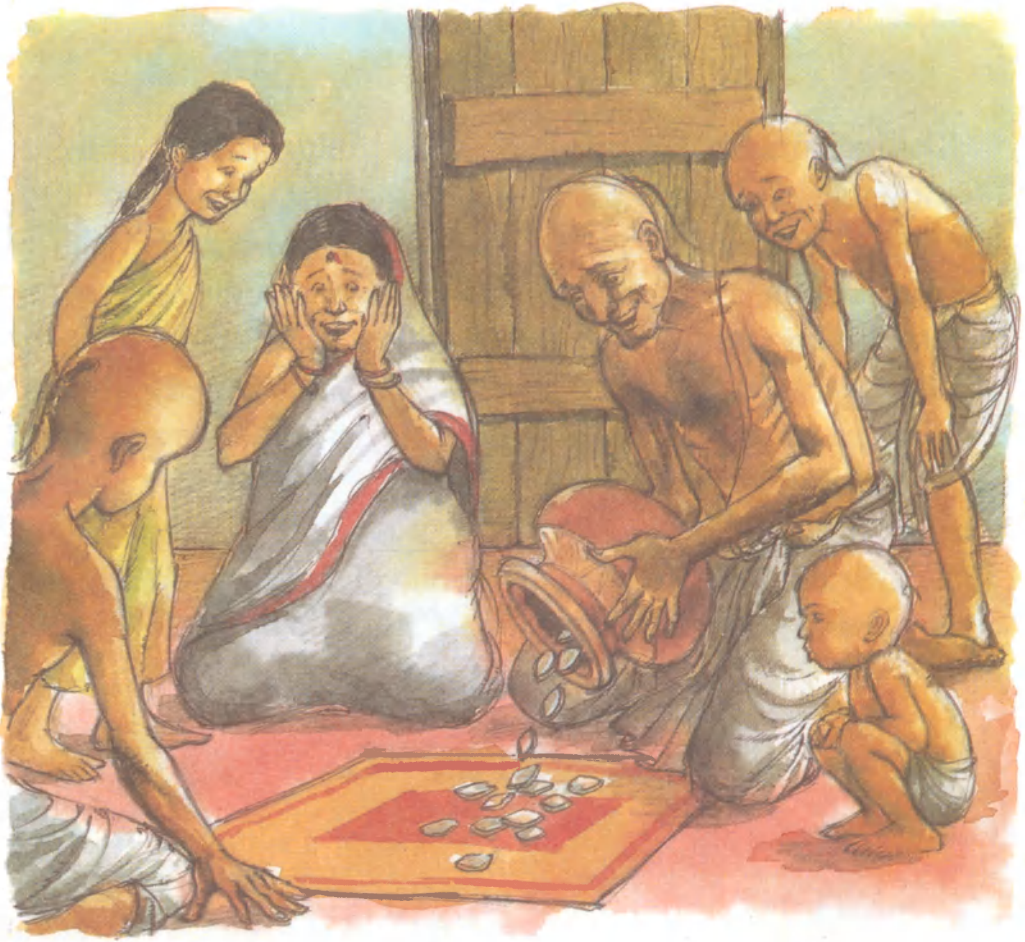
Good fortune, it is said, does not last forever. The Brahmin too ran out of luck. The first time he could ward off the bad luck because he returned home in the nick of time. His children had accidentally turned the wrong *handi* upside down, allowing the demons a merry time beating them. When the Brahmin saw the demons, he rushed to the *handi* and turned it back to its normal position. He then kept it away in a safe place.

The second time, however, there was little he could do. The children, who were arguing as to who would shake the *handi* first, dropped it. The *handi* was shattered to pieces.

The morose Brahmin once again turned to the gods for help. Both Lord Shiva and Goddess Durga appeared before him and, hearing his tale of woes, gave him yet another *handi*. "There will be no more *handis* for you," they cautioned him.

The Brahmin bowed low in reverence and ran back home. He summoned his wife and children and turned the *handi* upside down in the hope of *mudki*. They let out a chorus of joy when, instead of *mudki*, *sandesh* (a sweet) poured forth in a continuous stream. There were mouth-watering square-shaped and moon-shaped *sandesh*.

The Brahmin opened a sweet shop and his delicious *sandesh* fetched him great name and prosperity. No social function in his village as well as the neighbouring villages was complete without sweets from his shop.



The *zamindar* of the village, however, grew jealous of the Brahmin's rising fortunes. He had heard about the magic *handi*. So, he plotted a scheme to steal it. The *zamindar* had a son who was to get married shortly. During his son's wedding he invited hundreds of people and urged the Brahmin to bring his *handi* so that the *sandesh* could be served to his guests. The Brahmin did not like the menacing gleam in the *zamindar*'s eye but he dare not refuse his request. Once the Brahmin had shaken out more than a thousand sweets for the guests, the greedy *zamindar* snatched the *handi* from him. He abused the Brahmin and shooed him away.

The helpless Brahmin could not say anything and quietly went back home. He did not know what to do. Just as he thought of Goddess Durga, he remembered the second *handi*. With rising excitement, he took it out and returned to the wedding. There he shook out hundreds of demons. The hideous creatures went on a rampage with glee. They beat up the *zamindar* and his men. The *zamindar*, in fact, was chased by the demons from one room to another. He finally had to beg for mercy and return the *handi* to the Brahmin.

The Brahmin, thereafter, lived happily with his family for many, many years.





The Clever Goldsmith

Swapna Dutta

Once upon a time there lived a king who was very proud of his intelligence. He believed there was no one in the kingdom who could cheat him and get away with it. He said it to his ministers one day. Everyone agreed except one. He kept quiet.

The king was surprised. "Why are you silent?" he asked. "Do you not believe that it is impossible to cheat me?"

"No, Sir, I do not," said the minister. "It may be true of others but I know for certain that some goldsmiths always cheat their customers, even in our kingdom."

"I do not believe it," said the king. "I shall send for all the goldsmiths and talk to them myself."

"Sir, surely you do not expect them to admit it, even if it is true?" cried the other ministers.

"Don't worry, I know how to handle them," said the king.

He sent for the goldsmiths in the kingdom the very next morning.

The goldsmiths, who arrived, were surprised and wondered what it was all about. "Why has he called all of us?" asked one of them. "Is there a royal wedding or coronation which has been fixed all of a sudden?"

"Perhaps the queens are tired of their old jewellery and want us to cast them in a different mould," suggested another.

"No!" said a third. "The queens always send for us directly. This has something to do with His Majesty."

"I think it is because he wants to send a special gift to some other kingdom and wants the jewels in a hurry," said another.

"It is no use guessing," said Madan, the youngest of them all. "I am sure His Majesty will tell us what it is all about."

The king came into the room. "I have called you here to ask you a simple question and I want an honest answer," he said. "If I were to give you some gold to make a thing, would it be possible for you to take away any of it without my knowing? Even if you are working under supervision the whole time?"

There was a stunned silence.

"Well?" asked the king looking at them closely. "Speak up."

The goldsmiths looked at each other. "Yes, Your Majesty. It would be possible if we wanted to do it," they said together.

"Really?" asked the king looking incredulous. "How much of gold would you be able to take away?"

"I could take away a quarter of it," said some jewellers.

"I could manage to take away half," said some others.

"I could take the whole of it if I wanted to," said Madan.

The king looked him up and down. "I don't believe it but I would like to see you try," he told Madan. "You will come to the palace every day. You will get into the clothes I provide. I shall give



you the gold and you will make me an image of Ganapati right under my eyes. Whenever I go out of the room, my personal guard will be in charge. When you return home, you will leave everything behind, get into your own clothes and leave the palace after you have been thoroughly searched. This will be your daily routine until the Ganapati is made.”

“Very well, Sir,” said Madan.

“Do you still think that you can manage it?” asked the king.

“I am sure I can,” said Madan.

“If you are really able to do as you say, you shall marry my daughter and have half my kingdom,” said the king. “If you fail, I shall banish you from my kingdom forever.”

“So be it, Sir,” said Madan cheerfully.

“Remember, you will be watched every single moment by me or my guards,” said the king.

“Don’t be crazy, Madan,” said the other goldsmiths. “You know

you cannot do it! No one can, under such strict supervision."

"I can do it," he said confidently.

Madan came to the palace early the next morning. He got into the plain robe, took the gold and the set of instruments and started work. He was surrounded by the royal guards throughout the day. The king also sat there most of the time. Madan worked away carefully, melting, chiselling and hammering away. He did not mind the audience at all. After a day's hard work he got into his own clothes after handing out everything to the king's men and went back home.

On reaching home, however, he did something strange. Something that no one else knew anything about. He started making an indential image of Ganapati with brass and worked away late into the night.

He did it every day. He worked at the gold Ganapati under strict supervision in the palace by day. And he worked at the brass Ganapati quietly by himself, occasionally helped by his sister, at night. Both were complete in a week's time.

On the seventh evening, Madan held up the completed gold Ganapati for everyone to see.

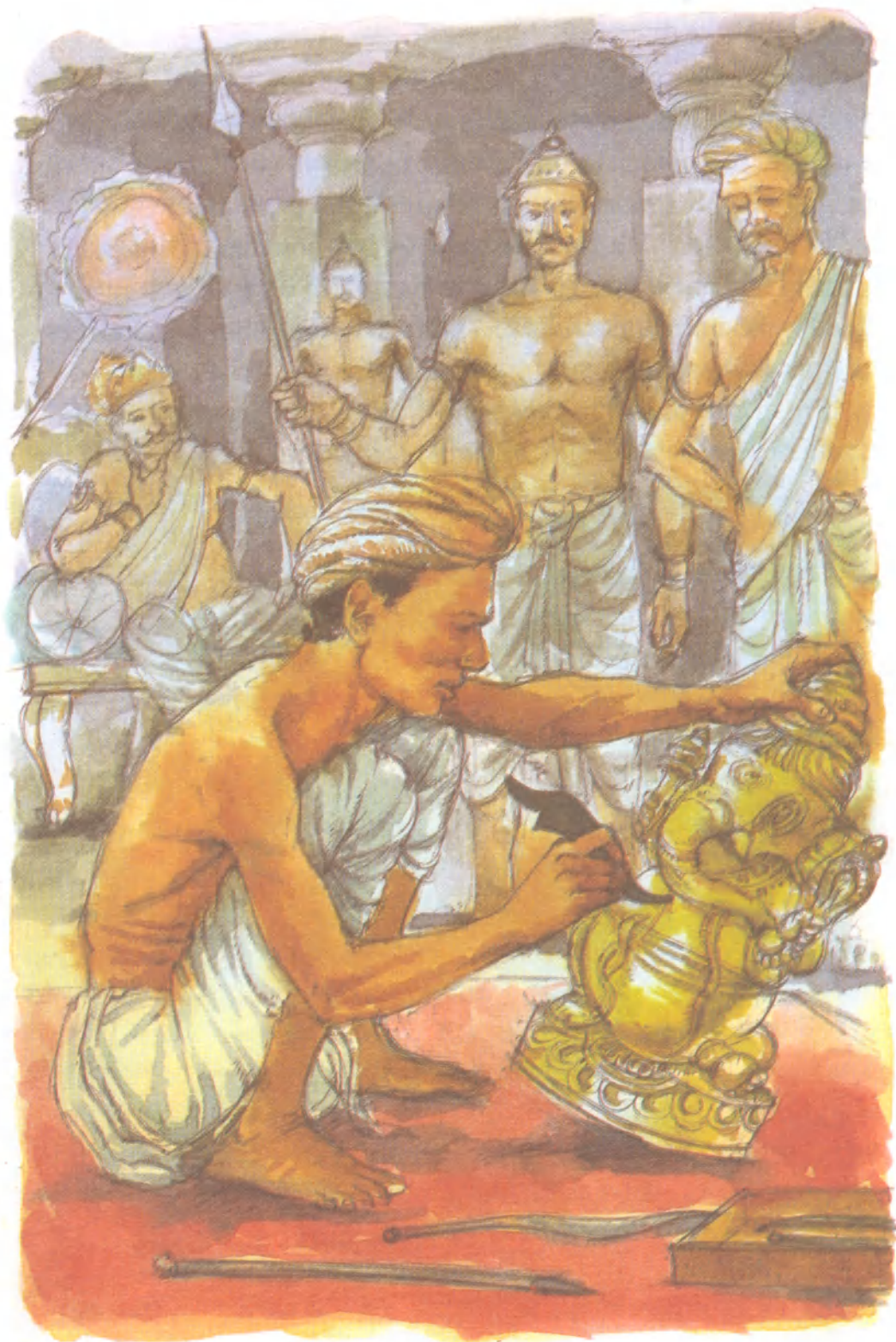
"Is it complete?" asked the king eagerly.

"Not quite, Sir," said Madan. "I have to keep it submerged in a pot of fresh curd the whole night and polish it the next morning. It is very important."

"Really?" asked the king, amazed. "I have never heard of anyone polishing gold with curd."

"It is my special technique," said Madan. "Can I have a large pot of fresh curd, please?"

"Now that is a stupid thing to ask for," said the royal guards



frowning. "How can you get fresh curd at this time of the day? People usually set it at night and it is ready by dawn. Why on earth did you not tell us in the morning that you wanted curd? We could have set some for you."

"I forgot," said Madan. "Can you not buy some in the market?"

Just then they saw a young woman with a large pot on her head walking by the roadside. "What are you selling?" cried one of the royal guards.

"Fresh curd," said the woman. "I came late this morning and could not sell any. So I am taking it back home."

"Wait!" shouted the guard eagerly. "Bring it up here. We will buy it."

"Thank goodness!" cried Madan. "I was getting so worried, wondering what I would do if you could not get me any curd."

The woman came up with the pot.

"I will have to see it first," said Madan, "it may not be good enough."

"I won't let you see it unless you pay me," said the woman. "As it is, it is unsold stuff. If you tamper with it, no one is going to buy it even at half price."

"Don't worry, we will buy it from you," said Madan peeping into the pot. "Seems all right." He brought the gold Ganapati and dropped it into the pot.

The king paid the curd-seller a gold coin. She was about to leave when Madan called her back. "I don't like this curd," he said. "It is far too watery and won't give a proper polish to my work. Better take it back. I will polish the image with fresh curd in the morning."

"And what am I to do with this curd?" cried the woman angrily. "No one will buy it now!"

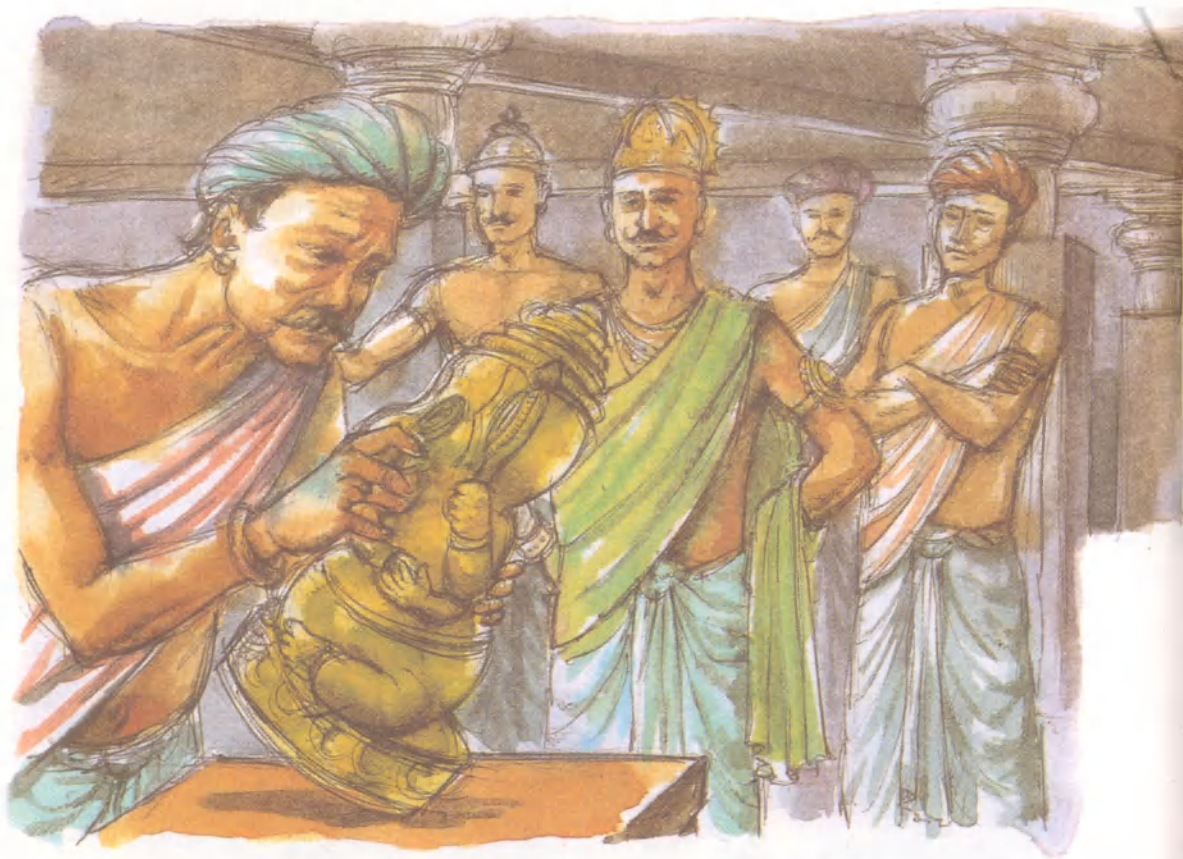
“Eat it, throw it, do what you like,” said Madan lifting the Ganapati from the pot, “but don’t dare to grumble. Remember, His Majesty has already paid you for it.”

The woman picked up the pot and went away muttering under her breath.

Madan polished the Ganapati in fresh curd the next morning and handed it to the king.

The king passed it to his gold expert. “Check and see how much gold he has managed to remove from this,” he said.





The expert examined it carefully. He frowned and examined it again. And again and again.

“What is it?” asked the king impatiently.

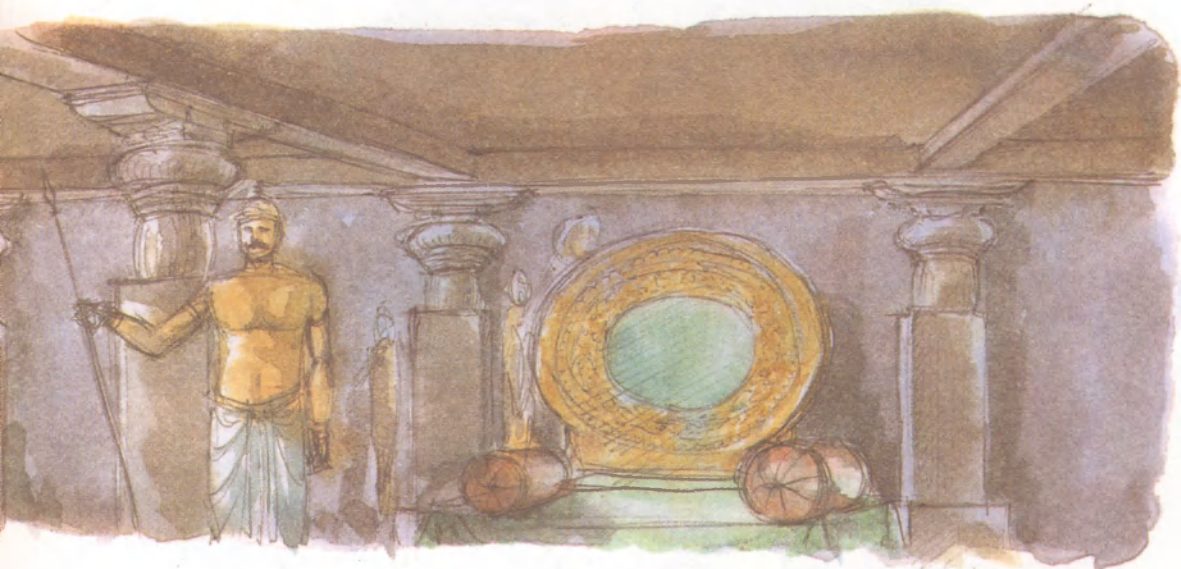
“Your Majesty, there is not a single atom of gold in this!”

“How can that be possible?” cried the king incredulously. “I gave him the gold myself and he made it in my presence. I have not allowed him to take a single thing from this room.”

“I don’t know how he managed it but this Ganapati is made of pure brass. There is no gold anywhere,” said the expert.

“Amazing!” cried the king.

“I told you I could do it, didn’t I?” said Madan smiling.



Finally the king asked Madan how he had managed to fool them.

“Are you sure you won’t punish me if I tell you?” asked Madan.

“Word of honour, I shall not,” assured the king.

Madan told him the story.

The woman selling curd was none other than Madan’s sister who had come there just at that time. The brass Ganapati that Madan had made during the night was already hidden in the curd. When she brought it to the palace, Madan had simply dropped the gold Ganapati into the curd and taken out the brass one.

The king was taken aback and then burst out laughing, “Well, well! you are a smart lad! It was clever of you to have fooled us all like this. I never thought anyone could get the better of me. But you have proved me wrong.”

Madan was married to the king’s daughter as promised. He was also given half the kingdom. And once he became the king, Madan never tried any of his tricks again and came to be known as one of the best kings in the kingdom, keeping all his people happy.



The Pigeons

Devika Rangachari

It was dusk and the lamps in the palace were lit in a row, their flames flickering gently in the wind. Suyya sat at the door of an inner chamber and wrapped his coarse woollen cloak more tightly around him trying hard not to sleep. It was bitterly cold for there had been a snowfall that morning and the sky had been grey all day. A murmur of voices came to his ears and he sprang to his feet, awaiting his beloved queen, Vakpusta. She approached with a female attendant. Little Suyya rushed forward with his offering of fruit, wrapped clumsily in a cloth, and handed it to the queen.

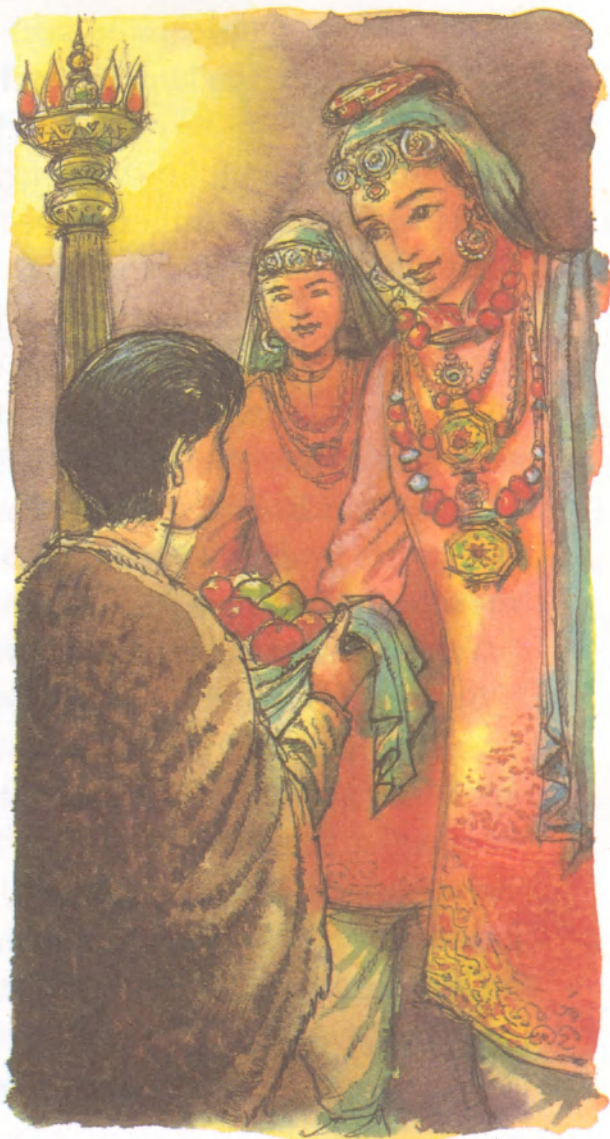
“What is this, little one?” the queen asked. “Oh, this is my special fruit. You must love me well to serve me so faithfully.” She knew the little boy evaded the guards everyday to give her his gifts.

Suyya, delighted at her praise, stared up at the beautiful face,

framed by long hair and bright ornaments, and sighed, "They say you are a goddess."

The queen laughed gaily. "Now you must go home," she said. "It is dark and you must hasten for your evening meal."

Suyya walked home quickly, hardly feeling the icy wind and the deep snow into which his little feet sank at every step. He was thinking now of the time when he had accompanied Queen Vakpusta and King Tunjina to the outskirts of Kashmir. His father being the king's attendant, Suyya was often allowed to wander about the palace and, on special occasions, to join expeditions like this one. The group had been hungry and thirsty. The royal couple had smiled and pointed to the newly-planted trees around them, which had been bare a moment ago, but were now suddenly laden with luscious fruit of every sort. Suyya, alone, could hardly eat anything in the face of such magic. The apple in his hand was larger and more gloriously red than



any other he had seen and the juice which trickled down his chin was like nectar...

Suyya's mother was waiting anxiously for him at the door. "What took you so long at the palace?" she exclaimed.

"A gift for the queen," he said importantly and his mother smiled resignedly.

The Queen had inspired such devotion in Suyya that she sometimes feared for him. Padma, her husband, had related many wondrous tales of the royal couple's doings. Verily two divine beings had descended on the land as their king and queen. It was said that even the weather obeyed their commands.

Not many days later, the land of Kashmir was afflicted by a famine. The snow bore down heavily from the sky, though it was autumn, covering the crops like a cloak. There was no grain left to reap in the fields. The food stores in the kingdom slowly dwindled till there was nothing left to eat.

"The good king is worried," Padma told his wife. "He roams the streets by day, relieving the sick and is trying to turn away the hand of death from the land."

Yet the famine showed no signs of yielding.

Suyya, thinner and weaker now, went to the palace. He had not been there for many days since he felt so tired. The watery gruel he ate did not fill his little stomach. He did not cry or complain because of the fear and despair he saw in his parents' eyes. Tarrying by the council chamber, he heard the king exclaim to his ministers, "Take my jewels then. Sell the treasures of the kingdom to save the people. What use are they if the life of my subjects is ebbing?"

Suyya returned home to partake of another frugal meal. The



streets were lined with people yearning for a morsel. Everywhere there were cries of sorrow and piteous wails of hunger. Children who used to throng the streets, lay at open doorways with sunken eyes, heedless of the harsh winds. A winding line of men were making their way to the border, their packages on their heads and stumbling weakly in the snowdrifts.

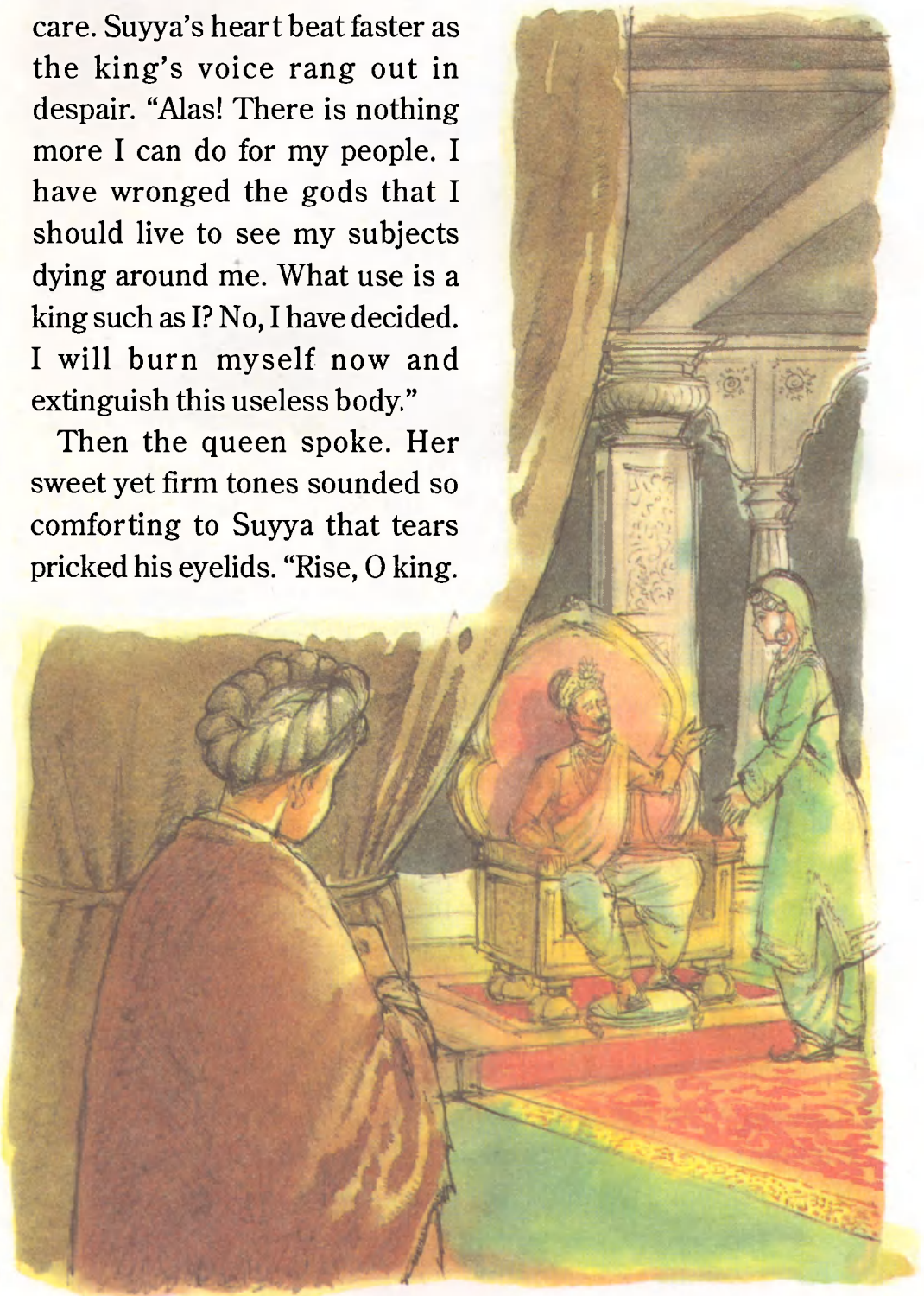
Padma carried Suyya to the palace the following day.

"It will take his mind off his hunger," his mother said with tears in her eyes. "Why are the gods punishing us so?"

All day long, Suyya sat in the palace courtyard. People came and went around him, but his tired mind did not register anything. At dusk, when the palace lamps were being lit, Suyya heard a familiar voice and slowly made his way to the inner chambers. No one stopped the child; the guards were too listless and ill to

care. Suyya's heart beat faster as the king's voice rang out in despair. "Alas! There is nothing more I can do for my people. I have wronged the gods that I should live to see my subjects dying around me. What use is a king such as I? No, I have decided. I will burn myself now and extinguish this useless body."

Then the queen spoke. Her sweet yet firm tones sounded so comforting to Suyya that tears pricked his eyelids. "Rise, O king.



Of what use is this grief?" he heard her say. "A king's duty is towards his people and he cannot abandon it. In the same way is a wife's duty to her husband. I will take care of your grief and that of the people. Be calm. Does my word ever fail?"

As she spoke, Suyya heard a curious sound of something falling and he ran out to the courtyard. Several courtiers were clustered in a corner, exclaiming loudly. As the boy approached, they stopped and rapidly distributed the fallen objects, giving praise to the gods all the while.

"What is it?" Suyya cried. "What has fallen from the sky?"

"Dead pigeons," answered an official, a friend of his father's. "Here, take some home to your mother. This will keep us alive for a while. What if it is forbidden food? The gods themselves have sent it."

Suyya rushed home with the lifeless pigeons. All along the way he saw huge crowds of people shouting excitedly and knew that the pigeons had fallen all over the land. They were in his home too—twenty of them, grey and cold, yet offering a sustenance.

His mother rushed to embrace Suyya. "Come, my son. We are saved! We are saved! Our bodies will have some nourishment at last!"

The following morning, the king issued a proclamation in the kingdom, declaring the miracle to be Queen Vakpusta's doing. The joyous people received the news with renewed fervour and admiration for their saintly queen.

Suyya, however, remained a little withdrawn and thoughtful. He had eaten his share, yet his heart remained heavy. Towards dusk he made his way to the palace. The land looked so different—lamps were lit gaily all along the streets, people were thronging



the roads once more and there, at the palace, the guards laughed to see Suyya, and patted his head affectionately.

Suyya proceeded unhindered towards the inner chambers and stood by the door. He had not long to wait. Familiar footsteps sounded in the passage and the queen came in sight. She paused when she saw Suyya and drew him inside.

“What? No gift for me this time?” she smiled warmly, holding his hand. “Your face has some colour at long last. Yet your eyes are sad. Why is that?”

Suyya looked into her beautiful eyes and the words came out in a rush. “The pigeons,” he said in a troubled tone, “they were all dead. You are a goddess—you protect life. How could you kill them?”

The Queen smiled and released the child’s hand. She looked out at the snow that shone white, despite the encircling dusk.

“Those were not real pigeons,” she said gently. “That was food sent down in the form of the birds, and it will be so for many more days. Keep this to yourself.”

The little boy ran home all the way, his heart at peace and filled with renewed love for the Queen.





Ali And The Donkey

Mala Pandurang

In a certain village in the land of Kutch, there lived a young man called Ali. Ali worked as a carpenter and all the villagers liked him. His parents had died when he was a small boy and so he lived alone.

Every evening, after he had finished with his chores, Ali would sit alone by the village pond and wonder what it would be like to have a family of his own. His only other living relative was an elderly aunt who stayed four villages away. Ali had met her just once, many years ago.

One day Ali decided that he would visit his aunt. After all, she was quite old and might be unwell. He was sure she would welcome a companion in her old age. Ali began to picture in his mind her joy on seeing him, and the tears of happiness that would come to her eyes.

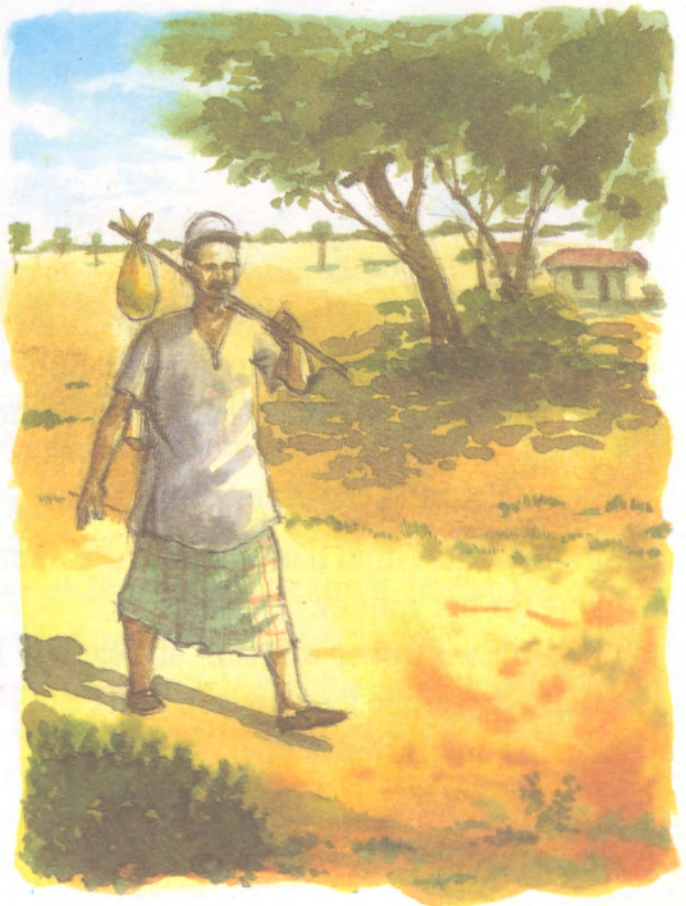
The very next morning, before sunrise, he set out for his aunt's village. His friend, Vimal, the potter, tried his best to

dissuade Ali not to go. "Think once again," Vimal told him, "it has been ages since you have met your aunt. She may not be that pleased to see you. I have heard from a cousin who stays in her village that she is a wealthy widow who hates to spend even a single paise. She may even think that you are visiting her just for her money."

Ali, however, was determined to make the trip and nothing Vimal said could stop him.

He did not own a mule of his own and so he walked the whole way along the hot and dusty road, stopping only at noon to rest for a while under the shade of a few palm trees. Tired and hungry, he arrived at his aunt's village at dusk. As he entered the village, he saw a cobbler who was gathering his tools together at the end of the day, and asked him the way to the home of his aunt. The cobbler looked at him curiously.

"You walk straight down this road until you come to a huge mansion which looks as if it will collapse any moment," he said. "I hope you are not expecting a warm welcome and a hot



meal," he added. "The widow who stays there is a terrible miser who chases away even the children who try to pick the fruit that has fallen in her garden."

Ali continued slowly towards his aunt's house. Suddenly he was unsure of himself. Had Vimal been right after all? As the house came into sight, his heart sank. The walls of the house were a dirty yellow, and the paint was peeling off. The tiles had fallen off the roof, and the courtyard was littered with rubbish. There were weeds all over the garden which had evidently not been swept for a long time. A thin, sad, brooding donkey was tied to a pole near the gate which was broken. The donkey looked starved. It had the unhappiest-looking eyes Ali had ever seen, and when it looked directly at Ali, it seemed to be pleading for food. Ali took pity on the donkey. He felt he just had to go back down the street to the nearest shop and buy the donkey a bundle of hay. When he returned and placed it in front of the donkey, it ate the hay hungrily as if it had not eaten in days.

"Who is out there?" he heard a shrill voice demand. "What do you want with my donkey?"

Ali turned around and saw a thin, white-haired woman. 'So this is my aunt,' he thought to himself. She was clad in a dull, white sari, and had deep lines etched on her forehead from constant frowning.

Ali introduced himself, but his aunt was not at all pleased to see him. Just as Vimal had warned, the aunt assumed that Ali had come for her money.

"I am a very poor woman," she said. "I have no money. I have hardly enough to feed myself. What can I offer you if you turn up like this on my doorstep?"



Ali was terribly disappointed but did not show it. All that he wanted was a little warmth and affection. That night he slept on the kitchen floor, feeling hungry and very much alone in the world. His aunt had fed him with just a bowl of thin, lukewarm gruel and, when he had told her that he would return home the next morning, she had not tried to change his mind.

At dawn, just as Ali was about to leave, his aunt decided that she would walk with him till the next village.



“Today is Tuesday—it is market day in the village,” she said. “I am going to sell that useless donkey of mine. That creature costs me a fortune to feed, and is just a lazy bag of bones.”

Ali and his aunt led the poor donkey (which was too thin to carry either of them!) to the market. People from all over the countryside had gathered there. Buyers and sellers were bargaining at the top of their voices. There were crowds of people milling around stalls with all kinds of colourful wares on display; bright clothes, decorated pots, different kinds of fruits and vegetables, and wooden toys for children.

Ali and the old woman went towards the centre of the market where several other sellers had brought their animals. In her shrill voice, she announced that she was willing to give the donkey to the highest bidder.

Ali was surprised to see quite a few traders come forward and bid for the animal. He realized that the donkey was, in fact, quite well-built with a broad back. If fed properly, it would be of



great use to whoever bought it. A rich merchant with a loud, arrogant voice made a good offer for the donkey.

The donkey raised its head and looked straight at Ali. It was as if the creature was begging Ali to buy it for himself. "Look at the rich man," the donkey seemed to say. "He has such a cruel look and he will surely whip me and treat me even worse than your aunt."

"I will take your donkey," Ali suddenly said to his aunt.

"Then give me fifty rupees more than the rich man's offer," the widow replied, realizing that Ali wanted the donkey badly, and would pay all that he had for it. That was indeed all the money

that Ali had with him but he could not resist the plea in the donkey's eyes, and so he gave his aunt what she demanded.

Ali walked back to his village leading the skinny donkey. As soon as Vimal saw them, he burst into laughter. "You went to find your aunt and returned with a donkey so thin I can see its bones," he chuckled. "Perhaps next time you will listen to my advice, Ali!"

Ali went about feeding the animal properly. Soon it put on weight and became strong. He began to use the donkey to help him carry loads. He would spend his time talking with the creature which seemed to understand not only what he said, but his feelings, too.

The expression in the donkey's eyes was always one of



gratitude. Ali did not regret the purchase, for the donkey became a very important part of his life. He no longer felt lonely in the evenings, when all the other villagers had retired into their homes.

A few months later, Ali received news that his aunt had died. Since he was her only relative, Ali felt duty-bound to see that she got a proper funeral. He left immediately on his donkey to attend to all the arrangements. After the funeral was over, Ali spent the night at his aunt's house for the last time. He walked across the courtyard to untie the donkey from the tree to which it was tethered. It had been restless since morning, and Ali felt that the place perhaps brought back unhappy memories of the times that his aunt had ill-treated it.

As he loosened the rope, the donkey walked across to a far corner of the courtyard and began to paw the earth.

'It must be hungry,' Ali thought and gave it fresh hay.

The donkey continued to paw the earth.

'It must be thirsty,' Ali decided, and gave it some water.

The donkey did not drink the water. Instead it continued to dig the ground in front of it.

"What do you want?" asked Ali growing irritated for he had had a tiring day.

The donkey looked at Ali helplessly.

Suddenly, Ali thought of a spade. 'Spade? What do I need a spade for at this time of the night?' he asked himself. Then a wild hope grew in his mind. Was the donkey trying to tell him something? Was it trying to persuade him to dig the ground?

A very excited Ali then began to dig exactly where the donkey had been continuously pawing. He had dug about a metre when the spade hit against a hard object and Ali heard the clang of metal.

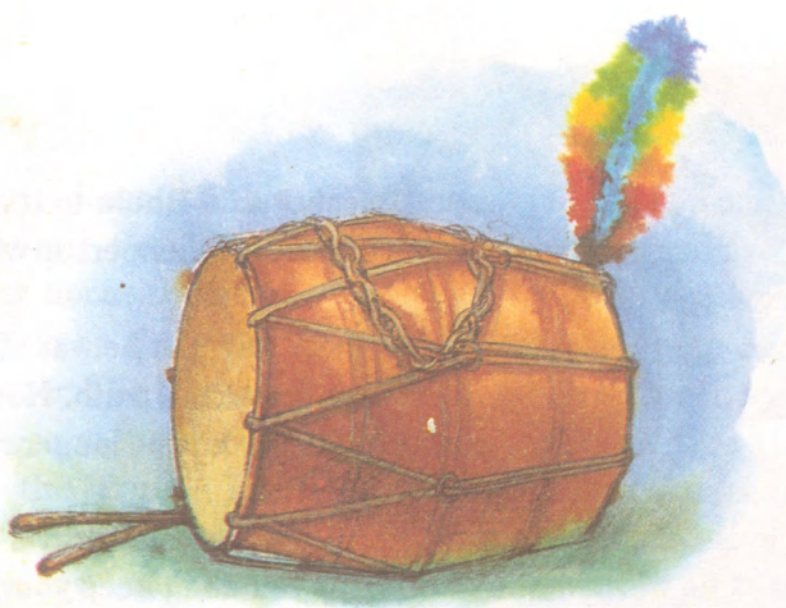
He continued to dig frantically, until he finally spied a metal chest. Binding it with rope, Ali managed to hoist it up. He opened it, his heart beating rapidly. The trunk was full of silver vessels and gold jewellery. Ali realized that this was the treasure chest in which his aunt had hidden all her wealth. The donkey must have seen his aunt burying it in the ground.

Ali threw his arms around the donkey's neck. "My friend," he cried out in joy, "thank you for such good fortune."

The gentle eyes of the donkey expressed gratitude.

Ali returned to his village with the trunk on the donkey's back. He started a shop and soon became a prosperous and honest businessman. He never forgot that it was a simple act of kindness that had led him to such good fortune in life.





The Magical Drum

Aradhna Jha

A long time ago, in a small kingdom in western India, there lived a ruler by the name Dharmraj. He was a good, wise and just king. His subjects greatly admired and respected him.

King Dharmraj was tall, well-built and handsome. He had thick, black hair, which Bholu, his personal barber, regularly trimmed. Bholu had been doing this work for many years and was very proud to be the royal barber. There was, however, one thing which Bholu had to be very careful about. Whenever he was summoned to cut the royal tresses, he had to make sure that he was alone with the king. No one else was permitted to enter the royal chamber during that time. This was because Bholu shared a small, dark secret with the king. On either side of King Dharmraj's head, grew a small, grey horn!

This terrible secret was known only to the king and his barber. Bholu was really shocked when he first came to know of it. But he promised the king not to reveal it to anybody.

“Please don’t worry, Your Majesty,” said Bholu to the king. “Your secret is absolutely safe with me. No other person will ever come to know of it.”

King Dharmraj was relieved to hear this. For he was afraid of how his people would react if they learnt the truth. How they would laugh and make fun of him! They would no longer respect him and might even want a new ruler!

So even though King Dharmraj was reassured by Bholu’s promise, he warned him sternly, “If you don’t keep your word, Bholu, you will be punished and banished from this kingdom.”

The barber trembled with fear. He decided to be very careful and keep his lips sealed about the matter.

The years rolled by and Bholu kept his promise. Pleased with his loyalty, the king often gave him generous gifts.

With every passing year, it became more and more difficult for Bholu to keep the secret. He yearned to tell someone about the king’s strange horns. But his warning always prevented Bholu from doing so.

One day, Bholu was returning home from the royal palace. He had just trimmed the king’s hair and was thinking about the pair of horns.

Bholu’s house was on the other side of a small forest. He slowly made his way past the tall trees and hanging creepers. Feeling tired after a while, he sat down under a shady tree to rest.

Bholu could not stop thinking about the horns. Suddenly, he jumped up very excited.

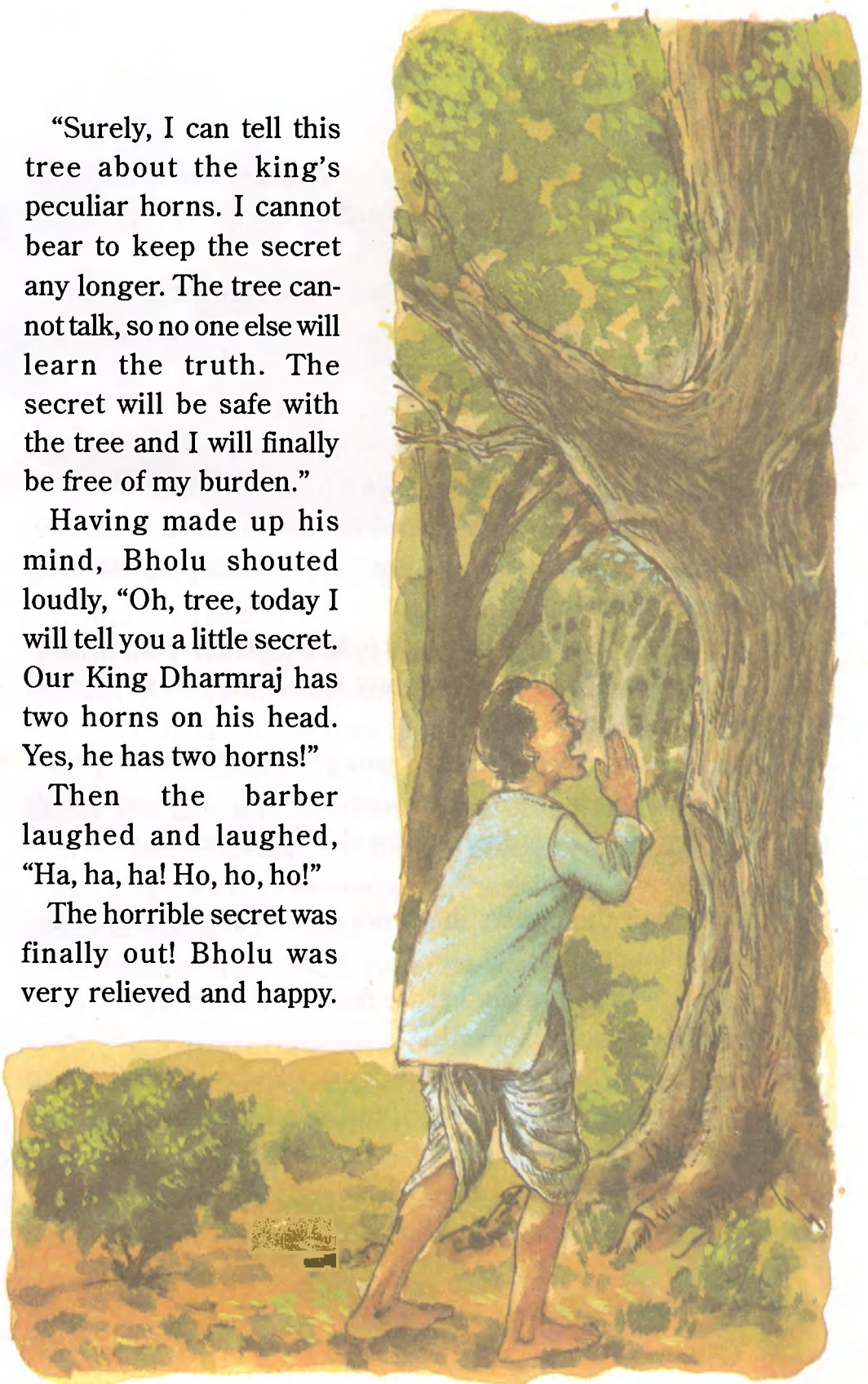
“What a wonderful idea!” he exclaimed looking up at the tree under which he had been sitting.

“Surely, I can tell this tree about the king’s peculiar horns. I cannot bear to keep the secret any longer. The tree cannot talk, so no one else will learn the truth. The secret will be safe with the tree and I will finally be free of my burden.”

Having made up his mind, Bholu shouted loudly, “Oh, tree, today I will tell you a little secret. Our King Dharmraj has two horns on his head. Yes, he has two horns!”

Then the barber laughed and laughed, “Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!”

The horrible secret was finally out! Bholu was very relieved and happy.



Slowly he walked back home.

The next day a woodcutter came to the forest. He stopped at the same tree and thought, 'The wood of this tree is very good and will make an excellent drum.'

With several deft strokes, he chopped down the tree. Then he sold the wood to a drum-maker who made a beautiful drum with it.

"This is the best drum I have ever made," said the drum-maker, very pleased. "Tomorrow I will take it to the market-place and sell it. I am sure to get a good price for it."

So the next morning the drum-maker went to the market-place. He stood in a corner and began beating his drum. A melodious sound came out of it.

The drum-maker was very happy to hear it. He shouted loudly, "Buy this drum! Who wants to buy this beautiful, wonderful drum?"

A small crowd slowly gathered around him. The people stood silently, listening to the musical sound.

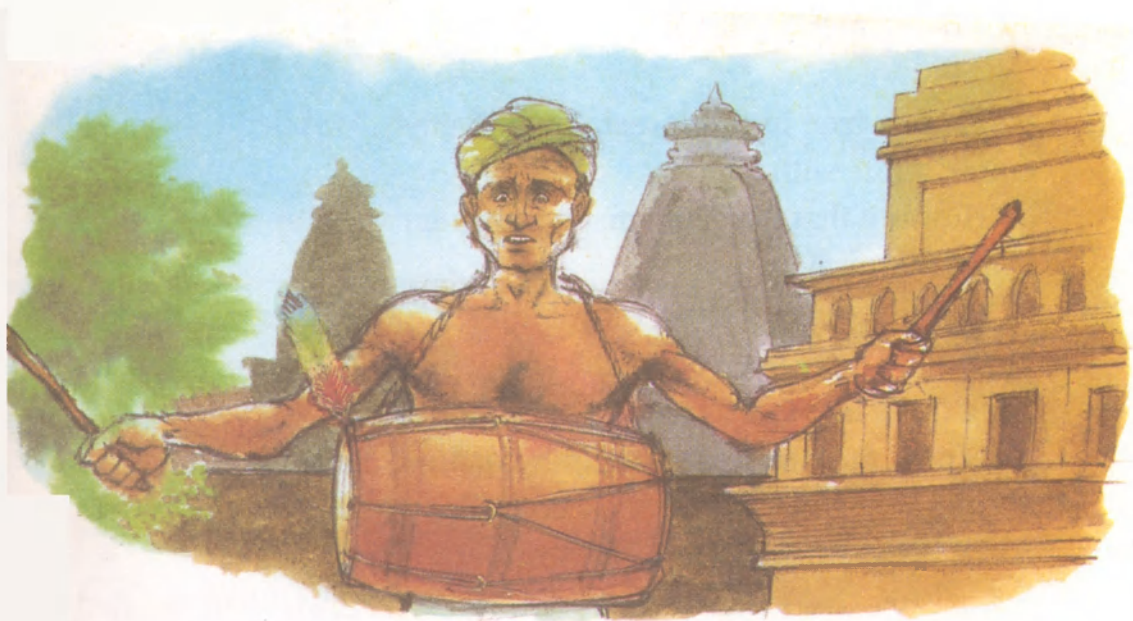
"This is a very fine drum, indeed!" remarked an old man admiringly.

Pleased with the praise, the drum maker began to beat his drum even louder.

Suddenly a strange sound arose from it. The people listened carefully. They were shocked.

"Boom, boom, boom!" went the drum. "Today I will tell you a little secret. Our King Dharmraj has two horns on his head. Yes, he has two horns! Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"

The people stood there, stunned. They could not believe their ears. The drum-maker beat his drum again. The same sound



arose from it. He was very surprised and embarrassed. How could a drum say all this?

Soon the crowd grew bigger and bigger. And how it laughed and jeered! "Our king has two horns! Our king has two horns!" the people chanted together.

When King Dharmraj heard about this, he was very upset and angry. His face turned a dark shade of red as he thundered, "Arrest that drum-maker and bring him here at once!"

The king's soldiers soon arrested the drum-maker and brought him, trembling, to the palace.

"You impertinent rascal! How dare you insult me!" roared the furious king.

The frightened drum-maker fell on his knees. "O, great king!" he wept. "I just bought some wood from a woodcutter and made this drum. I have no idea how it is saying those terrible things. Please forgive me, Your Majesty."

The king then summoned the woodcutter. "From where did you get the wood you sold to the drum-maker?" he asked.

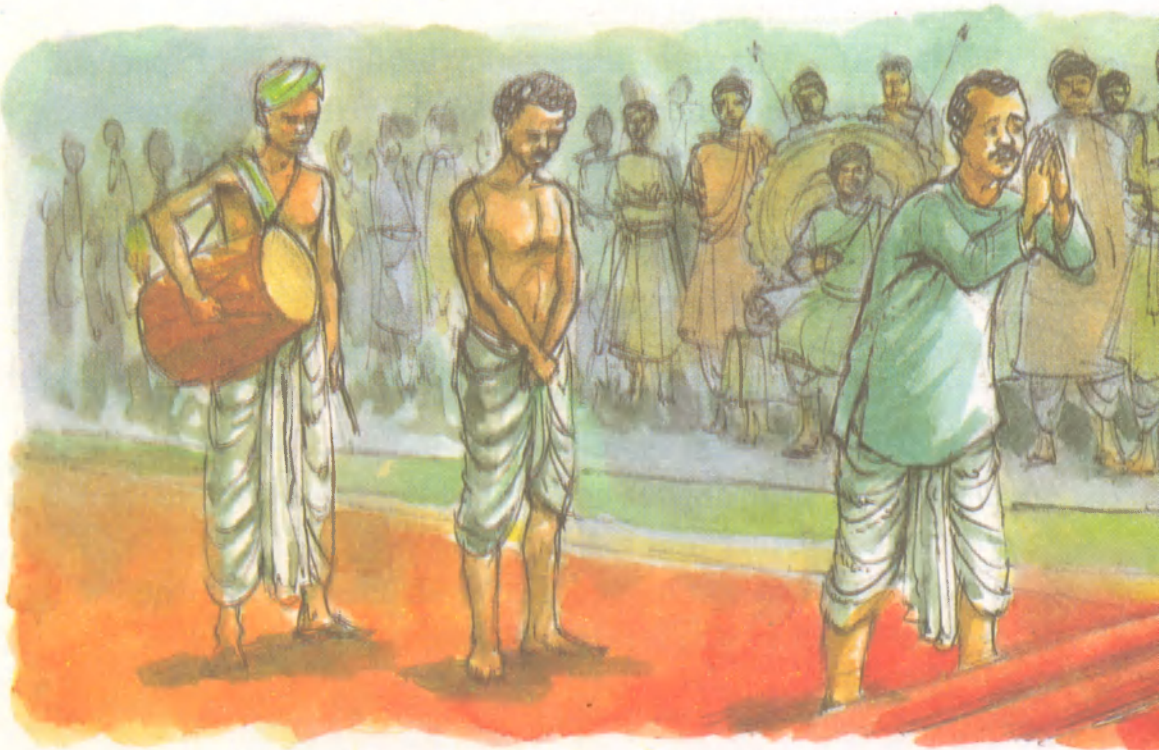
"From a tree in the forest, Your Majesty," replied the woodcutter, white with fear.

"How is it that the drum made from your wood speaks?" asked King Dharmraj.

"I really don't know, Your Majesty," said the woodcutter puzzled. "I have been chopping and selling wood for many years but a thing like this has never happened before."

By now, the king was thoroughly confused. How could the wood speak? How did it know his secret? The king and his courtiers had no answers to these questions.

But King Dharmraj was determined to find out who had revealed his closely-guarded secret. He thought deeply. Besides him, the only other person who had known about his horns was his barber. But Bholu had been loyal to him and had kept quiet all these years.



No, Bholu could never betray him. Nevertheless he decided to question him.

“Get Bholu here at once!” he commanded his guards.

The barber was brought, shaking from head to toe, before the king who said, “Bholu, you were the only person who knew my secret. To whom did you tell it? Speak the truth or you shall be punished!”



“Your M-Majesty,” Bholu stammered with fear, “as you know, I had kept my lips sealed for many years. It was not easy for me and I longed to share the secret with somebody.”

Bholu stopped speaking and nervously looked at the ground.

“Go on. What happened next?” said King Dharmraj coldly.

Bholu continued slowly, “One day while returning home through the forest, I stopped to rest under a tree. I had just cut your hair and was thinking about your horns. How I longed to discuss them with somebody! After all, I am human too. Suddenly, I had an idea—I told the tree your secret, thinking that it would be safe. How was I to know that its wood could speak?”

“Now I see,” said the wise king putting the pieces of the puzzle together. “That tree was magical. It could hear and speak. So when a drum was made from its wood and beaten, it spoke. It repeated whatever it heard last from you, that is, the secret about my horns.”

Having solved the mystery of the magical drum, the king looked at the barber. Bholu hung his head in shame. The woodcutter and the drum-maker, stood silently by, waiting to be punished.

King Dharmraj was not only wise, he was also fair and just. He decided to pardon the three men as they could not be blamed for the drum being magical.

So he turned to them and said, “You are forgiven and may leave now.”

The three men could not believe it. They were overjoyed. Bowing low they said, “Oh, king, you are indeed great! Thank you for your kindness.”



The Crafty Frog

Santhini Govindan

There was once a fat, green frog who lived in a river. He led a happy and contented life. One day, a terrible misfortune befell him. He had just climbed out of the river, on to the bank, to warm himself in the pleasant sunshine, when a large, black crow pounced upon him, and seized him quickly in her beak.

“What a tasty meal you will make for me,” she cawed greedily, as she eyed the frog. She flapped her wings and flew into the air, intending to take the frog to a faraway place, where she could feed on him undisturbed.

Poor frog! He was really terrified as he soared through the air, clutched tightly in the crow’s beak.

He knew that his end was imminent, for there was nothing that he could do to overpower his wily, old enemy, the crow. Even so, he decided that he would try and keep his wits about him, and not show the crow how afraid he really was. Perhaps then he would gain some more time to work out a plan...

After a while, the crow landed at the mouth of a lonely and dark cave. With a loud caw of satisfaction, she clutched the frog in her claws, and was about to pierce him with her sharp beak, when the frog burst into loud, raucous laughter. The crow paused, and looked at the frog incredulously.

"Why do you laugh, you fat fool?" she cried, "do you not know that you are about to die?"

"It is not only I who is about to die, but you too!" replied the frog. "My good friend, the great hooded serpent lives in this cave, and he will soon make a meal of you too!" The crow was most alarmed when she heard this, and without losing a moment, she snatched the frog into her beak, and soared in the air.



She flew as high as she could, and finally she came to alight atop a very tall tree. Once again, she got ready to devour the frog. The frog, as before, burst into laughter just as the crow was about to launch her first peck at his head. The crow stopped, and looked at the frog angrily.

“Why do you laugh foolishly, Mr. Frog? Surely your friend, the serpent is not atop this tall tree too?”

“My friend, the serpent does not live here to be sure,” replied the frog. “But another friend, the cat does. She is particularly fond of eating crows. She will be delighted to see the feast that is awaiting her!”

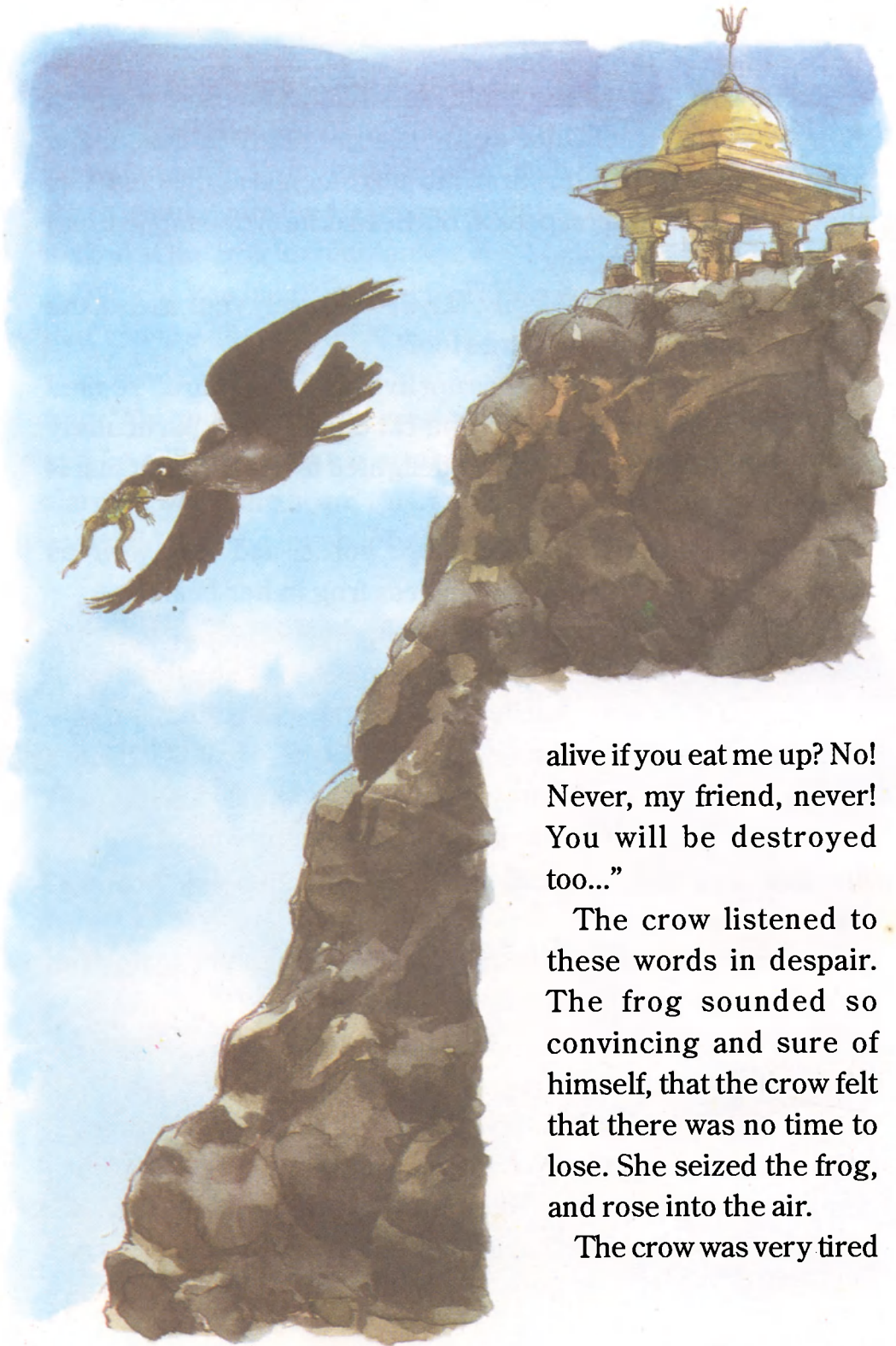
The crow trembled to hear these words, and took wing as fast as she could, bearing the hapless frog in her beak.

By this time the crow was furious at having been thwarted twice by the frog in her attempt to eat him up. Swiftly she flew to the farthest place she knew—a deserted temple on a high, rocky hill. As she set the frog down on the rocks, she said scornfully, “Laugh all you wish, you foolish frog, but there are no friends here to save you! Neither the serpent, nor the cat ever comes here! No one can save you now, and I will make a most delicious and leisurely meal of you!”

To the crow’s dismay, the frog began to laugh yet again! The crow looked at him in utter disbelief.

“How can you laugh when the angel of death is hovering over you?” she cried in rage.

“The angel of death is hovering over you too, my friend,” replied the frog smugly. “You see, you have brought me to a Shiva temple, and I am a great devotee of Lord Shiva. He works miracles! Do you think that he will allow you to leave this place



alive if you eat me up? No!
Never, my friend, never!
You will be destroyed
too..."

The crow listened to these words in despair. The frog sounded so convincing and sure of himself, that the crow felt that there was no time to lose. She seized the frog, and rose into the air.

The crow was very tired

and thirsty, and wearily, she made her way back to the very river from where she had seized the frog. As she set him down, she said, "This is the best place for me to eat you up! Everywhere I go, you seem to have some friend or the other who will kill me. Here, you obviously have no one, as I caught you so easily! Laugh all you wish," the crow jeered, seething with scorn. "You are about to die!"

The frog uttered not a sound. He bent his head and began to weep. "It is true I have no friend here," he said, "and I am prepared to die. All I ask is that one last wish of mine be granted..."

"Why should I grant any wish of yours?" asked the crow roughly. "I am tired and hungry too!"

"I saved you from certain death three times," said the frog mournfully. "Please grant me this last wish..." he implored, "and I shall bless you even as I die!"

"Oh, very well," said the crow impatiently, "but ask your wish quickly, as I have no time to waste..."

The frog lifted his tear-filled eyes, and looked at the crow's face. His voice shook as he spoke, "I am not as brave as you, fair crow. I am quite afraid to die! But I beg you to make my death as quick and painless as possible! Your big, black beak is so thick and blunt, that I fear that it will hurt me very much as you pierce my heart. Please wet your beak in water, and sharpen it, so that I may die quickly..."

The crow stared at the frog through her beady, black eyes, as she considered the matter. Then at last, she shrugged, 'What harm can there be if I sharpen my beak?' she thought.

"Very well," she said magnanimously. "I will sharpen my beak till it is as sharp as the point of a spear! In the meanwhile, you

must wait here till I come back."

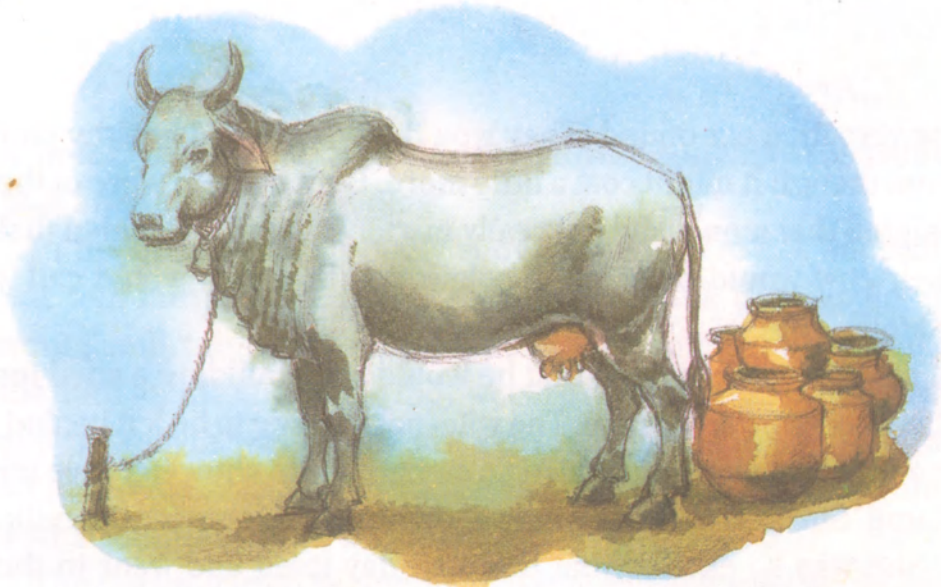
The frog nodded eagerly. Lo! barely had the crow turned away, the frog jumped into the river with one great leap! Joyfully, he splashed and swam in the water, as the crow vigorously ground her beak in preparation for her fine dinner.

When the crow finally thought that her beak was sharp enough, she looked around for the frog.

"Come back," she shrieked furiously, when she found that the frog had escaped, and was in the river. "I am ready and have sharpened my beak..."

From the river, the frog laughed contemptuously. "My dear crow," he said, "you must think of sharpening your wits too!"





Gopal Cures Day-Dreamers

Meenakshi Gupta Jain

There was once an intelligent and hardworking man called Gopal Bhand. He was known for his intelligence and tact in dealing with people and their problems. People used to come to him with their problems and seek his help.

As luck would have it, the couple living next door to Gopal was stupid. On top of that, the husband and wife both used to day-dream. They spent a good deal of their time in dreaming about their future rather than in working to improve their present.

One day the husband told his wife that he wanted to buy a cow so that they would have plenty of milk.

They started planning about buying a cow and in due course of time they started day-dreaming. While talking they came to the conclusion that they could soon be the proud owners of a cow, if they saved a little more money. The reality was that they had a long way to go before they could buy a cow, as they had very meagre savings. Dreaming does not cost anything, and so their

conversation continued. They would buy a big and healthy cow even though it might cost a little more. Both of them were of the opinion that money did not really matter. They also decided that their cow would be black in colour and that they would call it 'Kamli'.

The husband decided that he would start building a shed for Kamli as soon as possible. The wife, not wanting to be left behind, thought that she should also do something to show her love for Kamli. She said that she would soon buy some pots for the milk.

She was so excited that the next day itself she went to the market and started looking around for good pots. She spent a lot



of time trying to search for them and finally bought five beautiful pots after a lot of bargaining.

In the evening she proudly showed the pots to her husband. She told him that the first pot was for the milk they would get from Kamli, the second for the butter they would be able to make, the third for the buttermilk they would get while making the butter and the fourth was for the ghee that she would make from the butter. Her husband was very pleased with the prospect of getting so many things from a single cow.

They again started talking about Kamli and how they would look after her. The wife said that she would give the cow a good bath daily and would feed her with good fodder. So their cow would soon be giving large quantities of milk twice a day. The husband said that he would himself get good fodder for Kamli every day. They decided that they could sell the extra milk and ghee and would soon become rich.

Suddenly the husband noticed the fifth pot and asked her what that was for. The wife hesitantly replied that it was to carry some of the extra milk to her sister's house. Hearing this the husband was enraged because he did not like his sister-in-law. He shouted at his wife and asked her, "How can you even think of giving any milk to your sister and that too without my permission?"

The wife retorted saying, "I do not need your permission for this as I am the one who saved the money for buying Kamli. I am the one who looks after her and feeds her and I am the one who milks her. So I have every right to do what I want with the extra milk."

This angered the husband even more and he shouted back, "You saved that money from what I earn after toiling and sweating

the whole day long. I am the one who cuts grass for Kamli. And now you want to waste my efforts on your stupid sister. Moreover, she never gives us anything.”

The fight continued and both of them refused to give in to the other’s demand. Finally the husband could not control himself and he smashed all the pots. He then asked his wife, “Now that there are no pots left, how will you carry the milk to your sister’s house?”

Gopal, who had been hearing all this, could no longer control himself. He went to the couple and asked them what the matter was.



The husband at once said, "This woman wants to give all the extra milk that Kamli gives us to her sister."

"Kamli?" Gopal asked him. "Whom are you referring to?"

"Oh! you don't know, Kamli is the name of our cow," the husband replied.

Gopal who had never seen a cow in their house was surprised and said, "Your cow? Where is it?"

The husband still did not realize their stupidity and said, "I am talking about the one we are planning to buy as soon as we have saved enough money. Soon we are going to have a healthy and beautiful cow who will give us plenty of milk. My wife wants to give all the extra milk to her sister while I want to sell it."

The wife interrupted him saying, "Not all the milk, only some. After all we have so much of milk."

Gopal corrected her and reminded her that they did not have any milk at that moment and that they would have some only after they bought a cow.

At once both the wife and the husband said, "It is only a matter of time. We are saving money for a cow and we will soon have Kamli with us."

Gopal asked them how much money they have saved; answers revealed that they had just decided to start saving money the day before. Being an intelligent man he at once realized that his neighbours were once again day-dreaming.

Gopal decided to cure them of their disease once and for all. He exclaimed, "Now I know what was been happening to my vegetable garden." Saying this he hit the husband hard on his head with a stick.

The husband was caught unawares and asked Gopal why he

had hit him. Gopal answered, "Your cow has been eating the beans and cucumbers from my vegetable garden." Saying this he gave the husband another hard blow.

The husband knew that Gopal had no such garden so he asked him, "What beans? What cucumbers? Which garden are you talking about?"

"The one I am going to plant soon," Gopal replied. "I intend to grow beans and cucumbers in the empty patch of land next to my house."

The wife who had been watching all this suddenly realized what Gopal was trying to say, and she burst out laughing at their foolishness. Slowly the reality dawned on the husband too. They both vowed never to day-dream in future.

Gopal congratulated them on their decision and hoped they would not forget their promise in a hurry.

Anyway he need not have worried. The two big bumps on the husband's head were enough to keep reminding them both of their beautiful but imaginary 'Kamli' for a long time.





The Wise Kid

Rajeshwari Prasad Chandola

In a dense forest lived a little kid in a cave with his father ram and mother goat. The forest had plenty of leaves for the three to feed on. Life would have been very happy for this family only if there had been no fear of predators.

There were the big tigers and the cunning and unkind jackals who seemed to be everywhere. Father ram and mother goat were always in great anxiety to keep their kid away from these dangerous animals. Every morning they would go out to bring food, leaving the kid in the cave. They told the kid that he should not go out nor should his young head be seen outside the cave.

The kid was growing, and he wanted to see the world outside. So one sunny afternoon, he crept out of the cave and started walking farther and farther away. He walked past the big banyan tree and the sparkling fountains. Then it started getting dark. Therefore, the kid made up his mind to return.

The poor kid lost his way. He wanted shelter for the night. He

came in front of another cave which belonged to a jackal. The animal had gone out. The kid crept into it and decided to stay there till his parents arrived.

At dawn, the jackal returned. He stopped outside the cave, hesitant to enter. He sensed that some strange animal had got into his cave. It shouted in a shrill tone, "Who is there in my home? Come out at once, or else I will kill you in a moment."

The kid knew what to do. He imitated the voice of a big animal and said, "I am the lion's uncle who has a bushy, long and strong beard. I eat fifty tigers for each of my meals. Go, get them."

The jackal became frightened on hearing this and he thought he must run away before this big animal came out of the cave in search of tigers. And so he did. Panting heavily, the jackal reached



the other end of the forest where he met the chief of the tigers.

"Uncle," the jackal said, "some strange animal has entered my house. It seems to be very big in size and has great strength. This I realized on hearing its ferocious voice. It has asked me to bring fifty tigers for its one meal."

"Pooh!" said the tiger. "Which animal can eat fifty tigers? Come with me and I will chase it away."

Meanwhile, father ram and mother goat were searching for their kid. Following the marks of its little hooves, they came to the cave of the jackal and called out for their kid. The kid came out and narrated the story of the jackal. At that moment they saw at a distance the jackal coming towards them along with the tiger.

"Now we are lost," the father ram said. "Still, let us see what can be done." They made a plan and all three went back into the cave and waited. When the tiger arrived, the mother goat pinched the ears of the kid who started screaming loudly.

"Why does the baby cry?" shouted the father ram.

"He wants a tiger to eat," the mother goat replied. "Ever since we came to this forest, he has eaten elephants, bears and buffaloes but no tiger."

"Yes, yes," said father ram in the voice of some gigantic animal. "I have sent the jackal to bring fifty tigers here. Please go out and see if he is coming."

On hearing these words, the tiger's courage failed. He imagined the baby of some big, giant animal swallowing elephants and thought that his own death was imminent. Without losing a moment, the tiger ran away. The jackal followed him. The more the jackal ran after the tiger in panic, the more the tiger feared that the jackal wanted to catch him for the big animal to eat.

Hearing this incident all the tigers deserted the forest the same day. The jackals feared that the monsters who could no more find tigers would turn to jackals as their next best food. They too left the forest with all their friends and relatives. The kid was now free to roam about as he liked without any fear or danger of being killed by big animals.





The King And The Blind Man

Kiran Shankar Maitra

Early one morning King Birbhadra went out hunting. While he was returning to his palace he felt very tired, hungry and thirsty. Suddenly by the roadside he saw a field of watermelons. What else could be more desirable to a thirsty person? He ordered his attendants to bring some good watermelons. While they were proceeding towards the field, the king heard the sound of laughter. Everyone looked in the same direction and saw a middle-aged blind man. The king asked, "Why do you laugh?"

"You ordered for good watermelons," the blind man answered, "but there are no watermelons here, so it made me laugh."

"You are blind. How did you know that there are no watermelons in the field?"

"My lord, one does not require eyesight to know everything. The season of watermelons is over. All good fruits have been collected, may be some rotten ones are left behind in the field."

The attendants reported exactly what the blind man had said.

King Birbhadra was impressed by the blind man's far-sightedness. He decided to take him along with him to the capital. The blind man might help him in solving problems.

The blind man's name was Sanjay. He was given a small hut in the outskirts to live in and was also given two potfuls of rice daily. Thus, Sanjay began spending his life.



Once a jeweller came to the palace with many precious gems and pearls. The courtiers, according to their prudence, advised the king to purchase the best ones. The jeweller noticed that none of them were capable of differentiating between real diamonds and the imitations.

He then held one diamond and an imitation in each hand and said, "The price of the actual diamond is one lakh rupees; the other one is just a glass piece. One, who is the most intelligent among you, may choose the real one. There is one condition—if anyone picks up the imitation as the genuine, he has to pay the price of the real one."

After hearing him there was complete silence. None ventured to offer advice any more.

Observing this the king sent for Sanjay, "Let me see whether he is able to differentiate between the real and the imitation."

The ministers and courtiers looked at each other. There were subdued contemptuous smiles on their lips. Sanjay? The blind man? How could he differentiate the genuine from the imitation?

When Sanjay arrived, everything was explained to him. He asked the jeweller to place both the genuine diamond and the imitation on his palms. The merchant did so. Sanjay kept his palms in the sun for sometime. After a while he handed over one to the king saying, "This is the real diamond."

Amazed, the merchant saw that the blind man had indeed marked the correct one.

The king paid him the price and then asked Sanjay, "How did you find the real one?"

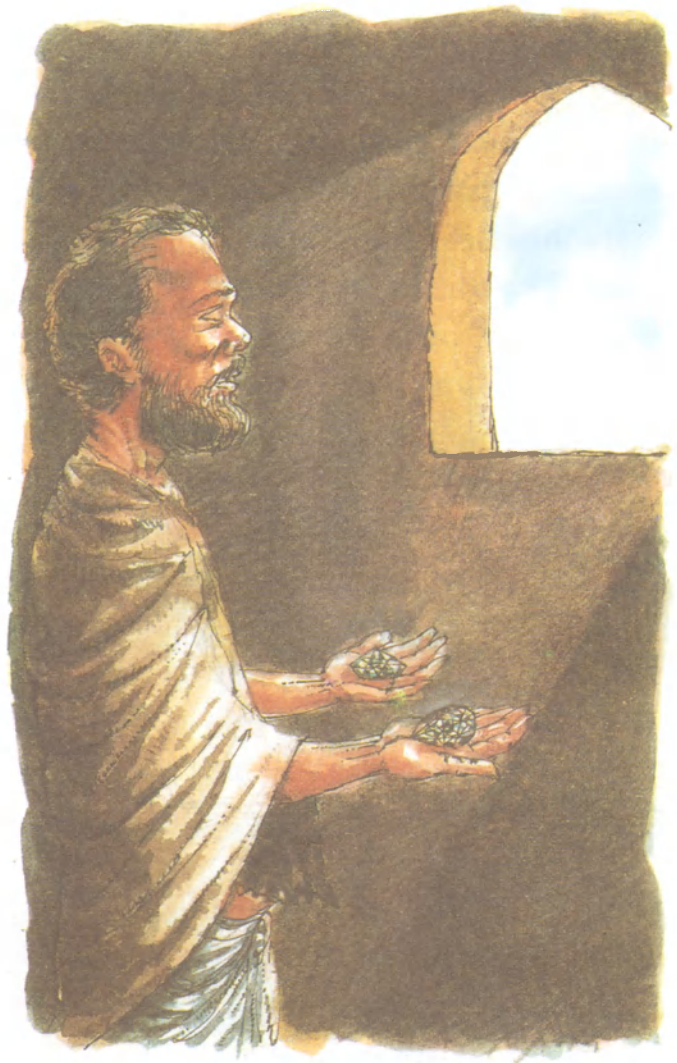
"My lord, if you keep diamond and glass in the sun, the glass gets warm but the diamond does not," Sanjay replied.

Satisfied with the blind man's explanation, the king sanctioned him meals thrice daily and some other facilities.

One morning in the court, there was a case of property dispute between two brothers. Before his death, their father had left them a vast property. There were a few thousand acres of land consisting of fertile as well as barren, hilly terrain. Also the

lakes, forests and rivers made it difficult to divide the property equally. So, they came to the king's court for settlement. When everything was explained to the concerned land and property minister and his officers, they found it difficult to divide the property. The king again sent for Sanjay.

The ministers could not understand as to how a blind man could



solve the difficult real estate dispute when experienced people with sight were in deep waters!

Hearing everything Sanjay said smilingly, "Let one of the brothers divide the entire property and other one choose which parts he would like to accept. And, who would divide and who would choose his part, let it be decided by drawing lots." Both the brothers accepted the decision gladly. Their arduous problem was solved easily.

Thus, Sanjay spent his days living in the small hut and by helping the king in solving complicated disputes and offering good, timely advice.

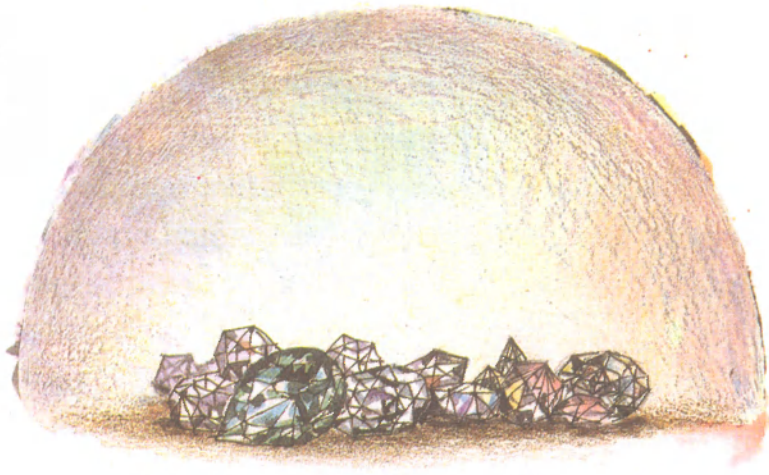
One afternoon, the king, feeling lonely, called Sanjay. He asked, "Sanjay, you are such a wise, intelligent and learned person. The most difficult and intricate problems become easy to your sharp intelligence. You have been meeting me in various situations. Is it not surprising that you never could comprehend that I have not got the kingdom by way of inheritance, but occupied the throne illegally?"

"I knew this from the very beginning," replied Sanjay in a calm voice.

"How?" asked the curious king.

"If one was born in a royal family and is helped by someone in solving the most difficult problems, then he will never be so ungenerous as to keep him on the outskirts of the city in a common hut and providing only three meals a day," Sanjay replied.

The king's head hung in shame.



Laplaus Hits The Hardest

Scharada Bail

The area around Raipur in Madhya Pradesh is known as Chhattisgarh. A large number of tribal people live here, as they do in other parts of the State, such as Bastar and Jhabua.

The tribal way of life is different from the way the other villagers live, although they are usually neighbours. While the villagers live mainly by farming, the tribals are closer to the forests. They make their own tools and instruments, weave baskets and hunt small animals. Their knowledge of the forest and its wealth is unmatched.

The tribals have their own language, songs and dances. They worship God through nature, and their ceremonies are different from the ones we have in temples and churches. Because they are innocent, and often childlike, some villagers and people living in the city think they can easily fool the tribals.

Thinking this way can lead one into serious troubles, as a merchant of Chhattisgarh found out.

Champak Lal was a merchant in a village near Raipur. His house was one of the biggest in the village. His shop sold grain and pulses, spices, soap, matches and other essential things. When these were weighed out to his customers, Champak Lal, or his assistant, Kewal Ram, were very careful that they did not give out a single extra grain.

The villagers were aware of how the merchant drove a very hard bargain, and how he was totally without feelings, or kindness where profit was concerned. His wife, Shanthi Devi, was fat, and wore heavy jewellery. Under the gold chains beat a kind heart.

One spring morning when Champak Lal was sitting in his verandah, he heard a man crying out on the street, "Buy my crows! Fat and juicy crows!"

Champak Lal was astonished. Who would sell crows, he wondered. And who would buy them? His curiosity was aroused. He got up and peered down the road.

A bare-chested tribal was coming towards his house with a basket on his head. A dirty cloth was twisted around his middle and he wore slippers made from the rubber of old truck tyres.

The *tangia* (axe) slung on the tribal's shoulder showed he was a hunter. As he came closer, Champak Lal called out to him.

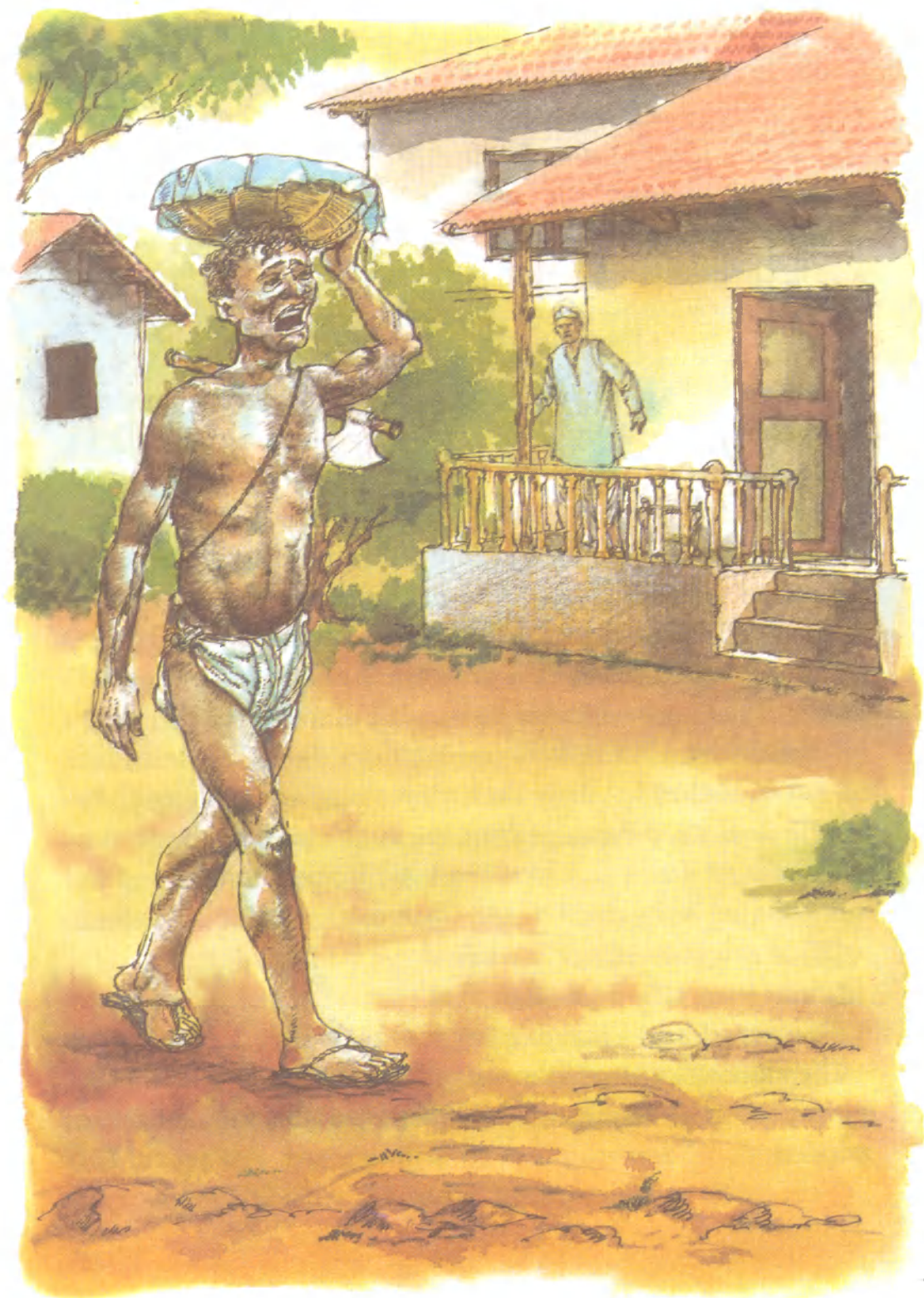
"What are you selling?" he asked.

"*Kaua* (crow), Sir," said the tribal.

"Show me," said Champak Lal.

The man walked up to the verandah steps, and put down the basket. Then he sat next to it, looked up at the merchant, and grinned.

"See, sir, fat and juicy crows," he said.



Champak Lal was amazed. Inside the basket was a pair of plump, grey partridges, birds especially valued for their tender meat. They lay with their legs tied, and their speckled feathers gleaming in the sun.

‘How foolish this man is,’ he thought, ‘calling these valuable birds crows!’ “How much are they for?” he asked aloud.

“Twenty rupees for the pair, Sir,” said the tribal.

“I will not pay a paise over fifteen rupees,” said Champak Lal, beginning to walk back into the house.

“O, kind and gracious Sir, take them. Please take them,” said the tribal, keeping them on the top verandah step.

Champak Lal turned back, giving a small grunt of satisfaction. He counted fifteen rupees and gave them to the man. The man smiled and gave a small salute as he took the money.

“What is your name?” asked Champak Lal.

“Nathu,” said the tribal.

“Well, run along, Nathu,” said Champak Lal. “And let me know again when you find some...crows,” he said with a mean smile.

The partridges were cooked on a stove out in the courtyard of Champak Lal’s house, as Shanthi Devi was a vegetarian. When she had seen the two birds, her eyes had widened in surprise.

“How much did you say you paid for them?” she asked.

“Fifteen rupees,” said Champak Lal, chuckling. He called his friend from a neighbouring village for dinner, and continued to chuckle late into the night.

Ten days later, he was sitting in the verandah again, when he heard a call, “Buy my beautiful *rangna*!”

It was the tribal, carrying a gleaming copper pot on his head. “*Rangna-a-a-a*,” he shouted. “Who will buy my beautiful *rangna*?”

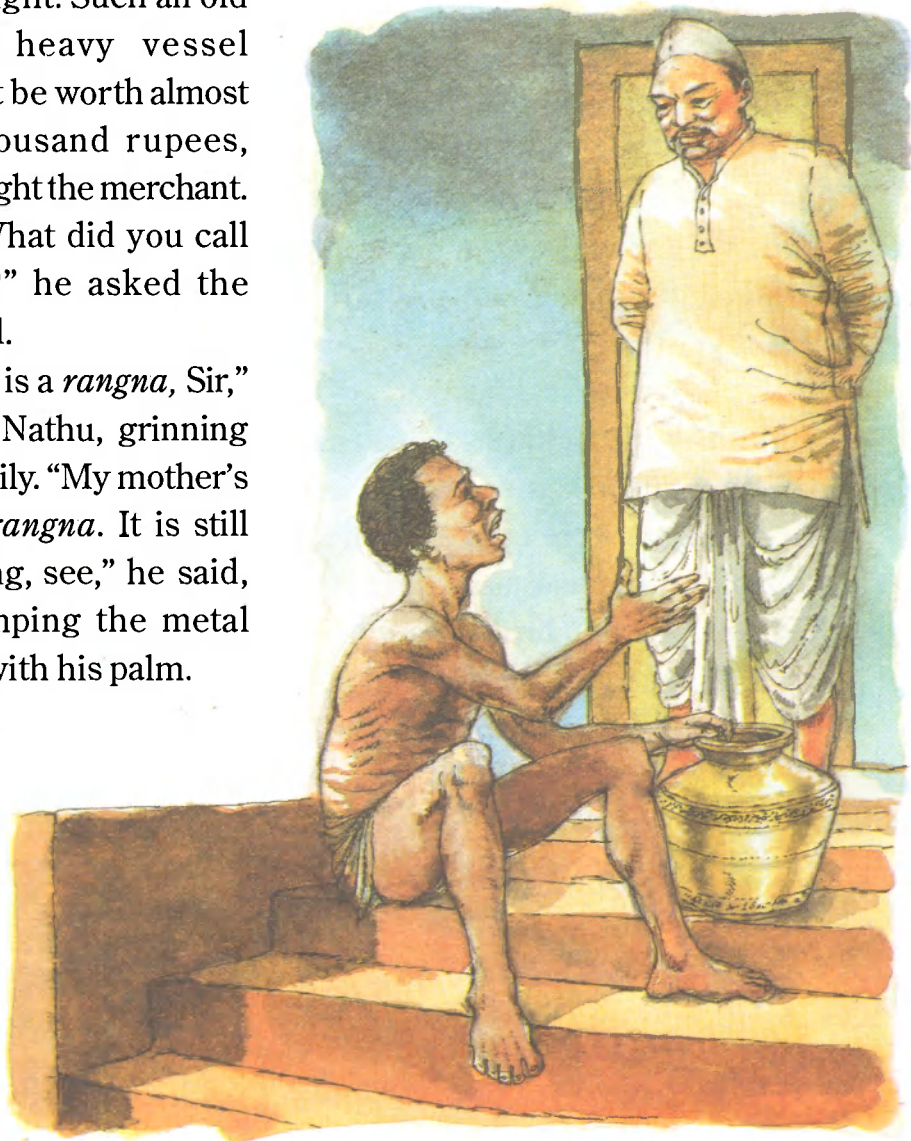
"Here, Nathu," called Champak Lal, remembering his name effortlessly, "what is this *rangna*? Bring it here."

Nathu walked over to his verandah again, and sat on the steps. He set the pot next to him.

Champak Lal stared at it. A very handsome, weighty piece, he judged. Although it was a used one, dented in a few places, the pot shone in the sunlight. Such an old and heavy vessel must be worth almost a thousand rupees, thought the merchant.

"What did you call this?" he asked the tribal.

"It is a *rangna*, Sir," said Nathu, grinning happily. "My mother's old *rangna*. It is still strong, see," he said, thumping the metal pot with his palm.



"How much is it?" asked Champak Lal.

"A hundred rupees, Sir," said Nathu.

Champak Lal turned down the corners of his mouth. "Too much," he said. "Find another buyer for your *rangna*."

"Oh, no! Good Sir, kind Sir, how much will you pay for it?" asked Nathu.

"Eighty rupees," said Champak Lal firmly.

The grin was wiped off Nathu's face. But he lifted up the pot and placed it a few steps higher, inside the verandah. Then he held out his hand. Champak Lal counted out eighty rupees and gave them to him.

He laughed heartily as he related the tale of how he had acquired the *rangna* to his wife. Shanthi Devi turned the pot over and over in her hands, marvelling at its weight and appearance, unable to find a serious flaw.

"This is more a gift than a sale," she said.

Champak Lal spent every morning in his verandah, alert and waiting for the tribal's call. He was extremely eager for his next bargain. All the people who had seen the *rangna* had admired it and exclaimed at its worth.

Hardly a week after acquiring the pot, Champak Lal was in his verandah when he saw Nathu approaching from a distance.

"*Laplaus!*" yelled Nathu, who was striding along, swinging his arms. "Who will buy my priceless *laplaus*?"

Champak Lal called out to him and he came immediately, sitting at his usual place on the verandah steps.

"So, what is this *laplaus* you are selling this time?" asked Champak Lal.

"Here they are, sir, the most precious *laplaus* you have ever

seen,” said Nathu. As he spoke, he removed a small leather pouch from the twist of cloth around his middle. He opened the pouch, and from it poured out a gleaming heap of diamonds on his dirty palm.

Champak Lal was struck dumb. The stones were blinding in their brilliance. There were twenty-two of them, from the size of peas to that of marbles. His mouth was dry with greed. He asked, “How much for these...er...*laplaus*?”

“Ten lakh rupees, sir,” said Nathu without hesitation.

“What? Ten lakhs? This is too...” began Champak Lal, but Nathu cut him short.

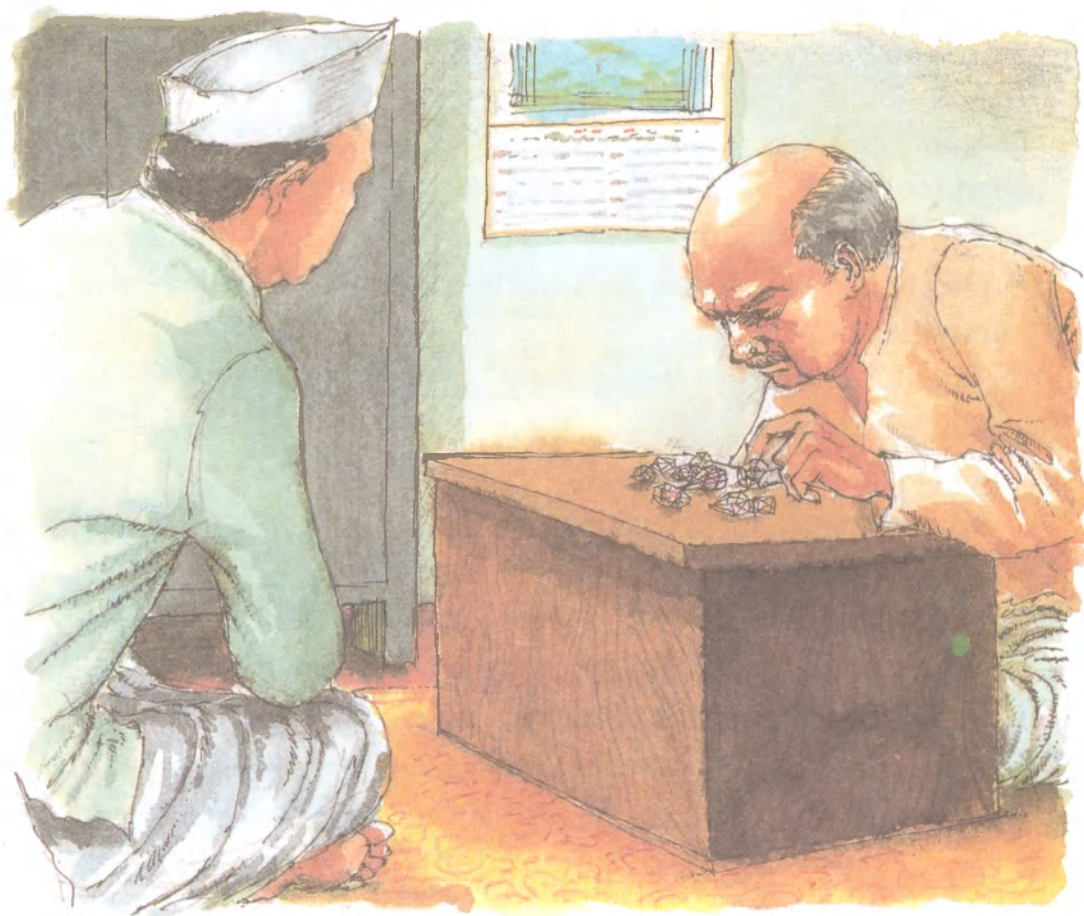
“Yes, yes, but I cannot accept a paise less, because these *laplaus* are not all mine. They belong to the whole tribe, and I shall have to pay all the others,” said Nathu.

Champak Lal was thinking. The Chhattisgarh area has diamond deposits which have not been fully mined even today. The tribals know the secrets of the forest and could well have amassed this wealth over the years. Moreover, Champak Lal had experience of Nathu’s estimate of what he was selling. If he sold a thousand-rupee pot for a mere eighty rupees, what would be the true value of something that he was selling for ten lakh rupees? The merchant’s mind boggled at the thought. He made a decision.

“All right, I will buy your *laplaus*,” he told Nathu. “But give me time till evening to raise the money.”

“O kind and gracious Sir, you are too good. I shall return at sunset after visiting my wife’s uncle,” said the tribal, and departed.

That afternoon Champak Lal sold all his stock, much of his wife’s jewellery, and managed to collect the sum of ten lakhs, just minutes before Nathu reappeared. Nathu’s grin was back in place,



and the diamonds as brilliant as ever. Even in lamplight, they could dazzle the eyes.

Champak Lal paid the money after counting and checking the stones once again. The tribal wrapped the money in a cloth, slung it over his shoulder along with his axe, saluted the merchant and vanished into the dark forest.

The next day Champak Lal took the diamonds to the city to sell.

The jeweller examined them carefully, then shook his head and said, "Brilliant they are, but diamonds they are not. Glass, only glass."

Champak Lal could not believe his ears. All thoughts of

bargains and profits fled. He had thought all along that he had been fooling the tribal. Actually it was Nathu who had laid the cleverest trap for him.

The people of Chhattisgarh tell this story with the following poem that sums it up:

Kaua ka dhokha me teetar bikais

Aur bikais rangna

Ab jo pade laplaus dhamaka

Na ghar sohay, na angna.

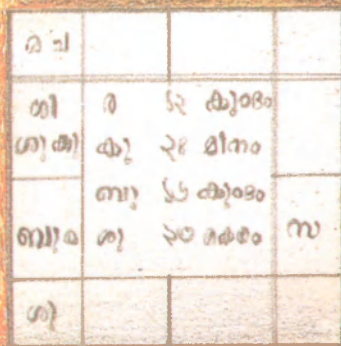
(He bought partridges in the guise of crows

And he bought a *rangna*

But now that the *laplaus* explosion has hit him.

Neither his house, nor courtyard can comfort him.)





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The Auspicious Moment

Mamata Pandya

Once there lived a man and his wife. They were very good people and very simple too. So simple that they were almost stupid in many ways.

One night they woke up to hear some noise in the house. "Sounds as if there are thieves in the house," whispered the husband. "Can you hear them, wife?"

"Yes. It must be thieves, who else would be making such sounds in our house at this time of the night," she whispered back. "Shall I yell loudly so that neighbours can hear and come to our rescue?"

"No, wait," said the man. "You know that we don't do anything important without checking the auspicious time. It has been a family tradition for generations. Let me get the time chart and see what is a good time to scream for help." And he tiptoed to the cupboard and pulled out his books and charts and silently began to read in the dim light of a *diya* (earthen lamp).



“Well, what does it say?” whispered his wife anxiously.

“Oh, dear,” the man shook his head in dismay, “according to this, the first auspicious time for this type of action is only after six months. We cannot do anything at this moment. We may as well go back to sleep now.”

The wife was uneasy. She was not sure if it would be correct to wait that long. Yet, she knew that all important occasions were fixed only after checking the calendar and time charts. So she did not say anything. The couple went back to bed quietly, wrapped a sheet around their heads and tried not to hear any noises downstairs.

The thieves had a field day. They helped themselves to all they could lay their hands on and decamped.

The man and his wife found the house cleaned out in the morning, but what was there to do now? Six months went by. The man kept track of the dates, and the day dawned when it was auspicious to scream for help.

“I will show those thieves today,” muttered the man. And he called his wife. Together they set up a great hue and cry. “Help,

help. Thieves. Thieves in the house. Help,” they yelled.

The neighbours heard and came running. “Where are the thieves?” They looked around but did not see anyone except the couple in the empty house.

“Oh, the thieves came and left six months ago,” said the man. “I am informing you all today.”

“What is the point, you silly man?” shouted the people angrily. “What do you expect us to do six months after the thieves have disappeared?”

The man replied meekly, “It was not the auspicious moment to call for help then, you see.”

Everybody laughed.





The Verdict

Neela Subramaniam

Many years ago, a gang of four thieves lived in a dense forest. They hid their stolen money in an innocent-looking vessel which they guarded carefully. After a while, they grew fed up with their thieving activities.

“I am tired of this lifestyle. We have to be alert constantly in case we are caught!” one of them complained.

“Yes, I wish we could lead a peaceful and honest life!” agreed the second thief.

“A good idea! We will leave the forest and go to a town where nobody knows us. Perhaps we will be able to find an honest trade to follow,” said the third thief.

Three thieves of the gang liked the suggestion and decided to leave the forest. The fourth thief, however, did not like the idea of honest work. He did not say anything for he planned to steal the money in the vessel somehow and escape with it. He waited for the right time to strike.

The four thieves reached a town and lodged in a *chhatram* (dharmashala). Two of them ventured out to learn more about the place. They soon came upon an old woman whose house seemed to be both comfortable and suitable for their needs. The two of them returned to the *chhatram* and told their friends about the old woman's house where they could stay. They too agreed and the four thieves set out at once.

"We are four merchants," said one of them, "and want to start a business in this town. We like your house and want to rent some rooms."

"We will pay you a good rent till we decide to leave," added the second thief.

The old woman was happy and entertained her visitors most hospitably.

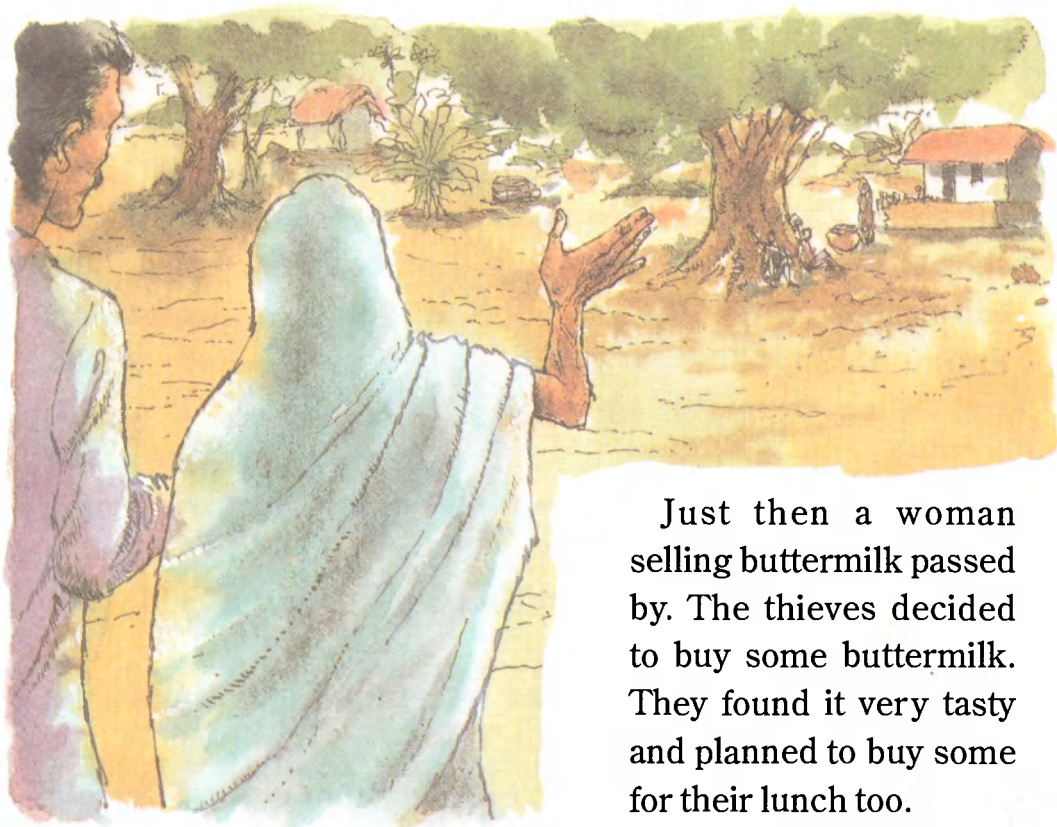
"You are welcome to stay here as long as you want," the old woman smiled. She was glad that she would have good tenants.

The four thieves had learned that she was a very honest soul and was not covetous of others' wealth. So they trusted her with their precious vessel of money.

"Please keep this vessel safely with you. There is one condition: you must give it only if all four of us together ask for it," they said.

"All right!" the old woman took the vessel. She went out to her backyard and looked around to see if anyone was watching. Finding the coast clear, she dug a hole, put the vessel in it and covered it up again.

The four thieves left in search of work in town. They soon felt very tired and rested in the shade of a banyan tree some distance away from the old woman's house.



Just then a woman selling buttermilk passed by. The thieves decided to buy some buttermilk. They found it very tasty and planned to buy some for their lunch too.

Three of them felt too tired to go to the old woman's house to fetch a vessel. The fourth thief, who was waiting for such an opportunity, was most willing to go.

He went to the old woman's house and said, "The others have sent me to fetch the vessel."

"I can give it only if the four of you come together," she shook her head.

A thought occurred to the thief.

"My friends are sitting under the banyan tree some distance away. Ask them yourself," he suggested.

The old woman went out of the house. She saw the three men under the banyan tree.

"Did you send your friend for the vessel?" she shouted.

"Yes! Please give it to him!" the others shouted back.

The old woman thought that they needed their vessel for business purposes and had sent their trusted friend. So she gave the thief a spade and told him to dig for it in the backyard. She then went to attend to her household chores.

The thief dug out the vessel and ran out quietly by the back gate.

In the meantime, his friends became worried as time passed and there was no sign of their friend. So they went to the old woman's house.

"Where is our friend we sent to collect a vessel?" they asked.

"I gave him a spade to dig up the vessel quite some time back. Did he not give it to you?" the old woman was surprised.

The three thieves realized that they had been tricked by their friend.

"We told you to give the vessel only if all four of us came together. You have disobeyed us. We suspect that you and our friend hatched this plot to cheat us!" they said.

The old woman was very upset.

The three thieves took her to the judge in town and complained about her. He ruled that she should bear the full responsibility for the loss as she had been careless in the matter and that she should pay for the loss incurred. The old woman returned home weeping.

Unknown to anyone, the king and his minister were touring the town incognito to learn about people's problems. They stopped and asked the old woman why she was crying. At the same time, some youngsters were playing on the road and their leader was a boy called Raman. He too listened as the old woman narrated her tale of woe.



"I hope those men are punished for treating you shabbily," Raman exclaimed.

The king and his minister asked in surprise if he could pass a judgement in the case.

Raman nodded his head confidently and declared that he would do so only in the king's court.

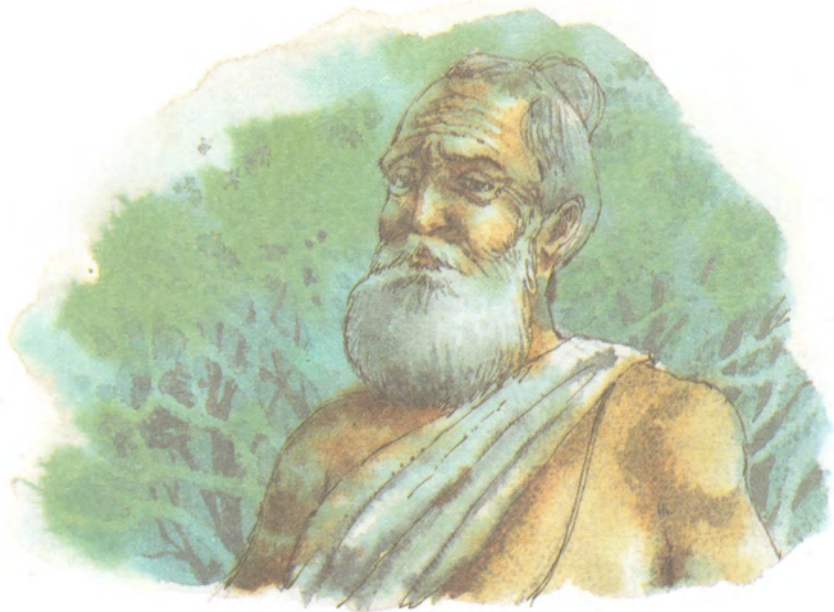
The next day, the court assembled at the palace. Raman sat in the judge's chair. He listened to the story of the three thieves.

"This old lady had to give you the vessel only if all four of you came together and asked for it. Wasn't that the condition?" Raman asked and the three thieves nodded.

"Good! She is ready to abide by the agreement. But there are only three of you. Call the fourth man so that the terms of your agreement are fulfilled!" Raman ordered.

"*Sabash* (Well done)! What wonderful judgement!" the king exclaimed in praise. "You have a wise head on young shoulders! From today you will be known as 'Maryada Raman' and will judge such cases at the court."





The *Brahmadaitya*

Subir Ghosh and Richa Bansal

In a distant village of Bengal, a poor Brahmin and his wife lived a miserable life. Both begged from house to house and were somehow able to manage a square meal a day. Days passed into years and one day their village had a new *zamindar* (landowner). The Brahmin thought of paying court to the new *zamindar* and asking him for a boon. The next day, dressed in the only good *dhoti* (loin cloth) he had, the Brahmin set out for the mansion of the *zamindar*. The *zamindar*, however, was busy acquainting himself with the affairs of the village.

Some of the *zamindar*'s servants informed him of a large banyan tree in the outskirts of the village which was supposed to be haunted by many, many ghosts. A few brave men, the servants said, had ventured to the tree, but none had returned alive. They were all found dead near the banyan tree with their necks wrung grotesquely. Since then, the area around the tree was always deserted at night. Only some shepherds, grazed their cattle around that place during the day.

The *zamindar* was a trifle worried about this. So he announced a reward of a hundred *bighas* of rent-free land for anyone who could dare go there after dusk and bring back one branch of the banyan tree to him. The Brahmin, who was seated nearby, thought maybe one of the *zamindar*'s men would be brave enough to perform the task. But when he saw that no one was forthcoming, he decided to try his luck.

'As it is,' he thought, 'my life is miserable. If I can get a branch from that tree I can at least hope to live a better life. And, if the ghosts kill me, they would only be ending my wretched existence.' He volunteered to go there.

When he returned home and told his wife about it, she was overcome with grief. She pleaded with him not to end his life so foolishly, "Please don't leave me. My life will be worse if you are not around."

The Brahmin remained unmoved by her entreaties. The villagers, however, mocked and pitied him. "You can count this as your last day. Change your mind while you still can."

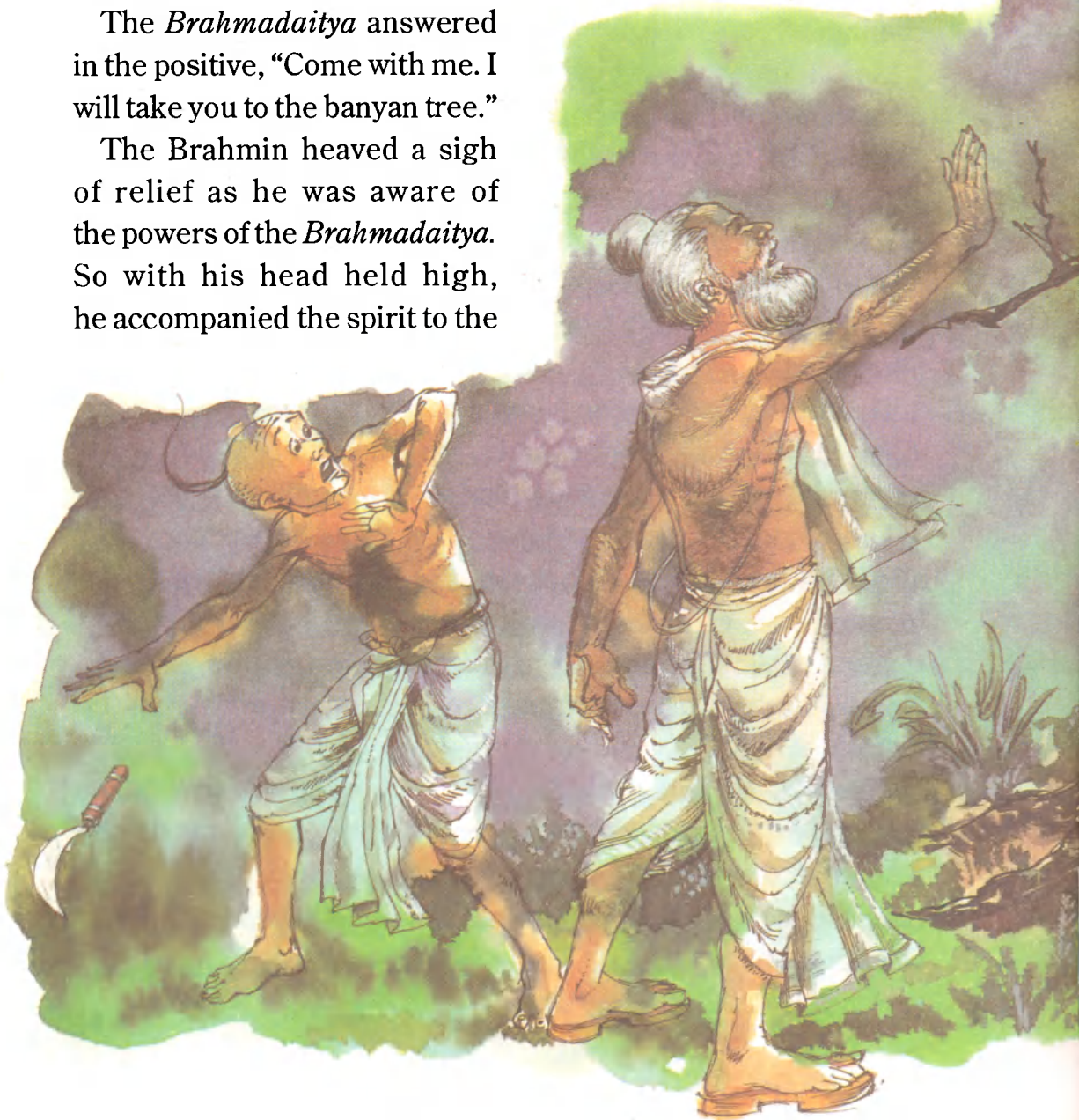
The Brahmin was a determined man and so an hour after sundown he left for the banyan tree. As the distance to the haunted tree grew lesser with every step he took, his heart thumped louder and faster with fear. Shivering, the Brahmin stopped under a *bakul* tree, just a couple of yards away from the haunted tree.

The *bakul* tree was inhabited by a *Brahmadaitya* (spirit). The *Brahmadaitya* was quite impressed with the poor, skinny Brahmin's bravery at having made it so near the banyan tree. He asked him, "Oh, Brahmin, are you afraid? What do you want? I will help you."

The Brahmin gulped twice and managed to croak out a hoarse whisper, "O, blessed spirit, I have to cut and take a branch from the banyan tree for the *zamindar*. I am very poor, but if I do this the *zamindar* will give me hundred *bighas* of rent-free land. I am very frightened to go there. I will be eternally grateful to you if you could help me."

The *Brahmadaitya* answered in the positive, "Come with me. I will take you to the banyan tree."

The Brahmin heaved a sigh of relief as he was aware of the powers of the *Brahmadaitya*. So with his head held high, he accompanied the spirit to the





banyan tree and took out his saw. Just then, more than a hundred ghosts sprang out from nowhere and rushed menacingly towards him. The *Brahmadaitya* intervened and asked the ghosts to allow the Brahmin to cut a branch from the tree.

The ghosts revered the *Brahmadaitya* because although he too was a ghost, he was far superior to them. So on hearing his commanding voice, the ghosts heeded his wish and even offered to cut the branch themselves. And, before the Brahmin could even bat an eyelid, there was a huge branch lying in front of him. He thanked the *Brahmadaitya* profusely and ran as fast as he could to the *zamindar*'s house.

The *zamindar* was surprised to see the branch. He said he would go to the banyan tree the next day to ascertain whether the branch actually belonged to the tree.

Early next morning, the *zamindar*, accompanied by his men, went to the tree. To their great amazement they realized that the branch had actually been cut from the haunted tree.

The *zamindar* kept his promise and gave a hundred *bighas* of rent-free land to the poor, landless Brahmin.

The fields that came the Brahmin's way had paddy ready for harvest. Since the Brahmin knew little about harvesting and had no resources to go about it, he once again rushed to the *Brahmadaitya* for help. "Rescue me, O, *Brahmadaitya*! I need your help again."

"How can I help you?" the *Brahmadaitya* asked.

"The land I received is full of paddy, ready for harvest. I do not have the resources to cut it. Help me, otherwise everything will be ruined!" the Brahmin pleaded.

The benevolent *Brahmadaitya* assured him, "Do not worry,



Brahmin. I will ensure that the paddy is not only cut, but the rice is thrashed and stored in granaries and the straw piled up. All you have to do is to get a hundred sickles and place them at the foot of the *bakul* tree at night. Also ready the place where you want the grain and the straw to be stored.”

The Brahmin, being a poor man, did not have many wealthy friends. He stood there wondering how to get a hundred sickles.

The *Brahmadaitya* solved his problem. “You are a rich man now. Borrow the sickles from the villagers.”

The Brahmin rushed back to his village and did as the *Brahmadaitya* had asked him to. He was pleasantly surprised when the villagers handed over their sickles to him with a smile. He took these and placed them at the foot of the *bakul* tree at sunset.

He then prepared a piece of ground near his hut to store the paddy and the straw. All his chores done, he retired for the night.

Once the village was lost in deep slumber, the *Brahmadaitya* beckoned a hundred ghosts from the banyan tree and told them

to cut and store paddy for the poor Brahmin. The ghosts were more than willing to be of any help. Armed with the sickles, the ghosts took to the field. Before the sunrise, the paddy was cut, the grain separated from the straw and all stored neatly in the Brahmin's newly-built granary.

Next morning, the Brahmin and his wife were thrilled to see the good job done by the *Brahmadaitya*. The villagers were equally stunned at the miracle, and believed the Brahmin to have been blessed by the gods themselves.

After some days, the grateful Brahmin approached the kind *Brahmadaitya* once again. "O, *Brahmadaitya*, can you help me out again? I wish to thank the gods for all the favours that they have bestowed on me. For this, I shall have to feed a thousand brahmins. I shall be eternally thankful to you if you could provide me with the material needed for such a big feast."

The *Brahmadaitya* was a very noble spirit. He said, "O, Brahmin, your request shall be fulfilled. Just show me the place where I should store the provisions."

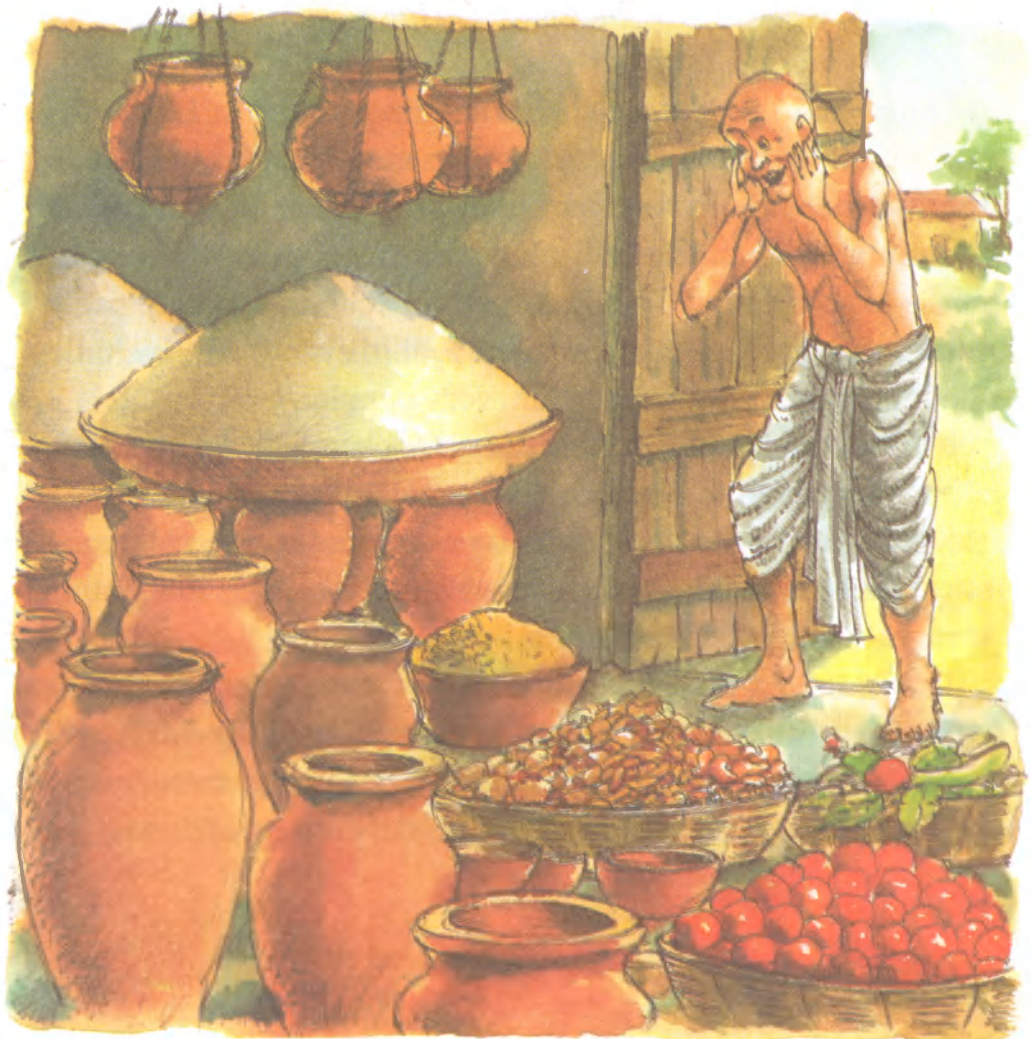
The Brahmin prepared a makeshift room to serve as a store room. And the day before the feast he was overjoyed to see the room filled chock-a-block with a hundred jars of pure ghee, massive mounds of flour, an amazing array of dry fruits and vegetables, about a hundred jars of sugar and an equal number, if not more, of milk, curd, and all that is needed for a sumptuous feast.

The Brahmin then employed a hundred cooks to prepare the feast for the thousand brahmins. The next day dawned bright and clear. The Brahmin and his wife were busy welcoming the unending stream of brahmins. He himself remained hungry as

he wanted to partake the feast with the *Brahmadaitya* who had helped him beyond measure. This wish remained unfulfilled as by befriending the Brahmin, the *Brahmadaitya* had completed his stay on the earth.

Soon Pushpak, the chariot of Kuber, the god of wealth, descended from the heavens to release the *Brahmadaitya* from his ghostly existence. The *Brahmadaitya* was ecstatic to find a celestial place.

The Brahmin too had his cup of life brimming over with joy and peace. He had many sons and daughters and he lived long, long enough to enjoy the company of his grandchildren.





The First Person

Swapna Dutta

Long ago Maharaja Krishna Chandra reigned in Bengal. He had several jesters in his court. The most popular one among them was Gopal. He was a barber by profession. Everyone called him Gopal Bhand. 'Bhand' means a buffoon, someone who can make people laugh. Gopal's jokes and actions, his unexpected comments and the way he made a fool of everybody, including the Maharaja himself, made him very popular.

No one could get the better of him. Or play tricks on him. Gopal always managed to see through them and turn the tables very cleverly. Most people in those days believed in several strange superstitions, simply because they did not know any better and it was not an age of scientific reasoning.

The Maharaja believed—like many others—that the person whose face he saw first on waking up affected his fate for the rest of the day. If his day passed smoothly, the person concerned was 'auspicious'. So he would reward him the next morning. And

if anything untoward happened, the person was definitely 'inauspicious' and a danger to the royalty! So the Maharaja would punish him the next day. The greater the calamity the more severe the punishment!

Everyone in the kingdom knew about the Maharaja's belief and tried to keep out of his way, first thing every morning. It could be fun to get an unexpected reward—which could be a bag of gold coins or a piece of land or a cow of good breed. But it could very well lead to punishment too—from blows to banishment! So few people cared to risk it.

Gopal was not afraid of the Maharaja or his whims. He was not even afraid of being punished, as he knew that he was clever enough to deal with whatever came his way.

However, the people the Maharaja usually saw on waking up each day were his personal attendants, the royal bodyguards or the queen. There was little chance of strangers coming into the palace at that early hour. Unless, it was the Chief Minister coming to warn him about something important which needed his attention. In such situations, he forgot all about rewards or punishments, anyway.

There were times when the Maharaja woke up early and went for a walk by himself without waking up anyone. It could be within the royal orchard or garden. It could be by the riverside. Or it could even be in the market place. That was when there was a chance that he might bump into just anybody. The person he saw first waited with bated breath, wondering what the Maharaja's day had been like, and whether it was going to bring him a reward or punishment.

One morning, the Maharaja went for a walk by the riverside. It



was early and the shore was deserted.

Gopal, who usually slept till late, woke up quite early that morning because he felt unusually hungry. He felt a sudden craving for fresh fish and decided to go to the riverside and buy some from the fishermen. He knew that most of them went fishing very early and returned about that time with their haul. Strangely, Gopal did not find a single fisherman there. He saw Maharaja Krishna Chandra walking by the river.

The Maharaja saw him too. "Hello, Gopal!" he said in surprise,



"I thought you always slept late and crawled out of bed with the mid-day sun."

"Good morning, Your Majesty," said Gopal. "Yes, I do get up late as a rule. I had a strange desire to test my fate this morning so I rushed to the riverside."

"I don't understand you," said the Maharaja. "How can you test your fate here?"

"I knew I would meet you before anyone else," said Gopal glibly.

"How could you possibly know that?" asked the Maharaja, surprised.

"One does sometimes, like a flash," said Gopal. "I cannot explain it. Anyway, I am sure I shall have a wonderful day, having seen your auspicious face before anyone else's."

"I am sure you will," said the Maharaja, delighted.

They walked towards the palace together. It was not considered unusual for the king and a commoner to walk together in those days. No one thought it strange. The king had the right

to behave as he chose and mix with anyone he thought fit and go wherever he wanted to. Nor did people think that a king must ride a carriage at all times and be accompanied by a troop of bodyguards no matter where he went.

"By the way, Gopal, I hope you realize that you are the first person whose face I have seen today," said the Maharaja. "Let me see how my day goes. Only then I shall know whether you are auspicious or not. Accordingly I shall reward or punish you."

"Of course, Your Majesty," said Gopal politely. "It is just a question of who is more auspicious, you or I."

"What on earth do you mean?" asked the Maharaja frowning. "It seems rather a cheeky thing to say."

"I am only a jester, sir," said Gopal with folded hands. "A jester's words should not be taken too seriously."

They reached the palace before long. The Maharaja invited Gopal to come in and sit in his chamber for a while. Gopal was so full of jokes—he always made people feel cheerful. Specially the Maharaja. As they sat down, the royal barber arrived.

"I must shave your face, Your Majesty," said the barber, thankful that he was not the first person to confront the Maharaja that day.

"Very well," said the Maharaja. "You may do it now. Gopal, why don't you tell me what happened at the marriage party you went to attend last night?"

Gopal started his tale in his usual exaggerated style, making everything sound like a joke. Before long the Maharaja was in splits of laughter. The barber was laughing too. So was everyone else in the room including the royal guards and the attendants. As the Maharaja shook with laughter at Gopal's jokes, the barber's hand slipped. The razor got embedded in the Maharaja's



cheek making him bleed profusely. The barber shook with terror. He was quite sure that the Maharaja would order his execution. Or his lifetime banishment from the kingdom! Making the king bleed was no light matter!

The royal attendants rushed to treat to the wound which soon stopped bleeding. Everyone stood tense. All except Gopal. He continued to smile as before. "Don't smile, Gopal," said the Maharaja, livid with anger. "I hope you remember that you are the first person I saw this morning."

"Yes. And you are the first person I saw in the morning, Your Majesty!" replied Gopal.

"How does that matter?" asked the Maharaja irritably. "It is my day that I am talking about. You are the most inauspicious man I ever saw. I see your face first thing this morning and I come home and start bleeding! I am wondering what punishment to give you."

"Punishment, Your Majesty?" cried Gopal, pretending to look astonished.

"Of course," said the Maharaja, "I have never bled like this before. I think I shall command your execution. A man who is inauspicious enough to make the king bleed deserves to die."

Gopal threw up his hands. "That is not fair, Your Majesty."

"Why not?" asked the Maharaja frowning.

"Because you are far more inauspicious than I am, Your Majesty," said Gopal.

"How dare you say such a thing!" cried the Maharaja. "You deserve double execution for being so rude to royalty!"

"I dare to say it because it is true," said Gopal stoutly.

"How?" shouted the Maharaja, curious in spite of his anger.

"It is perfectly obvious, Your Majesty," said Gopal. "I am

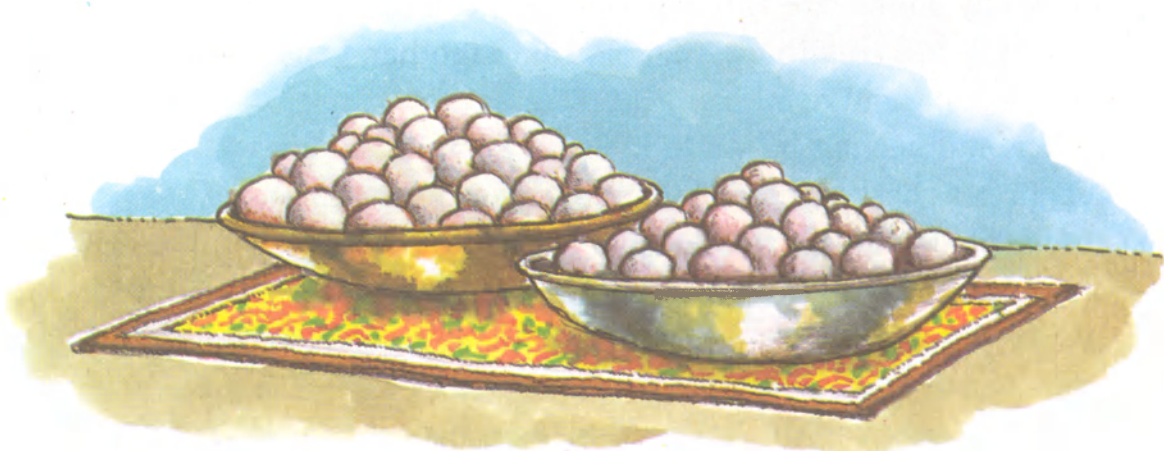
inauspicious. You see my face first thing in the morning and get a simple wound. I see your face first thing in the morning and get a death sentence! Do I really need to spell out who is more inauspicious?”

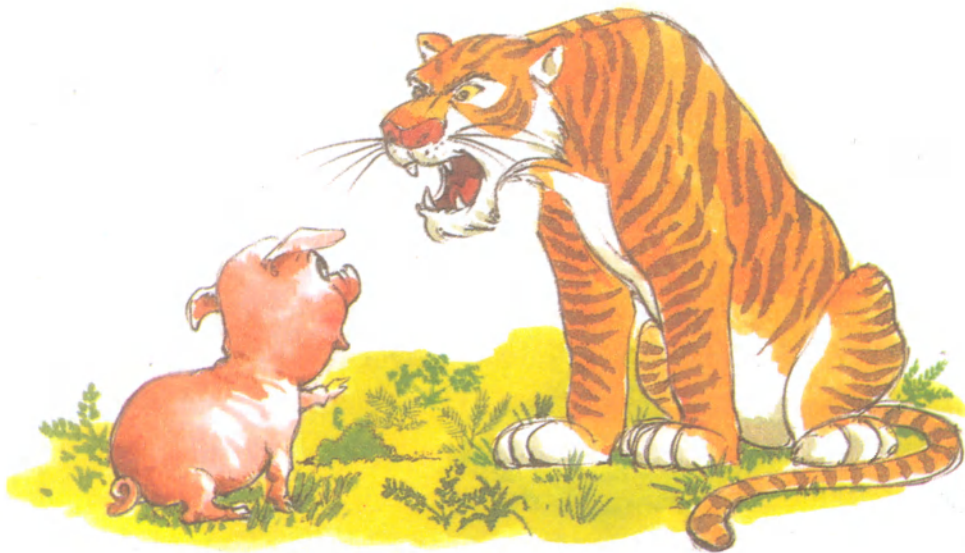
The Maharaja was stunned into silence. Then he burst out laughing. “You are quite right, Gopal. Mere bleeding is nothing compared to execution. I suppose I must be more inauspicious! I see now that such considerations are stupid and I thank you for pointing that out to me.”

“In that case, why not send for some *rasagullas*, Your Majesty?” said Gopal. “I have eaten nothing since morning and I am starving.”

“Very well,” said Maharaja Krishna Chandra with a smile, “*rasagullas* it shall be—as many as you can eat!”

The morning ended with everyone feasting on sweets.





Justice In The Jungle

J. Mullick

There was a wild sow in the jungles of Tripura. She lived happily with her children. One day, while she was searching for food for her children in the jungle, she noticed a weeping tiger cub near a bush. Finding no trace of the cub's mother, she thought that the tigress might have been killed by the hunters. The mother pig took pity on the cub and thought, 'How can I leave this orphan cub in such a condition? After all, I am a mother. I shall take the cub with me and rear him up.'

The mother pig began to look after the cub along with her children as best as possible. Thus the tiger cub became a member of the pig family. He and the piglets used to play together, roam together and sleep together. The days passed on.

One day, the mother pig died. The cub was, by then, a full-grown tiger and the piglets were not little at all but big, fat pigs. By nature, a tiger lives on flesh. A deep desire for eating flesh gradually developed in the tiger. He was tempted to devour the flesh of the

pigs. Direct attack could earn a bad name as they had grown up together. Therefore, he chalked out a plan.

One day, he said to one of the pigs, "Brother, last night I had a dream. In my dream, I saw I was eating you up. It is a sin to dishonour a dream. Therefore, I have decided to kill you and eat your flesh. I am ready to fulfil your last desire, if there be any, before killing you."

The pig tried his best to make the tiger understand that a dream had nothing to do with reality. But the tiger was adamant. By then, the pig realized that it would be too difficult to escape from the clutches of the tiger. At last, the pig said, "If you kill me, other pigs will defame you. I think, it would be better if three animals accept your argument before you kill me."

The tiger agreed to the proposal.

Both of them first went to a monkey and narrated the entire story. The monkey supported the proposal. Then, both of them

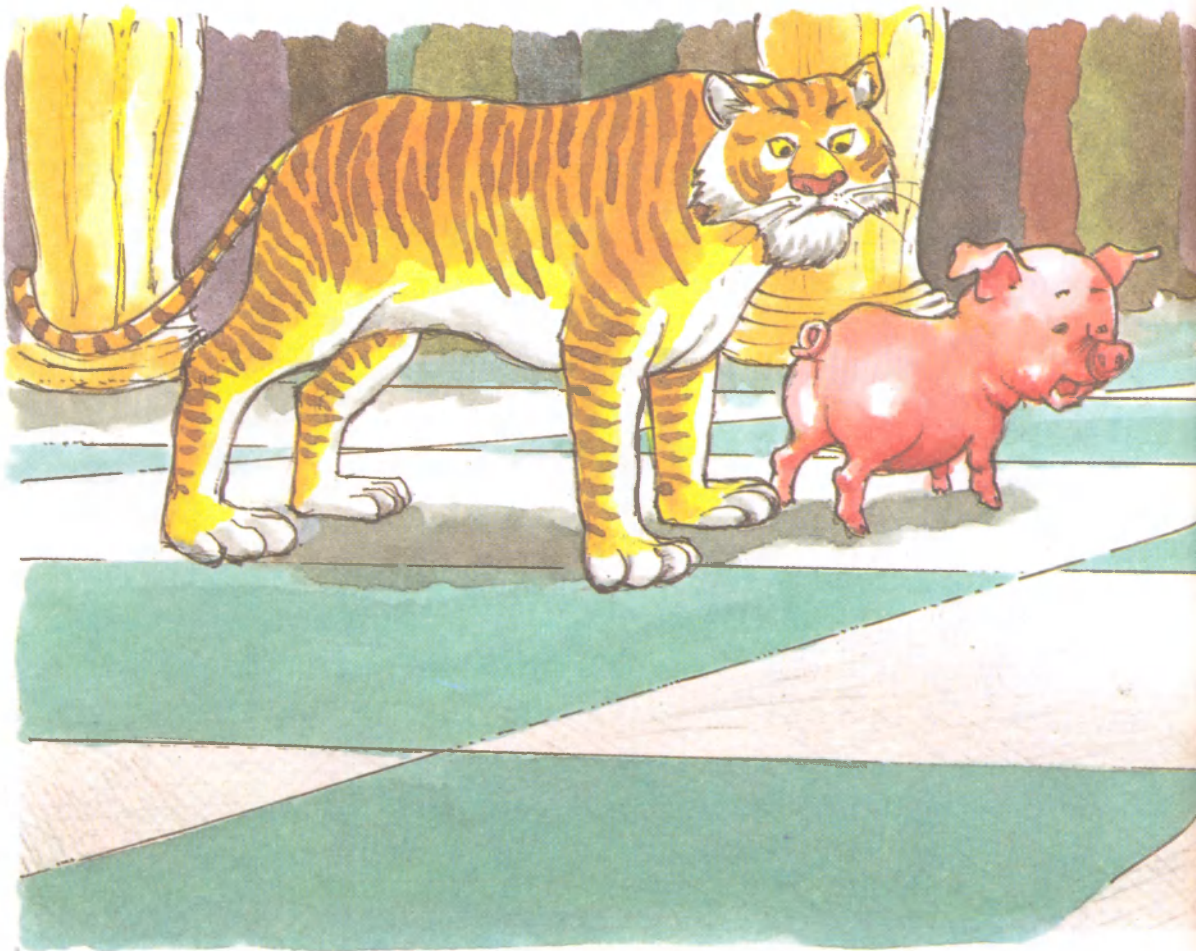


met a hen who also supported the tiger. The tiger was very delighted but the pig was very upset.

At last, they appeared before a bat. After hearing the claim of the tiger, he immediately realized the intention of the tiger.

However, he disclosed nothing and only said, "It is a very complicated matter. I would request you to go to the king for proper judgement." He also informed them that he would appear in the king's court at the time of the hearing of the case.

Both the tiger and the pig appeared before the king in his court and narrated the whole episode. The pig also informed the king that a witness would appear very soon. The king asked them to



wait for a while and took up other royal business.

Suddenly, the bat fell from the ceiling of the royal court on the ground and began to dance with joy. The king warned the bat not to misbehave in the court.

The bat prayed to the king to forgive him for his behaviour. “My Lord! I fell asleep while waiting on the ceiling of the court.



At that time, I had a dream but I am afraid to narrate it,” the bat said, rather scared.

The king told him, “Don’t worry, you can narrate the dream without any fear.”

The bat then narrated, “In my dream, I saw that I was marrying the princess.” He prayed to the king to fulfil his dream by arranging his marriage to princess.

The king, naturally, became very angry and cautioned him not to press for such an absurd demand. Then he said, “It is not proper to put forward a proposal on the basis of a dream. A dream is a dream and has no connection with reality.”

The bat seized the opportunity and asked, “If that is true, then how can the tiger demand to kill the pig and eat his flesh on the strength of his dream?”

The king accepted the bat’s arguments and rejected outright the proposal of the tiger. He also ordered the tiger and the pig to live separately in the jungle.





The Wise Mother

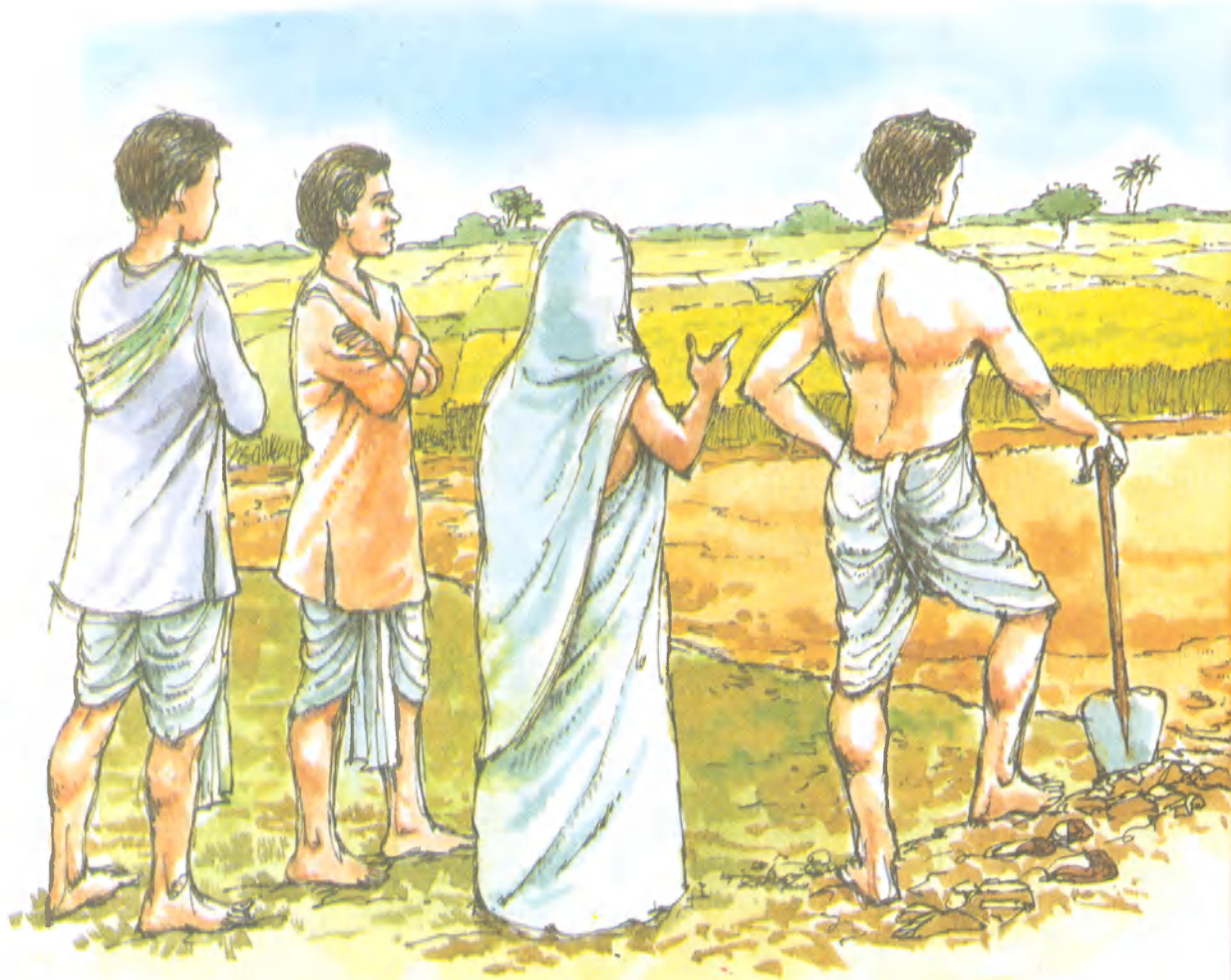
Thangam Krishnan

In the eastern part of India lies the State of Orissa. The area around the Mahanadi's delta is a very fertile one with rich rice fields, forests and lush green grass which gives ample food for cattle.

Long ago there lived a Mahajan's wife with her three sons and their wives. Theirs was a happy family which lived in peace.

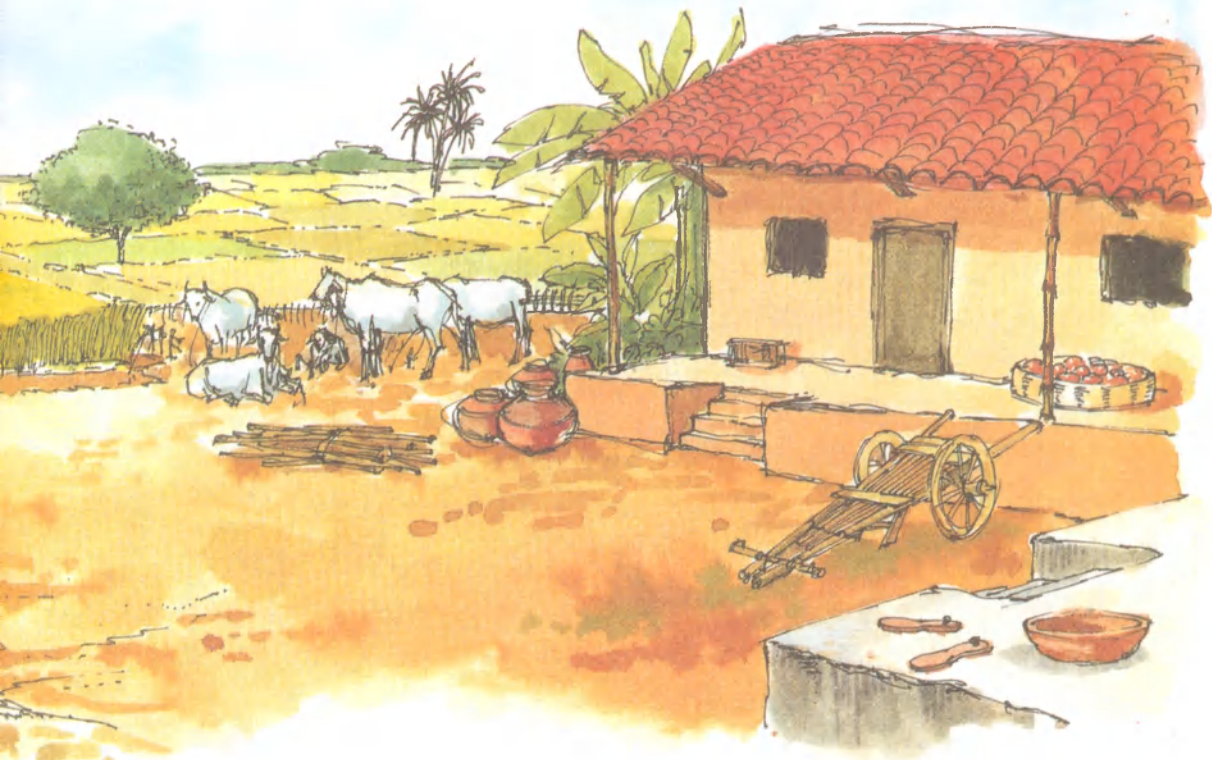
"These lands and woods came from the hard work of your father," the mother told her sons. "From the produce of the land and the timber, he bought the large herd of cattle and built this big house so that the family could live together in comfort." There was a sense of pride in her voice. They were standing on a mound providing a view of the rice fields. The crops swayed in the breeze. They were ready for harvesting.

"Yes, I remember going to tend the fields every morning with father," said Bidhu, the youngest son. "I used to love the work."



He was the farmer son who had followed in his father's footsteps. He had plenty of hard work to do—managing the labour, collecting the produce, finding a suitable market for them, and so on. Yet, the land was his first love.

"Sadhu and Radhu wanted to go to college and study," continued his mother looking at her two elder sons, "and he was glad that they had also become so successful. Yet, he always appreciated your love for the land and died a peaceful man. His dying wish was that the property should not be divided and that you should all live together in this big house."



“Of course, Mother,” replied Sadhu, “there is no reason why we should do anything against his wish.”

Sadhu, her elder son, was a scholar and earned a good income. People in and around the village sought him for advice. Radhu was a lawyer and he too earned a good income through his profession.

The problem was that Bidhu’s work was the hard, physical kind. He had to stay out in the fields from morning till evening at all times. The other two brothers led a fairly comfortable life compared to him. This made Bidhu’s wife unhappy.

“There is a letter from my brother,” began Bidhu’s wife one night as Bidhu returned from the fields. Bidhu was relaxing on a cot after his dinner. “He has invited us to his house for a holiday. He has built a new house and is going to have the *Grihapravesha* (house-warming ceremony).”

"How can I go?" asked Bidhu in a tired voice. "There is so much work to do."

"You always say this," his wife was a little annoyed. "Does that mean we can never go anywhere?"

"I did not say that. I will make all arrangements for you to go."

"No," Bidhu's wife was stubborn, "either both of us go or none goes."

"All right," replied Bidhu trying to prevent a yawn.

"Why is it that you have to work hard while your brothers take it easy?" Bidhu's wife sounded irritated. "After all, you look after their share of the land too. While they are able to go on holidays with their families, we are always stuck at home. This is not fair."

Bidhu's sleep had deserted him.

"Listen to me," continued his wife. "Ask for the property to be divided and let us live separately. That will give you more free time."

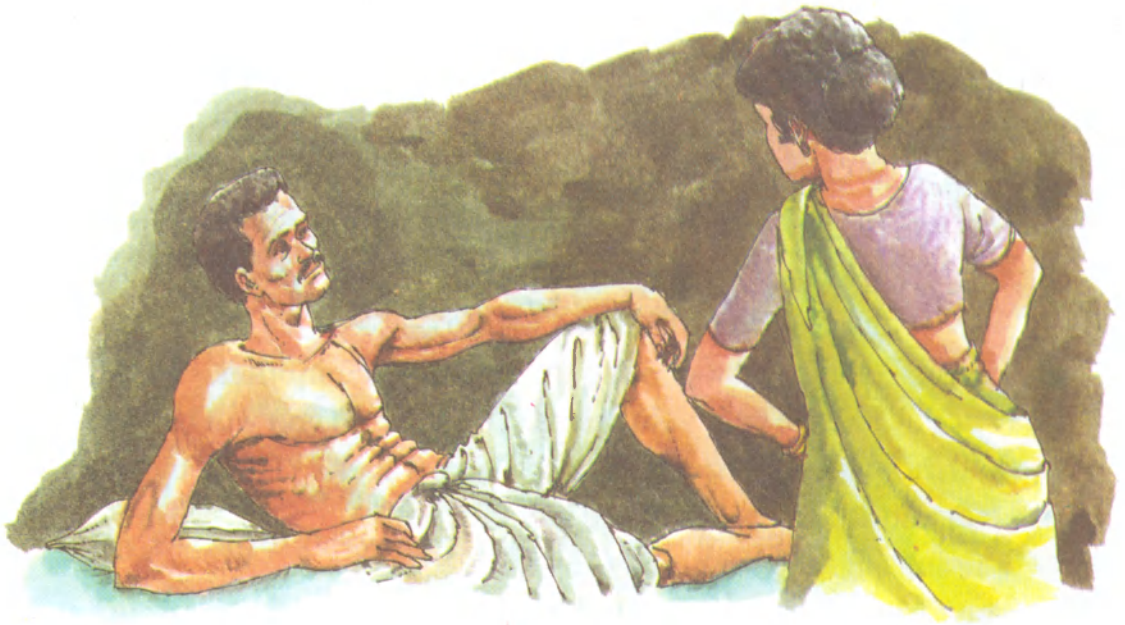
With this advice being dinned into his ears every day, Bidhu started thinking that what his wife said was true. 'My work is more important than my brothers. It is because of me that they have so much wealth, and can afford such a comfortable life,' he thought.

One morning while they were having breakfast, Bidhu told his mother and brothers that he wanted his share of the property.

"What is this, Bidhu?" asked the shocked mother. "Your father always wanted you to be united and stay together. What has happened?"

"If that is what Bidhu wants, let us do it," said Sadhu philosophically.

"All right," agreed the mother, "but let me tell you one thing,



Bidhu. No work is high or low. Though I do agree that farming is a very important and difficult profession, other professions too are equally important and no less noble. You will realize this soon.”

All the necessary documents were gathered on which the division was to be made. Bidhu took a lot of interest in this while his brothers looked on.

Then one day his mother said, “My sons, it is the custom in our family to go to Puri and pray to Lord Jagannath before undertaking any important work. We shall leave tomorrow and on our return we will divide the property.”

The sons agreed and set off on their journey next day with their wives and mother.

After visiting the temple they were on their way back when the mother said, “Sons, I am very tired and hungry. Let us eat something here and rest for a while before continuing our journey.” They were on the outskirts of a village near an old

temple. There was an eatery nearby.

When the sons searched for the moneybag they could not find it. "Oh," said Sadhu, "I remember giving it to mother."

The mother too searched for a long time in vain. There was no sign of the moneybag.

"What shall we do now?" asked Radhu.

"There is no other way but one," advised the mother. "I shall stay in this temple with your wives. The three of you will have to go into the village, get some work and earn wages. Without money we can neither eat nor proceed any farther."

The sons agreed to this suggestion.

The three brothers branched off in different directions going towards the village. Bidhu met a group of people discussing something seriously. "What is your problem, my friends?" queried Bidhu. "Can I help?"

"This piece of land is always water-logged and we are unable to grow anything in it. Yet we have to pay taxes to the king," explained a villager.

Bidhu thought for sometime and said, "If I tell you how paddy can be grown in that field, what reward will you give me?"

"A hundred pieces of silver," the villagers answered very generously.

Expert farmer that he was, Bidhu then explained. "Make balls of cowdung and earth mixed together and keep them wet and soft. Put in a few seeds in each of them and let the balls dry,"

The villagers listened to him with rapt attention.

"Then?" they prompted.

"Cast them into the field. The balls will sink and the seeds will sprout."

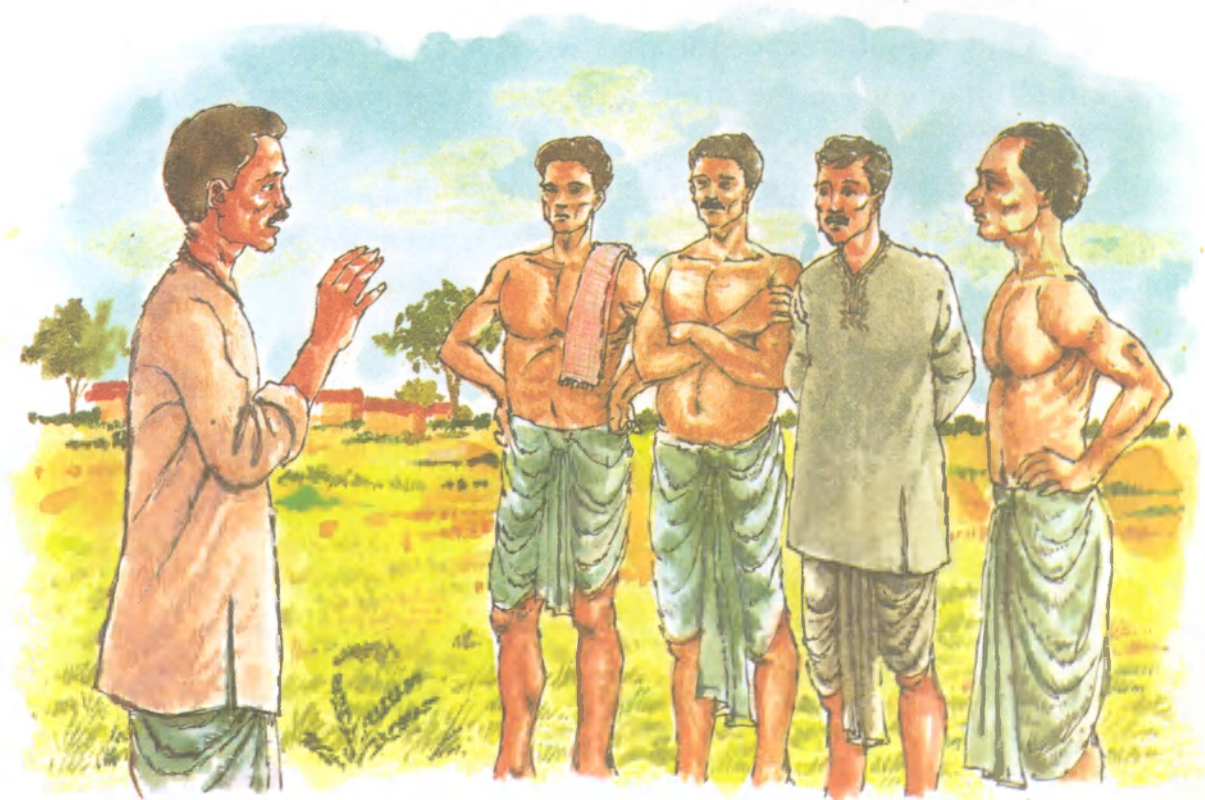
The villagers thanked him and gladly paid the money with which he returned to the temple.

Radhu, while on his way, saw a man with a sad face sitting under a tree. Though he looked prosperous, there seemed to be some problem that was worrying him.

"What worries you, my friend?" asked Radhu. "You look dejected. Can I help?"

"If you can," sighed the man. "We are four brothers," he started. "When our father died we divided the property equally amongst us. There was one black cat which we did not know how to divide. So we said that it will belong to all of us but each brother will be the owner of one of its legs," he paused.

"Fair enough," answered Radhu.



“Um...as luck would have it, one day the cat fell from the roof and broke the leg that belonged to me.”

Radhu was getting very interested.

“I tended the wound and tied it with a bandage soaked in oil. The cat, being fond of warmth, went to sleep near the hearth.”

“How could that make you so miserable?” asked Radhu getting curiouser.

“That was the beginning of my misery. A spark from the fire fell on the oily cloth and it caught fire.” He stopped to look up at Radhu.

“Then what happened?”

“From there the fire spread to the nearby houses and burnt them down. The neighbours put the whole blame on me and took the case to the Panchayat.”

“What did the Panchayat say?”

“They said that since the cat’s wounded leg which belonged to me had caused the fire, I have to pay the damages. I don’t have that much money to pay all of them.”

Radhu, the lawyer, thought deeply and found an easy solution. He said, “Cheer up, my friend. If I get you out of this scrap, what reward will you give me?”

“Five hundred pieces of silver,” answered the man.

“In that case go and call your neighbours and the village elders. I shall join you soon.”

When Radhu reached the village, there was a large crowd under the banyan tree.

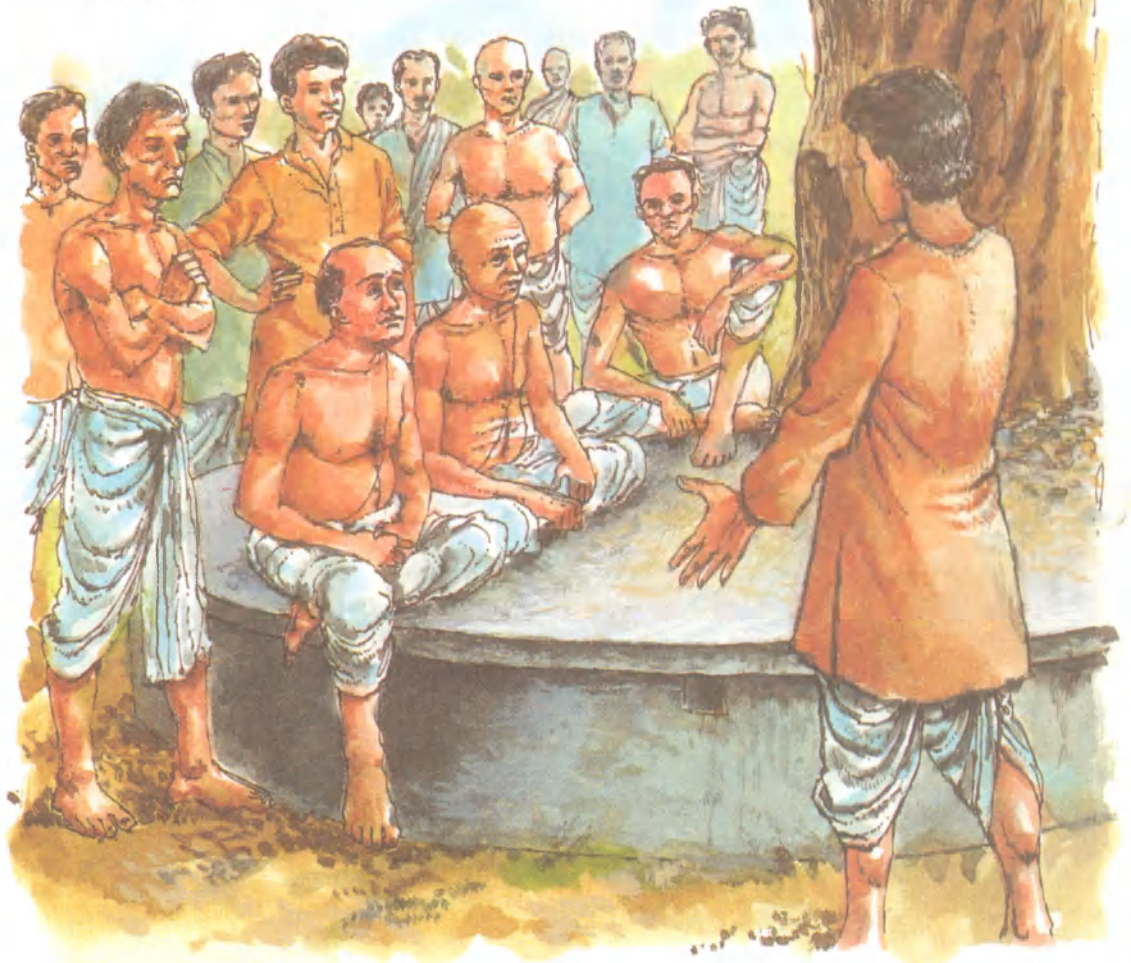
After listening to them he said, “Is it true that the cat caused all the damage and it was due to the bandage on its wounded leg...”

“Yes,” said the villagers.

“Do you also agree that it was because the cat ran that the fire spread and the houses burnt down?” asked Radhu.

“We do,” answered the villagers.

“The cat cannot run on its wounded leg. It is the other three good legs that enabled it to run...” Radhu stopped here and waited for the effect of his words to sink in.



“Yes, it is true. It was because of the three good legs that it could run.”

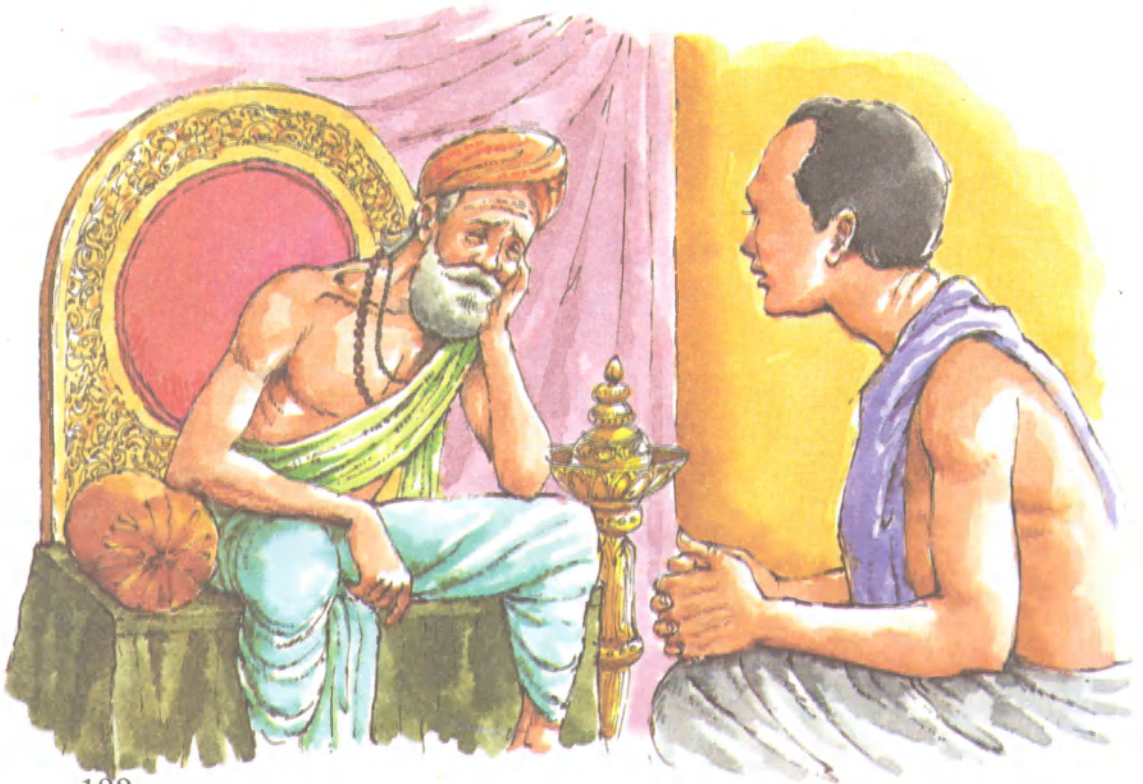
“Therefore...let the Panchayat judge who should pay for the damages caused by the fire.”

Everybody wondered at his wisdom while nodding in agreement. It was decided that the owners of the three good legs should pay the damages. The owner of the wounded leg was very happy and paid Radhu the promised five hundred pieces of silver.

Radhu returned to the temple with the money.

Meanwhile, Sadhu, the eldest brother, heard somebody's cries from a house. It was a big house and there was a guard outside it.

“Why is somebody in this prosperous looking house crying? Who lives here?” he asked the guard.



"The king's minister lives here, sir," replied the guard.

"Will you kindly take me to him?"

The guard went in to get permission and then came back to accompany him inside the house. It was the minister himself who was in tears.

"What is the matter, Honourable sir?" asked Sadhu. "If you tell me your problem, perhaps I can help."

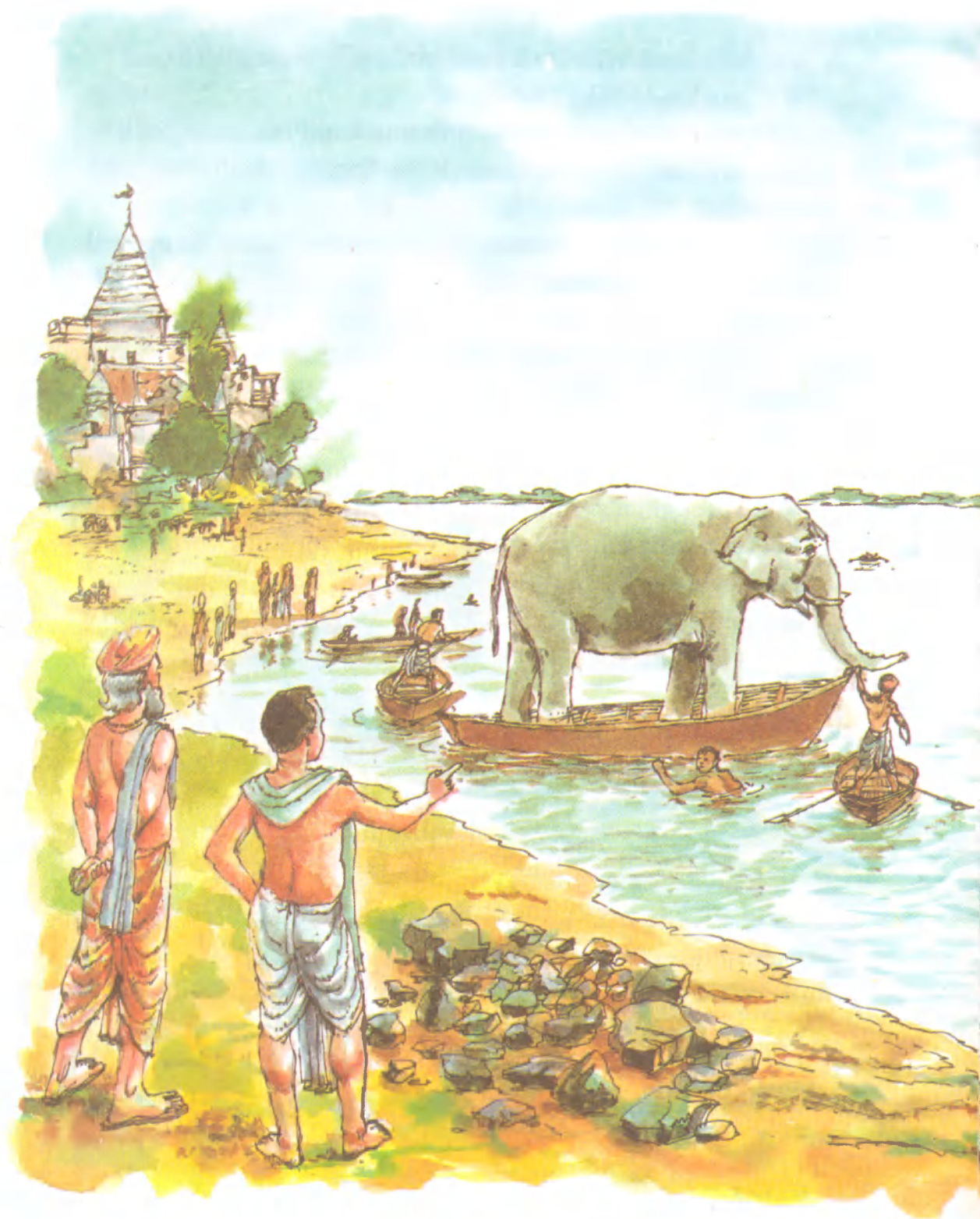
"Strange are the whims of the royalty indeed," the Minister replied guessing from Sadhu's appearance and words that he was a learned man. "My king has asked me to find the weight of his elephant. If I fail to do so, my head will be cut off." The minister started crying again.

Sadhu thought for sometime then said, "Please do not cry, sir. If I help you to find the weight of the king's elephant, what reward will you give me?"

The minister being a minister could afford to give a reward befitting his position. "A thousand gold pieces!" he announced grandiosely.

Sadhu asked the minister to take him to the place where the elephant was. From there it was taken to the riverside where there were a number of boats.

"Please ask the mahout to make the elephant stand inside a boat," Sadhu requested. When this was done, the boat started sinking into the water, and then stopped. "Please mark the level to which the boat has sunk," he requested the officials who looked on curiously. "Now take the elephant out of the boat and fill it with big stones," said Sadhu. As the stones were filled, the boat started sinking again. "Fill it until it sinks to the level marked earlier," he said.



When this was also done, he said, "Weigh the stones. The weight will be the same as that of the elephant's."

The Minister was so happy that he not only gave the thousand gold pieces but also made other gifts.

Sadhu returned with them to the temple where the others were waiting for him. They all had a hearty meal and got ready to return home. At that moment the mother took out the lost moneybag and showed it to her sons and their wives.

"I had deliberately hidden it," she said in a serious tone. "I only wanted to show you all that each work is important and has its own benefits. Bidhu, I hope you have realized that your brothers too earn a lot of money which is pooled into the family's income."

Bidhu and his wife were sorry for wanting to divide the family. They returned home and lived together as a one family for a long time.

The wise mother was glad that the small crack that had appeared in the family's relationship was set right.





Making An Ass Over A Mare

Mamata Pandya

Once there was a boy. Not the brightest of boys, to be sure. One day when he was returning from the fields, he met a man leading a mare. The boy suddenly had a great desire to own the mare. So he asked the owner, "What will you ask for this mare? I would like to have her."

The man said, "A hundred rupees and the mare is yours."

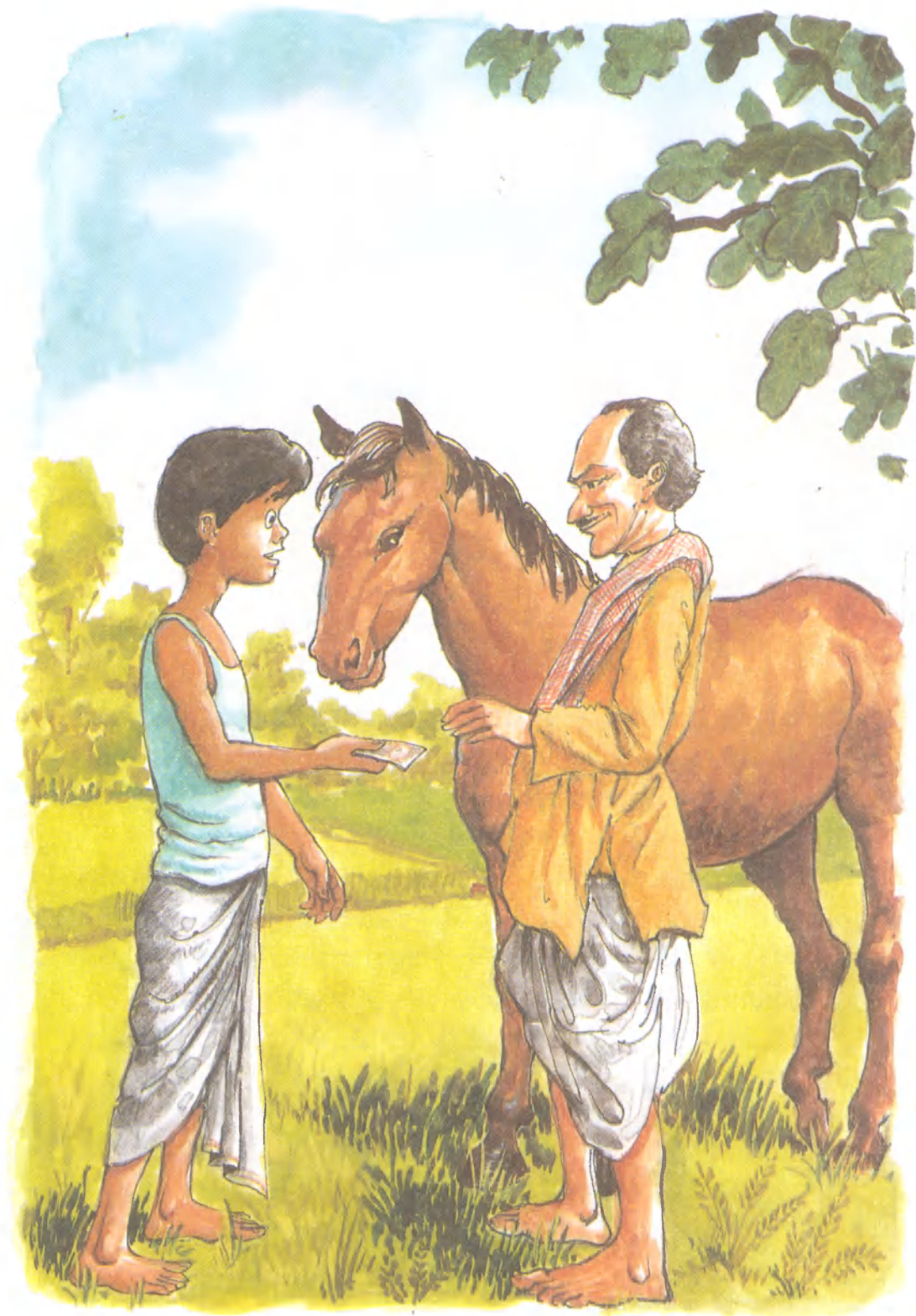
"I do not have one hundred rupees," said the boy, "but I do possess fifty rupees."

"Well then, you will just have to walk home, my lad," said the owner. "It is hundred, or nothing."

"Listen," pleaded the boy, "let us make a deal. I will give you fifty rupees cash and instead of the remaining fifty I will give you back your mare. How is that?"

The man was no fool. He quickly agreed and then quietly walked away with his mare and the fifty rupees as well.

The silly lad too walked on, proud and happy at the deal. He





trotted along, holding the imaginary reins and urging his mare onwards. He reached home and called his father. "Father, look what I bought today. A mare."

"Where is it, son?" asked the father.

The boy explained, "You see, it was like this. The mare cost a hundred rupees. I had only fifty. So I paid fifty to the owner and returned to him the mare instead of the remaining fifty. I did not want to come home with any debts on my head."

"Bravo, son!" said the father. "Hats off to your bargaining ability!"



Boom, boom, boom!

Hear ye! Hear all!

Come, listen to the stories of kings—some
proud, some gentle, of a kind queen with
magical powers; of friendly, helpful
ghosts; of a clever frog and a wise kid;
of people—some smart and some foolish.

Boom, boom, boom!

Hear ye! Hear all!



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