TALES RETOLD

- WHY FOLKLORE?
- TWO TALES OF TRUTH
- COSMIC TALES
TREE OF THE ISSUE

NEEM

Neem (Hindi), Neemgachi (Bengali), Bevu (Kannada), Vepa (Telugu), Vepu (Tamil, Malayalam), Neemhay (Marathi), Margosa (English).

Familiar to most people for its medicinal properties, the Neem is recognised by few despite its distinctive leaves and annual profusion of sweet scented flowers. It is a medium-sized or large tree with a straight trunk, elegant in form and evergreen, a native of India, Burma and Sri Lanka.

The flowers which appear from March to May, are tiny stars borne in great numbers. Buzzing swarms of bees and other insects can usually be seen hovering round the tree all through the flowering season. Later, when the fruit is ripe the tree is visited by numerous birds. The fresh, green colour and shining surface of the leaves give the tree a delicate and charming appearance during the monsoons when the flowers have fallen and the tree is in full foliage with carved, toothed leaves.

Young leaves are a pale, tender green tinged with rust. These are eaten on Hindu New Year Days to ward off sickness during the coming year. Hindus, to whom the tree is sacred, also festoon fresh leaves across their houses when there is an epidemic of chicken pox or to keep evil spirits away when there is a birth or death. Dried leaves put in drawers or cupboards keep out moths and cockroaches. Another use for these 'magic' leaves is in poultice form for healing wounds.

From the yellow fruit is obtained the famous Margosa oil, so effective in the treatment of leprosy and skin diseases. External application of oil from the seed is believed to cure rheumatism. The bark and gum yield valuable medicines. In fact, every part of this tree is of some value. Listen to this legend...

A woman, whose husband was about to set out on a voyage, wished to ensure his early return. She consulted a medical man who told her she must advise her husband to sleep under a tamarind tree every night of the outward journey and under a neem tree every night of the homeward journey. This he agreed to do. The tamarind is reputed to exude unhealthy, acid vapours, so before long, the unfortunate man found himself too sick to continue his travels. He returned home and the healing powers of the neem tree under which he slept each night worked to such effect that by the time he reached home his sickness was cured.

Neem timber is beautifully mottled, hard and heavy and is used for ship building, carts and furniture. Wood from old trees is so bitter that no insects will attack it.

(Flowering Trees and Shrubs in India - D.V.Cowen).

SAVE INDIA’S TREES!
Dear Editor,

I would like to congratulate the band of people who have undertaken the publication of THE EYE. I myself was introduced to it by chance exactly at a time when I was looking for something to base my teaching of General Studies for the eleventh standard. I found that I could draw upon the variety of issues discussed in THE EYE to get my students to react and respond to those very issues, be they in the nature of Science, the Arts, value systems and concepts. The students are keenly interested in the magazine and would like to be a part of the movement that the magazine espouses.

Ms. Jayashree Jayachandran, Carmel Convent, New Delhi.

Dear Editor,

THE EYE is getting better with each issue. Congratulations for dedicating the latest issue to 'Handwork'. While all the articles were interesting the one by Arvind Gupta on Science through Crafts came as an eye opener to many of the teachers of my school. They have already started working on the ideas expressed by Arvind.

Thank you for the book review. Through this, many institutions will become aware of the books by Khanna. I've already placed an order for the books.

I remember the excitement with which I received and read the first issue of THE EYE. All subsequent issues of THE EYE have lived up to the expectations of a few of us who had sent out our subscription after reading the very first issue. Our best wishes to you and your dedicated "microscopic" team.

While I am eagerly looking forward to the next issue I have a suggestion. Would it be possible for you to announce the theme of your future issues, in which case some of us could send in our contributions. While all your readers would love to read anything connected with our culture, a few may hold certain aspects close to their heart, and such people may have something valuable to contribute.

Mukesh Shelat
B.V. Reddy School, Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh.

SUBSCRIPTION DETAILS

RATE

FOREIGN RATES

Single Copy
Rs. 14.00
US $ 25/ £ 20

Annual Subscription (Individual)
Rs. 75.00

Annual Subscription (Libraries & Institutions)
Rs. 200.00

Donor Subscription
Rs. 5000.00

Please add the additional sum of Rs. 5/- if you send an outstation cheque as encashment charges.

Payment to be made by cheques and drafts only in favour of

SPI-C-MACAY PUBLICATIONS.

Mail to: THE EYE, 39 Anand Lok, New Delhi 110 049

THE EYE NO.2 VOL.II 1993
'Birds do not sing because they have answers; birds sing because they have songs'
— Old Chinese Proverb

This issue is full of stories. Indian Stories. Stories from the South, East, West, and North. Stories that have been sung, said, performed and finally written down. Stories that were born from the vernacular languages - sad, witty, heroic and profoundly wise. Stories that moved with dignity down several generations, swelling with each telling.

'Folklore' is the mirror to the culture of a country and, I daresay, its history and literature. It is also the smartest social-shaper mechanism.

The stories selected here are culled from all the genres that generally constitute folklore, namely, the plain narrative, the bardic poem sung with instrument and interspersed with prose, ballads that speak of deep human emotions, riddles, proverbs, parables and fables. Our tellers have told them in the true spirit of the local soil.

Folklore is not just for children, although children are the very first recipients of it. Are the mothers, aunts and grandmothers still there, telling stories we wonder. Or have they begun to abandon society's children to television? Will the wandering bard sing no more and the fiddler draw his bow away?

As we were putting this issue together, we heard of the death of our great master folklorist, translator and storyteller, A.K. Ramanujan. His spirit has certainly inspired this issue. We are thankful to our tellers, translators and illustrators, who we believe, have enjoyed these telling of their tales.

Have a great story-time, readers!
Few had expected to be speaking of A.K. Ramanujan so early in the past tense. His sudden death in Chicago has deprived India of the finest interpreters of his kind.

Until he came along, Indian literature largely meant works in Sanskrit or in languages of Sanskritic origin (and of course, Indian books in English). He made people take note of the wealth of the Dravidian tongues and made both Indians and non-Indians realise that India exists as much in its tapering south as in the spreading Indo-Gangetic north, that the civilisation of India is a fabric woven of Sanskritic and Dravidian, formal and folk strands.

He also enlarged the very concept of literature by telling us that a people do not express themselves only in written forms but also in the spoken and the sung.

He has set out this idea in a series of highly regarded scholarly papers and most recently in his introduction to that marvellous book Folktales From India. Every Ramanujan preface has something new and profound. His footnotes become other people’s headings.

In this particular introduction, he tells us of an old woman who is searching for something in the street. A passerby asks her what she is looking for. Keys, she says. Any idea where you could have lost them, he asks. Probably in the house, she answers. Then why are you searching for them here, the man asks, puzzled. And the old woman answers: Because I can see better out here, under the street light, for I have no oil in my lamp in the house.

Ramanujan uses this as a parable for the nature of the general mass of Indological studies. People who want to understand Indian civilisation, he remarks, “look for it under the light, in Sanskrit, in written texts... in the well-lit public places of the culture.” He wants us now to move indoors, into the expressive culture of the household, to look for our keys.
He has on a couple of occasions, described the cultural compartmentalisation in his own parental home. His father lived upstairs and it was the domain of Sanskrit and English. The kitchen and eating room downstairs belonged to his mother and to Tamil, the mother-tongue of the family. If he stepped out he was surrounded by Kannada, for they all lived in Kannada territory.

As in that parental home, so in India, there is constant interaction among various languages. Ramanujan wants us to appreciate that “written and hallowed texts are not the only kinds of texts in a culture like India’s.” This perception has led him to advocate a re-examination of the theory of Great Traditions and Little Traditions. In India’s own case the classical and the folk are an interacting continuum. Texts are no more important than contexts.

This comprehensive view of Indian civilisation is one of Ramanujan’s bequests to us. But no less important is what he has done for the understanding of texts. Ramanujan’s teenage hobby was magic. He added to his pocket money by demonstrating his sleight of hand. In later life his magic extended to words. Without his insight into words, into not just what they meant, but how they sang, he could not have produced "Speaking of Siva, Interior Landscapes" and "Hymns for Drowning" - his renderings of ancient Tamil and mediaeval Kannada poems and songs of saints.

It would be an understatement to call them masterpieces of the art of translation. In his prefatory note to "Speaking of Siva," Ramanujan tells us that in real translation, the Spirit killeth and the Letter giveth Life, and that any direct attack on the spirit of the work is foredoomed to fuzziness. Only the literal text, the word made flesh, can take us to the word behind the words.

Those who know Basavanna, Allama Prabhu and Akka Mahadevi in the Kannada original will concede how closely Ramanujan clings to the original poems. He does not 'transcreate' that wholly muddled idea of the process of translation. Ramanujan knows the weight of each word and the solar systems of meaning hidden in each phrase. These translations would not have been so successful if Ramanujan had only been a scholar and linguist. They succeed because he is also a fine and fastidious poet in his own right in Kannada and in English. And they succeed so well because of a third reason - his grasp of the social history of our land.

See for example how he sums up the place and contribution of the Bhakti poetry in our various mother-tongues:

“Bhakti religions like Veerasaivism are Indian analogues to European Protestant movements. Here we suggest a few parallels: protest against mediators like priest, ritual, temples, social hierarchy, in the name of direct individual, original experiences; a religious movement of and for the underdog, including saints of all castes and traders (like Bunyan, the tinker), speaking the sub-standard dialect of the region-producing often, the first authentic regional expressions and translations of inacessible Sanskrit texts (like the translation of the Bible in Europe); a religion of arbitrary grace...doctrines of work as worship leading to a puritan ethic...”

It is this kind of intellectual sweep and sensitiveness which made U.R. Anantha Murthy, Chairman of the Sahitya Akademi, compare Ramanujan to Ananda Coomaraswamy. Like Coomaraswamy he remained scrupulously modest, approachable and generous, in spite of gigantic erudition.

The mathematical Ramanujan was called the man who knew infinity. His namesake in the cultural realm could well be described as the man who knew affinities.

Shri H. Y. Sharada Prasad studied at the Universities of Mysore and Harvard. Actively involved in the freedom movement, he was imprisoned thrice during this period. He was Editor, Indian Express from 1945-55 and in 1957, he joined the Government of India's Publications Division. He worked with Charles Eames to set up the National Institute of Design in the 1960's and also the Nehru Exhibition from 1964-67. He was appointed as Information Advisor in the Prime Minister's Office in 1966. He currently holds several distinguished positions, among them being Chairman, National Institute of Design and Vice-President, Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

Folk tales are told not only to make children sleep. They are often told to keep adults awake: when farmers gather to watch crops all night or when workers slice areca nuts in a factory...

A. K. Ramanujan
HE WROTE...

'A folk tale is a poetic text that carries some of its cultural contexts within it; it is also a travelling metaphor that finds a new meaning with each telling.'

'Stories and words not only have weight; they also have wills and rages and they can take different shapes and exact revenge against a person who doesn’t tell them and release them into the world.'

'...Stories are part of a more pervasive process in society. The tales demonstrate over and over again that daughters (and sons), wealth, knowledge and food must circulate. These are danus or gifts, that in accordance with their name must be given and received. Stories are no different. Communities and generations depend on such exchanges and transfers.'

STILL LIFE

When she left me after lunch, I read for a while. But I suddenly wanted to look again and I saw the half-eaten sandwich, bread, lettuce and salami, all carrying the shape of her bite.

— The Striders

INSTEAD OF A FAREWELL

To meet and say farewell to this part of me that turns and returns with a different partner in a square dance, meeting before I begin to see, seeing after I have done with meeting, squaring at last in a glimpse the ancient circle of you and me: how can I say farewell when farewells are made only for people who stay and only for people who go away?

— The Striders

SELF-PORTRAIT

I resemble everyone but myself, and sometimes see in shop-windows, despite the well-known laws of optics, the portrait of a stranger, date unknown, often signed in a corner by my father.

— The Striders
A POEM ON PARTICULARS

In our city markets
I have often seen a wicker basket
sit
upon its single, ample
hip,
its rattan pattern filled
with another,
subtler
bubble-bed pattern of oranges:
pellmell pile,
not one with a stain,
some thick-painted green all over,
others
with just a finger-print
of green;
some so ripe, there was a hint
of fungi-ash
on a slightly hollowed cheek;
some flushed and saffron,
some gamboje, some tangerine;
some pulpy, velvety-skinned,
their inner fist
of fingers
held rather loosely, and each day
more loosely,
in their body’s
grandpa grip.
But
every one of these
had an absurd, almost human
umbilicus
at the top
where once the Tree
had poured its
future
from forgotten roots
and possessed it close,
to feed
this Fall-minded
pot-bellied
bud
till it rounded
for our baskets.
I have heard it said
among planters;
you can sometimes count
every orange
on a tree
but never
all the trees
in a single
orange.

— The Striders

TIME TO STOP

There are times
when
going to museums
makes you see
pointilliste anthills,
Picasso faces on milkmen
framed in the living room
window,
a violet shadow
all around a dead
or dying cow
and you come
back at night to see
how it looks
under the gaslight,
and after an accident,
blood
looks remarkably
like fresh paint.
Then
it’s time to stop
going to museums.

— Relations

SOME INDIAN USES OF HISTORY
ON A RAINY DAY

1

Madras,
1965, and rain.
Head clerks from city banks
curse, batter, elbow
in vain the patchwork gangs
of coolies in their scramble
for the single seat
in the seventh bus:
they tell each other how
Old King Harsha’s men
beat soft gongs
to stand a crowd of ten
thousand monks
in a queue, to give them
and the single visiting Chinaman
a hundred pieces of gold,
a pearl, and a length of cloth;
so, miss another bus, the eighth,
and begin to walk, for King Harsha’s
monks had nothing but their own two feet.

2

Fulbright Indians, tiepins of ivory,
colour cameras for eyes, stand every
July
in Egypt among camels,
faces pressed against the past
as against museum glass,
tongue tasting dust,
amazed at pyramidfuls
of mummies swathed in millennia
of Calicutt muslin.

3

1935. Professor of Sanskrit
on cultural exchange;
passing through, lost
in Berlin rain; reduced
to a literal, turbanned child,
spelling German signs on door, bus,
and shop,
trying to guess go from stop;
desperate
for a way of telling apart
a familiar street from a strange,
or east
from west at night,
the brown dog that barks
from the brown dog that doesn’t,
memorizing a foreign paradigm
of lanterns, landmarks,
a gothic lotus on the iron gate;
suddenly comes home
in English, gesture, and Sanskrit,
assimilating
the swastika
on the neighbour’s arm
in that roaring bus from a grey
nowhere to a green.

— Relations
THEY KNEW HIM......

'There are few who can match his enviable erudition in viewing together the conventions of Sanskrit, Dravidian and modern English poetry.

...Ramanujan believed in a measure of continuity in tradition and vigorously asserted that a significant creativity within a tradition always, on the one hand, confirmed its existence and on the other, extended and modified it.'

Sitakant Mohapatra
The Economic Times.

'He took me aside and explained gently that there were people to whom money mattered and there were people to whom work mattered. People obsessed with finances let their work suffer if the money did not come through. My task, he said, was never to let the work suffer. The money would take care of itself. Ramanujan’s perceptions were luminously clear in life as well as academia.'

Aditya Behl.
The Book Review.

"...the past never passes", as he once said characteristically, and his own splendid and multi-faceted achievement will continue to be our living heritage'.

Harish Trivedi.
The Book Review.

'For two years, off and on, we had worked on an essay, Siblings in Indian Folklore. This was to be based on his vast collection of Kannada and Tamil folktales which were almost ready for publication. They only awaited one of his marvellous introductory essays which said more than most scholars’ books. He promised that he would complete the study this autumn. I guess this particular essay will never be written.'

Sudhir Kakkar.
The Book Review.

'There have been a few deaths in my life when I have not been able to tell the man from his making, the dancer from the dance. Ramanujan’s unexpected death some time ago has been one such.'

Ramachandra Sharma
Indian Review of Books.

'Like tricky Chinese boxes, A.K.Ramanujan’s poems are difficult to open but of exquisite workmanship; they’re objects to hold between fingers as much as they are printed lines to read with the eyes.

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra
The Economic Times.
WHO NEEDS FOLKLORE?

A.K. RAMANUJAN

Why Folklore?

For starters I for one need folklore as an Indian studying India. It pervades my childhood, my family, my community. It is the symbolic language of the non-literate parts of me and my culture. Even in a large modern city like Bombay or Madras, even in Western-style nuclear families with their 2.2 children, folklore is only a suburb away, a cousin or a grandmother away. One of the best folk plays I’ve seen was performed in the back streets of Madras city by Terukoothu troupes. When a friend of mine in Bangalore, the capital city of Karnataka state, said to me, “How can you collect folklore in a big city?” I asked him to try an experiment. He was a professor of Kannada, and he had a composition class that afternoon at his college. I asked him to set a composition exercise to his class of urban students. Each of them should write down a folk tale they had heard and never read. That evening, my friend sought me out excitedly to show me a sheaf of forty tales his students had written down for him in class from memory.

I shall not speak here of Indian urban folklore, for wherever people live, folklore grows—jokes, proverbs (like the new campus proverb, “to xerox is to know”), tales and songs circulate in the oral tradition. Similar to chain letters, Murphy’s Law, and graffiti, folklore may also circulate on paper or on latrine walls. You don’t have to go to Pompeii to see graffiti. Verbal folklore, in the sense of a largely oral tradition with specific genres (such as proverb, riddle, lullaby, tale, ballad, prose narrative, verse, or a mixture of both, and so on), non-verbal materials (such as dances, games, floor or wall designs, objects of all sorts, from toys to outdoor giant clay horses), and composite performing arts (which may include several of the former as in street magic and theater)—all weave in and out of every aspect of living in city, village, and small town. What we separate as art, economics, and religion is molded and expressed here. Aesthetics, ethos, and worldview are shaped in childhood and throughout one’s early life by these verbal and non-verbal environments. In a largely non-literate culture, everyone—poor, rich, high caste and low caste, professor, pundit, or ignoramus—has inside him or her a large non-literate subcontinent.

In a South Indian folk tale, also told everywhere, one dark night, an old woman was searching intently for something in the street. A passerby asked her, “Have you lost something?” She said, “Yes, I’ve lost some keys. I’ve been looking for them all evening.” “Where did you lose them?” “I don’t know. Maybe inside the house.” “Then, why are you looking for them here?” “Because it’s dark in there. I don’t have oil in my lamps. I can see much better here under the street lights,” she said.

Until recently, many studies of Indian civilisation have been done on that principle: look for it under the light, in Sanskrit, in literary texts, in what we think are the well-lit public spaces of culture, in things we already know.
There we have, of course, found precious things. Without carrying the parable too far one may say we are now moving inward, trying to bring lamps into the dark rooms of the house to look for our keys. As often happens, we may not find the keys and may have to make new ones, but we will find all sorts of things we never knew we had lost, or ever even had.

Regional Languages

Four centuries ago, just a century after Vasco da Gama landed on the west coast of India, just decades after Gutenberg had printed his first Bible in Europe, Christian evangelists had begun to study our mother tongues, compile dictionaries, make grammars, and even print them in India. Yet, until recently, Sanskrit almost exclusively represented India to most people in the West.

In the 1971 census, more than 3,000 mother tongues were recorded, including dialects and speech varieties. Fifteen of the languages are written, read and spoken by about 95% of Indians. Literature in a language like Tamil goes back 2,000 years, and in several others, like Bengali and Gujarati, at least 800 years. In addition to these literatures, there are oral traditions, riddles, proverbs, songs, ballads, tales, epics, and so on, in each of the 3,000 odd mother tongues that we have classified under the 105 languages. It is true, as they say, a language is a dialect that has acquired an army, but all these myriad dialects carry oral literature, which is what I call folklore. One way of defining verbal folklore for India is to say it is the literature of the dialects, those mother tongues of the village, street, kitchen, tribal hut, and wayside tea shop. This is the wide base of the Indian pyramid on which all other Indian literatures rest.

We have valued and attended only to the top of the pyramid. Robert Redfield, the Chicago anthropologist who influenced Indian anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s, said, "In a civilization, there is a great tradition of the reflective few and there is a little tradition of the largely unreflective many". That is a famous formulation and deserves to be infamous. Traditionally Indians also make a distinction between marga the 'high road' and desi, 'the byway, the country road' in their discussion of the arts. The 'Great Tradition,' with capitals and in the singular, said to be carried by Sanskrit, is pan-Indian, prestigious, ancient, authorised by texts, cultivated and carried by what Redfield calls, 'the reflective few.' The 'Little Tradition,' or traditions in the plural, are local, mostly oral, and carried by the illiterate (the liberal would call them non-literate) and the anonymous 'unreflective many.' Redfield himself and Milton Singer later modified these notions and others have been critical of them. They were seminal at one time, especially because they urged anthropologists not to ignore the 'texts' of a culture in favor of 'fieldwork.'

Cultural Performances as Texts

Now we need a new emphasis, a larger view regarding texts themselves. Written and hallowed texts are not the only kinds of texts in a culture like the Indian. Oral traditions of every kind produce texts. 'Cultural performances' of every sort, whether they are written, or oral acts of composition, whether they are plays or weddings, rituals or games, contain texts. Every cultural performance not only creates and carries texts, it is a text.

When we look at texts this way we can modify terms such as great and little traditions and see all these performances as a transitive series, a scale of
forms’ responding to one another, engaged in continuous and dynamic dialogic relations. Past and present, what’s ‘pan-Indian’ and what’s local, what’s shared and what’s unique in regions, communities and individuals, the written and the oral—all are engaged in a dialogic reworking.

City and village, factory and kitchen, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain, Christian and Muslim, king, priest, and clown, the crumbling almanac and the runaway computer—all are permeated by oral traditions, tales, jokes, beliefs, and rules of thumb not yet found in books. I shall say more later about the dialogic relations between folklore and other parts of this Indian cultural continuum.

Interactive
Pan-Indian Systems

In the view being developed here, even what’s called the ‘Great Tradition’ is not singular but plural—it is a set of interactive pan-Indian systems, Brahminism, Buddhism, Jainism, with tantras and bhakti interacting variously with these. To be comprehensive, we should add Islam, Christianity, etcetera, and modernity itself as the other active systems that participate in this give-and-take.

Let’s examine briefly the idea that some traditions are pan-Indian and some not. Sanskrit and Prakrit, though they have a pan-Indian distribution, still originate in particular regions; Sanskrit itself, though translocal and apparently a-geographic, has varieties of pronunciation that can be identified as Bengali, Malayali, or Banarasi. Nor are the so-called ‘Little Traditions,’ especially folk traditions, necessarily or usually confined to small localities or dialectal communities. Proverbs, riddles, stories and tunes, motifs, and genres of songs and dances are not confined to a region, even though they may be embodied in the non-literate dialects and may seem to be enclosed in those mythic entities called self-sufficient village communities. It is well known that folklore items, like many other sorts of items in cultural exchange, are autotelic, that is, they travel by themselves without any actual movement of populations. A proverb, a riddle, a joke, a story, a remedy, or a recipe travels every time it is told. It crosses linguistic boundaries any time it is told.

Neighboring languages and regions have, therefore, a large stock of shared folk materials. Collections, for instance, have been made of the proverbs shared by the four Dravidian languages. Similar ones can be made for other genres and for other neighboring language areas, and indeed for the whole subcontinent. A proverb such as ‘It’s dark under the lamp’ has been collected in Kannada and in Kashmiri, at two ends of the Indian subcontinent. The sentence is the same in each place, but it means different things. In Kannada it means that a virtuous man, like a lighted lamp, may have dark hidden vices. In Kashmiri, I’m told, ‘It’s dark under the lamp’ has a political sense—that a good-natured king may have evil counselors. This, of course, characteristic of cultural forms.

Not only do folklore items travel within the country or culture area, they are also part of an international network. Archer Taylor’s English Riddles gives as current English riddles and their centuries-old written variants, as well as variants from Africa, India, and the New World. One can collect today, as I know from experience, oral tales from illiterate women in Kannada villages that are similar, motif for motif, to the tales of the Greek Oedipus or to Shakespeare’s King Lear or All’s Well That Ends Well.

Here we begin to glimpse a paradox: where the so called pan-Indian Hindu mythologies of Vishnu or Shiva, or the great classics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana are unique to India, folklore items such as proverbs and tales participate in an international network of motifs, genres, types, and structures—using them all, of course, to say something particular, local, and unique. One arrives at the paradox that the classics of a culture, like the well wrought epics or plays and poetry, are culture-bound forms, but large portions of the so called little traditions are not.

Written and Oral Media

Folklore also raises and makes us face other central questions; for instance, questions regarding the differences and relations between written and spoken media in Indian oral culture.
The relations between oral and written traditions in any culture are not simple oppositions. They interpenetrate each other and combine in various ways. Written traditions live surrounded by oral ones and are even carried by oral means. As in many other languages, in Kannada, the word for writing (bore) is the same as that for drawing; and until recently to read meant to read aloud. I’ve heard of a grandfather who would say he couldn’t read a novel because he had a sore throat. So, too, to write meant to write down. Writing was an aide memoir, a mnemonic device for materials to be rendered oral again. Speech lies dormant in writing until it is awakened again by one’s own or another’s voice, like these words on this page as you or I read them.

Sometimes it is thought that the so-called classical texts are fixed and the so-called folk texts are constantly changing. Similarly, writing is thought to be fixed and speech constantly changing. One often identifies the ‘classical’ with the written and the ‘folk’ with the oral. But, for India, we should distinguish between three sets of independent oppositions. The three are classical vs. folk, written vs. spoken, fixed vs. free or fluid. The classical, the written, and the fixed do not necessarily belong together.

Oral and written forms in a culture often wish to be like each other, like the two sexes, male and female, each envying what the other has. Yet, each defines and marries the other. In the oral forms, in folklore, many devices such as refrains, formulae, and memory training exist to give the relative permanence of writing. From time to time, in writing traditions, writers wish to return to the freshness of speech and imitate it, as in modern Indian poetry. It was Flaubert who said that style should be adjusted to the rhythms of respiration.

In all cultures, and especially in the Indian, the oral and the written are deeply intermeshed in another way. A work may be composed orally but transmitted in writing, as Vyasa said he did with Ganesa as his scribe. Or it may be composed in writing, as Kumarayyasa (Vyasa junior) said he did in Kannada, but the text kept alive by gamakṣ or reciters who know it by heart and chant it aloud. There are of course texts, such as proverbs and tales, that are usually composed orally and orally transmitted, many of which never get written down. And texts, like newspapers—written, printed, and silently scanned or read—never go through an oral phase. Thus, over a long history, a story may go through many phases. An oral story gets written up or written down in the Jataka or the Panchatantra. Then the written text may reach other audiences who pick up the story and retell it orally, maybe in other languages, and then it gets written down somewhere else, perhaps starting another cycle of transmissions.

In a folktale told about Aristotle in Europe and about a philosopher in India, the philosopher meets a village carpenter who has a beautiful old knife, and asks him, “How long have you had this knife?” The carpenter answers, “Oh, this knife has been in our family for generations. We have changed the handle a few times and the blade a few times, but it is the same knife.” Similarly, the structure of relations may remain constant, while all the cultural details change, as in a folktale that goes on changing from teller to teller. Any fixity, any reconstructed archetype, is a fiction, a label, a convenience.

**Oral Traditions:**

**The Difference They Make**

Thus anyone concerned with written texts has to reckon with the oral materials that surround it. This contrasts strikingly with modern America, where the end of any formal oral communication is a written text. You speak in Congress so that your speech may be read into the Congressional Record; everything anybody says in a court is typed up; and at the end of what’s supposed to be spontaneous
FOLKLORE

oral traditions give us alternative conceptions of deities that balance and complete, and therefore illuminate the textual conceptions.

conversation on a TV talk show, you get the message, “Send three dollars and you can get the transcript of this show.” And finally, the most popular TV game show, Wheel of Fortune, has to do with spelling words and phrases. Every letter is cashed into dollars, every phrase into furniture and a trip to Hawaii. In a culture like the Indian, however, and certainly in villages and certain communities to this day, writing lives within the context of oral traditions. Even newspapers are read aloud. If you have been near any primary school in a small town or even in Madras, you would hear the pupils a mile away, for the classes recite their lessons in a loud chorus. Not only the alphabet and the multiplication tables, but every major religious or literary text like the Ramayana is memorised and chanted aloud. As a proverb in Kannada says, “Why do we need a mirror to see a blister on our hands?” Yet, we seem to, for we believe in the mirror of writing, or even better, the mirror of print.

Oral traditions thus enlarge the range and they complicate and balance the texts we know. Yet we ignore the oral. Take mythology for instance. At present, in all our anthologies of Hindu mythology there is not one folk myth. Every text is from the Sanskrit, though myths occur in Tamil and Bengali and every other language. They even occur in stories of written texts like the shalaparasas, (place legends), or the mangalakaryas.

Oral traditions give us alternative conceptions of deities that balance and complete, and therefore illuminate the textual conceptions. For instance, in the goddesses of pan-Indian mythologies, like Lakshmi and Saraswati, rise out of the sea churned by the gods and the antagods; Parvati is the daughter of the King of Mountains. They are consort goddesses; their shrines are subordinate to those of their spouses, Vishnu or Shiva. Their images are carefully sculpted to the fingertips. They are usually saumya or mild and docile. They preside over the normal auspicious cycles of life, especially marriages, prosperity, and such.

But look at the village goddesses and see how different they are. Their myths tell us of ordinary human women who were cheated into marrying untouchables, or raped by a local villain, or killed and buried by cruel brothers. Out of such desecrations they rise in fury, grow in stature to become figures that span heaven and earth, with powers of destruction that terrify the village into submission, sacrifice, and worship. Theirs are not myths of descent or avatara, but of ascent from the human into divine forms. They become boundary goddesses of the village, give it their name, or take their names from the village. While the Sanskritic Breast Goddesses (as I call them because they give us their breasts) receive vegetarian offerings of fruit and flowers, these village goddesses require animal sacrifices and a sprinkle of blood on their devotees. The Tooth Goddesses represent the other side of the mother (as stepmothers do, in folktales), who punish, afflict people with plague and pox, and when prostituted, heal the afflicted. They are goddesses of the disrupted lifecycle, deities of crisis: they preside over famine, plague, death, and madness. Their images are often pots and pans, faceless stones, sometimes only a severed head. They dwell outside the village boundaries and are brought in only for special worship, often in times of crisis. Without them, life is not complete, nor is the Hindu view of the divine.

The goddess Kali, as the Sanskrit texts present her, is a Sanskritised version of hundreds of village goddesses all over the country and certainly partakes of their fierce aspects. Yet, in the Sanskrit paranas (encyclopedias of Hindu myths) and myths based on them, Kali is created by the gods pooling their weapons and powers and let loose on the Buffalo Demon whom the male deities cannot destroy, the emphases, details and major themes of the village mythologies are quite different. The village Mariyamman goddesses arise out of human deception and tragedy. If the Breast Goddesses are consorts to their male spouses, the Tooth Goddess is often a virgin and, if married, she tears her villainous male consort to pieces. He is later symbolically offered as a buffalo or goat sacrifice to her images. The consort goddesses are auspicious, consecrated. The village goddesses are ambivalent, they afflict and heal.

Such a conception of divinity is not confined only to female deities. Consider the village gods, such as Muttappattan. He is a Brahmin who falls in love with a cobbler chieftain’s daughter, marries them, skins and tans cowhides, eats cow’s flesh, dies in battle defending his village against robbers, and becomes a god to whom his community of cobblers makes offerings of gigantic leather sandals. It is one of the most moving long poems of South India. Until recently, no record or translation of this tragic story was available.

Oral epics embody a theory of emotion different from that of rasa, explore ranges in the emotional spectrum like shame, terror, fury, and disgust that are not usually explored in the Sanskrit poems and plays. And how can we, mere mortals, do without them?

The oral traditions offer us also a different view of the female from the views found in the written texts. When the Ramayana is sung by the Tamburi Dasayyas of Mysore, the center of attention is Sita, her birth, marriage, exile, sufferings and final disappearance...
into Mother Earth. In the Tamil story of *Mayili Ravanar*, set in a time after Rama has defeated the ten-headed Ravana, a new thousand-headed Ravana arises to threaten the gods, and this time Rama cannot handle it. It is Sita who goes to war and demolishes the impossible demon.

See what happens in an oral folk *purana* sung ceremonially on Madeswara hill (Karnataka) every year by several bardic groups during the festival devoted to this hero/saint/god called Madeswara. The *purana* begins with a creation myth.

The Primordial Goddess is born three days before everything else. She grows up very quickly, attains puberty, and wants a man to satisfy her. Finding no one around, she creates out of herself, Brahma, the eldest of the gods, and asks him to grow up quickly and sleep with her. But as he grows up and she urges him on, Brahma says, "You are my mother. How can I sleep with you?" She gets angry, calls him a eunuch, and burns him down to a heap of ash with the eye of fire in the palm of her hand. The next day, she creates Vishnu, who is very handsome. She can't wait for him to grow up and satisfy her. But he too will not sleep with his mother. So, in a rage, she burns him down to a heap of ash. On the third day, she creates Shiva, and urges him to grow up and become her lover. He too has misgivings until she says, "Look around and see what happened to your brothers who refused me." He turns around and sees the two heaps of ash that were once his brothers. He sizes up the situation and says to his mother, "All right. I'll do as you say. You want me to be your husband, don't you? Don't you want your husband to be at least equal to you? Don't you want to teach him all your skills and give him your powers?" The Mother Goddess, Ammavaru, is delighted and says, "Of course, I want you to have everything," and teaches him all her magic arts and bestows on him all her powers. Then Shiva, now grown up, says, "Let's dance. You must do whatever I do. Let's see who is better." They whirl around in a fantastic cosmic dance together, each mirroring the other, until suddenly, Shiva puts his hand on his head in a dance movement. His mother, following him, puts her hand on her own head and the eye of fire in her palm...
begins to burn her. As she burns, she curses Shiva, “You, you refused a woman. May one half of your body become female, may you never get rid of her!” That’s how Shiva came to be the lord whose one half is woman. Then as his mother burned down and became a heap of ash, the eye of fire that lived in her hand came to Shiva and said it had nowhere to go. So he took it and slapped it on his forehead. That’s how he got the third eye.

After his mother had gone up in flames, Shiva looked around and found the two heaps of ash that were once his brothers. With his newly learned powers, he revived them. Now the three gods, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, said to each other, “There’s work to do. We must create the worlds.” One of them said, “How can we create without women?” Then Shiva sees the third heap of ash that was once his mother, divides it into three smaller heaps, and gives them life. Out of these portions of their mother’s ash, come Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Parvati, the three consorts of the Hindu trinity, who then marry them. Creation begins.

In the Sanskritic myth, the male gods create the goddess and give her their powers. In the foregoingly myth it is exactly in reverse. She gives Shiva his powers. In the Sanskritic myth it is the father figures that last after the daughters. Here the female too has her share of sexual desire, made explicit. She is cheated out of her powers by the male god who uses them to destroy her. Further more, her sons still end up marrying portions of their mother—both Jung and Freud would be interested in that! But the male gods marry her only after fragmenting and domesticating her into a nice tame threesome—feminists would be interested in that. This is a way of looking at male/female power relations very different from anything we know from the better known written texts.

I could go on to talk about alternative views of the gods, karmas and charity, as well as why tales themselves are told. Since I have talked about them elsewhere, I shall content myself with giving you some short examples. The gods in the puranas and the heroes in the epics have bodies without bodily functions. They do not blink their eyes nor do their feet touch the ground. But in folk traditions, they have bodies, they are embodied, localised, domesticated. In the place legend of Gokarna, Ravana prays to Shiva and receives from him the boon that Shiva, with all his goblin attendants, should go with him to Lanka. Shiva gives him the boon, but doesn’t really wish to go. He tells Ravana that he can carry him as a linga all the way, but that he should not put it down anywhere until he reaches Lanka. Ravana agrees. When he gets to Gokarna, he must answer the call of nature. He cannot hold the sacred linga in his hands while doing that, can he? So he puts it down, and the linga begins to grow downwards and take root. Ravana hurries back and tries to twist it out of the earth, but he is not able to. That’s how Gokarna has a linga and they say that, if you dig under it, you’ll find that it’s twisted. Aldous Huxley once complained that, even for a realistic novelist like Tolstoy, the heroines never go to the bathroom nor do they menstruate. In the village oral traditions, they do. Gods like Ganesa, heroes like Bhima, demons like Ravana, or even poets like Vyasa cannot help going to the bathroom, and goddesses like Ganga and Gauri menstruate. As the bhakti poem says:

Folklore that is in many ways close to bhakti traditions, gives to them and takes from them, sharing genres, motifs, and attitudes, and seems not only to ask the gods to embody themselves, but actually envisions them as having bodies with all the needs and ills that flesh is heir to.

Bodied, one will hunger,
Bodied, one will lie.
O you, don’t you rob and taunt me again for having a body:
body Thyself for once like me and
see what happens,
O Ramanatha!”

Devara Dasimaya,
Tenth century, Kannada
(tr. by Ramanujan, 1973: 107)

Folklore that is in many ways close to bhakti traditions, gives to them and takes from them, sharing genres, motifs, and attitudes, and seems not only to ask the gods to embody themselves, but actually envisions them as having bodies with all the needs and ills that flesh is heir to.

Folk renditions of the pan-Indian epics and myths not only bring the gods home, making the daily world mythic, they also contemporise them. In village enactments of the Ramayana, when Sita has to choose her bridgroom, princes from all over the universe appear as suitors. In a North Indian folk version, an Englishman with a pith helmet, a solar toppee, and a hunting rifle regularly appears as one of the suitors of Sita. After all, since the eighteenth century the English have been a powerful presence in India and ought to have place in any epic ‘bridegroom choice’ or swayamvara.

In a Karnataka performance, Rama is exiled, and as he takes the little boat on the river Sarayu to go to the jungle, all of Ayodhya follows him in tears. He bids them farewell from his boat, making a short speech: “O brothers and sisters, please go home now. I take leave of you now but I’ll be back in fourteen years.” Then he leaves, and wanders through the forests. Sita is abducted by Ravana, Rama gathers the monkey army, kills Ravana, and returns victorious with Sita. When he arrives at the spot where he had bid his people farewell fourteen years earlier, he sees a group standing there, their hair grown grey, their nails long and uncut, their feet rooted to the banks of the Sarayu. He asks them who they are. They say, “O Rama, you forgot us when you took leave. You bade farewell only to the men and women, calling them brothers and sisters. We are the eunuchs of Ayodhya. We have waited for you here all these fourteen years.” Rama is very touched by their
devotion and, feeling guilty at his negligence, gives them a boon: “O eunuchs of Ayodhya, may you be reborn in India again and rule the country as the next Congress party!”

I can go on forever, detailing what happens to kama or chastity in the oral tales, retelling the bawdy tales of the villages about clever women who cheat on their husbands and get away with it, unlike all the chaste women of the epics who never cheat or the unchaste ones who are chastened by their infidelity, like Ahalya. But I think I’ve said enough to argue the essential relevance of folklore to Indian studies and the alternative views and systems folklore carries. Folk materials also comment continually on official and orthodox views and practices in India. If we listen, we can hear the voice of what is fashionably called the subaltern—the woman, the peasant, the non-literate, those who are marginal to the courts of kings and offices of the bureaucrats and the centers of power.

Excerpted from the first Rama Watamull Lecture on India, delivered at the University of Hawaii in March 1988.

A K Ramanujan was born in 1929 in a Tamil speaking family settled in Mysore (now Karnataka). He grew up speaking three languages—English, Kannada and Tamil. After taking a Masters degree from Mysore University, he taught briefly at Madurai, Tamil Nadu. He did his doctorate from Indiana University, U.S.A. in 1961 in Linguistics and then joined the Department of Linguistics in the University of Chicago. A gifted poet and translator, some of his works include, The Striders (1966), Relations (1971) and Second Sight (1986). He was awarded a Padma Shri by the Indian government in 1976 and the MacArthur Fellowship in 1983. He is the author of thirteen books which include The Interior Landscape, Hymns for the Drowning and Speaking of Shiva. At the time of his death, he was William A. Colvin Professor in the Department of South Asian Studies and Civilisations, University of Chicago. Illustrations: Anoop Kamath

LINES TO A GRANNY

Granny,
tell me again, me again in the dark
about the wandering prince;
and his steed, with a neem-leaf mark
upon his brow, will prance
again to splash his noonday image
in the sleep of these pools. He will break
with sesame words
known only to the birds,
the cobweb curtained door; and wake
the sentinel, the bawdy cook;
the parrot in the cage
will shout his name
to the gossip of the kitchen's blowzy flame.

Let him, dear granny
shape the darkness
and take again
the princess
whose breath would hardly strain
the spider's design.

But tell me now: was it for some irony
you have waited in death
to let me learn again what once
you learnt in youth, that this is no tale, but truth?

A K Ramanujan
History, Folk Tales, & Story-Telling

OMKAR GOSWAMI

In Akira Kurosawa’s classic 1950 film, Rashomon, three men—a priest, a woodcutter, and a worldly wise commoner—have taken shelter from torrential rain in an imperial rain. The woodcutter tells of his discovery of the corpse of a samurai in the woods. This is followed by the tales told by the principal characters: the killing of the samurai and the seduction of his wife by a bandit, narrated by the brigand; the same events revealed by the wife; and by the dead samurai’s ghost. The stories are contradictory in their interpretation, assertion, and choice of focal points. The bandit’s version insists on his manliness and fairness versus the samurai’s pretensions and weaknesses. The wife’s account gives importance to her virtue and how she tried to save it. The ghost speaks of the greatness of samurai virtues and the valour of the samurai in protecting his wife. And, when the woodcutter tells the story the second time round, he contradicts his first tale: he had something to hide, for he had stolen the dead samurai’s lance.

Like Rashomon, the writing of history is also the weaving of contradictory tales and interpretations—new stories overlaying previous ones, all attempting to describe some ‘events’. Historians recognize this. Gone are the days when historians proudly claimed that history concerned the objective search for the truth about the past. L. B. Namier wrote many years ago that, “The function of the historian is akin to that of a painter and not of the photographic camera; to discover and set forth, to single out and stress that which is the nature of the thing, and not to reproduce indiscriminately all that meets the eye... History is therefore necessarily subjective and individual, conditioned by the interest and the vision of the historian.”

This article highlights three things. First, while it is totally illegitimate to talk of ‘objectivity in history’, it is equally incorrect to claim that a historian can ever ‘single out and stress that which is the nature of the thing’ a la Namier. Second, in many cases, good administrators—those who ‘faced’ the riots and left behind their description in official files and correspondence. These are white rulers’ perceptions of the actions of the natives. Since these are records of the ‘upholders of law’ about those who were attempting to ‘subvert the law’, the evidence is constructed wholly in terms of what a historian, Ranajit Guha, calls the ‘prose of counter-insurgency’. Thus, the description of Titu Mir’s uprising of 1831 or the Santhal rebellion of 1855 were replete with phrases such as ‘fanatic insurgents’, ‘daring and wanton atrocities on the inhabitants’, ‘defying the authority of the State’, ‘plunder and murder’, ‘disturbing public tranquillity’, ‘one of their Gods... to reign as king over all this part of India’, and so on.

Titu Mir, Kanu and Sidhu of the Santhal leadership, or Birsa Munda, or any of the leaders of grass-root level revolt were the ‘subalterns’ of society. One common characteristic of subalterns is that they are ‘the unlettered ones’—who never leave behind any written or documentary evidence which forms the basis of traditional historical analysis. So, a historian is left with only two things: the primary and secondary texts of colonial administrators, and the historian’s own imagination and ability to translate the grammar of counter-insurgency into a coherent description of subaltern consciousness and action.

But the transitive rules are entirely subjective—and are fashioned wholly by the political and world-views of the historian. We can never ‘clearly’, ‘definitively’, ‘conclusively’ deconstruct the texts of the alien rulers to arrive at the ‘consciousness’, ‘culture’, ‘motivation’, and ‘world view’ of the unlettered ones. The problem is worse still. First we need to take the rulers view of ‘action’ to arrive at the rebels’ actions as to what ought to have been their motivation, consciousness, and driving force. So, in almost all cases, good history writing is nothing other than a sequence of overlaid stories: the
immediate story of the colonial administrators who faced 'the mob'; of colonial rulers who turned into historians after their retirement (who wrote books with huge titles like The Personal Adventures And Experiences Of A Magistrate During The Rise, Progress And Suppression Of The Indian Mutiny); of the 'pro-raj' historians; of the 'anti-imperialist' historians; of the Marxist's attempt at cull out the 'objective, material reality' of such revolts; and of the de-constructionist's translating colonial text into their beliefs about subaltern consciousness. All these are 'stories'—texts, and sub-texts. They all look at some events using, more or less, the same 'evidence' to create contradictory impressions upon the reader. How then, can most history be any different from Rashomon? Can we ever talk of arriving at the nature of the thing?

If histories are overlaid stories, then their richness depends upon the breadth of 'source material'. It is now universally recognized that history writing is immensely enriched by the use of folk tales, ballads, local sayings and aphorisms, and many other forms of non-documentary sources (earlier treated as fringe evidence). For example, one cannot possibly write a history of banditry in the Chambal without understanding the language, the cultural context, the idiom, and the perceptions of the people in the ravines. And these cannot be gleaned through police records or the 'high' evidence of magistrate's court proceedings.

Similarly, all people's uprisings are replete with rumours and secret symbiotic acts and codes—the most well known being the chappatis of 1857. The purpose of rumours is to create a flutter, to rally people, to mobilize, to scare, to exaggerate at they move along. Instead of trying to discover the 'objective basis' of such rumours, it is far more rewarding to understand their cultural context—which can be often found in folk tales, local epics, adages, and deification in ballads. Some of the best histories have used folk tales and ballads with telling effect—used them to weave a rich, earthy, multi-hued tapestry around the rarefied world of written evidence and archival records.

Finally, a good historian must be, first and foremost, an excellent story teller. She has to give 'life' to evidence. She has to shuffle all the data—written and oral—and create something that makes the reader feel the 'authenticity' of the description, and carry the reader into the past along a maze of conflicting, roller-coaster events. It has to seem to be 'true', and it has to rivet attention at all times. All these are ingredients of first-rate story-telling. Not surprising, then, that the history books which one invariably recalls with fondness are richly crafted gems of story-telling: where 'evidence' and 'hypothesis' mesh so beautifully, that one can no longer distinguish one from the other. May such history continue to thrive.

Omkar Goswami teaches at the Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi.

---

**SUBSCRIPTION REMINDER**

Dear Reader,

- Remember to renew your subscription. This is a special reminder to those whose subscriptions end with this issue.
- Your issue cover carries your code number. Remember to quote it whenever you correspond with us.
- To ensure safe delivery of your issue, give us your complete postal address and include the pin code.
- Please make all cheques/drafts only in favour of SPIC MACAY PUBLICATIONS. Include Rs. 5/- for countercheques as bank charges.
- THE EYE makes a good gift. Subscribe for a friend.

THE EYE is a written word-movement, which seeks to involve a large number of people concerned with the issues discussed in the magazine. It is produced with minimum infrastructure and resources and the workforce is largely voluntary. Therefore, we request our readers to kindly bear with delays between issues and other inconveniences. We would be more than happy to have you join us in any capacity. If you like the magazine, pass the word around.

---

THE EYE No. 2 Vol. IX 1992

18
THE ELDERR MOOSU OF VAYAKKARA

RETOLD BY
RUKMINI SEKHAR

It is a well known fact and one accepted by most people that what a vaidyan* needs most are the blessings of his gurus and a special grace that endows him with a healing touch. However well versed in the texts or however capable and intelligent he might be, it is certain that without these special attributes, his treatment will not be effective. But what if he is a great scholar and also blessed with these special qualities? Then surely, it becomes legend.

Of all the eight famous vaidyan families, the Vayakkara Moosu family, since the olden days enjoyed a unique reputation, being fully possessed of all the fine attributes of traditional learning and hard commonsense.

I will now try and describe some of the famous tactics of the late Elder Moosu, father of Aryan Narayanan Moosu, who became a legend in his time and went down in the annals of the history of traditional medicine in Kerala. Naturally, these tales are based on hearsay and must be accepted as such. Suffice to say, is there anything that the great cannot achieve?

The very first story concerns an unfortunate man who suffered a great deal because he just could not clear his bowels and bladder. You can imagine his state! His belly was swollen and all he did was roll on the floor and scream in agony. He could neither lie down, sit, eat nor sleep. He summoned several vaidyans who threw their hands in the air and said that the malady was beyond them. “I’m going to die”, decided the patient. But before they gave him up for dead, the nephew of the man thought that it may be a good idea for him to consult the Elder Moosu. Why not take one last opinion?

So he reached Vayakkara the morning after his uncle was assaulted by this strange problem.

The Elder Moosu was meticulously supervising his servants who were cutting vegetables for lunch. The nephew blurted out the problem of his uncle’s belly. Almost as soon as he heard the details, the Elder picked up a pumpkin, removed the stalk and gave it to the nephew, saying, “Grind this to a paste, mix it with warm water and give it to your patient.” The nephew took the stalk and headed for home. “So simple”, he mused. “Will it work? I will give this a shot anyway. Let’s see what happens”.

He cut the stalk into half, ground it to a paste, mixed it with warm water and gave it to his uncle. Just minutes after that, the patient cleared his stomach and relief swept over him like a wave. But then, alas, another problem emerged - he couldn’t stop going!

The diarrhoea persisted all through the next day and the patient was getting

*Vaidyan: A doctor of indigenous medicine, usually Ayurveda.
weaker by the minute. In fact, he was getting quite desperate. The nephew ran once more to The Elder Moossu.

The latter asked him, "Have you given him the entire pumpkin stalk ground to a paste and mixed in warm water?"

"No sir, only half. The rest is with me," said the nephew.

"Then give him the rest", the Elder said.

The nephew ran back and did accordingly. Almost at once the diarrhoea stopped. And soon the patient was back to normal and all was well.

Another story goes as follows. A Mappila, a Muslim gentleman, came to see the Elder. His problem was his enormous weight which overcame him completely, not letting him sit, stand or lie down. There was, however, nothing else wrong with him. Only his corpulence, what a heavy burden! And what was worse, the fat increased every day! He got himself treated by some of the best known vaidyans of the day, but since none of their treatments worked, he finally came to Vayakkara. There is a saying in Sanskrit, 'Fat is itself a medicine for fatness.' So it was not surprising that all those treatments had no effect on him at all.

The Elder Moossu looked at the fat man from head to foot, quietly, gravely. Then somberly.

"There is no need for you to be treated at this stage. For you will die within thirty days. I can see all the full blown symptoms of death. If you survive by the grace of God or due to the sheer strength of your will, then come to me after thirty days and we can decide on the course of your treatment. There's no point deciding now."

Can you imagine the shock that overcame the Mappila? I mean, would you be surprised if he fainted? For that is what happened. If Vayakkara Moossu said something, it usually happened, almost word for word. Then can you blame him for getting knocked out unconscious? Isn't everyone afraid of death?

Exactly three hours and forty five minutes later, the Mappila came to his senses. Immediately, five of the toughest men lifted him up, put him in a boat and rowed away.

When he reached home, our friend realised that he had completely lost his appetite - not even his usual bowl of kanji or rice gruel (of which he usually had large quantities) held any interest for him. And sleep, that delightful occupation he so loved, also eluded him. He was a man grieved by the vaidyan's pronouncement of death within thirty days. He lay around, large and restive, waiting for his death.

Unbeknownst to him he had begun to shed weight. Why say too much? That baby elephant of a man, who when he stood up looked like a fat pillar, started looking like a human being. One day he realised that a month had gone by and he was alive. Yes, alive! He was weak as hell but he could still move around normally.

It was time to visit the Elder. A month had passed and he hadn't died. And he hadn't used much will power either. He gathered his whole family together and reached Vayakkara.

The Elder Moossu looked at him, a hint of a smile playing around his lips.
To the question whether the Mappila was still going to die, he answered, "Oh no, you won’t die, don’t worry. I never did believe for one moment that you will. There are ways to get thin people fat but it is extremely difficult for the fat to get thin. So I had no option but to put you through severe mental anxiety that would make you eat little or nothing. Worry is the best way to lose weight. Is there anything worse than the fear that you are going to die? So what I told you a month ago was my treatment. And it worked, didn’t it? Since you don’t suffer from any other problem, I guess we should stop the treatment. Just see that you don’t swell up like before. Exercise regularly till you break into a sweat. Too much food and money has made you sloppy. Now discipline yourself, do you hear?"

It is said that the Mappila followed the Elder’s instructions and lived till a ripe old age.

Then there was this lady who after five days of labour still couldn’t deliver her baby. On the fifth day, just one fingertip of the infant appeared and stayed there. The midwives were baffled and worried since there were no apothecaries to set this right. Only the good old traditional vaidyans could do something.

The lady’s husband came to, who else, but the Elder, “Sir, normally the head comes first, doesn’t it? But this finger, it’s almost mocking us, sticking out there!”

The Elder Moosuss said, “Get a red hot iron nail or a small knife. Then touch the baby’s finger with it.”

Oh, but how could they do this! Such a tiny finger! But then if the Elder is telling us to do this, then it must be alright, they thought. That is what they did - heated the nail and touched the baby’s finger. And lo and behold! That cheeky little finger withdrew! In a little while the lady delivered normally. The infant’s finger was a little burnt, but then what is the Elder there for?

Listen to this funny story of the lady who stretched her right hand up to get something from a shelf placed high, close to the ceiling. The tragedy was that the hand never came down! It stayed up and could not be brought down however hard she tried. Many vaidyans were consulted. The hand was massaged by experts who knew all about nerves. Some felt it was rheumatism, others felt that it was because some nerves got misaligned and yet others thought that an evil spirit had possessed her right hand. All sorts of medication was tried out and they even called in an exorcist to chase away the foul spirit. But the hand stayed right up rather like a flagpole.

Vayakkara Moosuss was the only answer. He saw the lady, her right hand like a temple pillar and her anxious relatives.

"Let her climb on to that tall stool", he ordered. "Now, tie up her left hand with a rope, tightly now, to that ring on the rafter of the ceiling."

Thus she stood as the Elder’s other patients all gathered around the spectacle. Visualise the scene, readers. Quite unusual, isn’t it?

"Now, husband of the lady, remove her clothes", the Elder ordered again.

"My dear goddess Bhagawati, how can I?" he gasped. "In front of all these people! No, I can’t!"

And dear readers, what do you think went on in the lady’s mind? I dread to imagine.

“Oh, so you won’t do it”, thundered the Elder. "Then I shall have to do so myself." The husband cringed and the lady started weeping.

The Elder went up to the lady and gave a firm tug at her lower cloth and started to remove it from her body.

"Ayoo, Acho, don’t", she screamed and her upstanding right hand came down and caught up the tip of her lower cloth. The Elder’s pulling at her clothes and the hand descending occurred almost simultaneously.

The Elder Moosuss retreated to the far side of the room and said nothing. I guess the treatment was over. They undid her left hand and the lady went home swinging both her hands.

A yawn can be a dangerous thing especially if your mouth doesn’t close after one. This was what happened to one young man. He yawned and his mouth hadn’t closed since. It was wide open. Vaidyans flocked to his home and rubbed several decoctions and oils on his jaws. But open his mouth was. As always, and as last resort, they brought him to the Elder. As soon as he heard what the problem was, he went to the man and without any warning, in a flash, gave him a resounding hit on the top of his head and his chin simultaneously. The jaws snapped shut. And the man went home happily.

There are so many stories around this brilliant and practical vaidyan, the great Elder Moosuss, too innumerable to recount in one sitting. You do believe me when I say how important it is to be blessed by one’s gurus and to be endowed with that special healing touch which is beyond bookish knowledge of the texts. For the Elder did embody that as legend will have it.

*

Translated from Aithihyamala written by Kotturathil Shankunni.

Illustrations: Anil

Burn not your house to frighten away the mouse. - Malayalam
KIRITA

RETOLED BY
SUDHA GOPALAKRISHNAN

Eager to have a ‘glimpse’ of the deity himself, he sent for the Swamiar. Vilvamangalam accordingly, ‘sought

permission’ from the Lord and set a date and place for the meeting. At the appointed time, Manaveda saw the Lord in the guise of a child playing under a pipal tree. He was filled with ecstasy and longing! Ah, what a beautiful child indeed! He moved forward, unable to contain his joy and wanting to hug the child. The child who was Lord Krishna

smiled sweetly saying, “This was not part of my agreement with Vilvamangalam”, and vanished. But during the scuffle, the king had grasped the peacock plume on the headgear of the vanishing Lord and was left with a single feather which was ripped off in the process.

After this incident, the king meditated on the form of Lord Krishna and composed the Krishnagati, a lyrico-dramatic poem in eight cantos celebrating the life of the Lord. This became the source for the dance-drama of Krishnattom.

King Manaveda’s confrontation with the Lord inspired him in his conception of the costume and make up in Krishnattom. The peacock feather which he carefully stored, was attached to the headgear of the actor who played Krishna. Miraculously, it would fit the head of whoever played the part, irrespective of size! Besides, the actor would be as one completely imbued with the spirit of the Lord during the entire span of the performance.

Once a Krishnattom troupe staged a performance in Tripunithura, near Cochin. In this performance, they were to stage the killing of Kamsa, the cruel uncle of Krishna. The king stationed a huge elephant on stage whom Krishna in the episode is supposed to kill. The actor, when he donned the Krishnamatti head-dress became so spellbound that he killed the mighty elephant and rushed after the panic-stricken king who fled for his life.

This is a story with a difference, where the main character is the head-dress, kirita, which is worn by an actor who plays Krishna in the performance of Krishnattom, the traditional Sanskrit dance drama associated with the Guruvayoor temple in Kerala. In popular parlance, this head-dress is called Krishnamatti - the brilliant, golden headdress of Krishna, stone-studded and decked with enchanting peacock feathers. Legend has it that these peacock feathers came from the Lord himself!

The story is that King Manaveda who ruled Kozhikode in the mid-seventeenth century was a devout worshipper of Lord Krishna. He came to know that the celebrated devotee of Krishna, Vilvamangalam Swamiar enjoyed divine communion with the Lord.

Dr. Sudha Gopalakrishnan has a Ph.D. in Comparative Drama from Kerala University. She has worked in the Sahitya Academy Delhi for five years for Encyclopedia of Indian Literature. She published her book entitled ‘From the Comic to the Comedic’ in 1990. She is currently working as project officer for Encyclopedia of Arts in the IGNCA, New Delhi.

If your face is ugly what can the mirror do?  - Tamil
FROM KARNATAKA & ANDHRA PRADESH

TENALI RAMA

RETOLD BY
A.K.RAMANUJAN

How Tenali Rama Became A Court Jester

In a South Indian village called Tenali there lived a clever Brahmin boy. His name was Rama.

Once, a wandering sanyasi was impressed with the boy’s looks and clever ways. So he taught him a chant and told him, “If you go to the goddess Kali’s temple one night and recite these words three million times, she will appear before you with all her thousand faces and give you what you ask for— if you don’t let her scare you.” Rama waited for an auspicious day, went to the Kali temple outside his village, and did as he was told. As he finished his three-millionth chant, the goddess did appear before him with her thousand faces and two hands. When the boy looked at her horrific presence, he wasn’t frightened. He fell into a fit of laughter. No one had ever dared to laugh in the presence of this fearsome goddess. Offended, she asked him, “You little scallywag, why are you laughing at me?” He answered, “O Mother, we mortals have enough trouble wiping our noses when we catch a cold, though we have two hands and only one nose. If you, with your thousand faces, should catch a cold, how would you manage with just two hands for all those thousand runny noses?” The goddess was furious. She said, “Because you laughed at me, you’ll make a living only by laughter. You’ll be a vikatakavi, a jester!” Oh, a vi-ka-ta-ka-vi! That’s terrific! It’s a palindrome. It reads vi-ka-ta-ka-vi whether you read it from right to left or from left to right,” replied Rama. The goddess was pleased by Rama’s cleverness that saw a joke even in a curse. She at once relented and said, “You’ll be a vikatakavi, but you will be jester to a king.” And she vanished. Soon after that, Tenali Rama began to make a living as jester to the king of Vijayanagara.

Tenali Rama’s Ramayana

A courtesan once invited Tenali Rama to recite the story of the Ramayana. He began the story by saying, “Rama and Sita went to the forest,” and stopped there. He said nothing more. The courtesan waited and waited and finally asked, “Then what happened?” “Don’t be impatient,” said Tenali Rama. “They’re still walking in the forest.”

At another time, he was angered by a similar request from another arrogant courtesan. “I’ll really make you experience the Ramayana, just as it happened,” he said, and continued: “In the Ramayana, Hanuman the monkey set fire to the city of Lanka, just like this!” And he set fire to the courtesan’s house.

Reprinted from ‘Folktales from India’, Published by Penguin Books India Ltd.

Better to have a beggar as spouse
Than dwell alone in a great king’s house.
-Pali

Hard it is to conquer nature, if a dog
were made a king
’Mid the coronation trumpets he would
gnaw his sandal string.
-origin unknown

He who seeks friends faultless
Shall forever remain friendless
-Bengali

If the almanacs are lost, the stars are not lost.
-Telugu

The Eye is a forum for
young people (and others
not so young!) to send in
articles, short stories,
poems, photographs,
illustrations, cartoons etc.
We look forward to
to receiving them.

If you are interested in
volunteer for THE EYE
in anyway, you can either
contact our magazine
coordinators or write to
us directly.
They say in this old country of ours, that there are three sure ways of finding God. They are, in case you want to know, *karma, jnana* and *bhakti* or if you must have a shadowy English equivalent. Action, Knowledge and Devotion.

The first, *karma*, means doing whatever you have to do as well as you possibly can. It means sometimes taking the hard option. It means WORK.

*Jnana* or Knowledge means cultivating your mind, figuring out why we are the way we are and then applying that knowledge to understanding this crazy business of life and living. It’s also called Truth - *satya*. That which is. *Jnana* and *karma* often work in tandem, though some *jnani* need to get away, lope off to the high Himalayas and settle down for a long uncomfortable think.

But heaps of people can’t cut loose because they have exams to pass, families to feed and lots of loving and giving to do which has perforce to be done here and now. Then there are those who can’t be bothered to think because thinking means facing the truth.

But you don’t need to be particularly clever, say the elders, if you check out *bhakti*, the third and most popular way to God. *Bhakti*, devotion, does not mean the lavish use of camphor and coconuts, prayer beads, candles or incense. *Bhakti* is like a thunderbolt - it strikes you flat. It’s like falling suddenly and violently in love... With God as a specific deity. It is personalised, customised, tailormade. And intense. *Bhakti* makes you do crazy things to prove your love (don’t we all?). What if you get hurt by *bhakti* though? Is it still worth it? Kanappa certainly thought so. Hear his tale and judge for yourself....

BLIND FAITH
THE TALE OF KANAPPA NAYANAR

Kanappa, who was also called Mukkanna or Netarpaka, was a hunter in the jungles of Tamil Nadu way back in the 8th or 9th century, give or take a hundred years. He fell violently in love with the Greatest Hunter, Shiva. He tried to worship him at the nearest temple but the Brahmin priest (who else?) drove him forth as an unkempt, unwashed barbarian.

If you think Kanappa was unduly upset, think again. He was a *bhakta* and so externals didn’t bother him. He walked off to his own part of lush jungle to find a likely spot for worship. There it was, a small clearing up the side of a hill screened by a large and thick mango tree. A little stream ran down the hill.

Kanappa began to dig up some rich red Deccan soil to make a *shiva lingam*.

That done, he looked around thoughtfully, figuring out how to get his worship started. And picking up his bow and arrow, he disappeared down the hill.

Some weeks later, the Brahmin priest had the weirdest dream. Shiva Mahadeva, the great god himself, appeared in a vision. Dark and powerful built, wild locks of hair escaping from the *jata* on his head, the vilest, fiercest cobras hissing round his throat, a faint, burning gleam of covered fire shining on his ash-smudged forehead, Shiva laughed unpleasantly at the cowering priest.

“Go seek the hunter on the hill and see him worship me”, he said and vanished. The priest dared not disobey.

The very next morning, after a specially long ritual bath and many noisy prayers, he waddled up the hill and came upon the red *lingam* in the clearing. Hiding behind a tree, he waited, cross and out of breath, for the barbarian to appear.

He did not have to wait long. A much loaded Kanappa, cheeks bulging with water, hands dripping with blood, emerged from behind a mango tree.

Going straight to the *lingam* he leaned over it lovingly and spat a mouthful of water on it. Next he placed his foul offering of raw meat on the ground and as an act of final sacrifice, he took a sprig of wild jasmine from his own unwashed topknot and laid it reverently atop the *lingam* before lying full length in front of it in total obeisance.
Barbarian! Illiterate boor! Mahapaap! Sinner of Sinners!

The priest hurtled from the shadows, almost foaming at the mouth with horror at this gross desecration, kicking Kanappa’s prone body, his hands clenched, but not daring to grip the lowly hunter’s neck.

As Kanappa leapt up in shock, the priest fell away. An eerie silence descended on the clearing, just long enough to hear the sudden rustle of wings as a frightened bird flew off. And then, harsh repentant sobs rent the air. Kanappa felt convinced that he had blundered terribly. And in his innocence he wept.

How strange they looked then, priest and hunter, the one a trained middleman of God and the other, a pure but grievously puzzled bhakta.

Just then, a deep voice rang in the forest clearing. “Kanappa!” it called out commandingly. “My priest says you have sinned. Do you accept that?”

“Yes Lord, yes! I am unworthy!” moaned the stricken hunter after one startled glance at the lingam from where the voice seemed to come.

“Will you do penance?”

“Yes Lord, anything.”

“You have hurt me by your foul deeds. Look, my eye bleeds at the sight.”

And indeed, from one of the eyes drawn cruelly on the face of the lingam, a trickle of bright, ruby red blood began to flow.

“Lord, my dearest Lord! Take my eye, only get healed, I cannot see you in pain,” cried the hunter and with one swift movement, gouged his own eye out and stuck it on the lingam.

The priest, after one shocked scream, watched fearfully. And lo, the lingam’s eye stopped bleeding. But even as Kanappa heaved a sigh of relief, he saw, to his fright and horror, that the lingam’s other eye had begun to shed a slow but unmistakable stream of blood.

“Wait, Lord! Kanappa won’t let you suffer, just wait!” he called in anguish. He stuck his big toe against the second bleeding eye to mark the place, while his knife went up without a moment’s hesitation to his own remaining eye.

The priest, whose human instincts were stronger than his caste taboos, lunged forward, arms outstretched to stop him, but the Voice beat him to it.

“Stop Kanappa!”

The Voice was firm but infinitely tender. The hunter froze. “Stop, my own beloved bhakta! This leela of mine was to show a cynical world the power of pure bhakti. Blessed, blessed are you and all those who possess the courage of their convictions”.

The Voice faded away. The priest fell at Kanappa’s feet. The hunter, now healed and able to see, shone in the glory of his bhakti. Enough said? Only this much more: even a thousand years later, Kanappa still ranks high among the sixty three Nayanmars or Shaivite hymnodists of Tamil Nadu and is usually the first to be remembered when trying to tell a tale of terrifying truth and blind bhakti.

Truth and the courage of convictions do pop up in the strangest of guises. You heard a tale of bhakti. Now, let’s hear it for jnana, in a truly scary story of a grim but unbudgeable old gent also of Tamil Nadu, called Nakkarar......

GO TO BLAZES!
THE TALE OF NAKKIRAR

O

f all the ancient kingdoms of South India, the Pandyan realm with its glittering capital, Madurai, was perhaps the most interesting, because so many good stories have come down from its rule. Madurai was the nerve centre of the Sangam, and the convention of poets and writers held there regularly was pretty famous. Standards were set there for literature; the old
Nobody, but nobody had quite such rich imagery, such perfect scanning, such elegant construction. And just as the king graciously proffered the promised gold to the lout a sharp voice spoke out.

awed, hushed whispers, for his dauntless, some would say, foolhardy courage in speaking the truth even in the face of sure death.

It happened like this: one day, the Pandyan king announced a literary contest. The reward was a bag of gold. A slow and stupid young Brahmin boy, who was desperately poor, wanted very much to win the gold. So he began to woo and pester Shiva, (who perhaps should have known better!). Swift to pity, quick to anger, easy to please and always handing out horrendously powerful boons to the nastiest demons who promptly try to destroy Him and send Him scurrying in the most undignified way. And yet...it’s really very hard to resist loving the great God because nobody seems to understand or tolerate human weakness quite like He does. He’s so warmly impulsive, so mysteriously remote, so strong, so tender, so comforting to the deformed, the depressed and the destitute, because He too has no possessions, no parents. And yet He did so many splendid things, like create dance. He is the great destroyer of evil. And everyone seems to love Him, from the most beautiful and powerful Parvati to the meanest beggar in Varanasi.

Well, it’s no wonder then that our loutish young Brahmin went a-begging to Shiva for a prize-winning poem. Shiva, of course, gave it to him.

The poem, naturally, took the first prize, though there were dark mumblings of surprise from the assembled scholars at the unlikely winner. But the poem was good. Brilliant! Nobody, but nobody had quite such rich imagery, such perfect scanning, such elegant construction. And just as the king graciously proffered the promised gold to the lout a sharp voice spoke out.

“Stop! There is a serious flaw to this poem.” It was Nakkiar, eyes flashing scornfully, topknot quivering with righteous wrath at the just detected flaw.

The startled assembly waited for the great poet to justify this sensational accusation.

“Tales of Truth”

grammar, Tolkappiam and the body of Sangam verse that still survives, is rightfully honoured as the oldest such literature in India, dating all the way back to between the 1st and 4th centuries. Most interesting is the fact that the first Sangam ever is said to have been convened by Shiva, the first among poets.

Nakkiar too was a poet, the chief poet at the Pandyan court. He was the son of a simple school teacher. Nakkiar slowly rose in eminence to become the final authority in the subject of letters. They say he wrote many poems of which only two survive. In one, he praises Lord Muruga or Kartikeya and in the other, he describes the long winter night at Madurai.

But Nakkiar is spoken of most in
poet”, and Nakkirar paused with deliberate sarcasm, “speaks of the natural fragrance of a woman’s hair. This is untrue. A woman may use scented oils and powders, adorn her hair with strings of jasmine or plait leaves of kewra into her hair. But nobody’s hair, because it grows and dies on the scalp, can have a natural fragrance. Even sweat is produced by skin, not hair.”

The assembly was in an uproar and the poor prize-winner shut his eyes tight and prayed to Shiva to rescue him quick, for Pandyan justice was swift and unswerving when it came to death penalties for the dishonest.

As the tumult died down and the king began a serious enquiry into the debate, a stranger walked in. Pale and slender, he seemed a Brahmin among Brahmins. His spotless white dhoti, the fresh ash marks on his noble forehead and the snowy white sacred thread added to the lustre of his golden skin. His hands and feet were almost dainty.

Walking fearlessly past the king’s doorkeepers, he advanced sedately to the quaking fake-poet’s side, gripped his shoulders reassuringly and then bowed to the king and Nakkirar.

“Forgive me my masters”, he said, “that worthless poem is my vile creation. No blame should be attached to this poor person. I am here to defend it and him.”

The assembly sat back, waiting with relish for the assured denouement. The graceful, smooth-voiced stranger had plenty of poise, but Nakkirar’s sharp tongue and honest mind were already legendary. There would be at least one execution on the morrow. Perhaps two, if the stranger was convicted of deliberate falsehood.

“I ask you stranger, how it is factually possible for a woman’s hair to be naturally fragrant.”

“Perhaps not an ordinary woman’s. But surely a well-born, well fed person, born into luxury...like our Pandyan queen, for instance.”

“Not true. She too is a woman. Her hair cannot be naturally fragrant”, was the grim reply.

“Not even an apsara’s, dancing in the pillared halls of Indra’s sabhas? Not Urvashi’s, Menaka’s or Rambha’s?”

“No, not even an apsara’s.”

“Not Saraswati’s? The goddess of learning clad in purest white, throned on a white lotus, playing her veena?”

“Not her’s.”

“Not Lakshmi’s? Think carefully before answering, great scholar. Lakshmi, sprung from the churning of the milk ocean. Lakshmi, born of a lotus, dispenser of delights, beloved of Mahavishnu. Not Lakshmi’s hair, crowned with all earth’s treasures?”

“You describe a woman. And a woman’s hair does not smell naturally fragrant.”

A slow change had begun to spread over the pale, slender stranger. His outline thickened and grew mighty and powerful. His skin flashed a dark sheen. Faint stripes, as of a tiger skin seemed to obscure the whiteness of his dhoti and his throat pulsed blue, a wild iridescent blue. And what were those disturbing snake-like shapes coiling across his chest where a sacred thread had just hung limply?

A sense of terrible foreboding filled the Pandyan court. While most faces seemed hypnotised, a few, overwhelmed by the vision before them had sunk down in fear. The poor Brahmin boy, the cause of it all had slunk away behind a pillar.

The stranger spoke again. This time his voice was angry and loud.

“Not even, oh scholar,” he paused and stared at Nakkirar’s eyes, “not even Parvati’s hair?”

Nakkirar stood spare and unafraid. In a detached way, his mind took in all the terrible changes in the stranger’s form. Then he looked straight at the luminous eye in the middle of the stranger’s forehead around which sparks of blue seemed to dance. He spoke with quiet finality:

Netri kannaneaayinar, kuttram kuttramay.

(Even if it’s the Third-Eyed One, a fault is a fault).

The end of this story does not matter. Did Shiva burn this honest fanatic to a crisp with one flash of his dreaded third eye? Or was it Nakkirar who told Shiva to go to blazes? And did Shiva, once his wrath cooled, acknowledge the scholar’s defiant honesty and ‘restore’ him as a God rightly should? And, in the final analysis, can one ever forget such a gutsy character?

Nearly two thousand years later, Indian memory hasn’t been able to.

Renuka Khandekar is a freelance writer on the arts. She is presently Editor of Roli Books’ Lotus Collection.

Illustration: Anil

The poverty of the learned is better than the wealth of the unlearned. -Tamil.
FROM MAHARASHTRA

MAHALAKSHMI KAHANI

The word 'kahani' (story) in Marathi has distinct connotations: a melodramatic tale, heroic and full of pathos is one, but more traditional is a religious story read or narrated by the elders, particularly women, on the day of a vrata, which means religious observances, including fasting and special prayers. Special tales or Vrata Kathas are told as part of a calendrical ritual and their telling in that context has ritual efficacy. It is believed that both tellers and listeners receive benefits. Very often, an ordinary tale may acquire this status by being told in such a context. Sawan or the monsoon month is the month of many vratas. Almost everyday of the week there is a vrata and a story to go with it, for instance, somwarchi kahani (Monday), shukrawarchi kahani (Friday), etc.

The Mahalakshmi Kahi (the story of the Mahalakshmi vrata) which incidentally, does not fall in the month of sawan, is a traditional story. I have tried to retain a kahani's basic features - simplicity, repetitive narrations and so on. Another speciality of the kahani is that it doesn't resort to any direct sermonising.

RETOLD BY ARVIND DIXIT

In a certain kingdom spread far and wide, there lived a king with two wives, Pattamadhavri, who was his favourite and Chimbadevirani whom he didn’t love at all.

The king’s greatest enemy was the demon, Nandabaneshwar who possessed awesome powers. In the blink of an eye he could scale great heights in the sky and also dive down to the bottom of the deepest ocean. He was so elusive! And such a menace! He must be caught at any cost.

So the king addressed all his citizens one morning and ordered them to produce Nandabaneshwar before him, dead or alive.

Navalvat, a young man and his old, poor mother lived a quiet life in this kingdom. When he heard the king’s proclamation of catching the wicked demon he told his mother,

“Pack up some food for me. I’m joining the others in the demon hunt.”
"My son, we must all obey the king's orders. But they are not free of danger and so you must be careful. Besides, do not mingle so easily with the others. Eat separately or they will see the coarse food which I'm giving you. They are sure to make fun of you," said the old woman.

"Yes, I shall remember what you say," replied Navalvat.

She packed some jowar bhakris and bid him farewell.

Navalvat was faithful to his mother's advice. He kept so far away from the others that by nightfall, he strayed into a thick jungle. Meanwhile, his friends returned to the city and reported to the king that their search was fruitless.

Totally lost in the forest, the young man could find no place to rest except the top of a tree. At the stroke of midnight, he was awakened from his rather restless sleep to see a group of beautiful devkanyas (celestial maidens) and nagkanyas (snake maidens), radiant with the most exotic jewellery, and wearing gorgeous clothes. Each one carried a ghaggar or copper pitcher. And what was most peculiar, each of them wore a band of yellow thread on their wrists.

Then they placed a brass mask of Mahalakshmi Ambabai against a tree. Thus began a strange ritual which made Navalvat sit glued to his branch with fixed eyes.

First, they offered flowers to the mask, then filled their copper pitchers with the smoke of the smouldering incense, beginning at the same time, a rhythmic dance. A step to the right, a step to the left, one to the rear and one to the front. With each step they would gently toss the ghaggar in the air and let it fall into their joined palms, puff into its deep hollow, pfoo, pfoo, pfoo... They danced away into the night, gazing at the mask of Amba.

Navalvat was trembling with excitement. He couldn't contain himself any longer, so he slid down the trunk and asked them for the meaning of this ritual.

"This vrata is to propitiate the Mother Mahalakshmi. Seek her favour, a boon maybe."

"What kind of boon?" Navalvat asked.

"If Amba is pleased, you can unravel the most riddlesome. The impossible becomes the easily possible, the missing will be found," a devkanya explained.

Navalvat joined them in their ritual of propitiation. Towards the wee hours of the morning, Amba appeared to them in person.

"I am very pleased with you, my son," she said. "The enemy of your king will be found dead in the palace courtyard. You will be given half the kingdom and you will have a grand mansion next to the palace." Mahalakshmi then vanished to her usual abode, the temple of Kolhapur, before her devotees there would find her missing.

It was a morning like any other in the king's palace. Except that when the queen woke up and looked out of the window, to her surprise, lay the supine body of Nandabaneshwar, the dreaded villain! Naturally, it was only a matter of time before the whole palace was agog with the news. The king was particularly happy and asked,

"Who is the brave man that slayed the demon?"

It was puzzling. All the people sent by the king had returned saying that Nandabaneshwar could not be found. But wait! Wasn't there one young man who did not return that night, the old woman's son? "Call him," said the king.

Navalvat was brought before the king, nervous and trembling with fright.

"My Lord, what have I done! I am innocent of any crime. I promise!"

"Don't worry, my son," the king assured him. "People tell me that you killed my enemy. Is it true?"

"No, my lord, not me. It must have been the goddess's blessing," and so saying, Navalvat recounted the whole episode of the devkanyas and nagkanyas.

"But what was Ambabai's blessing?" the king enquired.

"Sir, she said that I would be given half the kingdom. And also that I will have a grand mansion next to the palace."

The king did just that and Navalvat lived comfortably.

Meanwhile, Pattamadhrani, the favourite queen of the king heard the story of Ambabai's appearance to Navalvat and how she blessed him. So promptly she went to him and asked him for details about the vrata.

"You may begin on the eighth moon of the month of Ashwin. Make a wrist band of sixteen threads of cotton, coat it with turmeric, offer sixteen grains of rice and sixteen times you must make water offerings to the tulsi plant. You must do this year after year at the same time," explained Navalvat.

The yellow wrist band of cotton threads annoyed the king.

"Have I given you innumerable gold bangles studded with precious stones? Why do you insist on wearing this dirty thread? Get rid of it and let me see your arms covered with those beautiful bangles."

The queen made a fatal mistake. She undid the frail yellow wrist band and flung it away. The servants found it on the floor and took it to Navalvat, who was surprised and annoyed that the queen had flouted the rules of the vrata. Surely she would have to pay for this!

So, it was not surprising that when Chimadevrani, the queen who was out of favour with the king, also wanted the sacred thread, Navalvat was deeply suspicious. On being assured that her intentions were indeed sincere and
honourable, he initiated her too in the rituals of the vrata.

The month of Ashwin arrived. Mahalakshmi Ambabai disguised as an old woman appeared before the favourite queen, Pattamadhavari. Although the latter had adopted the sacred initiation rituals, Ambabai found that the vrata was not being observed. She asked the queen in a quavering, old woman’s voice,

“Oh queen, is there anything special about today?”

“No, why should there be? It is as any other day”, the queen retorted.

“Oh well, then give me water to drink, my daughter, and your kingdom shall never be short of water”, the old woman said.

“Fool! What nonsense. No shortage indeed! Get you gone, old woman,” the queen hissed back.

“Give me a bowl of curd and rice and there will be no shortage of curd and rice in your kingdom”, Ambabai persisted.

“Oh will it now! I said please leave!” the queen scoffed.

Then the old woman cursed her thus, “You thoughtless young lady! How can you turn away a needy person from your doorstep? And what thoughtlessness you exhibit! You will soon be turned into a half-frog, half-woman and will have to take refuge in the other queen’s bath!”

Ambabai vanished. And decided to visit Chimadevirani’s section of the palace, where she saw festoons of leaves and smelt the smoke of incense. She could see that the area was all prepared in readiness for her worship.

The old woman could not resist a question, “Oh queen, what is so special about today?”

“Oh aai, don’t you know, Mother Mahalakshmi Ambabai is going to visit us today?”

“Then believe me, I am Mahalakshmi.”

“How can I be so sure, old lady?”

At this, Ambabai instantly assumed the appearance of a young girl, grew into a charming woman by noon and into an ageing woman by evening. The queen was overwhelmed. This is really Mahalakshmi visiting me! Blessed am I!

She welcomed the old woman, bathed and fed her and began to blow into the ghagar. The ritual began.

Poo, poo, pooo, the blowing echoed. When the king heard the sound he followed it to the chambers of his second queen, who welcomed him and entertained him with a game of dice till dawn. It was time for Mahalakshmi to return to her abode at Kolhapur. As she was leaving she asked the second favourite queen what boons she should grant her. “Nothing”, said she.

“Oh, but the king will now treat you as his favourite. And besides, Pattamadhavari will be turned into a half-frog, half-woman and take refuge in your bath tank”, said the goddess.

“Please don’t be so harsh on her”, Chimadevirani begged.

“Alright, as you say. But she will be banished from the country for twelve years.”

The goddess left.

The king began to take notice of his second queen. He even began to like her! He summoned his royal chariots and took Chimadevirani on a grand public procession. It was almost as if he were showing her off! He sent word to Pattamadhavari to receive them with full honours. But, as she was wont to do, she received them in shabby clothes and gave no reception at all. The king was furious and as kings often do, banished her into the forests to be executed there.

But the king’s servants had received several favours from her. How could they behead her just like that? They set her free and she roamed the forests till she reached a far off town.

The wandering queen strayed into the potters’ section of the town. Here, the potters were making special pottery for the new queen. But, despite all their skills and constant work the job never ended. Must be an ill omen in their midst, they mused. They combed the town, found the queen and dragged her out by her hair. Naturally, in a few moments, she found herself walking away from the town. Wherever she went, she met with the same fate, in the bangle makers’ village, the goldsmiths’ village and the weavers’ village. Everywhere they thought that she was a witch who brought them ill luck.

Twelve years passed. The queen lived with a rishi, a saint who taught her the ways of the scriptures. She repented for her deeds and became a devotee of Mahalakshmi. One day, while deep in meditation, Mahalakshmi appeared before her, “Arrange for plenty of drinking water,” was all she said and disappeared.

The next day the king came to the same forest for a hunt. He got thirsty and sent his men to look for water. They found Pattamadhavari and her plentiful supply of cold water. They went back and told the king who recognised his old wife immediately and seeing how she had been transformed, he took her back to the palace. The three of them lived in harmony and understanding.

May Ambabai not be displeased with us as she was with Pattamadhavari. Let us end the tale here as it has always been ended.

Illustrations: Oron
The Fatal Light

This is the legend of Kunakeshwar, a Shiva temple which still stands on the seashore near Devgad in the Ratnagiri District of Maharashtra. The present narration is based on 'Toofan', from a collection published by Shivshahir B. M. Purandare.

RETOLED BY
ARVIND DIXIT

This happened during the days when many a traveller from East and West used to leave their homelands with their quills and diaries for Hindustan, the land of plenty. The land of gold and jewels, of peacocks and pearls, of evergreen trees and exotic herbs, of the finest cloth and choicest condiments.

Aziz was one such traveller. He was an Arab, a devout Muslim. He had begun as a petty peddler, but by dint of hard work became master of a kafila, acquired a dhow and then a multi-masted schooner. He was now on a voyage to Hindustan.

Before leaving, he visited his mosque. He carried, reverently, a carved box in which was the Holy Quran. It was a gift from the Maulavi.

He then cast his sails and the journey began. The sails were new and neatly rigged and the ropes were strong. Ample provisions were loaded and all merchandise safely stored away from the salty air. His sailors were certainly well experienced and to top it all, he had acquired an interpreter who could explain to him the different experiences in Hindustan. And then the Maulavi’s gift of the Quran. Allah was great!

His first stop was in Iran. Though he sold a lot of his merchandise there, he replenished his stock on board with the choicest of Iranian goods. He then proceeded due East, resolving not to stop till he reached Hindustan.

He had heard so much about this fabled land - about its trading centres and the beautiful women who went about without a burkha. All that he heard fascinated him except one thing. The Hindustanis worshipped idols! Idols of wood, stone or metals. Idols, humans and animals. How could they commit this sacrilege? Surely that shouldn’t be allowed.

One full moon night, after having sailed without sight of land for many anxious days, he studied the sky. "Anytime now, men, we should be there", he assured them.

And then suddenly everything changed. The sky became murky and overcast. The wind tore into the sails and pushed the schooner forward at tremendous speed. The sea became choppy and the vessel rolled and pitched like one possessed. They were caught in a fearful storm.

Aziz took charge. "Steer to the East, I say, to the East. Common men, harder!" Nothing was visible, they felt as if they were under a dimensionless, dark dome. Only the ship buckled and lunged. Lord, help us, Aziz prayed. He fumbled for his Quran nestling in the carved box. He picked it up, hugged it to his heart, kissed it and wept, "Oh Allah, please pardon our mistakes. You are the greatest. If we survive we shall fulfill all our obligations to your word, etc."
to Islam.” He repeated this prayer again and again.

“Sahib, look yonder! I see some light. Allah has heard us”, cried one of his men. They peered through the spray and the mist and saw a flicker of light far away.

“The light, the light! Allah, you are the greatest! I shall build a grand edifice for whoever was responsible for the light. Only save us all”, Aziz pleaded.

The storm subsided and the sea grew calm. The schooner began to move towards the light almost as if something was drawing it towards where the light came from. They touched land. Aziz ran as fast as he could towards the light, seeing nothing except its increasing glow. And when he reached it, he stopped, not being able to believe his eyes. Oh Allah, could this be an optical illusion? Why are you doing this to me, your eternal servant? Toba, Toba! He felt cheated. Fate was being very cruel to him indeed!

There, amidst flowers and incense was a Shivalingam, lit up by large oil torches, the flames of which leapt and crackled as the wind blew. The devotees had performed their worship and then left. It was the night of the Tripuri Poornima.

Idols! The very idea was antithetical to Islam. How thoughtless and impulsive of him to vow that he would build an edifice for the source of that light! Would that the sea had taken him rather than build an edifice for an idol! The koffers! Allah, guide this servant. Am I to be loyal to your Word or shall I fulfill my promise? His anguish wracked his body, not letting him sleep the whole night. He prayed till dawn and then made his decision.

He summoned his interpreter and walked to the village near the idol. The latter informed the villagers that his master intended to build a grand temple for their God on the shore. All expenses would be borne by his master but the villagers must co-operate and help him build it. They were overjoyed that some stranger who didn’t even know their language was going to build a temple for their homeless Shiva!

There, amidst flowers and incense was a Shivalingam, lit up by large oil torches, the flames of which leapt and crackled as the wind blew. The devotees had performed their worship and then left. It was the night of the Tripuri Poornima.

Work began the very next day. Aziz pitched a tent and started staying there to supervise the work. Every morning he would order more bags of money from the ship and empty them before the waiting villagers. They would take the money and distribute it to get men and materials. Work was progressing rapidly.

As days went by, Aziz became reflective, meditative. He was immersed in the Quran and prayed a lot, quite oblivious of the work going on outside.

The day the temple was completed, the villagers went mad with joy. Thousands from neighbouring villages thronged to see it. Hundreds of priests gathered to perform the pranaprathisthana puja or the
installation of the dality. The bells rang incessantly, horns and conches were blown and the drums beat a dizzy rhythm. And then, as the sun dipped at dusk, the villagers, tired after the celebrations grew sober and ready for the evening worship, the aarti. As the dusk deepened, they started for their homes.

Aziz had a strange sense of satisfaction that night. He had kept his word to Allah. Yet he could not sleep. Outside, there was a cool sea breeze and the waves foamed back and forth. He picked up his Quran and came out of his tent. Not a leaf stirred. Right in front of him was the Shiva temple, tall and imposing. The temple that he, Aziz, servant of Allah had built. He walked towards it, and tied up his Quran to his waist band. Slowly he started climbing the temple wall, looking for a foothold here, a crevice there. He reached the shikhra, the crown of the dome over the sanctum sanctorum. With quiet hands he took his Quran from his waist band, touched it to his forehead, closed his eyes and prayed,

"Oh Parvardigar! I seek to be pardoned. For I know I have contradicted your tenets and built a house of prayer for an idol. But if I had not, I still would have been a sinner for not keeping my word. What an irony! I am confused, yet I know I have gone against you. Here is my penance."

So praying, he jumped to the earth from the highest point of the temple roof. "Rehman-ur-Rahim, Bismillah!" were his last words.

The next morning the villagers found him dead with the Quran clutched tightly in his hands.

Arvind Dixit works in the University of Delhi as a Senior Technical Officer in the Plant Molecular Biology Department. He is actively interested in theatre and reviews Marathi plays for the Hindustan Times. He has publications of short stories and a novel and a play in Marathi to his credit.

Illustrations: Anoop Kamath

JATAKA TALES

The Jataka tales from Buddhist literature are a lively and profoundly wise collection of stories. Each story begins with a 'story of the present'. This relates the circumstances in the Buddha's life which lead him to tell the birth-story or the main story. It ends with a summary where he identifies the actors in their present births at the time of his discourse.

SASA-JATAKA

This story was told by the Master about a gift of all the Buddhist requisites. A certain landowner at Savatthi, they say, provided all the requisites for the Brotherhood with Buddha at its head, and setting up a pavilion at his house door, he invited all the company of priests with their chief Buddha, and offered them a variety of choice and dainty food. And saying, "Come again to-morrow," he entertained them for a whole week, and on the seventh day he presented Buddha and the five hundred priests under him with all the requisites. At the end of the feast the Master, in returning thanks, said, "Lay Brother, you are right in giving pleasure and satisfaction by this charity. For this is a tradition of wise men of old, who sacrificed their lives for any beggars they met with, and gave them even their own flesh to eat." And at the request of his host he related this old-world legend.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta came to life as a young hare and lived in a wood. On one side of this wood was the foot of a mountain, on another side a river, and on the third side a border-village. The hare had three friends - a monkey, a jackal and an otter. These four wise creatures lived together and each of them got his food on his own hunting-ground, and in the evening they again came together. The hare in his wisdom, by way of admonition, preached the Truth to his three companions, teaching that alms are to be given, the moral law to be observed, and holy days to be kept. They accepted his admonition and went each to his own part of the jungle and dwell there.

And so in the course of time the Bodhisatta one day observing the sky, and looking at the moon knew that the next day would be a fast-day, and all three of you take upon you the moral precepts, and observe the holy day. To one that stands fast in moral practice, alms-giving brings a great reward. Therefore feed any beggars that come to you by giving them food from your own table." They readily assented, and abode each in his own place of dwelling.

On the morrow quite early in the morning, the otter saluted forth to seek his prey and went down to the bank of the Ganges. Now it came to pass that a fisherman had landed seven red fish, and stringing them together on a withe, he had taken and buried them in the sand on the river's bank. And then he dropped down the stream, catching more fish. The otter scenting the buried fish, dug up the sand till he came upon them, and pulling them out cried aloud thrice, "Does any one own these fish?" And not seeing any owner he took hold of the withe with his teeth and laid the fish in the jungle where he dwelt, intending to eat them at a fitting time. And then he lay down, thinking how virtuous he was! The jackal too saluted forth in quest of food and found in the hut of a field-watcher two spits, a lizard and a pot of milk-curd. And after thrice crying aloud, "To whom do these belong?" and not finding an owner, he put on his neck the rope for lifting the pot, and grasping the spits and the lizard with his teeth, he brought and laid them in his own lair, thinking, "In due season I will devour them," and so lay down, reflecting how virtuous he had been.

The monkey also entered the clump of trees, and gathering a bunch of mangoes laid them up in his part of the jungle, meaning to eat them in due
season, and then lay down, thinking how virtuous he was. But the Bodhisatta in due time came out, intending to browse on the kucca grass, and as he lay in the jungle, the thought occurred to him, "It is impossible for me to offer grass to any beggars that may chance to appear, and I have no oil or rice and such like. If any beggar shall appeal to me, I shall have to give him my own flesh to eat." At this splendid display of virtue, Sakka’s white marble throne manifested signs of heat. Sakka on reflection discovered the cause and resolved to put this royal hare to the test. First of all he went and stood by the otter’s dwelling-place, disguised as a brahmin, and being asked why he stood there, he replied, "Wise Sir, if I could get something to eat, after keeping the fast, I would perform all my priestly duties." The otter replied, "Very well, I will give you some food," and as he conversed with him he repeated the first stanza:-

Seven red fish I safely brought to
land from Ganges flood,
O brahmin, eat thy fill, I pray, and
stay within this wood.

The brahmin said, "Let be till tomorrow. I will see to it by and bye." Next he went to the jackal, and when asked by him why he stood there, he made the same answer. The jackal, too, readily promised him some food, and in talking with him repeated the second stanza:-

A lizard and a jar of curds, the
keeper’s evening meal,
Two spits to roast the flesh withal I
wrongfully did steal:
Such as I have I give to thee: O
brahmin, eat, I pray.
If thou shouldst deign within this
wood a while with us to stay.

Said the brahmin, "Let be till tomorrow. I will see to it by and bye." Then he went to the monkey, and when asked what he meant by standing there, he answered just as before. The monkey readily offered him some food, and in conversing with him gave utterance to the third stanza:-

An icy stream, a mango ripe, and
pleasant Greenwood shade,
Tis thine to enjoy, if thou canst dwell
content in forest glade.

Said the brahmin, "Let be till tomorrow. I will see to it by and bye." And he went to the wise hare, and on being asked by him why he stood there, he made the same reply. The Bodhisatta on hearing what he wanted was highly delighted, and said, "Brahmin, you have done well in coming to me for food. This day will I grant you a boon that I have never granted before, but you shall not break the moral law by taking animal life. Go, friend, and when you have piled together logs of wood, and kindled a fire, come and let me know, and I will sacrifice myself by falling into the midst of the flames, and when my body is roasted, you shall eat my flesh and fulfil all your priestly duties." And in thus addressing him the hare uttered the fourth stanza:-

Nor sesame, nor beans, nor rice have
I as food to give,
But roast with fire my flesh I yield, if
thou with us wouldst live.

Sakka, on hearing what he said, by his miraculous power caused a heap of burning coals to appear, and came and told the Bodhisatta. Rising from his bed of kucca grass and coming to the place, he thrice shook himself that if there were any insects within his coat, they might escape death. Then offering his whole body as a free gift he sprang up, and like a royal swan, alighting on a cluster of lotuses, in an ecstasy of joy he fell on the heap of live coals. But the flame failed even to heat the pores of the hair on the body of the Bodhisatta, and it was as if he had entered a region of frost. Then he addressed Sakka in these words: "Brahmin, the fire you have kindled is icy-cold: it fails to heat even the pores of the hair on my body. What is the meaning of this?" "Wise sir," he replied, "I am no brahmin. I am Sakka, and I have come to your virtue to the test." The Bodhisatta said, "If not only thou, Sakka, but all the inhabitants of the world were to try me in this matter of almsgiving, they would not find in me any unwillingness to give," and with this the Bodhisatta uttered a cry of exultation like a lion roaring. Then said Sakka to the Bodhisatta, "O wise hare, be thy virtue known throughout a whole seon." And squeezing the mountain, with the essence thus extracted, he daubed the sign of a hare on the orb of the moon. And after depositing the hare on a bed of young kucca grass, in the same wooded part of the jungle, Sakka returned to his own place in heaven. And these four wise creatures dwelt happily and harmoniously together, fulfilling the moral law and observing holy days, till they departed to fare according to their deeds.

The Master, when he had ended his lesson, revealed the Truths and identified the Birth:- "At that time Ananda was the otter, Moggallana was the jackal, Sariputta the monkey, and I myself was the wise hare."
Latukika Jataka

This was a story told by the Master concerning Devadatta, while dwelling in the Bamboo grove. One day they raised a discussion in the Hall of Truth, saying, "Sirs, Devadatta is harsh, cruel and violent. He has not an atom of pity for mortals." The Master told them,

"Brethren, not now only, but formerly also he was pitiless". And here-with he told a story of the past.

Once the Bodhisattva came to life as the leader of an elephant herd in the Himalayas. At that time a quail laid her eggs in the feeding ground of the elephants. Soon the little birds emerged. But before they could fly, he Great Being with his mighty herd of elephants came to this spot ranging for food. The quail feared for the safety of her young ones. Raising her two wings, she stood before him and said,

Elephant of sixty years, 
Forest lord amongst thy peers 
I am but a puny bird. 
Thou a leader of the herd; 
With my wings I homage pay, 
Spare my little ones, I pray.

The leader elephant was moved by her plea and stood protection over the chicks while the herd passed by. Then, before leaving, he warned her of a solitary, disobedient, rogue elephant coming behind and told her to entreat him too so as to ensure the safety of her young. She did as she was instructed, but the rogue elephant was a cruel, pitiless fellow.

I will slay thy young ones, quail! 
What can thy poor help avail? 
My left foot can crush with ease 
Many thousand birds like these.

So saying, he crushed the little ones to atoms and went off trumpeting loudly. The quail was enraged and swore revenge.

Power abused is not all gain, 
Power is often folly's bane. 
Beast that didst my young ones kill, 
I will work thee mischief still.

She sought out first a crow, then a blue fly, and then a frog and did a good turn to each of them. In return each of them agreed to help her wreak revenge on the elephant.

One day the crow plucked out the elephant's eyes and the fly dropped its eggs into the empty sockets. The elephant went mad with the pain of being eaten by maggots. He raged about, overcome with thirst and looked for water. Then the frog, standing on top of a mountain, uttered a croak. The elephant thought there was water there and climbed up the mountain. The frog descended and croaked from the bottom. The elephant followed the sound and came to a bloody end. For he had moved towards the precipice and fell headlong over its edge.

The quail strutted over his body in delight. "I have seen the back of mine enemy", she said and flew away.

The Master said, "Brethren, one ought not to incur the hostility of anyone. These four creatures, by coming together, brought about the destruction of this elephant, strong as he was.

A quail with crow, blue fly and frog allied
Once proved the issue of a deadly feud
Through them the king elephant untimely died
Therefore all quarrelling should be eschewed.

Uttering this stanza inspired by Perfect Wisdom, he thus identified the Birth: "At that time Devadatta was the rogue elephant and I myself was the leader of the herd of elephants."

THE ETERNAL SEARCH

FROM ORISSA - A PARENGA FOLK TALE

In the southern part of Orissa, in the district of Koraput live the Parengas, a small tribal community of a few thousands. Like every tribal community, the Parengas too have their myths which are passed down through the oral tradition. The myths of the Parengas are more or less influenced by Hindu mythology. Among their tribal gods, Krishna, Bhima, Jama Deota (the God of Death) etc, all find a place, but are conceived of differently. For instance, Bhima is their rain god. Gods such as Dong Dong and Marding Deota are distinctively their own. This tale was collected by Verrier Elwin in the forties. Like most of the Parenga tales it has a mythical motif.

RETOLED BY JIVAN PANI

Once upon a time, there was a Parenga king. His queen gave birth to a daughter who was more beautiful than any flower. She was named Roopadai, literally meaning, 'goddess of beauty'. She was so beautiful that all the wild animals, including the fierce ones stared at her. When youth touched her body she looked like a blazing fire of beauty. Naturally, the gods coveted her and sought her hand. But she thought, “Why should I marry a god when I have taken birth as a human being”? 

Roopadai's father, the king, was petrified. The gods, he was sure, would never swallow rejection and were very vengeful. He was particularly afraid of Jama Deota, the God of Death. Once his eyes fell on the maiden he was sure to abduct her and take her to heaven where he would marry her! Therefore he ordered Roopadai not to come out on the roof and expose herself to the sky. Jama Deota's eyes often roved about in the sky.

The King searched for a human suitor for Roopadai. A young Parenga man was chosen. On seeing Roopadai, he fell desperately in love with her and was more than happy to marry her. And what a marriage that turned out to be! They were so happy. As these things go, could they be so forever?

Roopadai stayed on in her father's house even after her marriage to her Parenga husband. Her mother had died when the girl was young, even before her puberty. So, being the only female member of her family, her father requested her to stay on.

One day, the king went out hunting with his son-in-law. Roopadai cooked their dinner and waited for them to return. In a fit of excited anticipation, she went on to the roof to watch them heading for home. It was clear that she had completely forgotten the warning issued by her men that she was not to expose herself to the sky.

Jama Deota was looking around as usual from behind the clouds. His roving eyes fell on Roopadai, so gentle, fragile and exquisite. In one fell swoop, almost on impulse, he scooped her up and she vanished into the clouds.

When the men returned, they were horrified. Where could she have gone? They searched the palace, the land, the country. Yet no Roopadai was found. They went mad with grief. Surely Roopadai must have heeded their advice and not even thought of exposing herself to the sky. So they ruled out the possibility that Jama Deota could have abducted her. It must have been some prince from a far off land who could not resist her beauty.

Roopadai's husband sank into grief, inconsolable, abysmal. No food, not even a drop of water could be take. There was no life for him without his wife. He searched and searched. Every river, every building, every forest, every tree. He walked to neighbouring kingdoms searching.....till one day, overcome with lack of food and exhaustion, he lay down and breathed his last. That look of intense search clung to his eyes even as his body lay limp on its back, face upwards. It appeared as if his stilled eyes were searching for his wife in the infinity of the sky.

An eagle was flying high in the sky, looping and diving, cutting through the clouds and lunging downwards. Even from the earth one could hear its shrill
THE PLEA

RETOLD BY
GEETI CHANDRA

Once upon a time, in a little village in Bihar, there lived a farmer who tended his fields every day. One day, he noticed that birds were eating his crops. When this continued for several days, he decided he must do something about it; being a kind-hearted man he did not want to harm the birds. Therefore, he resolved to catch them in his net and take them across the Ganga where they would not be able to harm the crops. Accordingly, one morning, he spread his nets in his fields and when he returned in the evening, they were full of little birds.

But as he was carrying them away in his nets, the birds began to plead with him, singing,

chìn chìn chìn choon
the farmer whose corn we ate
chìn chìn chìn choon
has caught us in his net
chìn chìn chìn choon

from mountains and hills we come
chìn chìn chìn choon
our hungry children cry at home
chìn chìn chìn choon.

The farmer told the little birds he wouldn’t hurt them; only take them across the Ganga where he would leave them. Just then a marriage party was spotted, coming down the road towards the farmer and his unhappy prisoners. Seeing the merry faces, the beaming groom and the shy bride, the birds thought that these happy people would surely influence the farmer. So they began to sing,

chìn chìn chìn choon....

The bride hid her tears in her red sari. The groom looked very serious and the entire marriage party stopped their singing and dancing to listen to the birds. Finally the groom spoke, “Brother farmer, take all our finery, money and food. Take my wife’s jewels. Take even our utensils and houses, but let the birds go.” All the members of the marriage party pleaded with the farmer. But he refused, saying, “I will not accept these things. I will set them free only when I have crossed the Ganga.”

So the farmer and the birds went on their way and a little further down the road near a village they saw a woman milking her cow. As soon as they saw her the birds began to sing,

chìn chìn chìn choon....

Moved by the thought of the hungry children waiting at home for their mothers to feed them, the milkmaid begged the farmer to set them free. “Think of the poor hungry ones. Here, take this pail full of milk but let these birds go.” But the farmer refused the milk saying, he would release the birds only after he crossed the Ganga. They proceeded down the dusty road. Before long they saw a young girl carrying a copper pot full of water. The birds cried out,

chìn chìn chìn choon....

As she poured water for the farmer, the kind hearted girl said, “Why don’t you set the birds free? You can have my copper pot and my bucket, but please let them go.”

The farmer thanked her for the drink but refused to let the birds go, saying, “I shall not harm them but wish to leave them across the Ganga.”

It was now almost nightfall and the farmer and his birds trudged slowly down the road. At the outskirts of a tiny village, they came across an old farmer quietly harvesting his crop. With renewed energy and hope, the birds appealed to him,

chìn chìn chìn choon....

The old man understood what had happened. “Brother”, he said to the young farmer, “I can understand your loss. Here, take my crops in compensation for your own and let these poor creatures free.”

Our young farmer was satisfied and thanking the older one, he took as much from his harvest as he had lost and let the birds free. Then he went home with the crops and settled down to his old life.

The story has disappeared into the woods
Sit and ponder it as you should.

Geeti Chandra teaches English Literature at St. Stephens College, Delhi.
Illustration: Shubhbrata
FROM BIHAR - A BOJPURI TALE

PIRINYA

RETOLD BY
DR. KUSUMLATA SINGH

Piriny is a popular celebration of Western Bihar carried out in the month of Kartīk (October-November) by unmarried girls for a happy and prosperous married life, and well being of both the father’s and the father-in-law’s families at large. Pirinya literally means patties. Made out of cow dung and stuck on the inner walls of the household store or the cowshed, these objects are duly worshipped for 32 days. In the morning after a ritual bath the girls listen to this story from the elderly womenfolk of the family and then break their fast. The story highlights the merits of observing this celebration. She who has observed it in any one of her seven lives ensures the well being of her children for six successive births.

The story depicts two friends one who has sincerely observed the Pirinya and the other who has not. The one who has not, despite having been born in a princely home, married a king and living in all material comforts is unhappy because all her children die. The other who is only a humble priestess is blessed with seven sons, with merits having accrued from observing Pirinya. Seeing her friend in agony the priestess sympathises with her sincerely, wanting to cry and mourn as well. She even wants her own son dead. The queen is surprised, for how can any well meaning mother want to harm her own sons. After much persuasion she tells the priestess ways and means to kill her sons and fulfil her strange wish. The priestess tries desperately every time to kill her sons but she fails. At this juncture the Gods intervene only to show that no harm can befall the children of pious mothers who have painstakingly observed the Pirinya. Instead even her tears have so much power that they can bring a dead man alive.

This story is known as the Bari Kahni, The Big Story and told over he first sixteen days of the celebration followed by the Short Story, Chotki Kahni over the next sixteen days.

When the celebrations commence green stalks of the new paddy crop are plucked and stacked in the courtyard. On the 32nd day the stalks ripen. On that day the girls pick out the ripe grains of rice. In the afternoon they smear the walls of the store with cow dung and the green juice of the gourd leaves. They grind some rice to a paste and mix it with water to make a white paint. With the help of a fine bamboo brush they paint the walls with images of gods and goddesses, family members, household accessories, auspicious symbols, birds and plants. In the evening a sweet porridge is made of the newly harvested rice mixed with milk and jaggery. The girls mix the raw grains in this porridge and stuffing their ears with cotton wool so that they don’t get disturbed, quickly eat the porridge. Next morning they receive a gift of new flattened rice (Chura) and laddoos and this is how the celebration draws to a close.

The Piriny story is told in Bhojpuri. The style of narration is fast, something akin to rap music today. The verses are all in rhymes and the imagery is most graphic providing details of the rural life of West Bihar.

1) Haat - local market.
2) Netua - folk dancer.
3) Bahu - daughter-in-law.
4) Seth - Businessman.

THE STORY OF PIRINYA

The mason’s daughter and daughter of the bard
Go out shopping to the haat (I)
Both of them meet a fatal end
And are reborn both the friends
One marries a King the other a priest
And they beget seven sons each
That of the queen perish and die
And of the priestess all survive
To the palace goes the priestess
Oh! my sister, I like you wish to mourn
Cry in despair and scatter my tresses.

Sister oh, Sister you wish to mourn
The Queen repriamsds full of scorn
But the priestess keeps insisting
Seeing there is no point in resisting
Says the queen:
Go my sister scatter some mustard,
Your sons will come slip and fall
hurt themselves and perish and die
You scatter your tresses, cry and mourn
And lo! the priestess scatters some mustard
Come home the sons
Who neither slip nor fall
neither hurt themselves nor perish and die
The priestess can neither scatter her tresses
Cry and mourn.

Says the priestess:
Oh! my maid go and see
Which one is dead which one survives?
Comes back the maid:
Oh! my mistress none is dead, all survive
The bard rejoices, the netua dances
The city sings, the wives revel - all full of life
To the palace goes the priestess
And tells the queen
Sister oh, Sister, I could not mourn.

Says the queen:
Go my sister bring some poison
mix with sweets and keep aside
Your sons will come eat and die
You scatter your tresses cry and mourn
And lo! the priestess brings some poison
mixes with sweets and keeps aside
Come home the sons
Mother oh, mother we are hungry
Give us something to eat
Oh! my sons your aunt has sent
For you some sweet
Pick each of you a piece of it
dip it in milk and to your content you eat
Went forth the sons and lo! they repeat
Their mother's word into action
To her satisfaction.

Says the priestess:
Oh! my maid go and see
which one is dead which one survives?
Comes back the maid:
Oh! my mistress none is dead all survive
The bard rejoices, the netua dances
The city sings, the wives revel - all full of life
To the palace goes the priestess
And tells the queen
Sister oh, sister, I could not mourn.

Says the queen:
Go my sister call a snake charmer
get a snake
put it in a vessel
And keep it concealed
your sons will come pick up the vessel
The snake will bite and they will die.
You scatter your tresses cry and mourn
And lo! the priestess gets a snake
puts it in a vessel
and keeps it concealed
Come home the sons
Mother oh, mother, give the vessel
we'll get some milk
Oh! my sons take the vessel
It lies by the oven
And with your hands wash it clean
Went forth the sons
Put out their hands
pick up the vessel
Bring it close to their mouth
And blow it aloud
a golden necklace in it
they find dusting and wearing it they leave the vessel behind.
A TINY TALE FROM BIHAR

REINDEER BY ANJALI JHA

In Bihar where I come from, there are many stories about a character called Gono Jha. I heard one of them from my grandmother. It goes like this...

Once a thief crept into Gono Jha’s house. But he was not a very clever thief for he came in during the morning when the entire household was up and about. He realised his mistake as soon as he got in. But what could he do now? He had to wait and make his escape without being seen.

He looked around for a place to conceal himself. Ah, that charpoy (a bed made of woven ropes) in the corner was ideal! He dived underneath and curled himself into a tight ball. He was safe for now at least!

He hadn’t reckoned with the sharp eyes of Gono Jha who had spotted him right away, but said not a thing.

A few moments later, a visitor came to meet Gono Jha. They sat near the charpoy and began to chat.

Gono Jha offered paan (betel leaves and other condiments all rolled up) to his guest and then popped one into his mouth as well. They chatted and chewed, chewed and chatted. Then suddenly, Gono Jha spat a long red stream of paan juice aiming it under the charpoy. Alas, his aim was not quite accurate for a tiny drop fell on the guest’s immaculately clean dhoti. The gentleman was enraged.

“Have you no knowledge of how to spit paan?” he yelled and then proceeded to lecture Gono Jha on the art and technique of paan spitting.

Gono Jha heard him out silently. When the guest cooled down, Gono Jha said,

“A mere spot has angered you so much, my friend. But look at the coolness of the thief on whom I spat the rest!”

Ashamed and trembling, the thief crawled out from under the charpoy. He begged forgiveness and promising never to steal again, he ran from there in shame.

Anjali Jha studies in Class XI at Carmel Convent, New Delhi.
ORIGIN OF OPIUM

FROM BENGAL

The Origin Of Opium

RETOLD BY
LAL BEHARI DEY

Once upon a time there lived on the banks of the holy Ganges, a rishi who spent his days and nights in the performance of religious rites and in meditation upon God. From sunrise to sunset he sat on the river bank engaged in devotion, and at night he took shelter in a hut of palm-leaves which his own hand had raised in a bush hard by. There were no men and women for miles around. In the hut however, there was a mouse, which used to live upon the leavings of the rishi's supper. As it was not in the nature of the sage to hurt any living thing, our mouse never ran away from him, but, on the contrary, went to him, touched his feet, and played with him. The rishi, partly in kindness to the little brute, and partly to have some one to talk to at times, gave the mouse the power of speech. One night, the mouse, standing on its hind-legs and joining together its fore-legs reverently, said to the rishi, "Holy sage, you have been so kind as to give me the power to speak to men. If it will not displease Your Reverence, I have one more boon to ask." "What is it?" said the rishi. "What is it, little mouse? Say what you want." The mouse answered, "When Your Reverence goes in the day to the river side for devotions, a cat comes to the hut to catch me. And had it not been for fear of Your Reverence, the cat would have eaten me up long ago; and I fear it will eat me some day. My prayer is that I may be changed into a cat that I may prove a match for my foe." The rishi became propitious to the mouse, and threw some holy water on its body, and it was at once changed into a cat.

Some nights after, the rishi asked his pet, "Well, little puss, how do you like your present life?" "Not much, Your Reverence," answered the cat, "Why not?" demanded the sage. "Are you not strong enough to hold your own against all the cats in the world?" "Yes," rejoined the cat. "Your Reverence has made me a strong cat, able to cope with all the cats in the world. But I do not now fear cats; I have got a new foe. Whenever Your Reverence goes to the river side, a pack of dogs comes to the hut, and sets up such a loud barking that I am frightened out of my life. If Your Reverence will not be displeased with me, I beg you to change me into a dog," The rishi said, "Be turned into a dog," and the cat forthwith became a dog.

Some days passed; when one night the dog said thus to the rishi: "I can not thank Your Reverence enough for your kindness to me. I was but a poor mouse, and you not only gave me speech but turned me into a cat, and again you were kind enough to change me into a dog. As a dog, however, I suffer a great deal of trouble. I do not get enough food; my only food is the leavings of your supper, but that is not sufficient to fill the maw of such a large beast as you have made me. O, how I envy those apes who jump about from tree to tree, and eat all sorts of delicious fruits! If Your Reverence will not get angry with me, I pray that I be changed into an ape." The kind-hearted sage readily granted his pet's wish, and the dog became an ape.

Our ape was at first wild with joy. He leaped from one tree to another, and sucked every luscious fruit he could find. But his joy was short-lived. Summer came on with its drought. As a monkey he found it hard to drink water out of a river or a pool; and he saw the wild boars splashing in the water all the day long. He envied their lot and exclaimed, "O how happy those boars are! All day their bodies are cooled and refreshed by water. I wish I were a boar." Accordingly at night he recounted to the rishi the troubles of the life of an ape and the pleasures of that of a bear, and begged of him to change him into a boar.

The sage, whose kindness knew no bounds, complied with his pet's request, and turned him into a wild boar. For two whole days our boar kept his body soaking wet, and on the third day, as he was splashing about in his favourite element, whom should he see but the king of the country riding on a richly caparisoned elephant. The king was out hunting, and it was only by a lucky chance that our boar escaped being bagged. He dwelt in his own mind on the dangers attending the life of a wild boar, and envied the lot of the stately elephant who was so fortunate as to carry about the king of the country on his back. He longed to be an elephant, and at night besought the rishi to make him one.

Our elephant was roaming about in the wilderness, when he saw the king out hunting. The elephant went towards the king's suite with the intention of being caught. The king, seeing the elephant at a distance, admired it on account of its beauty, and gave orders that it should be caught and tamed. Our elephant was easily caught, and taken into the royal stables, and was soon tamed. It so chanced that the queen...
expressed a wish to bathe in the waters of the holy Ganga. The king, who wished to accompany his royal consort, ordered that the newly-caught elephant should be brought to him. The king and queen mounted on his back. One would suppose that the elephant had now got his wishes, as the king had mounted on his back. But no. There was a fly in the ointment. The elephant, who looked upon himself as a lordly beast, could not brook the idea that a woman, though a queen, should ride on his back. He thought himself degraded. He jumped up so violently that both the king and queen fell to the ground. The king carefully picked up the queen, took her in his arms, asked her whether she had been much hurt, wiped off the dust from her clothes with his handkerchief, and tenderly kissed her a hundred times. Our elephant, after witnessing the king's carelessness, scampered off to the woods as fast as his legs could carry him. As he ran he thought within himself thus, "After all, I see that a queen is the happiest of all creatures. Of what infinite regard is she the object? The king lifted her up, took her in his arms, made many tender inquiries, wiped off the dust from her clothes with his own royal hands, and kissed her a hundred times! The happiness of being a queen! I must tell the rishi to make me a queen!" So saying the elephant, after traversing the woods, went at sunset to the rishi's hut, and fell prostrate on the ground at the feet of the holy sage. The rishi said, "Well, what's the news? Why have you left the king's stud?" "What shall I say toYour Reverence? You have been very kind to me; you have granted every wish of mine. I have one more boon to ask, and it will be the last. By becoming an elephant I have got only my bulk increased, but not my happiness. I see that of all creatures a queen is the happiest in the world. Do, holy father, make me a queen." "Silly child," answered the rishi, "how can I make you a queen? Where can I get a kingdom for you, and a royal husband to boot? All I can do is to change you into an exquisitely beautiful girl, possessed of charms to captivate the heart of a prince, if ever the gods grant you an interview with some great prince!" Our elephant agreed to the change and in a moment the sagacious beast was transformed into a beautiful young lady, to whom the holy sage gave the name of Postomani, or the Poppy-Seed Lady.

Postomani lived in the rishi's hut, and spent her time in tending the flowers and watering the plants. One day, as she was sitting at the door of the hut during the rishi's absence, she saw a man dressed in a very rich garb come towards the cottage. She stood up and asked the stranger who he was, and what he had come there for. The stranger answered that he had come a-hunting in those parts, that he had been chasing in vain a deer, that he felt thirsty, and that he came to the hut of the hermit for refreshment.

Postomani: Stranger, look upon this hut as your own house. I'll do everything I can to make you comfortable. I am only sorry we are too poor suitably to entertain a man of your rank, for if I mistake not you are the king of this country.

The king smiled. Postomani then brought out a waterpot, and made as if she would wash the feet of her royal guest with her own hands, when the king said, "Holy maid, do not touch my feet, for I am only a Kshatriya, and you are the daughter of a holy sage."

Postomani: Noble sir, I am not the daughter of the rishi, neither am I a Brahmini girl, so there can be no harm in my touching your feet. Besides, you are my guest, and I am bound to wash your feet.

King: Forgive my impertinence. What caste do you belong to?

Postomani: I have heard from the sage that my parents were Kshatriyas.

King: May I ask you whether your father was a king, for your uncommon beauty and your stately demeanour show that you are a born princess.

Postomani, without answering the question, went inside the hut, brought out a tray of the most delicious fruits, and set it before the king. The king, however, would not touch the fruits till the maid had answered his questions. When pressed hard, Postomani gave the following answer: "The holy sage says that my father was a king. Having been overcome in battle, he, along with my mother, fled into the woods. My poor father was eaten up by a tiger, and my mother at that time was brought to bed of me, and she closed her eyes as I opened mine. Strange to say, there was a bee-hive on the tree at the foot of which I lay; drops of honey fell into my mouth and kept alive the spark of life till the kind rishi found me and brought me into his hut. This is the simple story of the wretched girl who now stands before the king."

King: Call not yourself wretched. You are the loveliest and most beautiful of women. You would adorn the palace of the mightiest sovereign.

The upshot was, that the king made love to the girl and they were joined in marriage by the rishi. Postomani was treated as the favourite queen, and the former queen was in disgrace. Postomani's happiness, however, was short-lived. One day as she was standing by a well, she became giddy, fell into the water, and died. The rishi then appeared before the king and said: "O king, grieve not over the past. What is fixed by fate must come to pass. The queen, who has just been drowned, was not of royal blood. She was born a rat; I then changed her successively, according to her own wish, into a cat, a dog, a boar, an elephant, and a beautiful girl. Now that she is gone, do you again take into favour your former queen. As for my reputed daughter, through the favour of the gods I'll make her name immortal. Let her body remain in the well; fill the well up with earth. Out of her flesh and bones will grow a tree which shall be called after her Posto, that is, the Poppy tree. From this tree will be obtained a drug called opium, which will be celebrated as a powerful medicine through all ages, and which will always be either swallowed or smoked as a wonderful narcotic to the end of time. The opium smoker or smoker will have one quality of each of the animals to which Postomani was transformed. He will be mischievous like a rat, fond of milk like a cat, quarrelsome like a dog, filthy like an ape, savage like a boar and high-tempered like a queen."

---

Lal Behari Dev is the author of Peasant life in Bengal and Folk Tales of Bengal.

Illustration: Anoop Kamath
FROM BENGAL

Santi-A Ballad

The ballads of Bengal are a joyful, celebration of love and life. In their depiction of the landscape of Bengal is a spontaneity and earthiness that has a universal appeal.

These ballads originated from Eastern Mymensing (now in Bangladesh) a region once dominated by the Garos, Rajvansis and other Semi-Aryan tribes who loved art and literature.

A distinctive feature of these ballads is the pre-eminence accorded to women and their depiction as strong, independent individuals, imbued with “a graceful modesty and firmness of purpose.”

“Santi” is the tale of a maiden wooed by her own husband, unbecknownst to her.

The ‘Baramasi’ songs of Bengal are reflected in this ballad, where a particular flower, fruit or festive occasion marks each month of the year.

RETOLD BY
DINESH CHANDRA SEN

(1)

“Sweet October has come, sweet is the milk in unripe aman rice. My mind is restless, O Santi, as I behold thy youthful charms.”

“Calm thy restless heart and quiet thy soul, O lad, to-morrow at dawn shall I go to yonder landing-ghat all alone and meet you there.”

“Neither am I a physician, lad, nor versed in the sacred lore; a simple village-girl, daughter of Guno of the Baniya-caste am I. If indeed you suffer from a malady, how can I cure it?”

(2)

“You are filling your pitcher, girl, go on doing so. But know that I am in charge of the tank and guard it here.”

“False! It is the virtuous king who has dug the tank and made its landing-ghat of stone for public use. I, the girl Santi, am filling my pitcher from the tank. I do not believe thee and care not for any guard.”

“You have deceived me, O Santi, all these days of November by your glib tongue. My hopes have evermore remained unfulfilled. Behold with new charms on the landscape, November has made its appearance.”

(3)

“In this sweet November thou lookest like a silvery streak of moonbeams; O, do not vanish away, but allow me, a stranger, to be revived by a sight of thee.”

“Night is coming. I must take care that my mother-in-law may sleep in comfort. I hold a stranger like you in the light of a father or brother.”

“This month, too, thou hast deceived me by your glib tongue. Behold the change on the fair face of Nature, announcing the advent of December.”

(4)

“It is December now and hear my vow. I will enter your sleeping room at the end of the night and get by stealth what I cannot get as a gift.”

“A hundred candles will I keep burning in my room to-night, and at the gate our elephant, Gajamati, will keep watch.”

“I will blow out all your hundred candles, and the elephant Gajamati will I kill at your gate by the force of my arms.”

“I will cover my bracelets with the edge of my sadi lest they jingle, and, sword in hand, shall I keep watch all night. If, at the end of night, the thief is caught, this is my vow that I shall sacrifice him at the altar of the goddess Chandi.”

“This month too, Santi, you have deceived me with your glib tongue. With a change in the landscape has January made its appearance.”

(5)

“It is January. Look, dear one, the sadi you wear is too short. Spread its flowing end as far as you can and receive the humble present of sweet betels and nuts that I have brought for you.”

“Take away these presents, I do not want them, lad. You have an elder sister at your house, present these to her, if you like.”

“Cruel words hast thou spoken, O Santi. The presents I mean for you, and you wish them to be given to my sister! You cause pain to my heart by saying so. Now for all these days of January you have played cunningly with me, deferring my hopes from day to day. Behold February shows itself with all its new and beauteous colours in Nature.”

(6)

“It is February. The nights are long. If on such a night a guest comes to your door, what will you do to receive him?”

“A couch and sofa will be spread for him in the outer room; soft pillows will be given to make his sleep easy and sound. He will have fine rice and pulses for his meals and a blanket will be given him to make the wintry night warm.”

“You have beguiled me, dear girl,
with your glib tongue this month also. My hopes remain unfulfilled evermore. Behold the approach of March, bringing an array of fresh charms to the landscapes around."

(7)

"It is March. The heat is scorching, Thy beauteous and youthful figure, O Santi, burns my heart with a desire, which I know not how to allay."

"A bad mother gave birth to you, wicked youth, and your father was a wretched eunuch. If there is heat in your body, why not jump down into yonder river and cool your body's heat therein."

"This month is also gone, O Santi, you have deceived me by your glib tongue and withheld the fulfilment of my hopes. On the fair face of Nature have bloomed forth new beauties announcing April."

(8)

"It is April now. Like the sweet layer of cream over milk is your lovely youth, O Santi! but what purpose does it serve, if like a miser, you guard your treasure from others."

"My youth is not a water-melon to be cut to pieces for distribution at dinner. Nor is it the milk of a woman's breast for feeding her babe."

"O cunning one, this month is also gone and you have beguiled me by your glib tongue, I pine with unfulfilled hopes. Behold the new charms of the landscape, indicating the approach of May."

(9)

"It is May. The mangoes are ripe in yonder grove; plenty of these fruits, besides jacks and black-berries, have I brought as my humble present for you."

"Keep these aside, lad, I do not want them. Go home and present them to your sister."

"Cruel are your words, O Santi, these presents are made to you and you cause pain to my heart by your refusal. This month has also gone and my hopes are evermore deferred."

Look at the change of landscape, announcing June."

(10)

"It is June, O Santi, behold the flood in rivers. Near Kanchanpur in the swelling stream has your husband been drowned on his way home."

"False! Had my husband died in the swelling stream near Kanchanpur, the chignon on my head would have been unloose of itself. The pearl-necklace on my breast would have been unstrung, the shell-bracelets in my hands, known by their pet names, Ram and Lakshman would have been
broden and the brightness of the red
sign of luck on my forehead would
have slowly faded away. I believe in
these signs and not in your reports, O
false lad."

"This month, also, hast thou beguiled
me by thy glib tongue. My hopes are
unfulfilled and I am joyless.
Behold, on all sides, July's advent is
proclaimed by a change in the
landscape."

(11)

"It is July. The muddy knee-deep
water is seen everywhere. When
passing from one house to another
through this watery path, you will be
served with some gentle strokes from
my stick of twigs as punishment."

"Beat me as hard as you can with
your stick, O lad. Kill me and float
my body in the river. But know, still
I will not go to a stranger's house."

"This month, also, hast thou beguiled
me by your glib tongue, and my
hopes remain unfulfilled. Behold
Nature wears a new apparel at the
advent of August.

(12)

"It is August. The rivers are full. I
will give you a boat, rowed by
sixteen men for playing race in this
pleasing season."

"Give your boat to your sister or to
your mother, or to those who care for
your presents. I do not value them."

"This month, too, you have beguiled
me by your cunning words. Nature
now has changed her scenes and
announces September."

(13)

It is September. In every house the
divine mother Durga is worshipped.

"Look at me closely, O Santi, I am
here, thy own dear husband, returned
home after long days. Don't you
know me, dear?"

Santi bowed her head down at these
words. "Swear by God," she said,
"and speak the truth."

"Which is your native city? What is
your name, O youth? And who are
your parents?"

"I am a native of Bahatia. There I
own a house of my own. My father is
a Kalpatauru and my mother's name is
Ganeswari. I married you, O Santi,
years ago, on the fifteenth of an
October. The pet name, by which I
am called, is Kilan Sadagar."

"If really art thou the dear one of my
heart, be pleased to stay here a while.
I will return instantly after enquiring
of my parents if your account is
true."

(14)

"O, my old father and O, my dear
mother, what are you busy with, at
this moment? Will you tell me to
whom you gave me, your daughter,
taking the due sum of money?"

"You have passed your twelfth year,
and now stand on the threshold of
youth. Is it the inclination, natural to
your age, that makes you discover a
husband at the gate?"

With a lamp in hand and a toka on
his head, the old man walks in slow
pace to see if really the son-in-law
has come.

"It is he, O Santi, no doubt, it is he.
Go, receive him. He, the jewel of
your heart, has been found at last.
Now open the chest, containing your
dresses and ornaments. Find out your
hair-comb of mica and articles of
toilet."

Santi divided her hair into two lovely
rows and made a chignon, over which
she spread garlands of champa and
parul flowers. She put a tiara on her
head and wore the chandrarah and a
waist-belt of the moon-pattern. From
her neck hung a lovely necklace. She
wore armlets on her arms and bracelets
on her wrist. Anklelets jingled on her
feet and string of the largest pearls she
wore on her breast. Her eyes she beautified
with the black kaajal-dye, and to finish
all, she put, on her forehead, the red
mark of luck.

See how bright and lovely she looks
tonight, as she softly treads the ground to
go to the nuptial room to receive the
husband of her heart.

... Folksongs are like the cry of the migrant geese on the
sandbanks of the Padma ...'

'Folk poetry and folk songs, whatever be their subject
matter and whichever sect or community they originate
from deserve to be assiduously collected by all lovers of
literature in the best interest of enriching our mother
tongue. They enable us to get better acquainted with our
fellow men and with their hopes and aspirations, joys and
sorrows ...'

Rabindranath Tagore

Dr. Dineshchandra Sen, the late
scholar, was an expert in the field
of rural Bengali literature. His
'Ballads of Bengal' is a painstaking
collection of the songs of Eastern
Myemensing, published in four
volumes.

Illustration: Anil
In a certain village in the hill district of Almora there once lived a simpleton called Bhuula. His wife wanted to invite her sister home one day and she asked him to go to her father’s place and bring her. On the eve of his departure, when Bhuula was sitting in his room puffing on the hookah, his cousins came and noticing his luggage asked him: “Where are you going?” Bhuula said: “I am going to my in-laws to fetch my sister-in-law.” The cousins said, “We know you are a simpleton, so be careful about your conduct in your father-in-law’s house, otherwise you will have no end of trouble.” “What should I do?” Bhuula asked. His cousins said: “If you meet anyone on the way you should greet him heartily in a loud voice and say, Namaste. When you are at your in-laws’, don’t speak more than what is necessary, otherwise you may say something foolish. Just say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, as occasion may require.” Bhuula promised to do as he was told, and next day set out on his journey.

On the way he came across a fowler who had spread his net to catch birds. By chance when he reached there the birds had entered the net and the fowler was about to close the net when Bhuula stood near and said in a loud voice: Namaste, bhai, Namaste! The fowler was startled, and so were the birds. Much to his annoyance the birds escaped. The fowler gave him a sound beating for having driven off his birds, and said: “What a fool you are to come bungling into my business. Now where shall I get my birds from?” Bhuula answered: “This was what I was to say but I see that it does not seem to be the right thing. Pray tell me what I should say then?” The fowlers said: “You should say, ‘Keep on coming and getting caught!’” Bhuula said: “All right, next time I will say this,” and went on. He had gone a mile or so when he met some thieves who were returning after having committed a theft. As soon as he saw them Bhuula said: “Keep on coming, and getting caught!” Hearing these words of ill-omen the thieves caught hold of him and gave him a good thrashing. One of them brandished a dagger and said: “We have let you off cheaply this time, but if you ever speak thus again we will put this through you.” Bhuula said in a trembling voice: “Sir, I didn’t mean any ill but it seems I haven’t said the correct thing. Tell me, what should I say?” The thieves said: “You should say, ‘Continue to bring and deposit.’” Bhuula thanked them for the advice and proceeded on. Soon he saw a marriage procession come that way, and keeping in mind what he had been told he said: “Friends, may this never happen!” The men in the marriage procession were shocked to hear his ill-timed words and began to beat him with their fists. This time sense dawned on poor Bhuula, and he did not ask for any more advice!

At last he arrived at the house of his father-in-law. He was given a hearty welcome and after he had refreshed himself with tea and sweets his mother-in-law asked him: “Son, does it go all well with you?” Bhuula remembered the advice given by his cousins and said: “Yes.”

“Is my daughter all right?” she asked.

“No,” replied Bhuula.

Hearing this the old woman was worried. “Is she sick?” she asked him. “Yes”, said Bhuula, seeing that he had already answered “no” to the previous question.

“Is she not improving?” his mother-in-law asked anxiously.

“No,” replied he.

The old woman began to fear the worst, and thought that Bhuula was speaking briefly because he wanted to break the news gently. She asked him breathlessly, “Is she dead?”

“Yes,” replied Bhuula.

Hearing this, his mother-in-law screamed and fainted. People ran from all sides and sprinkled water on her face. When she revived, they asked her what it was all about. She pointed to her son-in-law and said: “He has brought the news of my daughter’s death,” and began to weep. But her husband did not believe her, for only a day back he had got a letter informing him that she was well, so he asked Bhuula: “Is my daughter really dead?”

“No” he said, to the relief of them all. ●

K.P. Bahadur is an eminent folklorist and has compiled many collections of folktales.
FROM UTTAR PRADESH

THE CIRCLE ROUND THE THRONE

RETOLD BY SUDHIN GHOSE

Benares has, from time immemorial been famous for its Brahmins, bulls, and brocades. Its Brahmins are the most orthodox, its bulls the loudest roarers, and its brocades the finest in the world. Yet, thanks to the first, the brocade-makers were not allowed to own any land in the city of Benares till the time of King Bramha Datta. "The brocade-makers," the Brahmins used to say, 'are mere weavers - men of low degree. They lack intelligence and scholarship. If they were allowed to settle in the town their stupidity would infect the air. It is best that they should live in the suburbs and ply their craft there — far from the city's heart.'

Now, one day when King Bramha Datta was sitting on his throne, listening to the petitions of his subjects, the Prime Minister came running to him and whispered, "Sire! Something terrible has happened. The Mongols have sent us an ambassador extraordinary."

"Is that so very terrible?" said the King. "Show him in. We are ready to receive him. There is no reason whatsoever for you to tremble. He is, after all, an ambassador like any other."

"This Mongol envoy," the Prime Minister explained, "is very different from all others. He wants to deliver his message in signs. And that worries me a lot."

"Well," the King said, "if that is the case it can't be helped. Let him deliver his message today, and we shall give our answer tomorrow. That's the best we can do in the circumstances. Surely our wise Brahmins will be able to interpret his sign language. It is not polite to keep a foreign envoy waiting. Let him come in."

At this, the Prime Minister went out to usher in the Mongol emissary, and every pair of eyes turned towards the main entrance of the throne room to have the first glimpse of the extraordinary messenger.

Every pair of eyes turned towards the main entrance of the throne room to have the first glimpse of the extraordinary messenger.

The ambassador came in and bowed. He said nothing, but taking a piece of red chalk, drew on the floor a large circle with the King's throne as the centre. He then bowed again and withdrew.

"His Excellency will come back tomorrow at this hour for his answer," said the ambassador's companion and interpreter. And then he too withdrew with a bow.

"It is puzzling," murmured the King. "It is indeed so," echoed the courtiers, while the Prime Minister stroked his chin wondering as much as the others about the red circle round the throne.

Later on, when alone with the Prime Minister, King Bramha Datta asked, "What was the message of the Mongol envoy?"

"Sire," replied the Prime Minister, "I think he wished to say your throne is the very centre of the earth; your seat is a seat of glory."

"Nonsense," said the King and laughed. "I am not so innocent as to believe that the formidable Mongols have sent their envoy over mountains and deserts to deliver a message of this sort. Maybe, it is a declaration of war. Anyway, what answer are we to give?"

The Prime Minister adjusted his turban, thought for some time as he caressed his chin, and finally declared that he did not know what to say. He had consulted all the learned Brahmins and they too were as mystified as he. "We are not concerned with conundrums," the Brahmins had told him. "Our job is to interpret the scriptures. Go, consult the bulls: they may give a reply in signs."

"And did you try out the bulls?" the King asked jovingly.

"I did," the Prime Minister replied. "But they gave no answer either!"

"I guessed that"
"I saw him sitting at his loom, guiding his threads. He has made a machine which works by the current of the river: it swings his child’s cradle, it makes his bell ring, it swishes the arms of his willow, it makes his loom work."

end. He called for the watchmen, and they were instructed to question everyone in Benares and its environs for an answer to the Mongolian envoy’s message. And everyone — man, woman and child — gave a puzzled stare when interrogated. None knew the answer.

much. But what about the brocade-makers?

"Sire, they are more stupid than the brahman bulls."

"Maybe, you are right," said the King. "Maybe, you are not. However, you should do well to consult them. Anyway, we must be ready with our answer to-morrow morning. Otherwise," he ended, "you understand..." He did not finish his sentence.

The Prime Minister nodded. He understood what the King meant - if there was no answer forthcoming by the next sunrise the Prime Minister would lose his post. Bramha Datta was a man of his word.

So the harassed Prime Minister hastened to consult the weavers.

But there were no brocade-makers to be found anywhere! Being banned from the city they had gradually withdrawn from the suburbs as well. The poor Prime Minister was at his wits end. The enigma of the circle round the throne remained unsolved.

The Prime Minister was on his knees praying hard when a watchman came in to report: "Perhaps I have found the man who knows the answer."

"Where?" asked the Prime Minister jumping to his feet. "Where is he? Bring him here at once."

"That’s not so easy, sir," the watchman murmured. "He is a difficult man—the only brocade-maker living in the suburbs of Benares. And he refuses to come inside the city unless he is especially invited by the King."

"The cheek," muttered the Prime Minister. "Tell me, what makes you think that this arrogant man knows the answer? He is a weaver, you say. As a rule, weavers are inscrutably dull. I think he is stupid as well as overbearing. He must be an exceptional idiot."

"Not this one, sir," the watchman said. "On the contrary, he seems to be exceptionally clever. For, when I entered his house by the riverside I found there a cradle swinging by itself."

"That’s curious."

"And that was exactly what I said to myself. Then I thought it would be worthwhile to see the owner. So I pushed open the door leading to the inner hall, and immediately a bell began to ring on its own."

"What happened next?" asked the Prime Minister.

The watchman recounted that a passage through the inner hall led to the back garden of the brocade-maker’s cottage, and there was a patch of corn growing by the riverside where a willow swished its branches perpetually to chase away the birds. "Though, mind you," he added, "there was no wind. The tree seemed to move its arms by itself. And I repeated to myself, 'This is most curious.' I then looked round and cried, 'Ho! Where’s the owner?' "I am in the workshop," someone replied."

"Make your story short," said the Prime Minister impatiently. "Did you talk to him? What did he say?"

"I saw him sitting at his loom, guiding his threads. He did nothing else. He has made a machine which works by the current of the river: it swings his child’s cradle, it makes his bell ring, it swishes the arms of his willow, it makes his loom work. "So," I said to myself, "here is my man. And I told him all about the red circle drawn round the throne by the Mongol envoy."

"A maker of mere mechanical toys!" the Prime Minister sneered. Nevertheless, curiosity prompted him to ask, "What was his answer?"

"He laughed as he thumped me on the back and said, 'Go, and fetch the King before I give the answer.' 'You want the King and nobody else!' I cried. To this he replied, 'The Prime Minister will do, hurry. I have hurried, and here I am.'"

"Show me the way," the Prime Minister said. By now he was convinced that the weaver in question was truly an exceptional man. "It is already late. There is no time to lose."

The brocade-maker laughed heartily when he heard the Prime Minister’s story, and then told him not to worry as it was not yet morning.
"Do you understand my plight, good man?" the worried Prime Minister said. "I am trembling in my shoes. Not so much for myself as for the reputation of Benares. To be baffled by a Mongol envoy! Oh, the shame of it. Please give the correct answer, and you will get anything you ask for. Our King Bramha-Datta is a man of his word."

"Don't worry, Prime Minister," the brocade-maker repeated. "Come back tomorrow before sunrise. The answer will be ready then."

The next morning when the Prime Minister came to fetch the brocade-maker he found him arranging a few odd things to put them in a bag—a pair of knucklebones, a toy fiddle, some walnuts and a small cage containing a pair of tame sparrows.

"What are these for?" asked the surprised Prime Minister.

"For the Mongol envoy," the brocade-maker replied. "These will certainly undo him."

A blare of trumpets announced the entry of the Mongol ambassador extraordinary into the throne room of King Bramha-Datta. He came in and bowed as before. This time he took a seat facing the King as his companion and interpreter beckoned for an answer to the enigma of the red circle round the throne.

"On behalf of our gracious sovereign," the Prime Minister announced, "our trusted friend, the master brocade-maker of Benares, will give the answer."

At this, the weaver got up and placed his knucklebones on the floor beside the envoy. The Prime Minister and the courtiers held their breath, wondering if that was the correct answer to the problem posed by the mysterious circle of red chalk. Meanwhile, the Mongol ambassador gave a contemptuous glance at the knucklebones and rose to draw a much smaller circle round the throne in black chalk — or was it a piece of charcoal? — and then returned to his seat.

Every pair of eyes now scrutinised the brocade-maker—what was he going to do? He took out his toy fiddle from his bag and started a gay dance tune. To this the Mongol envoy replied by taking out of his pocket a handful of seed grains and scattering them on the floor. The weaver immediately produced his pair of tame sparrows and set them down, and these ate up the grains in less time than it takes to tell.

Now the envoy laid on the floor a piece of chain-mail — one of his epaulettes, and the weaver responded by piercing it with a pair of needles, the finest ones he used for making his brocades. Both the envoy and his companion-interpreter picked up these needles and examined them carefully; they then shook their heads and bowed to each other. Our weaver now came forward with one of his walnuts and gave it to the envoy, which cracked it between his thumb and forefinger as easily as one would crush a fried peanut shell.

A sigh rose from the Prime Minister and the courtiers gasped, for the nut was found to be hollow and filled with dew. They stared hard at the weaver—was he, after all, going to let down the King of Benares by offering the plenipotentiary a bad walnut? But the brocade-maker simply beamed. He twirled his thumbs when he saw the envoy and his companion-interpreter turn ashen and hold their breath as the drop of dew rolled out and proved to be a brocaded silk shawl, full ten yards long and ten yards broad.

The Mongol ambassador then rose gravely from his seat for the last time to bid farewell. He bowed, joining his stretched palms to salute in the Indian fashion, and our weaver slipped two walnuts into his cupped hands. The companion-interpreter also saluted in the same way to take his departure; and he too was given a walnut by the weaver.

They then left the court without uttering a word.

When the fanfare for their departure had ended, King Bramha Datta summoned the weaver to his side and said, "You have guessed the riddles of the Mongols and answered them correctly. Now ask me what you will and it will be yours. But pray tell me what all this means. No one in the court has understood a thing."

"Sire," answered the brocade-maker, "the meaning is quite simple. The red circle round your throne was the threat, 'What will you do if Mongol forces surround your kingdom?' The answer was — knucklebones! 'What are you compared with us?' — Mere children. Toys like knucklebones are the fit things for upstarts."

"And the meaning of the smaller black circle?"

"It implied, 'If the Mongols use the scorched earth policy and came closer to you, what will be your answer? The response was, 'Fiddlesticks!' At this the envoy produced his seed grains to indicate the armies the Mongols can bring into the field. And I replied, 'A couple of our tamest, the least equipped armies could annihilate a host of theirs. Even when protected by chain-mail?' 'Yes, even then. And if you don't believe me, Sir envoy, please examine the quality of the steel of my needles.' And that, Sire, settled the issue."

"Then," asked the King, "what about the brocade-maker did not ask for gold nor for gems, but simply that he and his brother craftsmen should be privileged to have the same rights as the Brahmins and bulls in Benares."
the walnuts?"

"Simply to emphasise the message of the needles— A nation of craftsmen clever enough to make ten square yards of brocade look like a dewdrop can also manufacture weapons capable of piercing through any chain-mail. 'The other three walnuts were also filled with pieces of Benares silk, and these were gifts for the Mongol ruler. Seeing is believing', the brocade-maker went on, "and I am sure the Mongol ruler would not believe a word of his envoy's story without some convincing tangible proof. So I gave away a few yards of brocade which any man can easily buy in the bazars of Benares.'"

"Now," said the King, "tell me your price. You have saved my honour and brought credit to Benares. What would you like to have for your services?"

The brocade-maker did not ask for gold nor for gems, but simply that he and his brother craftsmen should be privileged to have the same rights as the Brahmins and bulls in Benares.

And since that day the best brocade-makers of India have made Benares their home, and the greatest poet of Benares, Kabir, chose the profession of a weaver to earn his daily bread. "While," said he, "the wisdom of the learned comes from the opportunity of his leisure, the wisdom of the craftsman comes from the perfect mastery of his craft."

---

FROM KUMAON

THE KAPHAL BIRD

RETOLED BY
SUCHITRA CHAUHAN

As a little girl, I grew up in Ranikhet in the Kumaon Hills of the northern Himalayas. Kumaon is indescribably beautiful and serene. We lived on the top of a mountain in an old English bungalow, which I remember, had yellow roses climbing all over the roof. Looking down from the house, I could see meadows carpeted with daisies.

Often we used to hear the plaintive, sweet call of a little black bird echoing amidst the trees. And my mother had this story to tell me.

In a little village near Ranikhet, a little boy lived with his stepmother. The lady and the boy made a living by gathering the red fruit of the Kaphal tree and selling it in the market. They were very, very poor and had no other means to live. One day the boy set off as usual to pluck the fruits. It was a warm day. He filled his basket with as many fruits as he could pluck, but alas, by the time he returned home, they had shrunk in the heat to half their size. So it appeared that there was hardly any fruit in the basket. The stepmother was enraged. She screamed at him, "You greedy boy, you've eaten most of the fruits! What money will these few leftovers fetch us?"

So shouting she began to beat the boy furiously, again and again, till blue welts began to show on his arms and legs. The boy writhed in agony, pleading her to stop.

Again and again he cried:

Kaphal pako
Mein ni chako...

which in the Kumaoni language means, 'the kaphals were ripe but I did not eat them'.

Yet she continued to beat him relentlessly. Tears streamed down his face and fell on the basket and then suddenly he dropped down unconscious. The step mother looked into the basket and to her amazement she saw that it was full of the Kaphal fruit. The fruit had regained their original size, having swollen themselves with moisture from the boy's tears. The stepmother realised her mistake, but it was too late. She looked towards the boy and to her amazement she saw his still form transform into a bird and fly off into the distant hills crying out,

Kaphal pako
Mein ni chako....

Even today, the bird sings this sad song. You can hear it as it echoes through the forests of Ranikhet, and fades away over the hills. This is the tale that my mother told me.

---

SOME RIDDLES

Q. All the children of a mother are shivering.
   A. Banian tree leaves.

Q. One bridge for two wells.
   A. The nose.

Q. The last to come, the first to leave.
   A. Teeth.

Q. Here and there it hides in a corner.
   A. Broom.
WHY THE MAHABHARATA WAR WAS FOUGHT AT KURUKSHETRA

FROM HARYANA

RETOLD BY INDU ROY CHAUDHURY & VEENA SRIVASTAVA

The Kauravas and the Pandavas were the ruling families of Northern India. The Kauravas were power drunk and unjust. They cheated the Pandavas and sent them for twelve years into exile. When the Pandavas completed their exile and returned to their kingdom, the Kauravas were reluctant to give them back the share of their kingdom.

Lord Krishna inspired the Pandavas to fight for their rights. Now this was a difficult task. The Kauravas and Pandavas were cousins and therefore like brothers. It was impossible for them to think of facing each other on the battlefield which would mean killing one’s own kith and kin.

Lord Krishna went out in search of a place which would enable the Pandavas to overcome their emotions. He travelled through India and came to Kurukshetra. Here he saw a farmer working in his field and his son standing nearby. The farmer was trying to stop the water from running out of the boundary of his field. He was piling mud and stone, but the boundary would not hold water and kept on leaking.

The farmer looked around for something to plug the boundary so that it would stop leaking. Finding nothing, he caught hold of his son, cut his head and plugged the boundary with it. At once it stopped leaking. Satisfied, he then sat down and began to have his meal. He did not give a second thought to his son.

Lord Krishna was convinced. This was truly a place where people were devoid of all emotion. A father could kill his son without hesitation for a small job like repairing the boundary. Therefore, he selected Kurukshetra for the battle where the two families would go to war without letting their emotions cloud their thinking.

Indu Roy Chaudhury and Veena Srivastava are eminent folklorists.

... Stories are there before any particular teller tells them; they hate it when they are not passed on to others...

... Stories are part of a more pervasive process in society. The tales demonstrate over and over again that daughters (and sons), wealth, knowledge and food must circulate. These are danas or gifts, that in accordance with their nature must be given and received. Stories are no different. Communities and generations depend on such exchanges and transfers.

-A. K. Ramanujan-
Rimjha, the fair Gaddi maiden was the pride of the hamlet of Railu. Words could not describe her beauty which was a challenge to the gods themselves. The clear air of the mountains and the fresh food that the tribespeople ate, contributed to the colour and lustre of Rimjha’s face. And how she loved the flower-dotted hillsides and pine trees!

But, as tales go, Rimjha didn’t know that her whole life was going to change when the King of Kangra came to hunt near her Gaddi hamlet. The king was thirsty but only till he set eyes on Rimjha, with whom he was instantly besotted. That long, darker-than-night hair, her pink cheeks and startling eyes made an impression that rooted him to the ground.....

Kangra, nestling in the folds of the mountains of Himachal Pradesh, has this tale to tell. The region is home to the Gaddi tribe, traditional herdsmen, simple and sturdy. In the evenings, when the livestock are warmly inside, the community gathers around a fire. An important member of the community is the proverbial grandmother, bursting with stories of local heroes, demons and witches. No less important are the thwarted tales of romance, full of excitement and political intrigue, bloody battles and hard won triumph. Yet they are imbued with the deepest tragedy, very much in the tradition of ‘fatal romance’ tales all over the world. True love meets a disastrous end, yet survives because of the truth of it. The ballad, with its repetition and vivid imagery is an ideal form of narration for such a story as this one......

O fair maiden of Gaddi
Here comes the King of Kangra
To the village of Railu after his game
But your charm has worked

its spell
And now he’s but insane!
O graceful maiden of Gaddi.

But he realised that he could not stand there forever and stare at her. He needed an excuse to approach her. So he asked her for some water. There was no water to be found, whereupon Rimjha milked one of her goats and gave the warm milk to the king. He could bear it no longer and he started enticing her.

O young Gaddni, what’s life in these mountains
So empty, so worthless.
Stop roving in the jungles.
Your elegant beauty would lighten up
A mansion in these pastures.
This large and unbecoming cloak
Is it not an outrage to your beauty?
Throw it and draped in silks
You my love, toasted in the city you shall be
Can anyone here celebrate your beauty?

But what would this
RIMJHA AND DHARMU

Gaddni know of silks, she whose only ornaments were the flowers of the trees?
“What are silks ?”
“It’s a kind of cloth, dainty and exquisite.”
“What is the colour of silk?”
“Like this rose.”
“Who wears them?”
“The rich of the city wear them.”
“Then these are not for me.”
She said:

Silks and muslins are meant for kings and queens,
And for those whose lives are rich.
But for a Gaddni who has lived free
My simple cloak adorns me.
The muslins and shoes are for you
But what suits the rich can’t suit us too.
Don’t you see the needle work on
my cloak
Are the flowers not in their natural colours?

To prove this the Gaddni matched the wild flowers with the flowers embroidered on
her cloak. It was so real, so skilled! Even the king’s master craftsmen could not replicate with such perfection! Surely even the butterflies must be confused about discriminating between the original and the embroidered. What an accomplished girl, the king thought. A rare combination of beauty, artistic sense and intelligence. He coveted her even more. But for all his convincing, Rimjha was firm in her refusal to go with him to his palace. He went away, sad yet determined to possess her.

The next morning, the king sent one of his soldiers with a royal order to bring the Gaddni to his palace. Upon seeing her, he was once again overcome with lust and tried to force himself upon her. Rimjha was horrified and with all her strength, extricated herself from his embrace.

How she longed for Dharmu who played his flute as he grazed his sheep. Dharmu... so strong, so handsome, the centre of her love, her betrothed. She was sure that he could tackle all the king’s men in one fell swoop. But unfortunately, he was unaware of her abduction by the lustful monarch.

Rimjha won over one of the king’s
guards and persuaded him to carry her message to her love:

When your herd grazes in the palace vicinity
Your flute sends me tunes of torture,
My love, Dharmu, I remember those times oft
When we both grazed our sheep in the mountains aloft
A friend of my own country,
A friend from birth,
Will you not liberate me, lest my life be short?

Dharmu the Brave didn’t waste one moment. When the life of his Rimjha was in danger, nothing else mattered. He sneaked into the palace abetted by the same messenger-guard and took Rimjha away.

Naturally the king was outraged and issued a reward of a lakh of rupees to the one who apprehended Rimjha’s abductor. Alas, Dharmu’s own brothers were conquered by greed.

They led the king’s men to Dharmu who lay sleeping on the rooftop. When he heard the thud-thud of their shoes he woke up and pulled out his sword. A fight began. Dharmu’s mother was panic stricken for her son’s safety. Rimjha told her,

O mother of Dharmu, do not cry,
Have no fear
Defeat shall not be the fate of your son so dear.
He was lost in sleep on the rooftop so unaware
Upon the men’s knock, he emerged all strong
With a baton in one hand and in the other, a sword,
In boundless rage five men and their chief he killed,
And the seventh, he hit in the face, made him lick the dirt.

The king found it impossible to brook this defeat and once again wooed Dharmu’s brothers with larger sums of money. The brothers once again betrayed him and handed him over to the king.

Was it betrayal of a brother?
Or a betrayal of brotherhood itself?
Dharmu was trussed up in a horse wagon
To be brought to the palace of the kingdom
And when the carriage reached the gates
The city smelt of rebellion.

For the justful king had promoted the brothers to high posts within his coterie and overrode the faithful.

Dharmu languished in captivity, waiting for his punishment. Rimjha had to free him, come what may. Was it not foolhardy for a simple Gaddni to take on the might of the king? The people told her,

O beautiful Gaddni, do not be obstinate
You’ll rain it completely, his wretched foe.

She did not relent and sent a message to the king,

Your Majesty, set Dharmu free.
Of my own volition, I shall come to thee.

The king was overjoyed. Now, at last, she was yielding, that proud woman. I can’t wait to see her again! When Rimjha was summoned with the promise that Dharmu would be liberated if she went to the palace, she left, dark forebodings lurking in her heart.

O King, for the last time
A glimpse of Dharmu is all I seek
And then we shall bid goodbye...never to meet.

She was taken to the dungeon where Dharmu was imprisoned. And who was guarding him but his wicked, greedy brother? What form should justice take? Unbeknownst to the guard, Rimjha pulled out the wood saw which she had hidden within the folds of her cloak, and struck the brother, killing him instantly. Before anyone could prevent it, the spirited little woman killed herself. Dharmu was now free. With one sweep, he picked up the bloody wood saw and fought the guards who by now had swarmed into the dungeon. But Dharmu was defeated in spirit and all the strength went out of him. He died fighting.

And when the king saw the death of Dharmu
He ordered that the secret of his courage be discovered
His heart they weighed
Five seers no less.
So, mother of Dharmu, do not cry
Have no fear
Now they are immortal, your children so dear.

Nidhi Mehrotra 21, has graduated from Miranda House, Delhi University and is presently doing a course in Garment Manufacturing at NIFT.
Illustrations: Anoop Kamath
FROM THE NORTH WEST

Sakhi Sarwar & Dani Jatni

This is quite a modern legend. It was narrated by the 'lambdar' or headman of the village of Landeke in the Ferozpur District, who claimed to be the son of the boy whom Sarwar raised from the dead for Dani. Sayed Ahmed Sakhi Sarwar Sultan Lakhdata, usually known as Sarwar or Sakhi Sarwar is the most popular saint of modern Punjab. He is a typical saint and belongs to that class of Sufi ascetics who settled in the neighbourhood of Multan between the 11th and 13th centuries. His shrine is at Nigaha, at the foot of the Sulaiman mountains, at the entrance of the Sakhi Sarwar Pass in the Dera Ghazi Khan District, a spot eminently calculated to foster an austere life. A crowded fair is held there every Baisakh (April-May), attended by all sorts and classes of Punjabis, both Hindus and Muslims. The shrine is kept up by hereditary 'mujawirs' or attendants and by wandering bards who sing the saint's praises and collect pilgrims from all parts. The present tale, very much a part of folklore, is part of the Sakhi Sarwar cycle. Saints and holy men are still a living power in India and miracles are worked all around as a matter of daily occurrence and of not much wonder. The folk poem is hardly dead but the wandering bard is becoming so.

RETOLD BY R.C.TEMPLE

True Master of all power!
May our God throw a curtain over our sins!
He that doeth whatever he liketh:
Who hath thwarted his desire?
He giveth and taketh away:
Master and Giver of life.
In the eighty four lakhs of lives
God hath given sustenance!
Sarwar dwelt in the mountains,
And gave sons in charity.
Making whole the blind and leprous;
If there was pain, he put it away.
There are a hundred castes in the tribes;
He joined follower and follower together
As they used to be from the beginning.
Who has thwarted his desire!
Twelve years of wedded life had passed.
And Dani prayed to the saint.
God gave Dani a son,
And made her a follower of saints:
Making ready a thanks offering
Dani called a bard of Sarwar.

When the bard came he sang his song and news of it reached Dani's husband who was a follower of Guru Nanak. He came home at once and was very angry with Dani. He said,

"Thou shalt not take his name again".
"And he threatened Dani
He took Dani and thrust her inside
And he threatened her at the threshold.
Thrust inside she cried aloud,
"O Saint, listen to my complaint
Thou shouldst preserve the honour of thy follower."
Bhairon the Dread** to her Sarwar the Saint sent at once.
Bhairon the Dread came forthwith;
Came and awakened all the sleepers;
The younger and the older brother, and the whole household
The Dread One seized and hurried,
The day broke, and all the night had passed,
They all sat down and made excuses:
At break of day she made preparations,
And sent quickly for sugar and ghee.
Making dried cakes she tied them in her clothes
"Go you together to the Holy Saint",
Said the household.
Taking their leave they went from their home,
Making food for the way, tied in their clothes.
And encamped in the city of the Guru**
And sojourned together.
Act uprightly, speak sweetly!
The light of Nigahā hath ever shone!
May two sons each be granted to all
At Sarwar’s shrine!
Beating drums and sounding timbrels
The drums of my lord Sarwar.
Going together, they reached near Multan,
The shrine of Sarwar.

When they reached Multan, Dani, seeing there, some very
beautiful clothes and other excellent things said to herself,
"If I buy something like these and take them home and give
them to my companions, they will be very pleased in their
hearts. But what can I do? I have but twenty one gold pieces
for the offering to Sakhi Sarwar and the necessary expenses
for the way. One plan is certainly possible.
Suppose I keep back from these, twenty one gold pieces
which I have brought for Sakhi Sarwar, with half of them,
I can buy presents for my companions and relations." So she
acted with an evil intent and Sakhi Sarwar considered her to
be dishonourable.

There is no fathoming of the Saints:
They are but their own glory.
Ghauns Bahawddin, *Saint of the whole world,
The whole world worships,
They worshipped and cooked their food
And planted their flag and halted.
They crossed the Timnu at Royal Siddhu:
And Sarwar was pleased with the pilgrims.
From Haji Khan they went to Wadawar
And worshipped Saint Dhoda, ‘Sarwar’s’ brother.

When Dani crossed the Timnu River, Sakhi Sarwar to
try her (for he knew from the first that Dani had kept back
half of her offering for some purpose of her own, and had
already become dishonourable), sent his minister, Bhairon
the Holy, to Dani disguised as a Brahmin. And he,
going to Dani, begged alms, but Dani being vexed at
him said, "All the way I have been robbed by the
begging of you people. Some come as Brahmins
and some as Sayeds. I don’t know whence so
many Brahmins and Sayeds have come to this
hungry land. And now I will not give even a
cowry to anyone." Though Bhairon the Holy,
flattered and besought her much, still Dani
gave nothing and pushed him away. Then
Sakhi Sarwar went himself to Dani disguised
as a Sayed and he got the same answer as
Bhairon the Holy. Being displeased at these
things, Sakhi Sarwar slew her son as the com-
ing song will relate.

They came to Dhoda’s shrine,
Where the pilgrims distributed sugar:
There Dhoda sits holding court, hearing the
prayers of thousands,
They came to Rand’s tree**
Where Sarwar carucoled his mare Kakki:
Some were sleeping, some were sitting,
Some meditated on god.
Six hours of the night had passed,
God sent the Angel of Death.
The Angel of Death seized and harried the
boy:
Distress came upon the boy’s body,
And his mother got up and coaxed him:
Quickly got up Dani
And gave the boy her breast
From between Dani’s two hands
The boy fell dead.
Leaving the jand trees early they came to the
springs,
And the pilgrims washed with joy:
Going to a corner by the bank
Dani went and washed her boy.
When Dani saw that the boy was dead she did not wish to let it be known, for she had undertaken this journey because of the joy of the birth of her boy. Her husband and kin were certain to get angry for coming all this way and they would think that Sakhi Sarwar was false. So Dani told no one of her sorrow, and going apart into a corner, bathed herself and bathed the child too, just for show, and wrapped him up in her clothes. When the washing and bathing was over, the bard of her family came to her and said, “I have been a servant in your family for years and I have no cow, so my children get neither milk, nor curd nor ghee. I am in dire straits and so I make a petition to grant me a cow.” Then answered Dani, “When my desire shall be fulfilled, then I will give you a buffalo instead of a cow as a present.” Then answered the bard, “What desire is left you? Plenty is in your house and the child you wanted Sakhi Sarwar has granted you.”

When she heard this, Dani held her mouth as she feared to let the news of her son’s death pass her lips.

Then Dani went to Sarwar and said,
In this beautiful building and dome
The people come to worship thee
That the praises of the follower*** may be recorded
Who built it.
To the pilgrims who go for the first time,
Sarwar sitting and becoming a trader,
Diamonds, pearls, rubies, jewels
Hath the Saint offered in trade.

When much of the night had been passed in praying, the people went off to their own homes, but Dani hid herself in a corner of the shrine, and the attendant, thinking that the shrine was empty, shut the door and went away. When Dani saw there was no one in the shrine and that the door of the shrine was shut, she went to it and sat down and spoke to him:

She placed the boy at his feet
And addressed her petition to Sarwar:
Great victories hath Sarwar gained:
She placed the boy inside in an empty space.

Dani:
Listen, thou son of Zainulababdin:
I married into a Sikh’s house
My husband’s family are Sikhs and strangers’ children:
Seizing thy skirt I aye come.
If in this thou disappoint me
Who will support me in future?

Sarwar:
In the future, good deeds will bring salvation:
The bad cannot mix with the good.
If it be a pain I can cure it;
But who has restored the dead to life?

Dani:
Hold, Saint! why dost thou vex me
Thou didst make the dry forest green:
In the coldest month of January,
The wan tree brought forth fruit!

Sarwar:
All the people of the forest
Together made petition to the saints;
God heard their prayer;
And the wan tree brought forth fruit.

Dani:
Listen, babblers:
The fakirs ate the kids of the flock;
Made whole they were restored to their mothers;
Into the heads and hoofs and skins
Who had put life?

Sarwar:
They were three hundred and sixty men of God:
No hand of mine was there;
Coming together the fakirs made a prayer;
God heard it and granted it.

Dani:
All saints are great;
Art thou less saint than they?
There is none false than thou?
Show me some good plan;
Why hast thou put away my desire?

And Dani said, “Nama, the Dyer” was of low caste. His cow died from a blow from his bundle of clothes and he restored the cow to life. And Dhananna, the Jat made God himself to appear from a stone. What, art thou not equal to such men as these? Then answered Sarwar,

The king seized Nama the Dyer;
He went outside to slay him;
His bread and water were yet mixed;
He restored the cow to life and was saved;
Else he had been in trouble;
The actions of Dhananna Bhagat were holy.
Nama restored the dead cow to life;
In the very cold month of January
He bathed seventy times;
Before the gate of the king
He loosed the calf and made him suckle.
Saying this, the Saint sprinkled some of his own holy water over Dani. She became insensible and Sakhi Sarwar began himself to repeat the morning prayer:

*When compassion entered into Sarwar’s mind,
Then he went to the throne of God:
Before God he made his petition,
“Thou alone art the giver of gifts!”*

And he made this quotation from the Quran,
“My good report is with thee. If the child does not live then will dishonour be to me, and if he live then will honour be to me.”

*God, at my request,
Sent that angel quickly:
When life entered into the child
The child began to play.*

When the attendant, in the morning, opened the door of Sakhi Sarwar’s shrine, Dani had recovered from her swoon. When she saw the attendant, she ran quietly by another way. But she knew that her child was alive again. The attendant saw a child playing about inside and so he took it in his arms and called out, “Who left a boy in the shrine all night?” And Dani, hearing the call, came at once and said, “The child is mine!” Then said the attendant,

*Listen, thou fool and idiot!
Canst thou show me any marks of the child?
Dani:
Rings in his ears and crooked silver beads,
Golden rings in his ears!
Cheerfully hast thou granted my desires,
Thou saint of Nigaha!*

When Dani gave the signs and marks of the child, the attendant gave the child back.

*Dani’s friends became pressing;
Dani’s friends asked questions:
“Tell us the whole truth,
What chance hath happened?”*

*Dani:
The day we came to the ber tree,
God called my son to his presence.
I gave and distributed alms, sir;
A thanksgiving for my son, sir.
Good hath been thy deed, Sarwar,
That brought the son to his mother!*

---

**NOTES.**
* Bhairava, of Shiva, treated always as Sarwar’s messenger.
* Jhandiala, the city of Guru Handial, in Amritsar district.
* The great saint of Multan, Sheikh Bahauddin Zakaria, 1170 - 1266 A.D.
* Sarwar’s brother. He is buried in Baghdad but has a shrine at Vador.
*+ Ramu, son of Sarwar. The tree was ber.
*+++ Sita Baniya in the time of Aurangzeeb.
*+ Namdev, the celebrated Bhagat and poet.
* Bhuma Bhagat, hero of a very popular tale.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Anil

---

**Tales & Parables Of Sri Ramakrishna**

*The abstruse ideas of religion and philosophy have a greater appeal when clothed in homely imagery. Saints and seers through the ages have used the parable to preach their message to the common people. The parables of Sri Ramakrishna are based on his own or others’ experiences, yet the mystic way in which they are narrated give them a unique stamp.*

**THE PANDIT WHO COULD NOT SWIM**

Once several men were crossing the Ganges in a boat. One of them, a pandit, was making a great display of his erudition, saying that he had studied the Vedas, the Vedanta and the six systems of philosophy. He asked a fellow passenger, “Do you know the Vedanta?” “No, revered sir.” “The Samkhya and the Patanjala?” “No, revered sir.” “Have you read no philosophy whatsoever?” “No, revered sir.” The pandit continued to hold forth on his accomplishments with the others sitting in silence when a great storm arose and the boat was about to sink. The passenger said to the pandit, “Sir, can you swim?” “No”, replied the pandit. The passenger said, “I don’t know Samkhya or the Patanjala, but I can swim.”

What will a man gain by knowing many scriptures? The one thing needful is to know how to cross the river of the world. God alone is real, all else is illusory.

**LORD NARAYANA AND HIS SELF-DEFENDING DEVOTEE**

Once Lakshmi and Narayana were seated in their abode, Vaikunta, when Narayana suddenly stood up. She asked, “Lord, where are you going?” Narayana answered: “One of my devotees is in great danger. I must save him.” With these words, he left but only to return immediately. Lakshmi said, “Lord, why have you returned so soon?” Narayana smiled and said: “The devotee was going along the road overwhelmed with love for me. Some washermen were drying clothes on the grass. In his preoccupation, the devotee walked over the grass, whereupon the washermen in their anger, chased him and were about to beat him with their sticks. That’s why I ran out to protect him.” “But why have you returned?” Narayana laughed and said, “I saw the devotee himself picking up a brick to throw at them. So I came back.”
The epic of Pabuji is an oral epic in the Rajasthani language which is performed to the present day in the State of Rajasthan. Pabuji is revered as a great hero throughout Rajasthan, but more important, he is also worshipped as an incarnate god by many of the 'gossiping villagers' not merely in the desert West but also in the fertile East. This claim to divinity is not accepted by higher caste Hindus and Pabuji is not served by Brahmins, the priests of the official Hindu duties. Instead his priests, Bhopas, are drawn from the Nayak Caste which is one of the Scheduled Castes of Rajasthan. It is important to stress that the cult of Pabuji lies squarely on the Little side of the uneasy divide between Great and Little Traditions.

Pabuji lived in the village of Kolu - in that village are to be found the only conventional temples to him. Since many of his worshippers, the Rabaris for instance, are nomads and since Pabuji is a pastoral hero, the temple visits the worshippers. The Bhopas are itinerant and carry their temples in the form of a phad, a cloth painting about 15 feet in length. Having arrived at a village or town, the Bhopa erects his 'temple', shortly after nightfall. It is a holy object and various ritual rules have to be observed.

It is never possible for the Bhopa to sing the whole fantastic story - the assembled audience will request him for this or that episode. Usually, his wife holds an oil lamp to illuminate details of the painted phad in the darkness. During some songs the Bhopa will dance, the bells round his ankles jingling and his red rope swinging about him. He plays a fiddle called the ravanhatta. The padhs are painted by Joshi Chitrakars.
Buro gave Khinchī their sister Pema in marriage. But in fact he remained hostile, and his hostility was brought to a head when Pabuji secured from the Chaaran Lady Deva (an incarnation of the Goddess), the fine black mare Kesar Kalami, on whom Khinchī had set his heart. The mare was, of course, Pabuji’s mother returned to him. In exchange for the mare, Pabuji promised to protect Deval from Khinchī’s raids.

Then he set off on his exploits: he overthrew Mirza Khan, the cow-killing king of Patan, and then went to bathe in the holy lake of Pushkar to cleanse himself of the sin of bloodshed. Whilst he was bathing his foot slipped, and he was saved from drowning by the snake-god Gogo Chauhan. As a reward Pabuji offered him the hand of his niece Kelam.

Buro’s daughter, and he accepted. But Kelam’s parents were fiercely opposed to any such wedding, and so Pabuji set up a marriage instead. At his instigation, Gogo turned himself into a venomous snake and concealed himself in the garden; and when Kelam came there to swing, he bit her on the little finger. The curers were unable to do anything for her, but Pabuji said that she could be cured by tying an amulet in Gogo’s name, provided that she was then married to him. The cure worked and the wedding had to go ahead.

During the wedding-ceremony various people gave costly presents to Kelam; when his turn came, Pabuji said, ‘I shall plunder she-camels from Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, to give you.’ Everyone laughed, for camels were then unknown in Rajasthan and Lanka was known to be impregnable. And when Kelam reached her husband’s home her in-laws taunted her mercilessly. So she sent a letter to Pabuji imploring him to carry out his promise. He sent one of his men, Harmal, to Lanka to reconnoitre; and Harmal, disguised as a yogi (holy man), managed to get the information they needed, and also obtained physical evidence of the she-camels, all this despite being mistrusted and ill-treated by the inhabitants of Lanka. Then he returned to Kolu with his news, and they all set off to raid Lanka. They crossed the sea by Pabuji’s power and rounded up Ravana’s she-camels; then they did battle with Ravana and his army and defeated them, Pabuji himself killing Ravana with his spear.

On their way to give the captured she-camels to Kelam they had to pass through Umarkot in Sindh, and here the Sodhi princess Phulvanti saw Pabuji and fell in love with him. Pabuji continued on his way: he triumphed in an encounter with Devnarayan, and was soon able to hand over the she-camels to a delighted Kelam and return home to Kolu. But now he received a wedding-proposal from Phulvanti’s father. At first he tried to avoid it, and even when he capitulated and accepted it he caused further delay by insisting that saffron be obtained to dye the garments of the men who travelled in his wedding-procession - which resulted in an all-out war with Lakkhu Pathan, the owner of the saffron. But at last he set off back to Umarkot to be married. Deval, to whom he had promised his protection, stopped him on the way and tried to persuade him to stay, or at least to leave some of his men behind, but he refused, promising that if she needed him she would come instantly, even if she was sitting inside the wedding-pavilion. Then the wedding-procession started off once more, but as they travelled they observed a number of bad omens. Preparations for the wedding went ahead smoothly; but before the ceremony itself was even complete Deval arrived in the form of a bird to say that Khinchī had stolen her cattle.

Pabuji insisted on abandoning the wedding in order to ride in pursuit: he severed the bridal knot with his sword, and gave his bride a parrot which would tell her what became of him. He rode back to Kolu with his men, and after some slight delay set out in pursuit of the Khinchīs, leaving only Dhebo behind asleep. Deval woke Dhebo up and sent him out too, and he soon overtook Pabuji, for when his horse tired from endless galloping, he picked it up and

The mare Kesar Kalami is brought to Pabuji

Parbu Bhupu sings, plays the ravanhatta fiddle

Pabuji converses with Gogo on the steps on Pushkar Lake

Harmal encounters two witches on his way to Lanka
put it under his arm and ran on. Then disaster befell him. Vultures began to circle over him, and he as usual told them to be patient ("I shall satiate you with the vital organs of the Khinchis!"); but these vultures were not content, and told him they wished to eat his own flesh. Dhebo was a man of such noble character that he could refuse no request, so he disemboweled himself for

the birds. Then he drew his belt tight, and rode on; and soon he caught up with Khinchi. Single-handed he destroyed Khinchi's whole army, until only Khinchi himself was left alive, and he was about to kill him too when Pabuji, who had arrived on the battlefield, stayed his hand: "If you kill him you make my sister Pema a widow." They freed Khinchi, and set off to give Deval back her cattle. On the way, when

opium-box, where he had put it as a joke; then she complained that her cattle were thirsty and told Pabuji to water them - but when he tried to do so he found that all the water in the well had been swallowed on Deval's instructions by a genie named Susiyo Pir. He struck the genie through the head with his spear and watered the cattle; but by the time he had finished doing all this which she saw the massacre of the Rathors' and when she awoke the news was confirmed by a camel-rider, who brought her the turban of her dead husband. Similarly in Umarkot Phulvanti heard the news from her parrot, which then died. Then all the women prepared to become sari (i.e. to follow their husbands into death by mounting the funeral pyre). But Buro's widow was advanced in pregnancy, and before becoming sari she took a knife and cut out from her body a male child. She named him Rupnath, and had him sent to her mother's home in Ginnar to be looked after.

Rupnath grew up in ignorance of his origins, but one day when he was twelve years old he encountered Deval, and persuaded her to tell him the truth. Then he was consumed by desire to take revenge on Khinchi. In the guise of a holy man he went to Khinchi's place, and his aunt Pema (Khinchi's wife) told him how to avoid the traps and savage animals with which Khinchi guarded himself. He was successful in doing this, and thus came into the room where Khinchi was asleep. He awoke him, told him who he was, and then beheaded him. Pema then asked him for Khinchi's head so that she could become sari with it; but Rupnath told her that she would have to wait a little before he could return it to her. Then he went off with it back to Ginnar, where

Khinchi had been able to enlist the support of his uncle Jaisingh Bhati, and was riding on Kolu with a Bhati army. There was a great battle, in which Pabuji and Khinchi came face to face. Pabuji said, "Khinchi, take my sword and give me your whip; my body cannot fall to a blow from your sword." They exchanged weapons, but at first Khinchi did nothing; so Pabuji goaded him into fury by whipping him, and

he used it as a ball for a game that ran all the way from Ginnar to Kolu and back. Finally, with one blow of his bat, he sent it to Khinchi's place for Pema to become sari. Then, his mission accomplished, he became a genuine holy man, living on a sandhill near Bikaner, where he is still worshipped today.
Pabuji was seated in his court at Kolu;
as he sat there Lord Pabuji raised the matter of
horses ‘Chando my chieftain, we have travelled
round the four borders of the earth;
but we have not found a horse for Pabuji to
ride.
Chando my chieftain, the Lady Deval has been
to the far shore of the seven seas;
Deval has brought back horses of high price.
Chando my chieftain, I was sleeping at night in my court
at Kolu;
in my dream I sported with Deval’s mare Kesar Kalami.
Chando my chieftain, fasten saddles on our five horses!
We shall go and become Deval’s beloved guests.’
Pabuji and his companions mounted their five horses;
they set out and went to become Deval’s beloved guests.
So let us see whether they go to the lady Deval’s place
and what happens there.
Pabuji and his companions mounted their five horses;
they set out and went to become Deval’s beloved guests.
It was past midnight, shining with stars;
Pabuji shone on the road as the night passed.
Day broke, pale dawn came in the land;
at the break of day he paid his respects to Deval.
The courtiers of the goddess Deval were seated proudly;
in the crowded assembly-room Pabuji went and paid his
respects.
The lady Deval asked Lord Pabuji what simple matter was
on his mind:
‘O Pabuji, tell me what is on your mind!
On what great business have you come as Deval’s
guests?’
Pabuji answered, ‘Lady Deval, the spotless Sun-god with
his rising rays dispenses of serious business;
Lady Deval, in this world the spotless Sun-god with his
rising rays dispenses of serious business;
we have come as your guests on a minor domestic
matter.
Lady Deval, we have travelled round the four borders of
the earth;
but we have not found a horse for Pabuji to ride.
Lady Deval, you have been to the far shore of the seven
seas;
Deval, you have brought back horses of high price.

Lady Deval, tell me what simple matter is on your
mind!
A mare is tethered in the seventh of your
underground rooms;
show me the mare Kesar Kalami for me to ride!
Yesterday I was sleeping at night in my court at
Kolu;
in my dream I sported with Kesar Kalami.’
Deval replied, ‘O Pabuji, do not speak the name of the
mare Kesar!
Jindrao Khinchi of Jayal came and tied a thread to her.’
Pabuji said, ‘Lady Deval, do not speak the name of
Khinchi of Jayal!’
He does not ride within the borders of the Rathors.’
Deval answered, ‘Lord Pabuji, do not speak the name of
the mare Kesar!
Otherwise Khinchi of Jayal will attack unprotected
Gadvaro.’
Harmal Devasi took hold of Kesar’s red bridle;
Chando the chieftain took hold of the stirrup for
Pabuji’s foot.
Pabuji mounted Kesar;
as he mounted, his brave leading warriors conversed
with him.
Pabuji put his hand on her black mane;
placing his other hand on the saddle, he swiftly
mounted.
Pabuji mounted Kesar;
as he mounted, his brave leading warrior conversed with
him.
The other horses raced, their hooves beating on the
earth;
Kesar Kalami shone in the sky,
Dhebo the opium-drinker went and stood at the Chaaran
Lady Deval’s house and home;
as he stood there he called out to the Chaaran.
‘Lady Deval, you have done ill in the land;
a palanquin has come from heaven for my lord Pabuji!’
Deval answered, ‘O Chando and opium-drinker Dhebo,
offer incense of bdellium to Kesar;
to the wafting of incense Kesar will come down.’
Dhebo the opium-drinker offered incense of
bdellium to Kesar; to the wafting of incense
Kesar came down.

Illustrations: Pabuji Ka Phad By John Smith.
Simple acts of faith, at times, outweigh villainy, however calculated. This has been simply depicted by a narrative that is part of the folklore of Rajasthan.

I have often wondered how the tiny village of Keekargarh became such a green oasis while being surrounded by the awesome Thar desert! Till I heard this story.....

Years ago, this village, like any other in north-west Rajasthan was gripped by a deadly and recurring drought. Such was the aridity that the earth cracked, the local stream became a shy and fearful silver thread, and the wells bone dry. The sun beat down, scorching the skins of the livestock and felled them even as they desperately nibbled at the few scrub grasses that grew in apology.

Naturally, the villagers had no work; no crops to tend, no animals to rear. Lines of suffering were etched on their faces as they walked the shifting sands in search of water and vegetation. The children grew large tummies and emaciated limbs as their hapless mothers tried to feed them a watery lentil soup.

The men of the village decided to leave it and go to neighbouring towns in search of work. Whatever they earned would go into stocking up on wheat and pulses and meagre desert vegetables. With the salt which they bought, great jars of lime would be pickled. Lime pickle would taste so well with rots!

The provisions would be brought on the backs of those, oh-so-tall and rather stupid looking camels. But they were so good, so right for these patterned sands, ever changing, ever moving.

There was however, one community that flourished. The Chamars or the leather workers. Never did they have it so good as in these droughts. So many animals just died. Hardly had a cow collapsed with hunger and thirst, when they would lift it on a pole with its legs tied on either end, flay the hide, tan it and hang it out to dry. Then in their little workshops, big strong shoes would take shape, curling at the front like a big moustache. Somewhere in the
centre of the moustache would be a bit of brilliant pink wool that gave them such a royal look. The tall, handsome men of Keekargarh wore them with such effect. Oh, but I do love! Let me get back to the story as I heard it.

There was Biru, our hero, a very fine looking man with a dignified mien. His kohl lined eyes sometimes grew thoughtful and then would cloud over with nostalgia. Sometimes, unknown to anyone, a dark, murky tear would run down his cheeks as he thought of Kamili, his dead wife. He had fields and two bullocks to plough them. He had helpers who carried water from the baby canal. Now the drought saw them all leave, saw his fields change to a grim chessboard. He had nothing except a little cloth-covered bundle of Kamili’s jewels. As he took them out from a box near the rafer, he felt the uneven rough surface of her bangles, the almost elfin tinkle of her anklets and the two pearls of her earrings. He could not possibly carry them with him to Mohanpur where he was promised a job as a household retainer. But who should he leave them with till he returned after the first showers? Someone he could trust and who was not planning to leave Keekargarh, of course. Oh yes, Kalua, the charmer! He was so busy these days what with all those dead animals and all and surely he had enough money, so he would not steal poor Kamili’s jewels.

He packed his little travel bundle in a red cloth which was once Kamili’s sari. Then he locked up his house and went looking for Kalua. Sure enough he was out on the land, examining a cow that was breathing its last.

“Oh re Kalua, I’m off to Mohanpur. I don’t know what a farmer like me will do as a household retainer, but you know, I have a stomach to feed.” Biru said. “And, Kalua bhui, can you keep Kamili’s jewels for me till I return? They are all the wealth I have. I know you are not going anywhere, seeing as you are so busy with the animals.”

“Kamili’s jewels! But that’s a big responsibility! You know the rules of the village. You should give them to me in the presence of the Panchayat. It shall be our witness”, said Kalua as they walked along the flaky and dry canal embankment.

“Witness? Who needs one? Aren’t we friends? Didn’t we run around together in our childhood playing mischiefs? Didn’t we bring you and Meenu together and wasn’t the chief helper at your wedding? Why do we need to talk about witnesses?” Biru was incredulous.

As they walked they came under a large Keekar tree. It was one of the oldest trees in the village precincts, having shed its last few thorny arms.

Despite the drought, its tiny pairs of leaflets gleamed bright green. There were little brown scars where the tree’s resin healed its wounds when it got scorched in the heat of previous summers and droughts.

The small golden-yellow flowers still clung on desperately. The narrow, stiff leathery pods spoke of rains and future growth.

Biru looked up at his old favourite. It was an old friend, it was.

Kalua broke in, “I still think we need a witness.”

“Okay, since you insist, let’s ask the old Keekar to be one. No, the heat has not got to me. It’s, well, it’s just that the tree is alive just as you and I, so isn’t it as good as any human being? Besides, I’m getting late and I must leave soon, or I won’t reach Mohanpur by nightfall.” Biru said.

He opened his little casket of jewels to show them to Kalua. Kalua wrapped it back again and tied it up in his dhoti. Biru bid him adieu and began his long trudge to Mohanpur.

Several months later, when Keekargarh heard once again, the sound of peacocks, when the inkly rain clouds brewed dark and rich, and the first fat drop of rain fell, Biru returned, as did his other fellow village men. Keekargarh once more heard the doom doom of the pounding stick as women cleaned and pounded wheat. Children ran around in their nakedness as whiffs of cool black winds brushed their cheeks. The village was alive as they all knew from when they were children.

Biru was exhilarated to be back. He went to the charmer section of the village looking for Kalua. “Oh re Kalua,” he shouted. Kalua came out of his hut. In a fit of happiness Biru hugged him. “How are you, old friend?”

Biru felt Kalua stiffen. “Oh you are back”, he said. It was a sort of dull statement. Biru said, “Yes, to stay. That being the case I would like to take back Kamili’s jewels. Thank you so much for taking care of them for me.”

“Jewels? What jewels? I don’t remember any jewels.”

Biru’s mouth fell open. Nothing more needed to be said. In a flash he understood what had happened. He realised like all wise men, that any
argument at this stage would be pointless. He knew he'd been betrayed. He turned around and left Kalua's hut, his head in a daze. Who could he appeal to? If this is a group of human beings living together, then there must be a law. Yes! The Sarpanch, the village headman, that's whom he must visit.

The Sarpanch heard him out as he twirled his greying moustache. During his long life of sixty years, he had been privy to the most unusual cases. This one seemed to be too simple yet. A case of betrayal. In his experience, solutions were often presented themselves. Only he had to listen carefully. Very carefully indeed.

He summoned Kalua and while listening to him, he almost wound his moustache into a round knot. Kalua denied his having ever received any jewels from Biru for safekeeping.

Biru exploded. "I know I should have given him the jewels in front of a witness, but I do have one, a tree!"

The Sarpanch, who by this time was trying to straighten his moustache, was untruffled. "If you had a tree as witness, then go get its testimony'.

And so Biru made for the old Keekar tree. It stood there stoically, its branches bursting here and there in little green pin points. Biru walked along the now wet canal embankment and stood under his old favourite, turban upturned in his hand in supplication and complete faith,

"Oh dear friend, Kamli's jewels are with Kalua, you know that, don't you? I have full faith in you, so help me to prove him wrong in front of the Panchayat. You are part of this land in famine and plenty. You have witnessed the joys and sorrows of Keekargarh from as long back as I remember. You will be my witness, won't you?"

What Biru did not see was a little sprig of tiny green leaves that fell into his turban.

Meanwhile, back at the Sarpanch's house, Kalua was triumphant. That silly fool, who does he think he's kidding? Pooh! a tree indeed!

The Sarpanch looked at him carefully. His moustache had turned into a knot again.

"Kalua, this Biru, why is he taking such a dashed long time? Do you think he got cold feet and went back home?"

"No sir", replied Kalua. "Let him take his time. After all, does he not have to go as far as the old Keekar tree near the canal embankment? A witness, my foot!"

The Sarpanch's moustache twitched violently with the impact of what he knew was the evidence couched in Kalua's statement. How in heavens did Kalua know that Biru had gone to that particular tree near the canal embankment? The answer was obvious. Biru's tree was the witness!

The Panchayat was summoned. All the Chamars of the village were present in full strength. The Sarpanch oiled his moustache into fine needle points for the occasion and wore his specially bordered dhoti. Slowly, he presented the case to the gathering. At the point where Kalua betrayed his own self regarding the whereabouts of the tree, the Sarpanch raised his voice a bit to deliver the impact of the evidence. Kalua had lost. A hiss of disapproval rose from the crowd, especially from the Chamar section. Kalua was made to acknowledge the crime and hand over the bundle of jewels back to Biru.

Biru rose with excitement and walked gingerly towards the little bundle lying right in the middle of the Panchayat circle. With trembling hands he opened it. Yes, all Kamli's jewels were there! The bangles, the tiny anklets and the pearl earrings. And, what was that little brown thing peeping from in between the two bangles? Biru picked it up between his two fingers - a little dried sprig with tiny leaves. Need I tell you which tree they were from? And then, how did Keekargarh become so green? Kalua's punishment was the village's gain. He was made to plant over a hundred trees as compensation for his betrayal of Biru.

In course of time Biru succeeded our present Sarpanch and probably dealt with cases just like this.

Nidhi Mehta is 21 years old and has completed her B.A. in Geography Honours from Miranda House, New Delhi. She is presently doing a course in Garment Manufacturing Technology at NIFT (National Inst. of Fashion Technology).

Illustrations: Tina Rajan
Thomas Cana is the greatest benefactor of the Malabar Christians. He is also said to have been the Prime Minister of Cheraman Perumal, the Emperor of Malabar.

The tradition of the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar has it that, while their church was in a chaotic condition for want of bishops and leaders, the Bishop of Urabai (Edessa) was asked in a dream whether he was not sorry for the distress and ruin of the flock in Malabar which the Apostle had earned by his death. The Bishop then told this dream to the Catholics of Jerusalem, who, in consultation with the wise men of the place, determined to send Thomas Cana the honourable merchant residing in the city, to Malabar for information.

He set sail and landed in Cranganore (Kodungallur), where he found certain Christians wearing crosses hanging from their necks. Having gathered from them their past history and informed that they were surely in need of bishops, he soon loaded his vessel with what pepper and other merchandise he could procure, hastened home and delivered the strange news to the Catholics of Jerusalem.

Subsequently, with the permission of Yustadius, Patriarch of Antioch, the Catholics sent with his blessings to Malabar, Joseph, Bishop of Edessa, several priests and deacons and a great many men, women and children — four hundred and odd in all—under the leadership of the merchant Kinayi Thomas.

All these, after a safe voyage, landed in Cranganore in A.D. 345, and “the people of the Kottakkayal community and the Christians called Dhariyakkal of the sixty-four families”, all came together and received them and acknowledged Mar Joseph from Jerusalem, their Bishop. And the affairs of the Church were properly managed by Tomma (Thomas).

He obtained from the Emperor land and high social privileges, as well as copper-plate documents to that effect.

The 72 high social privileges which Thomas Cana obtained from the Emperor are used even today. Besides these, he got 18 low castes, like barbers, carpenters, bow-makers, bards toddy-tappers, etc., to serve the Christians and be under their special protection from the molestation of other castes. Thomas, the merchant prince, is also said to have presented the Emperor with one nali (measure capacity, about 20 cu. in.) of precious stones for his crown, and to have helped him with money in his battles.

Here are authentic specimens of the special titles and privileges which Thomas Cana and the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar obtained by the Emperor’s letter patent: (1) the title of the Emperor’s Own Merchant, (2) seven kinds of musical instruments, (3) palanquin, (4) elephant, (5) bodyguards, (6) cloth for walking along upon, (7) royal umbrella, (8) lingual cheers by women, (9) lamp lit by day, (10) carpets and (11) medals besides others, from the paraphernalia of a procession.

Here are some literal translations of songs related to Thomas Cana sung by the ancient Christians of the land.
THE SONGS

(1)
When of yore to immigrate to
Malankara
The gentleman Thomman Kinan
essay - Verily.
The king's sons belonging to seventy
two families -
Those good citizens, four hundred,
Embarked by the grace of the
Catholico - Verily.
The foreigner who came entered
Cranganore,
He entered, and when he visited the
Chera king, in plenty
He presented gold and coral and
pearls and obtained the country
He came, at an auspicious time
endeavoured, and gained his end -
Verily
That his greatness may be manifest in
all the world around.
He gave him marks of honour - the
fivefold band, the eighteen castes,
The horn, the flute, the peacock
feather fan, the conch, the canopy -
Verily.
The gold crown and all other good
ornaments.
He gave him marks of honour the
walking-cloth, the day-time lamp,
The seven kinds of royal musical
instruments, and three lingual joys
- Verily.
Drums and lingual joys and all
good pump.
The king with pleasure, gave,
And all these did Thomman Kinan
accept - Verily.
He got also the copper-plate deed
fittingly engraved.
The marks of honour which the
Kings' King gave
Last for all the days of the existence
of the sun and the moon - Verily.
For all the days of the existence of
the sun and moon

(2)
To preach the religion to Coromandel and Malabar
Men were appointed in good
Mylapore.
To preach the religion except in
Coromandel.
The Tarisias (Christians) failed, and
Bagudasi (Bagadad) heard of it.
The Catholico was sorry and his
heart grew weary.
In all the eight directions - in
Pandya's land, and in Coromandel
and China.
The sole truth was spread according
to the way of St. Thomas.
May Jesus help those who did so!
The Catholico and the Rampans
(monks) were all sorry.
Who will now go in time to govern
Malankara (Malabar?)
One from those seated in the assembly
answers:
One of the twin-born must go to
Malankara.
We are the sons and nephews of the

Chummar Choondal is a noted authority on Kerala folklore and is the author of several books on the subject.

RIDDLES

Q. The box is full of pearls and has a lock to it.
A. Pomegranate.

Q. It has three eyes but it is no Shiva; it lives on top of a tree but it is no bird; it's full of water but it's no pot.
A. Coconut.

Q. The doors that constantly slam but do not make a sound.
A. Eyelids.

Q. The tiny fellow has dresses innumerable
A. Onion.

Q. There are four thieves on a pillar with a jewel box in the middle
A. A clove.

-Telugu
COSMIC TALES
AND CREATION MYTHS

THE KADARS

The Kadars, an aboriginal tribe, live in the forests of the Western Ghats on the borders of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The majority of them are food gatherers. The decrease in forest lands has forced them to give up their nomadic life and settle in small reservations provided by the state governments of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Thus they live between two worlds: the forests, the mysterious old home of their forefathers and modern civilisation. The Kadars have almost ceased to be a distinctive cultural group. Here are a few of their creation myths.

RETOLED BY
ZACHARIA S.P. THUNDY

THE SEPARATION OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

In the very beginning of creation earth and sky were so close that there was not enough room for human beings to stand erect. All beings then used to move about on all fours. The Homo erectus found it extremely unpleasant and annoying to walk like monkeys on both hands and feet. Besides, there was constant daylight and no night, and the heat emanating from the ever-present Sun was oppressive. Both the Sun and Moon stayed stationary, a few feet away from the earth, wrapped in scorching heat and blazing light. Neither of them could circumambulate in their orbits around the earth, for there was no exit route either in the east or west.

The Kadars got together and devised a plan to separate heaven and earth by raising the roof of the sky as high as possible! They decided that all human beings all over the earth at the same time should unhusk rice by using the pestle and mortar. By raising the pestle together at the same time repeatedly, they succeeded in pushing the sky farther and farther up. As the sky went up higher and higher, the Sun and Moon receded farther and farther from the earth. In fact, now there are fourteen worlds between heaven and earth.

When the earth was separated from heaven, the passage for the movement of the Sun and the Moon was opened simultaneously in the east and west so that they could go round the earth. The luminaries of the sky thus could provide heat and light to humans, animals, and plants that live on the underside of the round earth.

Everyday, the Sun goes around the earth. When it is day on the upper side of the earth, it is night on the lower side. The land of the setting sun is so hot that one can cook rice on the burning sand without fire.

THE SUN AND THE MOON

The Sun is a male god and the Moon a goddess. The Earth is, of course, female; she is the mother of all living beings.

A long time ago, before the separation of Heaven and Earth and the separation of the Moon and the Earth, the Sun and the Moon lived together in heaven. They were young children who played together. As both reached the stage of puberty, the amorous Sun, one day made advances to the Moon. She rejected him by reminding him that sexual union between
THE SUN, EARTH AND CREATION

After he was rejected by the Moon goddess, the Sun felt that he should make the beautiful Earth goddess his wife. He invited her to an official divine assembly. When the unsuspecting Earth arrived, he invited her to dinner and asked her to eat rice with him from the same plate and exchange wedding rings. It was an open invitation to marry him. Earth refused the marriage proposal. She said that their union and the generated heat would burn to death all animals of the earth.

The Sun was furious and humiliated. He, the mighty God, was flouted twice, jilted twice, by two puny females! He stood up to his whole divine height and with a side-kick of his divine heel, cast Earth away from Heaven and banished her forever from all divine fellowship. She fell headlong down to the abyss below. It took her several days to reach the half way point to the bottom of the abyss, where she stopped. The enraged sunbird and the great horn bill, flew down to earth and cut open her stomach. Water, blood, and mud gushed forth and engulfed everything on earth. Earth was cut up and disfigured almost beyond repair.

The earth was in complete chaos, tohu-wa-bohu. The plaintive cry of Earth pierced the sky and reached the ears of the Sun. He looked down from heaven to see what was happening down below. When he saw the miserable face of Earth and tears in her eyes, his heart was moved to pity. He called all his servants together and asked: “Can anyone repair Earth and heal her wounds?” They all said aloud: “No. We can’t.” However, the divine ears of the Sun detected a distant whisper: “Yes, we can.” He saw at a distance, the slow, crawling figure of a turtle with a sparrow sitting on top of its shell. He waited a long time until they could finally reach his presence.

“Yes, we can heal the wounds of Earth and make her more beautiful than ever, if you help us with your light and heat,” they said. The Sun said: “Yes, you have my help and blessing.”

The turtle and sparrow set to work. The earth was a total mess; the deluge had destroyed all signs of life. First, the swift sparrow flew over the earth; the breeze produced by the lapping of her wings started to dry up the muddy waters (patalam) with the help of the sun’s heat. Then slowly, crawled in the turtle. It dived into the abyss and started to build up mudwalls to separate water from the dry land. Gradually, rivers began to flow through ridges and valleys; in the valleys there emerged plains full of flowers; the mountain ranges marked the boundaries for flowing waters, preventing them from deluging the earth. While at this work, they sang:

Stroke it now outside now inside.
Strike it now inside now outside.
Hurry on, you, son of Palati.
Gird your loins with a pearl belt.
Wrap a turban round your head.
Hurry on, you, son of Palati

Then they started planting trees on the hills and in the plains. While at this work, they sang:

Zacharias P. Thundy grew up in Kerala. Since 1968 he has been teaching English Linguistics and Eastern and Western Classics at Northern Michigan University, U.S.A. This collection of folk stories of the Kadars were prepared by him during several field trips to India.
THE APA TANIS OF ARUNACHAL

The Apa Tanis of Arunachal Pradesh in North Eastern India live in a single homogeneous area. Their meticulous division of land and a system of irrigated fields do not allow even the slightest waste. The Apa Tanis are tall and good looking. They are excellent weavers and they supplied other tribes with their cloth.

RETOLD BY
VERRIER ELWIN

HEAVEN AND EARTH

At first Kujum-Chantu, the earth, was like a human being; she had a head, and arms and legs, and an enormous fat belly. The original human beings lived on the surface of her belly.

One day, it occurred to Kujum-Chantu that if she ever got up and walked about, everyone would fall off and be killed, so she herself died of her own accord. Her head became the snow-covered mountains; the bones of her back turned into smaller hills. Her chest was the valley where the Apa-Tanis live. From her neck came the north country of the Tagins. Her buttocks turned into the Assam plain. For just as the buttocks are full of fat, Assam has fat rich soil. Kujum Chantu's eyes became the Sun and Moon. From her mouth was born Kujum-Popi, who sent the Sun and Moon to shine in the sky.

THE SUN AND MOON

First of all there was Kenku, but no one can say what it was or what it was like. From Kenku was born a female Wiyu in the form of an earthen ball. She said to Kenku, "I am Chantu." Kenku said, "You have been born from me. Who will be born from you?"

"I will give birth to Abo Tani," said Chantu. Then Abo Tani was born. Chantu said to him, "I am going to die. You must give birth to mankind." "If you die," said Abo Tani, "where will all men live? Everything will be dark and where will we get our food and water?"

Chantu said, "My thighs will become the earth on which you can move about and cultivate your fields. My eyes will become the Sun and Moon and my blood will become water."

In the days of Abo Tani there lived the Wiyus—Doini, Polo and Si. Of these, Si was the stronger and more wicked and he had many quarrels with Doini and Polo. One day, he asked Tamu who was the bodyguard of Si to go to Doini and Polo and devour them. Tamu took the form of a frog and when Doini and Polo saw him approaching them they cried, "We will give you fowls, dogs and cats. We will give you tai and kra leaves so long as you do not eat us." But Tamu took no notice of them.

Then a priest of the Wiyus, called Karcha, went to Tamu and said, "Don't devour Doini and Polo. If they do not give you the things they have promised, I will give them to you instead." 'Very well,' said Tamu. 'If you will give me these things I will leave Doini and Polo alone.' In this way Karcha made peace between them and Abo Tani made offerings to Tamu and Karcha as well as to Doini and Polo.

But Tamu is a very wicked creature and still from time to time tries to devour Doini and Polo and sometimes succeeds.

One day while the Sun was playing with her brother the Moon, they found the carcass of a mitlun lying beneath some bushes. They were delighted and at once set to discussing how to divide
the flesh. They agreed to share it exactly. When they had cut it up and divided it, the Moon said to the Sun, ‘You take your share and go ahead, and I’ll follow with mine.’ So the Sun went home first and shared the meat with her father. But the Moon, lagging behind, ate up every morsel of his share. When he reached home empty-handed, his father, who had heard all about it from the Sun, asked him where his meat was. The Moon said that he had eaten it all. His father lost his temper and beat him. His stick caught one of the Moon’s eyes and tore it out. This is why the light of the Moon is less than the Sun’s light, for he has only one eye.

Before our Sun was made, there was another, earlier, Sun.

Dacha-Untré had a son named Ari-Untré. Father and son never got on very well together, and one day they had a violent quarrel. Dacha-Untré was so angry that he shot his son with an arrow and killed him. As the blood flowed from the boy’s body it turned into fire. His bones turned into iron.

The arrow with which Dacha-Untré shot his son went into one of his eyes; that is how it killed him. But there was one eye left, and it was bright and shining as the Sun. Presently it went into the heavens and wandered about as our Sun does today. But it was so hot that the trees and grasses withered and men died of the heat.

Wiyu Midd-Kojim had a son, Kojim-Ludi, and a daughter, Kojim-Taker. One day the two children were playing together, when the Sun came up into the sky. They had no time to take shelter, and its heat burnt their heads to ashes and they died.

Midd-Kojim was very angry at this and he said to the Sun, ‘‘How great you are, but how proud you are! Are you willing to fight me? Otherwise I am going to kill you.’’ Before the other could answer he raised his gun and shot him dead. Then all the world became dark until the new gentler Sun came to shine in the sky.

ANGAMI AND AO OF NAGALAND

THE SUN AND THE COCK

RETOLD BY R. LUIKHAM

When the earth was initially created, all the creatures complained about the brightness and the heat of the sun. They thought that they would be happier without the sun. As the complaints grew stronger, the sun was rightly angry but he did his appointed duty till he was asked not to return to the earth. Accordingly, when on the subsequent morning the sun did not rise from his under-world, the entire earth was enveloped in complete darkness. For a short while, the creatures were happy as they had undisturbed sleep and a wanton spree of enjoyment. But of course, they did not foresee the impending disaster and indeed their excitement and rejoicing was short-lived.

Thus, when the third day passed without the sun rising, it started dawning on the creatures that perhaps it was wrong on their part to have complained against the brightness and the heat of the sun. As the darkness continued, all the creatures grew hungry and yet no food could be found in the darkness except for a few creatures who had stored their provisions. Indeed, the time came when all the creatures were completely helpless and in great despair. In this confusion, they violently blamed each other only bringing about more confusion and despair. Realising the impending disaster, all the creatures agreed that something must be done immediately. Eventually, they decided to send their representatives to the sun to plead with him.

Representatives of men, wild animals and birds went to the sun, praying him to forgive them for their being foolish and asking him to return to the earth. But he was far from being in a mood to listen to them. In his anger he said, “Look, I do my duty generating light and heat ungrudgingly so that you may have light and life as appointed by the Almighty God. On your part, have you in any way compensated me in return for my services? Instead of being grateful, you complained that the light was too bright for your eyes and the heat too strong for your skin. You asked me not to return to the earth and accordingly, I did not come. Now you better manage your own affairs.”

The creatures realised their headstrong folly and yet they did not know how to convince the sun. Men and animals alike, sent their best speakers and singers to plead their case with the sun. But the sun was adamant and replied thus, “You men are the most gifted among all the inhabitants of the earth, but at the same time you are the most selfish and uncharitable by nature. You also talk too much and I have no faith in you. Therefore, I will not listen to you.”

THE EYE NO.2 VOL II 1995

71
Thus, those gifted representatives of men and animals alike, sent to plead their case with the sun, returned dejected. After a long deliberation among the inhabitants of the earth, the cock was unanimously selected to go and plead the case on their behalf. The main consideration of selecting the cock to plead the case was that he was the most uncontroversial figure, being harmless, good looking, polite, diplomatic and persuasive. However the cock had to say this, “If my superiors such as mean, tigers and stags have failed to convince the sun, who am I to convince him? I have very limited intellect and power of speech. I am afraid you have selected the wrong representative. Nonetheless, if you all press me to go, there is no harm in trying our luck once more.”

Thus the cock having finally yielded to the pressure of all, took a nice bath, brushed his feathers to a shine and went over to the sun with strong determination to put across their case as effectively as he could.

On arrival, he addressed the sun thus, “Oh mighty Sun, there is no denying the fact that you are the most mighty of God’s creation. At the same time, your part to punish us? If we were wise like you, we would never have asked you not to return to earth. Now, the fact is that all the creatures have realised their blunder and are genuinely sorry for their foolishness and ignorance. In fact, there were a number of small creatures including myself who did not share the decision when you were asked not to return to the earth, but we being in the minority, our voice was simply ignored. Now, my tribesmen are vanishing on account of wild cats feasting on the innocent hens and their chicks. Therefore, unless you return, all creatures big or small will die out soon. I promise, on behalf of all the creatures of the earth, that we will never complain again. Instead, each day you return, I will announce to the whole world that you, the life giver, are returning with all your beauty, majesty, dignity and warmth. Similarly in the evening just before you go back, I will announce that you are now departing to take rest. In fact, all the creatures expect you to grant our prayer and are awaiting your return with much eagerness. Hereafter, the dews will also fall on the ground and the flowers will open up in token of respect to you when you rise on the horizon.”

Hearing these sweet words of the cock, the heart of the sun melted and he answered thus, “If there were only a handful of creatures like you, I would certainly return, but alas there are too few like you.”

The shrewd cock knew at once that the sun was more than half willing to return and he pleaded, pressing his point further saying, “Oh mighty Sun, unless you return quickly all the small creatures who form the bulk of creation will die first. As for my tribe, the cunning wild cats will finish us soon and unless you return to the earth we will not live to enjoy your light and warmth. Any delay will bring complete disaster. I assure you, mighty lord, all the creatures are very anxious to welcome you back and have taken a vow never to ask you to leave again.”

The sun then started smiling and in his good mood he consented to return to the earth the following day. All the creatures were happy to hear the report of the cock and their despair turned into hope. Thus, the cock having won the victory single-handed became the hero of the day and all the creatures rightly rejoiced and celebrated. True to his promise, the sun returned once again from his underworld with all his dignity and might to the great relief of the creatures.

Honouring his word, the cock crew before the sun rose and the creatures were happy. The story goes that the crowing of the cock just before sunrise and sunset came into being at this time and has continued ever since.

R. Luikham is an educator and administrator with a keen interest in disseminating the culture of the Naga people.
THE KONDS

Among the innumerable tribes of Orissa, the Konds are the largest and probably the best known. Some of them, like the Kuttaia Konds continue to live untouched by modern civilisation in the remote mountains north-west of Ganjam. Then there are the more sophisticated Konds of Kalahandi, Koraput and the foothills and plains of Ganjam; and the Konda Doras who have been greatly influenced by Telugu culture. The main distinction between these sub-groups is in the systems of cultivation they follow and the influence of Hinduism on the Konds living in the plains.

All the Konds have a large pantheon of deities and spirits who must be appeased constantly. The priests and shaman wield considerable power over their tribes; there are also Kond shamanins whom other tribes believe to be witches. The potency of Kond magic is held in great awe by all the Oriya tribes.

RE TOLD BY
VERRIER ELWIN

THE SUN AND MOON

(1)

The Moon is the eldest daughter of Bura Pinnu and Pasruli, and the stars are their other children.

(2)

In the old days, the Sun in the form of a black cow used to go round and round the world during the night. Once a Kond was out trying to steal something and he caught the cow and took it home. After that there was nothing but darkness until he let it go. Now if we see a black cow at night we leave it alone.

(3)

Originally the Moon looked as big as a mat. At that time, it was so hot that rocks split in two and men and cattle died. The people went to Bura Pinnu and said, "If the Moon continues as big as this no one will be left alive." Bura Pinnu said, "I'll beat the Moon and knock her out of the ground so she won't be able to get up again." Then the people said, "But if Bura Pinnu kills the Moon it will be dark and we won't be able to get about. Don't kill her," they said, "but cut her in half." Bura Pinnu called the Moon, but she hid somewhere. So Paja Jani caught her by the hair and dragged her out but her hair came away in his hands. Each hair turned into a star.

Bura Pinnu said to the Moon, "Don't be afraid: I won't kill you, I just want to cut off a bit of you so that you won't destroy mankind by being too hot."

THUNDER AND LIGHTNING

(1)

There was no rain at first and clouds covered the world so that all was dark. People died of drought and darkness. When Bura Pinnu saw this, he tried in every possible way to send rain to the earth but not a drop fell. Bura Pinnu removed his sacred thread and broke it and threw it down from his home in the sky, saying, "Break open the bellies of the clouds." The thread turned into lightning and ran to attack the clouds. It went into the clouds and burst open their bellies and rain began to fall. Then it flashed round and round and broke every cloud open and returned to Bura Pinnu and he took it in his hand. Then he married the lightning to the wind and the two went to the clouds and drove away the men that guarded them. Rani-aru was angry with the lightning and tried to shoot it with an arrow, but he missed. Bura Pinnu said to the arrow, "When rain is needed, break open the clouds."

(2)

The lightning is the wife of Bhimsen. She is wanted and constantly runs away to her mother's house. Bhimsen beats her and the noise of his blows is the thunder.

(3)

In the sky is Piju-Pujera. When he goes to hunt and looks down, men on the earth look like animals, and he shoots at them with his bow and arrow and this is the thunderbolt. Sometimes he fires his gun and the flash is the lightning and the noise is the thunder. Generally he misses or many people would be killed.

When a tiger eats someone, the Konds burn the corpse and a lot of smoke rises into the sky. Piju-Pujera catches it and puts it in a special house. When he is hungry he brings it out and makes a heavy cloud. Down below, people get colds and coughs and sacrifice to him. He has a heavy meal, and when he is satisfied he collects the cloud and shuts it up until he gets hungry again.

Verrier Elwin is a noted scholar and writer who wrote largely about Eastern India, since he served there as an administrator during the British times. He was a Fellow of the Asiatic Society and the Royal Anthropological Institute, as well as an Honorary Member of the Bihar Research Society. He has authored innumerable books on the region, with special emphasis on the tribals.
One Vishnusharman shrewdly gleaning
All worldly wisdom's inner meaning.
In these five books the
charm compresses
Of all such books the world possesses.

Panchatantra

It is said that an ounce of sense contained in the Panchatantra is better than a ton of scholarship. Most of us are familiar with it from our childhood as 'once-upon-a-time' stories and have read them in abridged forms or in comics. Rarely have we encountered a literal translation in verse form. Indeed, these wise verses, often epigrammatic in style, go to make the real character of the Panchatantra. The stories are charming when regarded as pure narrative, but it is the beauty, wisdom and wit of the verses which lift the Panchatantra above the best story books.

The Panchatantra is a 'niti shastra' or textbook of 'niti'. The word 'niti' roughly means the 'wise conduct of life'. It is witty, mischievous and profoundly sane. The word, 'Panchatantra' means, the 'Five Books', the 'Pentateuch'. Each of the five books are independent, consisting of a framing story with numerous, inserted stories, told by one or another of the characters of the main narrative. The device of the framing story is familiar in oriental works, as in the Arabian Nights. The large majority of the actors are animals, who have, of course, a fairly constant character. Thus, the lion is strong, but dull of wit, the jackal, crafty, the heron stupid, the cat, a hypocrite. The animal actors present more vividly and shrewdly, undeceived and free of all sentimentality, a view, that piercing the humbug of every false ideal, reveals with incomparable wit, the sources of lasting joy. And this is how it happened...

In the southern country is a city called Maiden's Delight. There lived a king named Immortal Power. He was familiar with all the works dealing with the wise conduct of life. His feet were made dazzling by the tangle of rays of light from jewels in the diadems of mighty kings who knelt before him. He had reached the far shore of all the arts that embellish life. This king had three sons. Their names were Rich-Power, Fierce-Power and Endless-Power and they were supreme block-heads.

Now when the king perceived that they were hostile to education, he summoned his counsellors and said, "Gentlemen, it is known to you that these sons of mine, being hostile to education, are lacking in discernment. So when I behold them, my kingdom brings me no happiness, though all external thorns are drawn. For there is wisdom in the proverb:

Of sons unborn, or dead, or fools,
Unborn or dead will do:
They cause a little grief, no doubt;
But fools, a long life through.

and again:

To what good purpose can a cow
That brings no calf nor milk be bent?
Or why beget a son who proves
A dunce and disobedient?

Some means must therefore be devised to awaken their intelligence." And they, one after another, replied; "O King, first one learns grammar, in twelve years. If this subject has somehow been mastered, then one masters the books on religion and practical life. Then the intelligence awakens."

But one of their number, a counsellor named Keen, said: "O King, the duration of life is limited, and the verbal sciences require much time for mastery. Therefore let some kind of epitome be devised to wake their intelligence. There is a proverb that says:

Since verbal sciences have
no final end,
Since life is short, and obstacles impend,
Let central facts be picked and firmly fixed,
As swans extract the milk with water mixed.

"Now, there is a Brahmin here named Vishnusharman, with a reputation for competence in numerous
sciences. Entrust the princes to him. He will certainly make them intelligent in a twinkling.

When the king had listened to this, he summoned Vishnusharman and said, "Holy sir, as a favour to me you must make these princes incomparable masters of the art of practical life. In return, I will bestow upon you a hundred land grants."

And Vishnusharman made this answer to the king, "O king, listen. Here is the plain truth. I am not the man to sell good learning for a hundred land grants. But if I do not, in six months' time, make the boys acquainted with the art of intelligent living, I will give up my own name. Let us cut the matter short. Listen to my lion roar. My boasting arises from no greed for cash. Besides, I have no use for money; I am eighty years old, and all the objects of sensual desire have lost their charm. But in order that your request may be granted, I will show a sporting spirit with reference to artistic matters. Make a note of the date. If I fail to render your sons, in six month's time, incomparable masters of the art of intelligent living, then His Majesty is at liberty to show me His Majestic bare bottom."

When the king, surrounded by his counsellors, had listened to the Brahmin's highly unconventional promise, he was dumbfounded. He entrusted the princes to him, and experienced supreme content.

Meanwhile, Vishnusharman took the boys, went home, and made them learn by heart, five books which he composed and called:

(i) The Loss of Friends
(ii) The Winning of Friends
(iii) Crows and Owls
(iv) Loss of Gain
(v) Ill-considered Action.

These the princes learned, and in six month's time they answered the prescription. Since that day this work on the art of intelligent living, called Panchatantra, or the Five Books, has travelled the world, aiming at awakening the intelligence in the young.

THE STORY OF THE LAST EPISODE...

A crow and his wife sought the advice of their learned friend, the jackal, on how to get rid of a snake that crawled up their tree and ate all their babies. The jackal said:

- Of means to injure brutal foes
  You do not need to think.
  Since of themselves they fall, like trees
  Upon the river's brink.

Thus reassuring them, the jackal told them of the greedy old heron, who by a ruse, managed to trick the fish in a pond into believing that their lives were in danger where they lived.

He would 'rescue' a few of them every day and then eat them up. He finally met his nemesis in a crab who outwitted the crafty old heron and nipped off its head.

The crows were greatly fortified by this tale. Upon the jackal's advice, the lady crow stole a gold chain from the queen and dropped it into the snake's hole. She led the king's men to her tree below which was the snake's hole. Naturally the snake was caught and killed at once.

Cheek and Victor, the two counsellors of the king, continued to malign over the problem of their master. Rusty's friendship with Lively the Bull. Only intelligence could help them separate the two:

Intelligence is power. But where
Could power and folly make a pair?
The rabbit played upon his pride
To fool him, and the lion died.

"How was that?" asked Cheek. And Victor told two stories, NUMSKULL AND THE RABBIT and THE WEAVER WHO LOVED A PRINCESS.

Numskull and The Rabbit

I n a part of a forest was a lion drunk with pride, and his name was Numskull. He slaughtered the animals without ceasing. If he saw an animal, he could not spare him.

So all the denizens of the forest—deer, bears, buffaloes, wild oxen, rabbits, and others—came together, and with woe-begone countenances, bowed heads, and knees clinging to the ground, they undertook to beseech obsequiously the king of beasts: "Have done, O King, with this merciless, meaningless slaughter of all creatures. It is hostile to happiness in the other world. For the Scripture says:

A thousand future lives
Will pass in wretchedness
For since a fool commits

His present life to bless.

Again:

What wisdom in a deed
That brings dishonour fell,
That causes loss of trust,
That paves the way to hell?

And yet again:

The ungrateful body, frail
And rank with filth within,
Is such that only feels
For its sake sink in sin.

Consider these facts, and cease, we pray, to slaughter our generations. For if the master will remain at home, we will of our own motion send him each
day for his daily food one animal of the forest. In this way neither the royal sustenance nor our families will be cut short. In this way let the king's duty be performed. For the proverb says:

The king who tastes his kingdom like Elixir, bit by bit
Who does not overtax its life,
Will fully relish it.

The king who madly butchers men,
Their lives as little reckoned
As lives of goats, has one square meal.
But never has a second.

A king desiring profit, guards
His world from evil chance;
With gifts and honours waters it
As florists water plants.

Guard subjects like a cow, nor ask
For milk each passing hour
A vine must first be sprinkled, then
It ripens fruit and flower.

The monarch-lamp from subjects draws
Tax-oil to keep it bright:
Has any ever noticed kings
That shone by inner light?

A seedling is a tender thing,
And yet, if not neglected,
It comes in time to bearing fruit:
So subjects well protected.

Their subjects form the only source
From which accrue to kings
Their gold, grain, gems, and varied drinks,
And many other things.

The kings who serve the common weal,
Lustreantly sprout;
The common loss is kingly loss,
Without a shade of doubt.

After listening to this address, Numskull said:
"Well, gentlemen, you are quite convincing. But if an animal does not come to me every day as I sit here, I promise you I will eat you all."

To this they assented with much relief, and fearlessly roamed the woods.

Each day at noon one of them appeared as his dinner, each species taking its turn and providing an individual grown old, or religious, or grief-smitten, or fearful of the loss of son or wife.

One day a rabbit's turn came, it being rabbit-day. And when all the thronging animals had given him directions, he reflected: "How is it possible to kill this lion—curse him! Yet after all,

In what can wisdom not prevail?
In what can resolution fail?
What cannot flattery subdue?
What cannot enterprise put through?

I can kill even a lion."

So he went very slowly, planning to arrive tardily, and meditating with troubled spirit on a means of killing him. Late in the day he came into the presence of the lion, whose throat was pinched by hunger in consequence of the delay, and who angrily thought as he licked his chops: "Aha! I must kill all the animals the first thing in the morning."

While he was thinking, the rabbit slowly drew near, bowed low, and stood before him. But when the lion saw that he was tardy and too small at that for a meal, his soul flamed with wrath, and he taunted the rabbit, saying: "You reprobate! First, you are too small for a meal. Second, you are tardy. Because of this wickedness I am going to kill you, and tomorrow morning I shall extirpate every species of animal."

Then the rabbit bowed low and said with deference: "Master, the wickedness is not mine, nor the other animals. Pray hear the cause of it." And the lion answered: "Well, tell it quick, before you are between my fangs."

"Master," said the rabbit, "all the animals recognized today that the rabbits' turn had come, and because I was quite small, they dispatched me with five other rabbits. But in mid-journey there issued from a great hole in the ground a lion who said: 'Where are you bound? Pray to your favorite god.' Then I said: 'We are travelling as the dinner of lion Numskull, our master, according to agreement.' 'Is that so?' said he. 'This forest belongs to me. So all the animals, without exception, must deal with me—according to agreement. This Numskull is a sneak thief. Call him out and bring him here at once. Then whichever of us proves stronger, shall be king and shall eat all these animals.' At his command master, I have come to you.
This is the cause of my tardiness.
For the rest, my master is the sole judge."

After listening to this, Numskull said: "Well, well, my good fellow, show me that sneak thief
of a lion, and be quick about it. I cannot find peace of mind
until I have vented on him my anger against the animals. He
should have remembered the saying:

Land and friend and gold at most
Have been won when battles cease;
If but one of these should fail,
Do not think of breaking peace.

Where no great reward is won,
Where defeat is nearly sure,
Never stir a quarrel, but
Find it wise to endure."

"Quite so, master," said the rabbit. "Warriors fight for their
country when they are insulated.
But this fellow skulks in a fortress, you
know he came out of a fortress when he
held us up. And an enemy in a fortress
is hard to handle. As the saying goes:

A single royal fortress adds
More military force
Than do a thousand elephants,
A hundred thousand horse.

A single archer from a wall
A hundred foes forfends;
And so the military art
A fortress recommends.

God Indra used the wit and skill
Of gods in days of old,
When Devil Gold-mat
Plagued the world.
To build a fortress-hold.

And he decreed that any king
Who built a fortress sound,
Should conquer foesmen. This is why
Such fortresses abound."

When he heard this, Numskull said:
"My good fellow, show me that thief.
Even if he is hiding in a fortress. I will
kill him. For the proverb says:

The strongest man who fails to crush
At birth, disease or foe,
Will later be destroyed by that
Which he permit to grow.

And again:
The man who reckons well his power,
Nor pride nor vigor lacks,
May single-handed smite his foes
Like Rama-with-the-axe.

"Very true," said the rabbit. "But
after all it was a mighty lion that I saw.
So the master should not set out without
realizing the enemy's capacity. As the
saying runs:

A warrior failing to compare
Two hosts, in mad desire
For battle, plagues like a moth
Head foremost into fire.

And again:
The weak who challenge mighty foes
A battle to abide,
Like elephants with broken tusks,
Return with drooping pride."

But Numskull said: "What business
is it of yours? Show him to me, even
in his fortress." "Very well," said the
rabbit. "Follow me, master." And he
led the way to a well, where he said
to the lion: "Master, who can
endure your majesty? The
moment he saw you, that thief
crawled clear into his hole. Come.
I will show him to you." "Be quick
about it, my good fellow," said
Numskull.

So the rabbit showed him the
well. And the lion, being a dreadful
fool, saw his own reflection in
the water, and gave voice to a great
roar. Then from the well issued a
roar twice as loud, because of the
echo. This the lion heard, decided
that his rival was very powerful,
hurled himself down, and met his
death. Thereupon the rabbit cheerfully
carried the glad news to all
the animals, received their com-
pliments, and lived there contented-
elly in the forest.

"And that is why I say:
Intelligence is power....

and the rest of it."

"But," said Cheek, "that is like a
palm-fruit falling on a crow's head—a
quite exceptional case. Even if the rab-
bit was successful, still a man of feeble
powers should not deal fraudulently
with the great." And Victor retorted:
"Feeble or strong, one must make up
his mind to vigorous action. You know
the proverb:

Unceasing effort brings success;
'Fate, fate is all.' let dastards wait;
Smit fate and prove yourself a man;
What fault if bold endeavor fail?

Furthermore, the very gods befriend
those who ever strive. As the story
goes:

The gods befriend a man who climbs
Determination's height:
So Vishnu, discus, bird sustained
The weaver in the flight.

"How was that?" asked Cheek.
"Are undertakings successful even
through deceit, resolutely and well
devised?" And Victor told the story of :
THE WEAVER WHO LOVED A
PRINCESS
In the Molasses belt is a city called Sugarcane City.
In it lived two friends, a weaver and a carpenter. Since they were past masters in their respective crafts, they had earned enough money by their labors so that they kept no account of receipt and expenditure. They wore soft, gaily colored, expensive garments, adorned themselves with flowers and betel-leaves, and diffused odors of camphor, aloes and musk. They worked nine hours a day, after which they adorned their persons and met for recreation in such places as public squares or temples. They made the rounds of the spots where society gathered—theaters, conversaziones, birthday parties, banquets, and the like—then went home at twilight. And so the time passed.

One day there was a great festival, an occasion when the entire population, wearing the finest ornaments that each could afford, began sauntering through the temples of the gods and other public places. The weaver and the carpenter, like the rest, put on their best things, and in squares and courtyards inspected the faces of people dressed to kill. And they caught a glimpse of a princess seated at the window of a stucco palace. The vicinity of her heart was made lovely by a firm bosom with the curve of early youth. Below the slender waist was the graceful swell of the hips. Her hair was black as a raincloud, soft, glossy, with a billowy curl. A golden earring danced below an ear that seemed a hammock where Love might swing.

Her face had the charm of a new-blown, tender water-lily. Like a dream she took captive the eyes of all, as she sat surrounded by girl friends.

And the weaver, ravished by lavish loveliness, since the love-god with five fierce arrows pierced his heart, concealed his feelings by a supreme effort of resolution, and tottered home, seeing nothing but the princess in the whole horizon. With long-drawn, burning sighs he tumbled on the bed (though it had not been made up), and there he lay. He perceived, he thought of nothing but her, just as he had seen her, and there he lay, reciting poetry:

**Virtues with beauty dwell:**
So poets sing.
**This contradiction not Considering:**
That she, so cruel-sweet,
Far, far apart,
Tortures my body still,
Still in my heart.

Or does this explain it?

**One heart my darling took:**
One pines as if to die;
One throbs with feeling pure:
How may hearts have I?

And yet

**If all the world from virtue draws**
A blessing and a gain,
**Why should all virtue in my maid**
My fawn-eyed maiden, pain?

**Each guards his home, they say:**
Yet in my heart you stay,
**Burning your home alway,**
**Sweet, heartless one!**

That these—her bosom's youthful pride,
Her curling hair, her sinuous side,
Her blood-red lip, her waist so small—
should hurt me, is not strange at all:
But that her cheeks so clear, so bright,
Should torture me, is far from right.

**Her bosom, like an elephant's brow,**

**Swell s, saffron-scented. How, ah, how**

May I thereon my bosom lay,
When weary love is tired of play,
So, fettered in her arms, to keep
A vigil wakening half, half sleep?

**If fate has willed**
That I should die,
**Are there no means**
Save that soft eye?

You see my love, though far apart

---

**The Weaver Who Loved A Princess**
Before you ever, O my heart! 
Should vision cease to satisfy, 
Oh, teach your magic to my eye: 
For even her presence will distress 
If bought by too great loneliness. 
Since none—the merciful are bless—
Of selfishness may stand confessed.

She stole his luster from the moon—
The moon is dull and cold; 
The lily's sheen is in her eyes—
No charge of theft will hold; 
The elephant's majesty she seized—
Naught knows he of her art; 
From me the slender maiden took 
Ah, strange! a feeling heart.

In middle air I see my love, 
On earth below, in heaven above; 
In life's last hour, on her I call: 
She is, like Vishnu, all-in-all.

All mental states, the Buddha said, 
Are transient; he was wrong: 
My meditations on my love 
Are infinitely long.

In such lamentation, his thoughts 
Tossing to and fro, the night dragged 
Drearily away. On the next day at the customary hour, the carpenter, wearing an elegant costume, came as usual to the weaver’s house. There he found the weaver with arms and legs sprawled over the unmade bed, heard his long-drawn, burning sighs, and noticed his pallid cheeks and trickling tears. Finding him in this condition, he said: “My friend, my friend, why are you in such a state today?” But the poor weaver, though questioned repeatedly, was too embarrassed to say a word. At last the carpenter grew weary and dropped into poetry:

No friend is he whose anger 
Compels a timid languor, 
Nor he whom all must anxiously attend; 
But when you trust another 
As if he were your mother, 
He is no mere acquaintance, 
but a friend.

Then, after examining the weaver’s heart and other members with a hand skilled in detecting symptoms, he said: “Comrade, if my diagnosis is correct, your condition is not the result of fever, but of love.”

Now when his friend voluntarily introduced the subject, the weaver sat up in bed and recited a stanza of poetry:

You find repose in sore disaster 
By telling things to clear-eyed master, 
To virtuous servant, gentle friend, 
Or wife who loves you to the end.

Then he related his whole experience from the moment he laid eyes on the princess. And the carpenter, after some reflection, said: “The king belongs to the warrior caste, while you are a business man. Have you no reverence for the holy law?”

But the weaver replied: “The holy law allows a warrior three wives. The girl may be the daughter of a woman of my caste. That may explain my love for her. What says the king in the play?

Surely, she may become a warrior’s bride; 
Else, why these longings in an honest mind? 
The motions of a blameless heart 
Decide 
Of right and wrong, when reason 
Leaves us blind.”

Thereupon the carpenter, perceiving his determined purpose, said: “Comrade, what is to be done next?” And the weaver answered: “I don’t know. I told you because you are my friend.” And to this he would not add a word.

At last the carpenter said “Rise, bathe, eat. Say farewell to despondency. I will invent something such that you will enjoy with her the delights of love without loss of time.”

Then the weaver, hope reviving at his friend’s promise, rose and returned to seemingly living. And the next day the carpenter came bringing a brand-new mechanical bird, like Garuda, the bird of Vishnu. It was made of wood, was gaily painted in many colors, and had an ingenious arrangement of plugs.

“Comrade,” he said to the weaver, “when you mount the bird and insert a plug, it goes wherever you wish. And the contrivance alights at the spot where you pull out the plug. It is yours. This very night, when people are asleep, adorn your person, disguise yourself as Vishnu—my wit and skill are at your service—mount this Garuda bird, alight on the maidens’ balcony of the palace, and make whatever arrangements you like with the princess. I have ascertained that the princess sleeps alone on the palace balcony.”

When the carpenter had gone, the weaver spent the rest of the day in a hundred fond imaginings. He took a bath, used incense, powders, ointments, betel, scents for the breath, flowers, and so forth. He put on gay garlands and garments, rich in fragrance. He adorned himself with a diadem and other jewelry. And when the night came clear, he followed the carpenter’s instructions.

Meanwhile, the princess lay in her bed alone on the palace balcony, bathed in moonbeams. She gazed at the moon, her mind idly dallying with the thought of love.
in moonbeams. She gazed at the moon, her mind idly dallying with the thought of love. All at once she spied the weaver, disguised as Vishnu and mounted on his heavenly bird. At sight of him she started from her bed, adored his feet, and humbly said: “O Lord, to what end am I honored by this visit? Pray command me. What am I to do?”

To the princess’ words the weaver, in dignified and sweetly modulated accents, made a stately answer: “Yourself, dear maiden, are the occasion of this visit to earth.” “But I am merely a mortal girl,” said she. And he continued: “Nay, you have been my bride, now fallen to earth by reason of a curse. It is I who have so long protected you from contact with a man. I will now wed you by the ceremony used in heaven.” And she assented, for she thought: “It is a thing beyond my fondest aspirations.” And he married her by the ceremony used in heaven.

So day followed day in the enjoyment of love’s delights, each day witnessing a growth in passion. Before dawn the weaver would mount his mechanical Garuda, would bid her farewell with the words: “I depart for Vishnu’s heaven,” and would always reach his house undetected.

One day the guards at the women’s quarters observed indications that the princess was meeting a man, and in fear of their very lives made a report to their master. “O King,” they said, “be gracious and confirm our personal security. There is a disclosure to be made.” And when the king assented, the guards reported: “O King, we have used anxious care to forbid the entrance of men. Yet indications are observed that Princess Lovely has meetings with a man. Not unto us does it fall to take measures. The king, the king alone is prime mover.”

Upon this information the king pondered with troubled spirit:

You are worried when you hear that she is born;
Picking husbands makes you anxious and forlorn;
When she marries, will her husband be a churl?
It is tough to be the father of a girl.

Again:
At her birth she steals away her mother’s heart;

from every point of view, he sought the queen and said: “My dear queen, pray give careful attention to what these chamberlains have to say. Who is this offender whom the death-god seeks today?”

Now when they had related the facts, the queen hastened in great perturbation to the maidens’ apartments and found her daughter with lips sore from kissing and with telltale traces on her limbs. And she cried: “You wicked girl! You are a disgrace to the family! How could you throw your character away? Who is the man that comes to you? The death-god has looked upon him. Dreadful as things are, at least tell the truth.” Then the princess, with shamefaced, drooping glances, recounted the whole story of the weaver disguised as Vishnu.

Thereupon the queen, with laughing countenance and thrilling in every limb, hastened to the king and said: “O King, you are indeed fortunate. It is blessed Vishnu who comes each night in person to our daughter’s side. He has married her by the ceremony used in heaven. This very night you and I are to hide in the window niche and have sight of him. But with mortals he does not exchange words.”

On hearing this, the king was glad at heart, and somehow lived through the day, which seemed a hundred years. When night came, the king and queen stood hidden in the window niche and waited, their gaze fixed on the sky. Presently the King saw one descending from heaven, mounted on Garuda, grasping the conch-shell, discus, mace, marked with the familiar symbols. And feeling as if drenched by a shower of nectar, he said to the queen: “There are none other on earth so blest as you and I, whose child blessed Vishnu seeks with love. All the desires nearest our hearts are granted. Now, through the power of our son-in-law, I shall reduce the whole world to subjection.”

At this juncture envoys arrived to collect the yearly tribute for King Valor, monarch of the south, lord of nine million, nine hundred thousand villages. But the king proud of his new relationship with Vishnu, did not show them the customary honor, so that they grew indignant and said: “Come, King! Pay day is past. Why have you failed to
offer the taxes due? I must be that you have recently come into possession of some unanticipated, supernatural power from some source or other, that you irritate King Valor, who is a flame, a whirlwind, a venomous serpent, a death-god." Upon this the king showed them his bare bottom. And they returned to their own country, exaggerated the matter a hundred thousand fold, and stirred the wrath of their master.

Then the southern monarch, with his troops and retainers, at the head of an army with all four service branches, marched against the king. And he angrily cried:

This king may climb the heavenly mount,  
May plunge beneath the sea;  
And yet—I promise it—the wretch  
Shall soon be slain by me.

So Valor reached the country by marches never interrupted, and ravaged it. And the inhabitants who survived the slaughter besieged the palace gate of the king of Sugarcane City, and taunted him. But what he heard did not cause the king the slightest anxiety.

On the following day the forces of King Valor arrived and invaded Sugarcane City, whereupon hosts of counselors and chaplins interceded with the King: "O King," they said, "a powerful enemy has arrived and invaded the city. How can the king show himself so unconcerned?" And the king replied: "You gentlemen may feel quite comfortable. I have devised a means of killing this foe. What I am about to do to his army, you too will learn tomorrow morning." After this address, he bade them provide adequate defense for the walls and gates.

Then he summoned Lovely and with respectful coaxing said: "Dear child, relying on your husband’s power, we have begun hostilities with the enemy. This very night pray speak to blessed Vishnu when he comes, so that in the morning he may kill this enemy of ours."

So Lovely delivered to him at night her father’s message, complete in every particular. On hearing it, the weaver laughed and said: "Dear love, how little a business is this, a mere war with men! Why, in days gone by I have with the greatest ease slain mighty demons by the thousand, and they were armed with magic; there was Hiranyakashipu, and Kansa, and Madhu, and Kaitabha, to name but a few. Go, then, and say to the king: ‘Dismiss anxiety. In the morning Vishnu will slay the host of your enemies with his discus.’"

So she went to the king and proudly told him all. Whereat he was overjoyed and commanded the door-keeper to have proclamation made with beat of drum throughout the city, in these words: "Whatever any shall lay hands in during tomorrow’s battle in the camp of Valor slain, whether coined money or grain or gold or elephant or horse or weapon or other object, that shall remain his personal possession." This proclamation delighted the citizens, so that they gossiped together, saying: "This king of ours is a lofty soul, unalarmed even in the presence of the hostile host. He is certain to kill his rival in the morning."

Meanwhile the weaver, forgetting love’s allurements, took counsel with his brooding mind: "What am I to do now? Suppose I mount the machine and fly away, then I shall never meet my pearl, my wife, again. King Valor will drag her from the palace after killing my poor father-in-law. Yet if I accept battle, I shall meet death, who puts an end to every heart’s desire. But death is mine if I lose her. Why spin it out? Death, sure death, in either case. It is better, then, to die game. Besides, it is just possible that the enemy, if they see me accepting battle and mounted on Garuda, will think me the genuine Vishnu and will flee. For the proverb says:

Let resolution guide the great,  
However desperate his state,  
However grim his hostile fate:  

By resolution lifted high,  
With shrewd decision as ally,  
He grimly sees grim trouble fly."

When the weaver had thus resolved on battle, the genuine Garuda made respectful representations to Vishnu in heaven. "O Lord," he said, "in a city on earth called Sugarcane is a weaver who, distinguishing himself as my Lord, has wedded a princess. As a result, a more powerful monarch of the south has marched to extirpate the king of
Sugarcane City. Now the weaver, today makes his resolution to befriend his father-in-law. This, then, is what I must refer to your decision. If he meets death in battle, then scandal will arise in the moral world to the effect that blessed Vishnu has been killed by the king of the south. Thereafter sacrificial offerings will fail, and other religious ceremonies. Then atheists will destroy the temples of the lord, while pilgrims of the triple staff, devotees of blessed Vishnu, will abtain from journeyings. Such being the condition of affairs, decision rests with my Lord."

Then blessed Vishnu, after exhaustive meditation, spoke to Garuda: "O King of the winged, your reasoning is just. This weaver has a spark of divinity in him. Therefore he must be the slayer of yonder king. And to bring this about you and I must befriend him. My spirit shall enter his body, you are to inspire his bird, and my discus, his discus." "So be it," said Garuda, assenting.

Hereupon the weaver, inspired by Vishnu, gave instructions to Lovely: "Dear love, when I set out for battle, let all things be made ready that bring a benediction." He then performed auspicious ceremonies, assumed ornaments seemly for battle, and permitted worshipful offerings of yellow pigment, black mustard, flowers, and the like. But when the friend of day-blooming water-lilies, the blessed, thousand-beamed sun arose, adorning the bridal brow of the eastern sky, then to the victorious roll of the war-drums, the king issued from the city and drew near the field of battle, then both armies formed in exact array, then the infantry came to blows. At this moment the weaver, mounted on Garuda, and scattering largess of gold and precious gems, flew from the palace roof toward heaven's vault, while the towns-people, thrilling with wonder, gazed and adored, then beyond the city he hovered above his army, and drew from Vishnu's conch a proud, grand burst of martial sound.

At the bale of the conch, elephants, horses, chariots, foot-soldiers, were dismayed and many garments were fouled. Some with shrill screams fled afar. Some rolled on the ground, all purposive movement paralyzed. Some stood stock still, with terrified gaze fixed unwavering on heaven.

At this point all the gods were drawn to the spot by curiosity to see the fight, and Indra said to Brahma: "Brahma, is this some imp or demon who must needs be slain? For blessed Vishnu, mounted on Garuda, has gone forth to battle in person." At these words Brahma pondered:

"Lord Vishnu's discus drinks in flood
The hostile demons' gushing blood,
And strikes no mortal flat:
The jungle lion who can draw
The tasker's life with awful paw.
Disdains to crush a gnat.

What means this marvel?" Thus Brahma himself was astonished. That is why I told you:

Not even Brahma sees the end
Of well devised deceit:
The weaver, taking Vishnu's form,
Embraced the princess sweet.

While the very gods were thus pondering with tense interest, the weaver hurled his discus at Valor. This discus, after cutting the king in twain, returned to his hand. At the sight, all the kings without exception leaped from their vehicles, and with hands, feet, and head drooping in limp obeisance, they implored him who bore the form of Vishnu: "O Lord, An army, leaderless, is slain.

Be mindful of this and spare our lives. Command us. What are we to do?"

So spoke the whole throng of kings, until he made answer who bore the form of Vishnu: "Your persons are secure henceforth. Whatever commands you receive from the local king, King Stout-Mail, you must on all occasions unhesitatingly perform." And all the kings humbly received his instructions, saying: "Let it be as our Lord commands.

Thereupon the weaver bestowed on Stout-Mail all his rival's wealth, whether men or elephants or chariots or horses or stores of merchandise or other riches; while he himself, having attained the special majesty of those victorious, enjoyed all known delights with the princess.

"And that is why I say:
The gods befriend a man who climbs Determination's height,...

and the rest of it."

Having listened to this, Cheek said: "If you, too, are thus climbing determination's height, then proceed to the accomplishment of your desire. Bless be your journeyings."

Thereupon Victor sought the presence of the lion, who said, when Victor had bowed and seated himself: "Why has so long a time passed since you were last visible?" And Victor answered: "O King, urgent business awaits my master today. Hence I am come, the bearer of tidings unwelcome but wholesome. This is not, indeed, the desire of dependents, who yet bring such tidings, when they fear the neglect of immediate and necessary action. As the proverb says:

When those appointed to advise
Speak wholesome truth,
they cause surprise
By this remarkable excess
Of passionate devotedness.
And again:

A man is quickly found, O King, to say the sycophant thing; but one prepared to hear or speak unwelcome truth, is far to seek.

Hereupon Rusty, believing his words worthy of trust, respectfully asked him: “What do you wish to imply?” And Victor answered: “O King, Lively has crept into your confidence with reasonable purpose. On several occasions he has confidentially whispered in my hearing: ‘I have examined the strong points and the weak in your master’s power—in his prestige, his advisers, and his material resources. I plan to kill him and to seize the royal power myself without difficulty.’ This very day this Lively person intends to carry out his design. That is why I am here to warn the master service is mine by inheritance.”

To Rusty this report was more terrible than the fall of a thunderbolt. He sank into a panic-stricken stupor and said not a word. Then Victor, comprehending his state of mind, continued: “This is the great sadness in the discharge of a counselor’s duty. There is wisdom in the saying:

When a counselor or king
Rises higher than he should,
Fortune strives in vain to make
Still her double footing good:
Being woman, feels the strain;
Soon abandons one of twain.

For, indeed,

With broken sliver, loosened tooth,
Or counselor who fails in truth,
Purl roots and all; so only, grief
Will find its permanent relief.

And again:

No king should ever delegate
To one sole man the powers
Of state:
For folly seizes him, then pride,
Whereat he grows dissatisfied
With service; thus impatient grown,
He longs to rule the realm alone;

The man who loves not royalty,
Just serving while he can
Find nothing better worth his pains,
Is not a loyal man.”

And such impatient longings bring
Him into plots to kill his king.

“Even now, this Lively manages all business as he will, without restraint of any kind. Hence the well-known saying finds application:
A counselor who tramples through His business, though his heart be true,
May not unheeded go his way,
Since future days the present pay.

But such is the nature of kings. As the poet sings:

Some gentle born of love
To thoughts of active hatred move
Some deeds of traitorous offense
Win guerdon of benevolence;
The kingly mind can no man tame,
As never being twice the same:
Such service makes the spirit faint,
A hard conundrum for a saint.”

On hearing this, Rusty said: “After all, he is my servant. Why should he experience a change of heart toward me?” But Victor answered: “Servant or not, there is nothing conclusive in that. For the proverb says:

The man who loves not royalty,
Just serving while he can
Find nothing better worth his pains,
Is not a loyal man.”

“My dear fellow,” said the lion, “even so, I cannot find it in my heart to turn against him. For

However false and fickle grown,
Once dear is always dear:
Who does not love his body, though
Decrepit, blemished, queer?

And again:

His actions may be hard to bear,
His speech be harsh to hear;
The heart still clings delighted to
A person truly dear.

“For that very reason,” retorted Victor, “there is a serious flaw in the business of getting on in the world. Observe how this person, upon whom the master has concentrated his consideration to the exclusion of the whole
company of animals, now desires to become himself the master. As the verse puts it:

The man of birth or man unknown,
If kingly eyes on him alone
Are fixed, aspires to seize the throne.
Therefore, dear though he be, he should be abandoned, being a traitor, like one who has never been dear. There is much wisdom in the saying:

Pursue your aim, abandoning
The fools inclined to sin,
The comrades, brothers, friends, or sons,
Or honorable kin:
You know the song the women sing,
We hear it far and near—
What good are golden earrings, if They lacerate your ear?

"And if you fancy that he will bring benefit because he is bulky of body, you make a perverse mistake. For

How use a proud bull-elephant
That will not serve the king? A man is better, fat or lean. Who does the helpful thing.

"Again, any pity that our lord and king might feel toward him, is quite out of place. For

Whoever leaves the righteous path
For some unrighteous course Will meet calamity in time And suffer much remorse.

And again:

On wicked trick intensly bent, The wilful still lack ear to hear (So blind their mind) of nice and vice The cause in sows appearing clear.

Furthermore:

Where one will speak and one will heed What in the end is well, Although unpleasant at the time, There riches love to dwell.

And again:

No king's retainer should device A fraud, for spies are kingly eyes: Then bear with harsh as kind. O King: The truth is seldom flattering.

Tired servants never should be left. And strangers taken; A kingdom's health by no disease Is sooner shaken."

"My good fellow," said the lion, "pray do not say such things. For

- Never publicly defame Any once commended name: Broken promises are shame.

"Now I formerly gave him a safe-conduct, since he appeared as a suppliant. How then can he prove ungrateful?" But Victor rejoined:

"No rogue asks reason for his wrath; Nor saint, to tread in kindness' path: By nature's power, the sweet or sour In sugar dwell or neem-tree's flower.

And again:

Caress a rascal as you will, He was and is a rascal still: All save and sweating-treatments fail To take the kink from doggy's tail.

And once again:

Slight kindness shown to lofty souls A strange enlargement seeks: The moonbeams gleam with whiter light On Himalaya's peaks.

While, on the other hand:

The kindness shown to vicious souls Strange diminution seeks: The gleam of moonbeams is absorbed On Sooty, Mountain's peaks.

A hundred benefit are lost, If lavished on the mean; A hundred epigrams, with their True relevance unseen;

A hundred counsels, when a life Obeyes no rigid rule; A hundred cogent arguments Are lost upon a fool.

Lost is every gift that goes, Where it does not fit: Lost is service lavished on Sluggish mind and wit. Lost upon ingratitude Is the kindest plan; Lost is courtesy on one Not a gentleman.

Or put it this way:

Perfume offered to a corpse, Lotus-planting dry, Weeping in the wood, prolonged Rain on alkali, Taking kinks from doggy's tail, Drawn in deafened ear, Decking faces of the blind, Sense for fools to hear.

Or this way:

Milk a bull, and think him some Heavy-udderred cow: Blind to lovely maidens, clasp Eunuchs anyhow: Seek in shining scraps of quartz Lapis lazuli: Do not serve an addlepate, Bidding sense goodbye.

"Egno, the master must by no means fail to heed my sound advice. And one thing more:

What tiger, monkey, snake advised, I did not do; and so That dreadfully ungrateful man Has brought me very low."

"How was that?" asked Rusty. And Victor told the story of THE UNGRATEFUL MAN To be Continued...

In 1924, Arthur W. Ryder, the well known American oriental scholar translated the Panchatantra from Sanskrit to English. It is one of the best of existing translations in any foreign language. The text here translated, dates back from the year 1799 A.D. We are happy to serialise and present the Panchatantra, interspersing verse and prose as translated by Ryder and published by Jaico. Illustrations: Oroon
BOOK REVIEW

KATHA
PRIZE STORIES VOLUME II
PUBLISHED BY: KATHA
EDITED BY:
GEETA DHARMARAJAN
PRICE: RS. 85/-

POORNIMA NARAYANAN

The second volume of Katha Prize Stories explores all the richness of Indian regional literature in this set of nineteen short stories. The range of themes and situations, from the supernatural to grimy reality, from quirky humour to pathos, transport one over the length and breadth of the country's regions, so varying in their thought, customs and way of life. This is veritably a traveller's guide to India, winding its way through the hearts and minds of its people rather than places or monuments of interest. The selection includes stories by outstanding Indian writers, both new and well-known.

In translating the stories, a very commendable effort has been made to retain the nuances of the regional languages, the flow of everyday speech. *Little Earthquakes* by M. T. Vasudevan Nair brilliantly evokes the ethos of the Kerela village. In this part of the country, so rich in myth and legend, there is unquestioning acceptance of the supernatural. The 'real' and the 'other-world' are effortlessly juxtaposed through the eyes of little Janakikutty. To her the two yakshis are playmates and not fearsome unseen vampires as they are to the rest of her family. The story raises the question as to who is real and unreal. And what is good and evil? The yakshis are invisible yet they are true to their nature, while the adults possessed of 'real' bodies are filled with guile and presence.

Shyamal Gangopadhyay's *A Fig Tree Stands Witness* is the grim story of greed triumphing over the closest of human relationships - the parent-child bond. As Madhumishit grows old, his children grow away. Love and concern give way to indifference and finally, greed - an all too familiar story in today's urban milieu.

Rukun Advani spins a tale of magic in *Death by Music*. The adolescent fantasies of two brothers, embodied in the desirable form of Elizabeth Taylor, take a most curious turn when she walks off the screen in a dingy Lucknow theatre and befriends them. The narrator's recollections of his teenage days with all their frustrations and emotional swings are told with wry, though tender humour.

"The window opened slightly and I saw a wrist twinkling with multicoloured Ferozabad glass bangles, a henna-smudged palm, a forefinger and thumb clutching the creased and crinkly end of a dupatta." This is Zamiruddin Ahmed's *Like Lightning in the Skies* - a tale of illicit passion that is doomed to fail in the close-knit, tradition-bound world of the mohalla.

And then there is *Tiladaanamu* by Rentala Nageswara Rao. In a paradoxical city of Indian cities, Islamia street in Hyderabad is home to the Brahmin community of the city.

Who controls our lives - the stars or ourselves? For despite the learned scholar Brahmin's efforts to negate the malefic influence of the *Moola Nakshatram* under which his grandson is born, the child's father, a Naxalite, surrenders himself to a life in jail while the old man dies while performing the *Kritis Yagna* for his grandson.

*Hide and Seek* is a deliciously ironic portrayal of the childish games that adults unconsciously play - a gently humorous look at ourselves and the complex, subtle and entirely unnecessary ways in which we complicate our lives.

For the discerning reader of English literature who is often frustrated by his or her lack of access to regional literature, *Katha* is a valuable acquisition.

---

READ THE BACK ISSUES OF THE EYE

THOUGHT PROVOKING! WORTH COLLECTING!

Available at Rs. 14/- each (plus Rs. 3.00 postal charges)

CHEQUES AND DRAFTS ONLY IN FAVOUR OF SPIC-MACAY PUBLICATIONS.

Send to/ Collect from:
THE EYE, 39, Anand Lok,
New Delhi-110 049

THE EYE NO.2 VOL. II 1995

85
SPIC MACAY, (Society for Promotion Of Indian Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth), a voluntary movement, has been active for the last sixteen years, creating a well established synergetic network of youth in the country, engaging itself in attaining its goal of furtherance of the Indian ethos in educational institutions. It works on funds raised from many sources; all donations are tax exempt.

Numerically, the reach of SPIC MACAY is roughly 150 student chapters all over India and about 50 globally. This is your movement and you can join it wherever you are.

For further details, write to: SPIC MACAY, 41/42 Lucknow Road, Delhi-110054, India.

SPIC MACAY SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME.

This scheme aims at arranging an introduction and a month's stay (every June) for a student, with a person who's pursuits have been singularly inspiring and benefitting to humanity. These persons are from various fields: the classical arts, social workers and activists and spiritual leaders.

Applicants will be selected after an informal interview. Write with personal details to: The Scholarship Coordinator, 41/42 Lucknow Road, Delhi-110054.

Our main program is to commence an Afforestation project, in the region adjacent to Kadumane Village in Sakleshpur Taluk. This is in keeping with the major objective of contributing towards the welfare and upliftment of the disadvantaged rural community, through an integrated development program, of which afforestation is a major component. The other objectives are the utilization of wasteland and human resources for natural resource generation, in the form of food, fodder, fuel, fertilizer, etc., and valuable non-wood forest produce.

We need the active participation of concerned people from all walks of life. They should commit themselves to environmental causes. There are three main projects of SAVE:

1. Kadumane Main Project (MOOLADHARA) in Sakleshpur,
2. "CITY FOREST" Programme for Bangalore, and
3. 1 million seedlings generation programme for Bangalore.

To seek the involvement of people we have planned a series of awareness programs, including Earth day concerts, vigils, exhibitions etc.

For membership details, write to:
The Chief Coordinator, 136, I Cross, Residency Road, Bangalore-560025
Tel. 584679
RESURGENCE

Resurgence is a leading edge magazine on ecological and spiritual values.

'One of our most respected new age journals' - THE INDEPENDENT

One year subscription (6 issues) £20 (£25 airmail) including p & p.
Orders to:
Resurgence subscriptions, Salem Cottage, Trelill, Bodmin, Cornwall PL30 3HZ.

A monthly magazine which introduces a whole new dimension to the world of books in India.

IRB carries timely reviews and news and views about books and bookmen in crisp, readable language.

IRB A magazine which tells you what you should be reading now.

INDIAN REVIEW OF BOOKS

Publishers
ACME BOOKS PRIVATE LIMITED
62-A, Omnes Road,
Kilpauk, Madras 600 010
Phone: 6412998
The Tooth Goddess” - Mariamman of Samayapuram.
She is associated with the disease of small pox. In order to appease her, devotees make offerings of salt at her shrine. She is a popular and powerful deity of Tamil folk traditions, and many stories are woven around her cult.