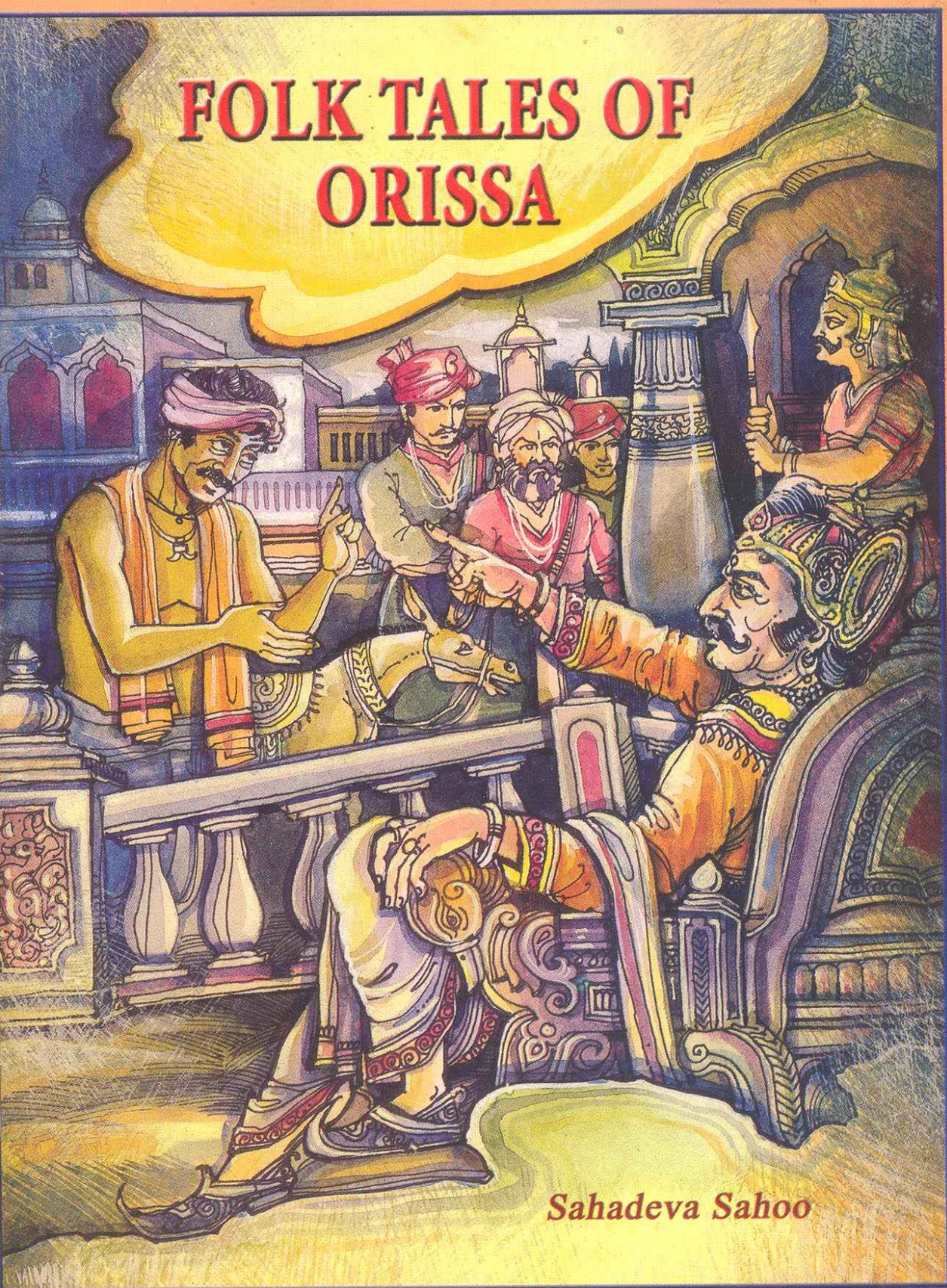


FOLK TALES OF ORISSA



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Gyanajuga Publications
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What a Brother !

Long, long ago there was in the kingdom of Khurda a Raja who was very kind to his people. He took ordinary people in to his army. If a soldier could do well he was promoted to the next higher position. The lowest position was a foot soldier, he was called Paik. The highest position was given the title of Buxi. Buxi was the head of the King's army. He was the commander of the Raja's army.

Every healthy young man in the kingdom of Khurda was not only sure to join the Raja's army as a paik but hoped to rise one day to the rank of Buxi.

In the village of Saradhapur in that kingdom there lived a farmer. He had two sons. When the elder son, Birendra, came of age he joined the Raja's army. He became a Paik. He was a brave fighter. He made a name in fighting the enemy. The Raja was happy with him. He got promotion every third year. He rose from Paik to Sardar, Sardar to Nayak, Nayak to Adhinayak. He won many battles with the neighbouring Rajas. The kingdom of Khurda was bigger than ever before. The Raja promoted Birendra and made him Buxi. Now he was at the top, for the Buxi was the highest post a paik could get those days. All soldiers were at his command. Everybody thought, he was the luckiest person.

By now the farmer's younger son, Surendra, came of age. He searched for service under the Raja. Paik was his natural choice. It was not difficult for him to get it, for he was strong and bold. Surendra was happier when he was placed as a Paik in the personal battalion of the Buxi. It was good to be under one's elder brother. Whenever he saw the Buxi passing his way, his joy knew no bounds. He had a feeling that the heavens were a palm away. Further he had the chance of being noticed by the highest army officer of the Raja.

But his happiness was short lived. He learned that the Buxi did not want to be known as his brother. He noticed that the Buxi did not allow him ever to

come nearer him. Birendra was afraid, people would come to know that the Buxi's brother was a mere Paik. It would tar his image as the Chief of the Army. One day he called Surendra and told him never to claim that he was his brother. "Don't tell any body that you are my brother."

One night there was fun and dance in the house of the Buxi. Surendra was given the duty of guarding the rear gate.

Many senior paiks, some nayaks, lots of businessmen and a few zamindars were entering the Buxi's place through the rear gate. Surendra could see that all of them were enjoying good meals. They were always on the move, from this side to that, from talking with one to laughing with another. There was noise from the plates and utensils when they struck each other. People were enjoying meals amid the music and dance.

Surendra felt uncomfortable. He was disturbed at the sight of everybody enjoying his brother's party. All the while he was thinking, 'Brother has forgotten me in the gathering of people. He is drowned in happiness. And I am all alone.' Suddenly he started crying.

A beautiful lady was passing that way at that moment, she was curious and wanted to know why he was crying.

"Buxi is my brother. You see how he is enjoying the whole show ! He does not even for once care to know where am I now ! He does not have time to think of his brother."

He continued, "My brother is so much engrossed in dances and songs that he doesn't have a minute to think about me. Should I not have a morsel of joy and happiness ?"

The lady heard the story. It is said, a woman can't keep a secret to herself. She told whomsoever she met on her way to the party. From her to others the words spread that the Buxi ill-treated his brother. The words travelled till it reached the ears of the Buxi. No sooner had the Buxi heard it than he became red with anger.

He thundered to some sentries near him, "Take that paik out immediately. Give him three hundred whips on the way. Leave him in his tent."

Who would disobey the order of the Buxi ? His order was immediately carried out. Surendra broke down completely, not because he was whipped, but because his own brother ill-treated him. He decided to leave the camp and never to return.

That night he left the tent. He walked and walked as if he had closed his eyes. He went straight ahead his nose and in the direction his eyes took him. He walked till his legs couldn't move any more. He took rest behind a tree.

Night passed. Morning came. Throughout the day he walked and walked. He entered a forest. Before evening he was in the thick of the forest. He could not walk any more, he sat down to normal breath.

Jungle was better than the civilised world. The silence of the jungle was better than dances and songs of Khurda. Loneliness here was much better. He had left behind a scolding and whipping crowd. Soon Surendra found dignity in picking fruits for his food and making a living.

He was now mentally and physically settled in the jungle.

One day the king of Khurda went hunting into the jungle. He saw a deer and ran after it. Quite a long distance he covered before he suddenly lost sight of the deer. He stopped and looked everywhere, but couldn't make out where he was. It was trees and trees. Which way should he go ? He ran this way and that. He couldn't find a path.

At this moment he heard somebody singing. He moved towards the source of sound. He saw a young man in the dress of a Paik. The king did not know that he was Surendra.

"Hi paika. What are doing are?"

Surendra didn't know the King. He also asked, "Hi, how are you here ?"

The King didn't give his identity. He said, "I am a Zamindar under the Khurda king. I came on a shikar. I have lost my way. Could you show me which way to go to Khurda ?"

"Yes, but not now. Now it is night. Khurda is very far. Stay here tonight. Tomorrow I will take you out of the jungle."

The King had no other option. He had to wait. With a sigh of relief he sat down, but could not resist saying to himself, "There is not a single roof here to take rest."

The paik heard it and said, "Wait, we will see. There may be a house nearby."

He climbed a tree and looked all around. At a distance he saw the twinkling light of a lamp.

"Should we go there? We can spend the night perhaps at that place."

While walking with the paika the King asked, "In which battalion are you working ?"

"Hi, brother, I don't work in any battalion. I have deserted the Khurda Raja's army. I have left my job as paika."

"What ? But why did you leave the service ?"

The paik told the story from A to Z. He was a deserter. His brother had ill-treated him. The King could now know that he was Surendra and his brother Birendra was the Buxi.

Soon they reached the place of the lamp. They did not feel the distance as they were busy in talking each other's plight. It was a small thatched house. The King had his horse tied there. Both entered the room.

An old woman was sitting near her fireplace. She became angry when she saw the two. "Why are you entering this house ?" she asked.

"Aunty, won't you give us some food ? God will bless you. Don't mind, we can sleep in the attic or the loft." Surendra said.



“There is nothing here to eat.” The old woman said, disgusted at their intrusion.

“What are you telling, Aunty ! I smell mutton curry.” was Surendra’s reply. While saying so Surendra went nearer the hearth. He saw some deer meat, cooked into a curry. He also saw some rice and a few wine bottles. The King

and Surendra were quite hungry. Both had their fill of royal food. Then they went up the ladder to sleep in the attic.

Surendra got suspicious. He called the King, without even a doubt that he was the king. "Look brother, there is some trouble here. Things do not seem natural. I sense some danger. Let us keep watch. If you sleep I will keep watch. You have to keep watch when I sleep."

The King agreed. It was first the King's turn. He took the sword from Surendra and sat up to keep awake. Soon sleep was overtaking him. His eyes were involuntarily closing.

"Are you dozing?" Surendra asked.

"No, I am thinking of something serious." The King explained, trying to forcibly keep his eyes open.

It was not too late before the King started snoring. Surendra couldn't sleep. He shook the whole body of the King and said, "Had you been in my battalion, I would have straightened you up." So saying he took the sword from him and kept a watch.

The King now felt relieved, he slept soundly.

After a few moments Surendra heard some sound from below. It was full of laughter and loud talk. His doubts were true. This house belonged to some dacoits. It seemed they had returned.

"Aunty, how are you?" Surendra heard them asking the old woman.

"Two guests have come. They have taken full meal. Nothing is left for you four. Now they are sleeping in the attic." The old lady was heard saying.

One of the dacoits came forward and proudly said, "Well, let me see who is there." He carried a sharp knife, it was shining even in the dim light of a small lamp.

He climbed up the ladder. As soon as his head was visible, Surendra swung his sword and cut his head with one sweep. After taking the head into the loft, he took the body up and laid it on the loft.

"Why is the comrade not returning?" Saying so another dacoit climbed the ladder to see what happened. He also had the same fate. Surendra made

two pieces of him and kept them on the loft. One after another three dacoits were finished.

Surendra had heard the old woman speaking of 'you four', he had already finished three. The Sardar must be the last man.

Indeed it was the sardar who went up the ladder at the end. He wanted to see himself why comrades were not coming back. He too met the same fate.

Sure of peace at last, Surendra slept soundly. When the King got up in the morning he saw Surendra in deep sleep. He saw four heads and trunks lying around. He was terrified. He shook Surendra and asked, "Hi, what have you been doing all through the night?"

Surendra narrated the events. At the end he scolded the King. "I have never seen such a bad watchman. Had you kept the watch and I slept, both of us would have been sleeping for ever."

Both got down. They saw the old lady asleep. They shouted at her till she got up. Surendra shook the lady and shouted again, "You are the woman who has kept all the wealth of the dacoits, have not you? Now, show me where have you kept them. Or else?"

The old lady trembled with fear. She was afraid the man looking like a paik might kill her as he had done with the dacoits. Two rows of her teeth banged against each other. That sound was audible to Surendra. She could not utter a single word. She silently walked up to the piles of straw lying in one corner. She raised two three layers of straw and showed whatever was kept there.

"Oops!" Surendra shouted. The whole stack was full of gold mohurs. Whatever he could pocket, he picked up. He asked the king, "Hi, brother! You also take some mohurs."

The King whispered "I do not need any. You know, the King gives me a very good salary. You may take my share too."

Surendra was very happy. He not only filled up his pockets, he also filled up the sheath of his sword.

Now it was time for Surendra to show the road to the stranger who was the real King of Khurda. Both of them fearlessly passed through the jungle. At the end of the jungle Surendra came to a foot path. He asked the King to take that road as that led to the Capital of the kingdom of Khurda. The Capital was not far off. No sooner had Surendra taken leave of the King than the latter made a request to him.

“Hello, my brother Paik. I cannot forget the good deed you have done to me. Had you not been in the forest I would have been lost. Had you not kept awake in the cellar, I would have lost my head. You have saved me from sure death.”

Then he said, “Don’t you like to see the King and ask him to take you back in service ? I will help you. You must see him. You do not have to search for the King. Just tell the people there that you want to see Bidyadhar. Everybody there knows me.”

Surendra was surprised at this offer. But he did not doubt that he was the King. He said, “Hello brother ! You know I have deserted from the King’s service. Why should I go there ? If I go, they may arrest me, would not they ?”

“Don’t be afraid. The King likes me very much. I will explain the whole matter. He will pardon you. Why don’t you come tomorrow ? You can test what I am saying. OK ?”

“I will come,” saying so Surendra went in to the jungle.

As soon as the king entered his palace, he told everybody how he had been saved by a wandering paik of his kingdom and how the said paik must be given respects due to a king when he would come there the next day. He called all his guards and Paiks and told them, “Tomorrow a person will come to meet me. If he says he wants to meet Bidyadhar, show him the respects due to the Buxi. Welcome him and bring him to me.”

Surendra came the next day. As he was in ordinary dress and not in his usual paik dress, he could not be recognised. As soon as he was at the first gate he was stopped by the paiks. It was the Lion’s Gate, the first one to cross before he could get inside the palace. He said he wanted to meet Bidyadhar. All the guards at the lion’s gate saluted him. All others present there greeted

him. Surendra was so pleased that he brought out a fistful of mohurs and gave them to the first Paik he saw. He asked him to distribute among themselves. They escorted him to the next gate. At that gate too he was given respects and honours due to the Commandar- in-Chief of the king, i.e., Buxi.

When he reached the second gate, the Paiks standing there also greeted him with military salutes. He also gave some mohurs. He thought it was his duty to give some reward for the honour they showered on him.

It happened at all the doors he crossed. Surendra wondered why was he being given so much respect. When he wanted to know the reason, all the Paiks said, "You are our Chief."

Surendra thought they were joking. He thought of the stranger's words when he left him on the path to the Capital of Khurda. He got angry with himself. He believed, that rascal of a friend must have told these fellows that he had lots of gold mohurs. These sentries were showing him honours to extract some gold mohurs. "They must be saluting me for sake of getting some mohurs."

He crossed seven doors before he reached the Raja's place. He was amazed to see many Paiks gathered there and with them some high ranking Sardars and Naiks whom he had seen at his brother's party. He was most amazed to see his brother Buxi bowing to that stranger he met in the jungle. Lo, and behold ! The stranger was the sitting in the throne and all were standing in respect for him.

"My God!" Surendra uttered within himself. "This man himself is the King. Yesterday he was in jungle, not finding his way. Today he is the King. I did not treat him like a King. What fate awaits me ! What an ill luck !" Surendra bemoaned. In reality his ill luck had run out. The King himself came down from his Throne and embraced him. The King spoke to the audience the story of his being lost in the jungle and the valour of Surendra. He described how without that brave paik's presence of mind his life would not have been saved. At the end the King proclaimed, "From today you are the Buxi."

Everybody was happy except one person. He was Birendra, Surendra's brother. Do you know why ? The King had demoted him from the post of Buxi to the lowest rank of a Paika.

Gopal Fights the Yama, the God of Death

Not many years ago, it happened in one of the schools of our State.

It was the 30th of the month of September. The Puja holidays would begin next day. Durga puja, Gandhiji's birthday and Lakshmi puja - all together made 20 days. It would be a long period of holidays. It was not proper for a student to be absent on the day before the long holidays began. That day one was also told when the school would reopen.

Gopal was no exception. All good students think that way. Whatever happens he will go to the school. Gopal thought the same way. He had never been absent for a day from his classes. He studied well. His parents, class teachers and his neighbours, every body, liked him.

Parents called him Tuna. That was his nickname. When he got up from bed that morning Tuna was not feeling well. His mother put her palm over his forehead. She felt it warm. She said, 'You are having temperature. You are sick. Don't go to school today.'

Tuna insisted that he would go to the school. That was the last day before the Puja holidays began. He would miss his friends for so many days, if he did not go to his school. He would talk to them and know their plans on how to spend the holidays and which places they would go and when. Teachers might give home works. His father did not wish to hurt Tuna's feelings. He advised his mother, 'Put some warm dress. Cover it with school uniform. Don't hurt his wishes.'

It was another day for Tuna. Sadhu took him on the bicycle and left him at the school. Sadhu was employed by Tuna's parents to carry Tuna to the school and bring him back home. Sadhu heard from others that the school would close at 3 O' Clock in the afternoon. He decided not to wait so long. He went away to do some shopping. He would come back to the school in time to take Tuna home.

The next day the school would be closed for 20 days for the Puja holidays. Happiness was in the air. The teachers were excited and classes relaxed. The class teacher came and took attendance. Tuna felt uneasy. He was having high temperature. The first period in the class was blank. No teacher came. When the class teacher came in the second period Tuna went up to her and said, 'Miss, am having fever. Shivering.' She knew it was not the time for Tuna's guardian to send somebody to take him back. She asked him to take down the home task and take rest. He had to do it in the holidays.

Tuna felt restless. The class teacher brought the first aid box, took one tablet and asked Tuna to swallow it with some water. She asked Tuna to lie down in the last bench. Tuna obeyed. He lay in the last bench. He could not see what Miss was saying to others. Four to five rows of empty benches and desks lay ahead of him. Beyond them the students, girls in the last three rows and boys in the front five rows. He was not worried. He could see legs only, if he looked through the benches. When he raised his head he could see the top of the black board, one or two lines of writing in chalk. Lying on the bench he could see once or twice the teacher's right hand and her fingers moving on top of the black board. He could not however see her face. Nor could the teacher see him. The rows of benches kept him hidden. Soon he closed his eyes, they were tired. He did not know when he felt asleep.

Once he woke up, but that was when there was noise of falling duster. The black board shook. It was resting on a tripod. On front two legs of that three legged stand were two wooden nails which supported the board. The black board was kept standing against the slope of the two arms of a tripod. It was half hidden behind the chair of the teacher. An almirah was in the other corner of the class room. It faced the teacher. It was full of teaching materials. Having turned his eyes all around once Tuna slept again. This time it was deep sleep.

Everybody in the class was anxious for holidays and enquired when the classes would close. All were in a holiday mood. Nobody cared if Tuna was there at all. In fact, nobody bothered about the other in the class. The teachers

too were eager to go home. None of them were in any mood to teach. They urged the Head Mistress to close the school early. She delayed it on good grounds. She told them, students would only crowd in the street. If she closed the school earlier, most of the parents would not have come to fetch their children home. It would be a bad scene on the road. There might be a traffic problem. But she could not resist their demand much longer. She declared the school closed at two thirty, half an hour before the time she had indicated in the morning.

Now a long holiday lay ahead. Boys and girls were so happy ! Their joy knew no bounds. They jumped over the benches, over the desks, just to be ahead of the others and get through the gate and then on to the road. Ten minutes and there were vacant classes. The whole compound of the school was also empty. No sooner had the Headmistress announced closure than the teachers found their way in the melee of the students and took to their conveyances.

The chowkidar of the school did his last round. He went round each class room. It was his duty to see that there was no body inside the school before he locked up the rooms. He had a good peep into every room. When he had finally made sure that his job had come to an end, he closed rooms one by one.

He had all he more reason to do so that day, because 20 days would pass by before anybody saw the rooms again. In no time the school bore a deserted look.

Sadhu was aghast to see that nobody in the school when he returned on bicycle at three o'clock. The school was closed as if it never functioned. He enquired from the chowkidar and got the reply that every student had left the school. Tuna must have headed home.

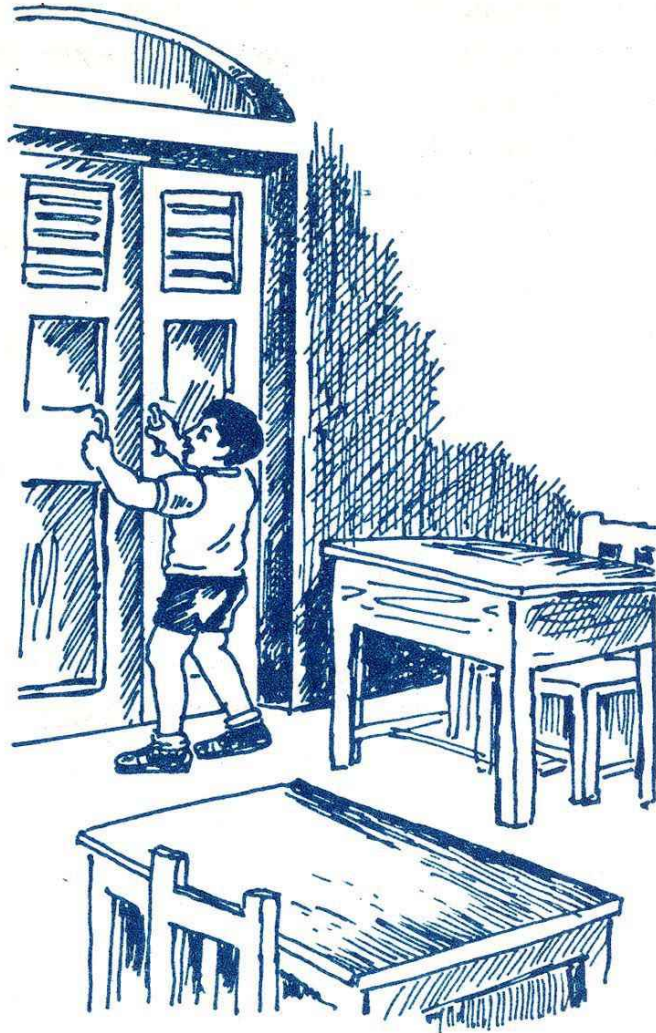
Parents of Tuna were thunder-struck when they heard Sadhu. Maybe Tuna was coming with some classmates, they surmised. They waited a few minutes. They sent Sadhu on an errand, that he should check with other students

on the road heading home if any of them knew where Tuna might be. He returned with no clue. Tuna's parents began their search. They thought it better to check with the class teacher. They came to the school chowkidar to get her address. They reached her house only to know that she had locked it. The neighbours said, no sooner had she reached the house than she boarded the town bus en route to her village. Why should she stay longer here if the school had closed for a long puja holiday ? Both the parents explained to each other.

Parents could not know who took Tuna or if he hired a rickshaw. All bad thoughts entered their mind. Nowadays child-theft was a common news. What if a kidnapper had taken him ! They had heard news of children being drugged and their limbs taken away and sold to ill-reputed hospitals. They wanted to act quickly and check if Tuna had been taken to railway station or bus stand. They took a car on hire and went wherever they thought they might get any clue. A number of times they went to a spot just to get a negative answer. People said they had not seen any child fitting the description of Tuna. They did not spend a moment there and immediately returned home, lest Tuna should have returned home and standing in front of the door they had locked.

In no time evening came. They never thought darkness would come so early. Now was time, they thought, to lodge an FIR with the police station. They knew, without a first information report the police would not move. All the while tears were rolling down the cheeks of Tuna's parents. Anxieties were written large on their faces. The Thana Babu, the officer in charge of the police station, felt sorry for them. Something had to be done before it was too late. The parents were breaking down with heavy heart. The Thana Babu quickly went into the jeep and reached the school. Then he went to the door of the class three room. He put ears to the door. He heard no sound. All was silent. Thana Babu went to the chowkidar of the school. Tuna's parents followed Thana babu wherever he went.

When Tuna woke up from sleep the room was dark, it was dark everywhere. He could see a faint light coming from the joint of the two halves



of the class room door. Slowly he got up, found his way to the door. The door was closed. He gave blows the door. He got bruised. He gave loud cries, repeatedly called Papa and Ma. He knocked on the door so much that his hands got swollen. No body opened the door. It was getting darker all around.

Ma was always in his thoughts. Where is she? Why Ma is not coming to me ?Then Tuna remembered Ma's advice: when in difficulty, call in Lord

Almighty, he would help. Ma had told him, Lord heard people's prayers. Tuna went on praying, O Lord, please, please, take me to my Ma.

Suddenly Tuna heard some people talking. He could hear even the chowkidar's voice. It seemed to come from a distance. Tuna thought they must be talking about him. He had chowkidar saying, he was sure there was no body when he locked the class room. Gopal, for that was Tuna's good name, was not in the room.

Tuna took this opportunity and beat the door heavily so that people might hear him and open the door. He gave heavier blows to the door with his legs and shook the door with his hands. The more he shook the door, more his hands and feet ached. But he forgot the pains when he used to keep silent just to listen if any body was coming his way. He put his ears to know if any body was opening the door. No. Nobody came. No. Nobody was talking. Perhaps they had left.

With so much force I gave blows to the door, still they couldn't here ! Tuna blamed himself and his bad luck. All was silent on the road. It was just behind his class. Now he heard a bullock cart making noise. If he could hear the cart moving, why couldn't any body hear him beating the door ?

When there was slight delay in returning home Ma used to be so much anxious. She would send people to search for me. She scolded Sadhu why he was not keeping time. Papa used to run to my school to fetch me. Why have they today forgot me ? Why can't they think that I am a prisoner in this room ? Such thoughts raced through the mind of Tuna.

While the sound of bullock cart melted away in the distance Tuna could hear his Ma crying. Ma, why are you crying ? Can't you imagine that I am present in this room ? Can't you think that I don't have strength to break this door ? O Lord, take me to my Ma.

Chowkidar's hut was a little away. Tuna knew it, but sound of his beating the door was not reaching him. There was no sound nor any body coming this way. "How can I get out, if door is not opened" thought Tuna. He lay on the

bench, tired and hopeless. Streams of thoughts drowned his mind. That Ma would be crying made Tuna forget his hunger and fever. He lay motionless. But his mind was fully awake. The whole night he was thinking of plans of escape.

The morning sun rose. The sunlight came through the gaps in the door and through the sky lights. Tuna had surveyed the room times without number.

The roof of the room was of the traditional style. It was covered with terracotta tiles. About a cubit below the roof was the sky light. Through its glass light was coming to the room. If he could break the glass in some way ! He planned how to climb up to that point ? He had to go up above the almirah and break the sky light and then he could slip down into the back yard facing the road.

The teachers used a small table. With much difficulty Tuna took the small table and placed it next to the almirah. Sometimes he pushed it, sometimes he pulled. With the table next to the almirah, he put the chair on it. He put the black board against the wall, its bottom resting against the leg of the chair. He picked up the duster and went up on the table, then climbed the chair, put one leg on one arm of the chair and the other leg on the edge of the black board. Now he took the duster in hand and climbed the almirah. Standing there he repeatedly beat the sky light with the duster. The glass broke into pieces and fell down outside the wall. It was strange, nobody heard it. Tuna thought. Yet he was determined, whether anybody came or not, he would just slip down. That was the only way of reaching his parents, his chance to see his Ma.

He took out the shirt, tore it into pieces and made a rope. He tied one end of the rope to the hook of the sky light and held on to the other end of the rope. He climbed on to the sky light and sat on its wooden frame. When he looked down at the ground, what a height ! One fall and his hands and legs would become powder. But he resolved to slip down. He let the rope slowly drop as he slipped along the wall. He was not afraid if in the process his hands and legs fractured. He must go to Ma.

He would of course shout when he slipped down "I am dying. Please save me." Lest some body hear and rescue him. Tuna did exactly what he had planned.

When Tuna recovered his senses he found himself in a bed. He soon realised it was a hospital. His whole body was in pains. All over the body there were wounds and red coloured medicines were flowing over the wounds. Hands, legs and face were covered with bandages. Suddenly Tuna shouted, eyes full of tears, "Please, take me to my Ma."

The doctor collected the address of Tuna's parents. He informed his parents. They came to his bed.

The parents were so happy that they forgot time, spent almost an hour embracing Tuna. The eyes of Ma were all swollen, for she had been crying all the while since Tuna went missing. Now tears of joy filled her eyes.

Papa's dry eyes now turned fresh and cheerful.

Papa, Ma and Tuna all three had been without food for almost a day. They had forgotten their hunger when they were worried. Parents were worried about Tuna. Tuna was worried about parents. Now in the company of each other, they also forgot their hunger. Their joy was overflowing.

Nobody had ever dreamt that Tuna could have been locked in the class room. Whenever others had gone that side he was asleep. Whenever he was beating the door nobody had looked that side. The chowkidar had never suspected that there could be a boy inside the class at the rearmost bench. Had Tuna not applied his mind he would not have been alive. He fought with the Yama, the God of Death.

The school opened on October 21 after Puja holidays. Without food and water no body could have survived for 21 days. In the hospital every body was full of praise for Tuna's presence of mind. And of course, Tuna's parents had no words to express their happiness. They were proud of their son and their pride knew no bounds.

Bhagia teaches his Raja a Lesson

This is story of a king who was a tyrant. In his kingdom there was no rich man. If he ever saw a rich man, he took away all his property. Still he was not sure that nobody was hiding wealth from his knowledge. So he devised a strategy. It is only one who is wiser than he that can cheat him of his wealth. Otherwise who can hide his wealth from his eyes ? He knew the saying, you pickup only one grain from the whole pot of rice to know if it is properly cooked. So he thought if he could find out who were more intelligent than the king, he could find hidden wealth there.

So he called his minister and kotwals. He had a meeting. He ordered them to send people to every corner. "In every village, look for the most intelligent man," he ordered. "Bring him for a test here. If he cannot cheat me, he will be my servant for ever."

Kotwals went out every where, in every direction. They found many cunning fellows, many pandits but nobody came forward to compete with the king. Every body asked, what sort of competition is this ? There is no prize if you win, but you become servant if you lose. Who would like to go to the king's court ?

But that was the way of the kings. Who would question the king's wisdom ? But then the king's kotwals were in no mood to return empty handed. That would amount to disobedience of his majesty's order. If King got angry, one did not know what punishment he would give. This fear led the kotwals to search further.

One day they camped in a very distant village. The village was prosperous, the villagers laboured very hard. When the crop was ready the king's men came and took away the harvest. How much could one hide? Even if one hides inside the house, digging holes in the floor. So the whole lot in the village was poor. When they saw king's kotwals they all went inside and locked

their doors. The head of the village was Bhagia. He couldn't hide because he had been appointed by the king as Head of the village. He fed them, told them stories, sang songs, tried to make them happy.

Morning came the kotwals wanted to go back. But they said they wanted to take Bhagia with them. Because they thought Bhagia must be wiser than all. If they took him the king would be very happy. Bhagia also agreed because he had seen their plight. If he did not go with them, the kotwals would take some others forcibly. But he insisted as a condition that he would not wear except a loins cloth. Going with bare body was an insult to the king, yet they agreed to Bhagia's conditions.

They all reached king's durbar. The king asked, "So you think, you can cheat me?"

Bhagia replied, "Cheating is my profession, it is in my blood."

King warned him and said, "Look I am cheating every body. If you can cheat me, try now."

Bhagia smiled and said, "Your majesty, had I known that I will have to compete with you I would have brought my dress, cheater's dress, and also the tools."

The king was astonished. He was about to ask, "Tools, what tools?", but he did not, because he did not wish to be known as less wise than Bhagia.

Bhagia explained, "Your Majesty knows every trade has its tools."

The king allowed him to bring his tools.

But Bhagia did not move. The king asked, "Why don't you hurry up?"

Bhagia said, "Your majesty must be knowing from your experiences that the tools are not ordinary things. They can't be packed quickly nor is it possible to bring them on one's shoulders. It requires hundred carts and six months to bring them."

The king was dumbfounded. If he asked for clarification he would be known as less wise than Bhagia. But the king was ready to admit that Bhagia could cheat him. So without argument, the King gave him hundred pairs of bullocks and hundred bullock carts. He also commanded that Bhagia return quickly.

Bhagia agreed. And yet he didn't leave the place.

"What more do you want?" asked the king.

Bhagia said, "If Your Majesty pardons me, I want some clarifications. The rules of the game is that if I lose I become a servant. But what if I win?"

The king said, "You can never win."

Bhagia agreed with a nod and said, "I know I can't beat Your Majesty. But suppose I win!"

The King asked, "What do you want? Tell me."

"Will Your Majesty give me as a prize what Your Majesty does not use."

It was so simple. Who would not give up what one does not use? The king promptly agreed. "Yes. I will give. There was a no harm in giving something we don't use." The king said.

Bhagia went to his village. The villagers wondered how could Bhagia return with so many bullocks and carts. Bhagia didn't answer any of their question. But he gave each one of the villagers one pair of bullocks and a cart. He asked every body to work in his field. And they worked hard. They got lots of paddy that season. They used bullock carts to transport their harvest, crops and vegetables, to their houses. It was so plenty that they thought, for five years they would have no wants. They stored all the paddy stock in the pits dug inside their houses. And then they put all empty baskets on the bullocks carts. They did what Bhagia had asked them to do.

Bhagia came to the King's durbar with the hundred bullock carts, full of empty baskets. The king was waiting anxiously for his return.

His Majesty ! Now I am here.” Bhagia reported himself before the king.

Anxious to know what Bhagia had off his sleeve, the king asked Bhagia to prove his knowledge. “Let us begin the test.” The king said.

Bhagia wanted time to open all the tools. But the King had no patience. To quicken the unloading he said, “Don’t worry ! My servants would open it.”

While they were loosening the bullocks from the carts, one of the dogs of the durbar came up to Bhagia. He was smelling Bhagia. That is the way of the dogs. When a dog sees a new person it smells the whole body. But this one was one of the king’s dogs. Bhagia could not but show some respect to it. He bent down and caressed the dog. He moved his hand over the dog’s neck. The dog seemed to enjoy it. In return the dog showed some affection. A dog’s way of showing affection is to lick. So the dog put his tongue on Bhagia’s ears, for his left ear was nearer the dog’s mouth.

It tickled Bhagia. But Bhagia wanted to cover his nervousness and he suddenly got up as if he jumped with surprise.

Bhagia talked to the dog, in a low voice, but all the while careful that the king should hear. “What a bad news ! Yesterday when she saw me off she was hale and hearty. She wished me well on my journey to His Majesty’s court. How is it that she is unwell today ?”

The king was surprised to hear Bhagia talking to his dog. He asked, “What ! Are you talking to my dog ?”

“Your Majesty ! Permit me to go back to my village and see my wife. She is bedridden. I will also bring my turban and shawl I forgot to bring.”

The king was at a loss. Bhagia had just taken a day. How could he know that his wife had fallen sick ? The king wanted a clarification. “When you left home your wife must have been well, otherwise you would not have come. How do you know that she has fallen ill today ?”

Bhagia replied, “Your Majesty’s dog just now whispered in my ears.”

Nobody disbelieved Bhagia. They had thought Bhagia must have been a genius, otherwise he would not have accepted the challenge thrown by the king. Every body in the king's court felt sad on hearing that such a wise man's wife was sick. They sympathised with Bhagia.

The King agreed and allowed Bhagia to go home. Bhagia asked for a horse. A horse could travel fast, so he could reach his village early and come back to face the king's challenge soon.

Bhagia asked for a good trained horse and a racing horse was brought from the king's stable.

Bhagia went to his village, he sold the horse at a high price. He purchased a donkey of the same colour. Donkey was very cheap. He dressed the donkey with horse's gin and strap. A donkey does not travel fast, its slow walk took many days to reach the king's court.

Because of such delay the king was angry. He saw Bhagia riding a donkey. That was offending. He looked all around and could not find his horse. His shouted "Where is my horse ?"

Bhagia showed his surprise. He replied, "Horse ! Which horse ? Your Majesty is teasing me. Is it because I am a poor farmer ?"

Then he continued, "True, Your majesty gave me a horse to go to my village and see my ailing wife. But that horse kept on changing to donkey, from donkey to horse, again and again, every now and then, throughout my journey."

"Impossible ! I have been riding that horse for the last ten years. I have never seen such changes in my horse."

Bhagia said, "I understand Your Majesty's surprise." Pointing his fingers to the donkey he continued, "Your Majesty can now see the same strap, the same gin and the same cushion. Even the colour of the animal is same. The only difference is that it doesn't look like a horse."

To be sure, the king ran his right hand all over the body of the animal. True it was a donkey, not a horse. Instead of blaming Bhagia the king said,



“Whatever has happened has happened. Now let us come to our business. You show me your cleverness. And cheat me.”

Now Bhagia was all smiles. He said, “Your Majesty ! You have been always saying, you can beat any body in the world in cheating, you are an

expert cheater. Has Your Majesty ever used any tools in the trade of the cheating ?”

The king kept silent for a while, and then said, “No.”

Bhagia again asked, “How did then Your Majesty think that I will be using tools ? That is where I cheated Your Majesty. Not only that, has Your Majesty ever heard this dog talking to Your Majesty or anybody else ? And it has been with Your Majesty for so many years ?”

The King’s reply was, “No.”

“How then did Your Majesty think that the same dog gave the news of my wife’s sickness ? Here I cheated Your Majesty the second time.”

The king felt ashamed. Hiding his shame, he asked Bhagia to go on.

“Your majesty is riding the horse for the last ten years. Has that horse ever turned into a donkey ?”

The king’s answer was, “No.”

Bhagia said, “How could Your Majesty agree with me that the same horse changes into a donkey now and then ? Here I cheated Your Majesty the third time. Now I want my prize.”

The king had to keep his words. He said, “Yes, you will have your prize. But you have said you will ask for such a thing as will not be a loss to me if I give it to you.”

Bhagia at once said, “Your Majesty ! Your brain.”

The king was red with anger. Bhagia trembled with fear. But he recovered soon and said, “Your Majesty ! I beg your pardon ! Now I see Your Majesty using his brain. At least Your Majesty is keeping the crown properly on the head which houses the brain. I won’t ask for it. In stead, Your Majesty may give land and jungle to our men free of rent, so that we can maintain our family well.”

Since that day the king became kind to every subject in his kingdom. People throughout the kingdom praised Bhagia. He had turned a tyrant into a kind king.

As you sow, so you reap

You must have heard your elders telling you, "As you sow, so you reap". The way you do your work dictates the result. If somebody fails in your class, the teachers say, the way he was studying he was bound to fail. If he does not, who else would? The results depend on the quality of your work and. It seldom depends on the amount of work you do or the time you spend on your job. If you do not put your mind and heart on the job, the work would be fruitless.

On the other hand, you must be hearing your parents say, "Look, how he is studying 24 hours a day. He will do well. If he does not, would you do?"

There is an exaggeration in these words. Nobody studies 24 hours a day. Would he have no other work? He has to take bath, take meals, and also go to the latrine. When somebody cites an example of a student studying 24 hours a day, he means that the student is working more hours than he should work.

The way to do a job, that is, the technique of doing a job, is more important. That is what Pandit Gopabandhu Das meant when he said that a man's worth was not measured in minutes, hours or days. A student's study is measured in the quality of his preparations. If you try to learn by rote, say, your history lessons, line by line, and do not understand why it is written that way, you will forget the whole passage if you do not recollect the first line. If you memorise the whole sentences, you will forget the substance of the sentence. Try to understand the substance, then build up your sentence. If you do not know how to separate the grain from the chaff, your result will not be good. Let me tell you a story.

It happened in the village of Haripur, in the District of Cuttack. Haripur Upper Primary School was known for its good results. The school had all its classes packed with children.

A few years back two boys, Rabindra and Jitendra, studied in that school. They were called fondly as Rabi and Jitu. They were in the same class. They not only came from the same village, their families lived next to each other. There was a keen competition between their parents. At every step the parents compared the performance of one child with that of the other.

Rabi's father used to tell Rabi, "See how well Jitu is studying. He stood first in the class three. He got a scholarship. And you ? Not a single of blade of grass will grow with your effort. When will you make your mark as a man ? Won't you try to keep up the names of your parents ?"

It was almost a daily affair for Rabi to hear similar words from his parents. He got angry with himself. Evil thoughts came to his mind. "All this happens because of Jitu", he thought, "If Jitu could be out of his way ! Life whould be so much peaceful."

Next moment he thought "It is no use thinking of driving Jitu away from the school or the village. Better I try to do well in my examination".

He was tired of receiving advice from all around. The teachers said "Work hard. The more you labour the better the results".

Papa said "Give up your waywardness. Give up your idleness. Reduce your outings. Confine your study to your reading room". Rabi knew he was not wayward, he was always in his study room. He could not understand what was wrong with him. Everybody seemed to have his or her own way of finding fault with him.

Even Mummy said, "I have seen Jitu getting up early in the morning and reading. You should know, early morning is the right time for study. That is the time when Saraswati, the Goddess of learning, keeps watch over whatever you read. You are therefore sure to remember."

Rabi decided he would spend more hours in studying and would also get scholarship like Jitendra. He continued to keep awake till the lantern in Jitu's room was burning, for light there meant Jitendra was reading.

Rabi asked his Mummy not to disturb him till she saw the light burning in Jitu's house and not to call him for the meal.

Parents saw the change in Rabi. They were very happy that the child had changed for better.

Rabi studied even beyond midnight. He got up early in the morning and again studied. The parents could see light from his reading room through the opening in the door and the window. His parents were very happy. They hoped, Rabi would do much better, a better rank in class four. He would march ahead of Jitu.

The parents helped him. Each day of examination, Mummy would put a water filled jar and ask Rabi to look at the jar before going to the examination hall. It was auspicious, they said. Every day on Rabi's return from examination hall, parents asked him how he had done. Rabi was each time nodding his head as a sign of having done satisfactorily.

But what was the result ? When the results came out in May, Rabi was no better than what he had done when he was promoted from class three to class four. He was then the third, now also he stood third.

The parents had hoped, as Rabi was studying seriously he might stand second, if not first. Their dreams were shattered. They scolded Rabi for not doing well in his examination.

Rabi thought he had worked very hard. Where did he go wrong ? He searched for answers. His parents were also taken by surprise. They had seen Rabi working so hard but result was not up to their satisfaction. He would reap what his fate ordained.

But Rabi's father did not rest with these words. He decided that he would himself supervise Rabi's studies. He started from the very day Rabi entered his fifth class.

Rabi also noticed that his father was keeping an eye on his study room. He was afraid lest he should be caught sleeping. He resolved that he would cut down his sleeping hours. He spent in study whatever time he could muster.

One evening he was physically shaken by somebody standing near him. He was taken aback. He felt guilty, because it was about 7 O'clock, not deep into night. He saw his father standing. He trembled in fear with the thought that a very large dose of scolding awaited him.

The lantern was burning near the low desk. The history book was lying open on the desk. His right hand was on it. He was asleep on his knee. "Why don't you sleep on the mat?" his father asked. "Remember when your body needs sleep don't force it to keep awake. A sleepless body is a tired body. You will have no mind to learn nor would your mind remember what you read. This type of reading is not real study. Whenever you doze or feel sleepy, you must lie down in your bed. If you have good sleep you get up all fresh. You will then remember whatever you read."

His father continued, "Do not read as if somebody is forcing you to read. Don't read when you do not feel like. Try to understand what you are reading. Whatever you fail to understand, keep a note of it. Ask your teacher or ask me. Once you understand the substance you will remember it easily. By memorising you can't remember them for long."

His father laid Rabi to sleep. Rabi expected scolding but got consolation.

This was a turning point in Rabi's way of study. Rabi was intent on his books and notes. He no longer had even a single look at the window of Jitu. He did not feel any urge to compare his labour with Jitu's. Whenever he felt sleepy, he went to sleep. He followed his father's words.

There was another incidence of similar nature that year. Rabi had one day asked his mother to wake him up early in the next morning. "Mummy, wake me up at 4 a.m., I want to study next two hours till morning."

His mother did what rabi had asked her to do. When she called Rabi to wake up, his father was also woken up. She advised Rabi to wash his face and sit down for the study.

Rabi's parents went to bed soon thereafter. At about 5 a.m., they were woken up hearing a loud sound. They ran to Rabi's study room to see what happened. They saw a burn injury on Rabi's forehead. They now understood what had happened. While reading Rabi had dozed off his head hit the hot lantern. There were a few blisters. The burn must have made Rabi shout in agony. The parents explained the futility of forcing oneself to read when the body failed to heed that command. It was not an occasion to scold Rabi.



His father repeated what he had said earlier, "Did I not tell you to stop reading when you feel sleepy? You didn't go to bed. You invited a burn. If you

don't have good sleep, you don't feel fresh. When you get up from the bed on your own you will find greater zeal to study."

From that day onwards Rabi didn't delay going to bed. Whether it was night or early morning, when sleep overcame him he went to bed. Whenever he awoke from sleep he took to studying. Now Rabi felt, the study was not like a load. Reading whenever he felt like reading he found it a light job. He also found it easy to remember. He also got time to play. Whatever he could not understand he went to his parents or teachers and they explained. The lessons were no longer beyond comprehension.

It was time for selection of students for the scholarship examination for class five. Both Rabindra and Jitendra were selected. The Headmaster sent up both the students for UP scholarship examination. When the results were out, five students were successful. Among them were both the students of Haripur UP school. Now Rabindra was no less than Jitendra.

My dear children ! Now you understand, working more hours is not what is required. Apply you mind and heart to your study and you are sure to win.

A Magic Chain

This is a funny story. It happened not long ago. In the village of Kabirpur there lived a farmer named Sadananda. He put his muscle and mind in his field. Whatever he earned from his land was enough to maintain the family and his day-to-day needs. Yet he loved to receive guests and never left them unsatisfied.

One day, a Sadhu who was passing by stepped into his house. He spared no pains to serve the Sadhu. The Sadhu was so pleased with Sadananda's treatment that he offered him a boon. Sadananda was wondering what should he ask.

The Sadhu observed that Sadananda was hesitating. He himself volunteered to describe his boon, "Sadananda you do as I suggest. You will no longer have any want nor any suffering. Go to your *Adhamania* field. In the southern corner you will find a high ridge. Level it with a spade. You will see your fortune open up."

No sooner had the Sadhu left than Sadananda picked up a spade, put it on his shoulder and proceeded to his field. His field was called *Adhamania* because it measured half a *mana*, *mana* in those days was a unit of measurement of land, equal to present-day acre. But Sadananda did not have the whole tract, it had been fragmented into smaller plots due to partition among the brothers in successive generations.

As soon as he hit the ridge with his spade, the ridge broke up. He saw a hole. Another hit with the spade and he saw two eggs in the hole. Both the eggs were broken by the strike of the spade. Out of one egg a bird came out and it had the face of a human being. In the other there was a gold chain.

The bird with human face suddenly turned into a fairy. Before it took off it said "Because of you I am now free from my curse. Take this chain. When you wear it on your neck and ask for something you want, the chain will give you. But it will give you once only. Therefore, take my advice. Before you ask for

anything, think about it 10 times. After your wish is fulfilled, the magic power of the chain will disappear.

Sadananda was so happy ! You cannot believe how happy he was unless you have had seen him at that moment. He seemed to sense the light in the darkness. He got hold of the chain and left his field on way to his home. At the beginning of the village there was a goldsmith's shop.

He thought, if he could show the chain to the goldsmith he would at least know the real price. The goldsmith saw the chain and tested it. When he heard that Sadananda got it free from his field, he thought he could get it for a song.

He said, "Sada, it is so thin a chain, it would not cost more than two maunds of paddy." He fondly called Sadnanda as Sada. By calling somebody by his nickname we hope we endear ourselves to that person. The goldsmith employed that ploy. Talking of maund, it was the unit of weighing those days and is equal to 40 kilogrammes.

As I have said in the beginning of the story, those were the old days when there were no coins nor currency notes. People exchanged one thing for another. Things were called commodities and the system was called barter. Because you see today money as a medium of exchange you do not feel the difficulties of barter. Let me give an example or two. Suppose a milkman sells milk but wants to buy oil in a place where the man who sells oil does not want to take milk, how would the transaction take place ? The needs of the two would never meet. Suppose a washerman wants rice in exchange of his service of washing the clothes of a man who has bricks and lime to sell, how do they exchange ? These were the difficulties those days. Sometimes rice was the medium of exchange just as money does these days. Therefore the goldsmith gave the price in terms of paddy.

In those days gold was cheap. So also was paddy. The chain was so thick and heavy that sadananda thought two maunds of paddy was not enough. So he burst into laughter. He said, "You might be a goldsmith but you have not seen such a chain. It is a magic chain. Put it on your neck and you get whatever

you ask it to give. All the ornaments you have in your shop will not equal this chain in price.”

The goldsmith had already thought of getting the chain cheap. Now he was determined to get it whatever might be the cost. He thought of different ways to own the chain.

He hit upon a cheaper option. And it was a mischievous plan. He requested Sadananda to have a meal with him before proceeding home. He said, “Sada, I do not like any guest to leave my door without taking something. Moreover, it is already dark. Let us have dinner together. Then you can go home.”

Sadananda was courteous. He was also traditionist, bound by traditions. His followed examples of his elders. He had heard his father saying, ‘if you refuse a thing offered by somebody, you would never get that thing again. It is more true if it is a meal. Refuse food and you go hungry that whole day. He has also heard it from his neighbours who never refused whatever he offered them when they visited him. Sadananda decided to accept the goldsmith’s invitation.

They had their dinner. Little did Sadananda know that the goldsmith had mixed Ganja in the sherbet he offered before the meal was served. He had a full meal because the goldsmith had made a very tasty preparation. It was made tasty to hide the bitterness of sleeping medicines which the goldsmith mixed in the food. Sadananda felt sleepy as soon as he finished his meal.

The goldsmith got what he wanted. It was like a cat getting dry fish in our homes. The goldsmith was waiting for such an occasion. As soon as he saw Sadananda getting sleepy, he offered him a bed. Sadananda soon went into sound sleep and started snoring. The goldsmith took out the chain from Sadananda’s neck. He made a similar chain in brass and goldplated it. When he found the new chain looked exactly as Sadananda’s magic chain, he put it around Sadananda’s neck.

Sadananda had no inkling of what the goldsmith had planned nor was he aware that so many events had taken place.

Morning came. Sadananda got up and went home.

The goldsmith kept the entire episode a secret to himself. Even his wife could not know. He had a great greed for gold. He went to the biggest room he had in his house. He stood in the middle of the room, and putting the magic chain on his neck he said, "Oh my magic chain ! Fill this room with gold mohurs."



In no time it rained gold mohurs. They were falling on his head, his hands and his feet. In fact, they were striking all parts of his body. They were hitting him hard but he did not feel any pain because the goldsmith was so happy with mohurs raining in the room.

Gold mohurs were piling up and it soon rose to the level of his loins. The goldsmith wanted to get out of the piles of mohurs. He was beating his hands against mohurs and trying to lift his legs up, one at a time. But he could not.

No sooner was he lifting one leg than the other slipped. He could not come out of it. All the while it was raining more and more mohurs. A few more seconds and he was buried in the gold mohurs.

It did not end there. The mohurs piled up over his body, right up to the roof of the room. They were so heavy. Their weight pushed the doors and windows of the room open. Through these openings the mohours flowed on to the street. The metallic noise made by the scattered mohurs drew the attention of the people nearby.

They could not believe what they saw. They came out and saw the goldsmith dead in a huge pile of gold mohurs. Almost all of them murmured, "Life is lost in penury, Life is lost in plenty." Penury means *extreme poverty*.

Sadananda in the mean time had reached his house. He narrated the story of the magic chain to his wife and assured her that all their worries were now over. "We will suffer no longer. But we must be careful, whatever we beg the chain to give. We should think ten times before asking for any thing. We must first decide what is the best for us."

His wife jumped at the suggestion and said, "Let us ask for another *mana* of land."

Sadananda replied, "Can't we buy land ? Why should we ask for a small gift, now that we have the Goddess of Fortune with us ? Let us work hard and reap a better harvest this year. With the surplus paddy we will be able to buy another mana."

And it happened as Sadananda wished. That year the crop was so good. Sadananda could not only purchase one mana of land, he also purchased some gold and silver.

Next year Sadananda's wife pleaded, "Why not ask for a milch cow ? Our children can have some milk."

"Nonsense !" said Sadananda. "Again you suggest a small gift ? With another year's labour we will have enough paddy to buy more than one cow."

And Sadananda was right. That year indeed Sadananda purchased a very good cow and they got a bucketful of milk daily.

Sadananda was so happy that he could not resist saying to his wife, "See, without asking anything from the magic chain, we have spent two years in plenty. Because the magic chain is with us, whatever we wish we get."

In this way, year after year passed. Once or twice she did remind her husband to ask for some gift. Sadananda postponed the matter each time she suggested something new.

"You were earlier wishing for this thing or that. Children need this or that. What has happened to you ? Nowadays you seem to have no wants ! Why did the Sadhu give you the chain ? On the other hand, you are labouring harder and harder as the days pass. Why don't you ask for an iron safe full of gold so that we can live like a king ?"

Sadananda reply was, "Do not lose patience. We are still strong and able to labour. We are living happily. But our sons ? They may need something. Now we do not have any wants and our children are happy. Let us leave the chain as it is so that our children can use it. But keep planning and thinking. What is that which will remove the wants of our children for ever ? We will ask the chain to give that."

But their children were not aware that their father had a magic chain. But Sadananda kept to his words he uttered before his wife. He laboured harder and harder. He purchased more and more lands, more and more cows and

bullocks, and employed more and more people to help him cultivate the land. His granaries were full.

Now he was spending time in luxury. He could afford to have and enjoy songs and dances on some nights. He arranged Daskathia and Pala in his village. He was living as if he was the King of the area. Of course he was not ordering anybody to do anything for him as a King would do.

Nevertheless his wife was nagging him and was asking this and that. All the while Sadananda used to reply, "That is a small thing. If there is anything bigger and richer we will ask for that from the magic chain. You go on thinking what is the best for our children."

Year after year passed like a year before. Gradually they forgot the fact of having a magic chain. Sadananda became old and his wife too.

Nobody lives forever. Sadananda died. His wife could not tolerate the sadness due to Sadananda's death. She died within minutes of his death.

Their sons and daughters, grandsons and grand daughters felt very sad as they loved them too much.

They all made arrangements for a grand funeral. When they took the old man on to the pyre, they noticed a gold chain on his neck. The eldest son advised everybody "Do not take away the chain from his neck. Papa used to wear it all along. Let the chain go with him". So the chain was lost along with Sadananda's body. But he lived in the memory of his children and grand children and villagers.

Sadananda did not know that the chain he had was not the original. Nevertheless it worked like the magic chain. It brought happiness, wealth and cheer to the family.

What do you learn from this story, my dear children ? Even a blessed thing in the hands of an evil man could bring sufferings while ordinary things in the hands of a good fellow could do wonders.

Sweet Knife Porridge

We sometimes read in the newspapers stories of people making a tour of the world. Mr. Gokul Das has travelled the whole country on foot. Mr. Vijoy Bhargav travelled the whole world in a cycle. Mr. B. K., a physically handicapped, travelled the whole country in two years. We begin to think that making such travels is very easy. We forget that they face innumerable problems and difficulties in their routes of travel. We cannot imagine some of the difficulties they face. I am not talking of threat to life. It is always there. But normal works of the day like going to bath, getting to latrine and resting after the evening are difficult to meet.

This story is about a brave young man, named Nabagat, on his tour of India. One day he got into a forest before evening. Darkness would soon envelop. With the sunset temperature would drop. He was afraid of the wild animals of the jungle. They might attack. He must find a place to rest. He walked very fast, almost ran in the forest road. He was relieved when he saw a ray of light at a distance. Soon he was there. It was the house of the Sahukar of the village. As it was an Adivasi village he lived at one end. The travelling young man did not know that Sahukars were money lenders and very miser.

Nabagat went up to the door of the house and knocked at the door. An old lady opened the door. Immediately Nabagat bent down and touched her feet. This was the traditional way of giving respects to elders. The old lady was surprised to see a young man after evening. "Who are you, my child?" she asked.

Nabagat answered, "I have travelled the North, I have travelled the South and I have travelled the West. I have finished three directions. Now the East is left. Once the East is finished, I will cover India, my Country, completely."

"That is OK. But why are you here?" The old lady asked.

"Just to spend the night, Mausi."

"I guessed it correctly. You must have come for the night halt. But as you see there is no space." The old lady said.

Nabagat looked inside the house through the door and found enough space. He said, "I can lie down anywhere on floor. I won't give you any trouble."

The old lady explained, "Dhania's father has gone out on a job since yesterday, he has not come back. He is out for two days. Dhania, too, has gone to the other village, he is yet to return. He had told me that he would return before darkness. No male person is here. You are a stranger. How can I allow you to stay in my house?"

While the old lady was saying so much, the young traveller ran his eyes inside the house. He could see through the opening in the door that the house was of a well-to-do family. He entreated her for a stay, "Mausi, don't you think I am like your son? Only one night and I will go on my way."

The old lady did not like to be addressed as Mausi. To her it meant she was a sister of his mother. She got angry and said, "Am I your father's sister-in-law?"

"No, Mausi, I did not mean that. You are like my mother. Who else would be so dear except Mausi!"

But there was no let up in her anger. She further said, "Do you think this is a hotel? I don't stock food for everybody in the world. Get ahead to some other house."

Nabagat looked all around the room. It was full of household articles. Obviously, some cans must be full of food items. He thought the old lady was very miser. So, he appealed to her. "Mausi, why do scold me? Allow me to sleep on the floor. And only for the night. Had I been your son, would you have left me to sleep among the tigers and the bears of this jungle?"

Nabagat went on explaining his difficulties and assuaging her anger. He also touched her feet several times. At the end the old lady agreed. This time Nabagat not only again touched Mausi's feet, he kept his hands on her feet till she physically lifted his head up. Such a feeling of gratitude the old lady had not seen before.

Nabagat sat down in the verandah overlooking the court yard. He rearranged his luggages. Then in a sweet and soft voice said, "Mausi, you must be hungry. It is already late in the evening. It is not known when Mause and Dhania will be back. Why should you wait for them and suffer hunger?"

The old lady said, "My child, I am waiting for the return of Dhania and his father. Only when they take something can I take my meal. That too I have not gone to the kitchen. I am waiting for their return to cook the meal."

Nabagat knew the custom of this part of the country. The lady of the house takes food only after her husband has taken it. He changed his voice and said, "Mausi, you come and join me in a meal. I have some food."

"And you ! A traveller offering food !" The old lady laughed at him.

Nabagat said, "You do not know, Mausi, those who travel far and wide know and learn many new things. They can even a cook meal out of a knife."

He continued, "Bring me a cauldron and I will show you how I cook a knife." The old lady got interested to see how one cooks without anything.

She gave her a small pot to cook. Nabagat filled it with water and placed it on the hearth. When water boiled he brought out a knife from his pocket. With knife in hand he made four or five rounds around the pot, uttered some sord as if chanting some mantra, and dropped the knife in the cauldron.

"Why are you doing this, my son ?" the old lady asked in amazement.

Nabagat said in his own language, "I am making *chhuri khiri*." Knife was *chhuri* and *khiri* meant a type of sweet porridge. He was making a sweet porridge out of his pocket knife. "I have the knife. Now if you could give me a spatula I will stir the porridge."

The old lady had seen many recipes, that is, methods of food preparation, but had not seen a recipe for *chhuri khiri*, or knife porridge. She had a strong desire to see. Immediately she went inside her kitchen and brought out a spatula. Nabagat stirred the boiling water with spatula.



The old lady could not resist saying, "Hi, my son, if people could make porridge in plain water there would be no hungry fellow in the world. No body would run short of food.."

"Mausi, seeing is believing. Simply look at what I am doing. Once you know you can also make better dishes, because cooking is your forte." Forte means a strong point in one's character. Nabagat praised the old lady by using this word. And she was flattered.

The old lady did not bat her eyelids even once and fixed her gaze movement of Nabagat's hands. While stirring the boiling water Nabagat said, "Mausi, it appears the porridge will be very dilute. You know, for the last seven days, I am using the same knife to make porridge. If some raw rice could be added the porridge would be thick and tasty."

Nabagat allowed a few moments of silence so that his words could sink into the old lady's understanding. Then he said, "Do not worry, Mausi, if there is no rice I will manage as it is." And he again went on stirring the boiling water.

The old lady thought for a moment and said, "Why should not I worry ? There must be somewhere a fistful of rice. Let me see. In fact the old lady brought a glassful of scented raw rice. Nabgat had not bargained for it. He got more than he wanted.

He put all the rice in the cauldron and went on stirring while the old lady looked on.

While stirring the rice in boiling water the young traveller was repeating a sentence, "I have been using this knife so often during the last week that it has lost its salty character and this porridge may taste watery." Then pausing a little he said, "However I will manage it."

The old lady grasped the meaning of what Nabagat said. After all she was also invited to this porridge. She said, "Silly ! Why don't you say you want some salt ?"

Nabagat put the salt in the cauldron and again went on stirring with the spatula. The old lady's eyes remained fixed on the cauldron. She wanted to see what a porridge made of a knife looked like.

Nabagat sensed the lady's interest in his new recipe and said, "I bet, nobody in this area might have tasted this type of sweet porridge." While saying so he was at one moment looking at the old lady and at another moment fixing his gaze on the cauldron, but always stirring the mixture.

The old lady become sarcastic. "Nonsense ! By boiling a *chhuri*, you get *khiri* !"

Nabagat answered, "No, Mausi, no, it is sense. You will find it so tasty, only if I can add some milk and a little sugar. It will be so fantastic that even the Collector of this district would love it."

A few days back the local Collector had come to that Adivasi hamlet. He was inquiring into money lending activities among the Adivasis. Dhanias father was laying a lot of papers before him. She could only understand that the Collector was a very powerful man and could give punishment to Dhanias father. So she thought this young man might be known to the Collector. To be sure of her guess she asked Nabagat, "My son, do you know the collector ?"

Nabagat got an opportunity. He got a break. "Do you want to know how do I know him ? It is this collector who has given me this certificate." Nabagat showed a paper which he brought out of his bag and placed before the old lady. She hardly knew what it meant. Nabagat never left the job of starring the mixture.

The old lady was impressed. She did not however know that it was usual with all travellers to collect some certificate from the collector of the district through which they travel. Nabagat was not telling a lie, because he had procured a certificate. The old lady thought she should not displease a person who knew the Collector. Why should she refuse a little of milk and a pinch of sweet ? This thought led her to bring a glass of milk and half a glass of sugar.

Which porridge would not taste well if such items were added ? Nabagat took the old lady for a ride. While stirring the mixture Nabagat made the last gesture and said, "Mausi, bring the mat and we will sit down to take *khiri*."

But he did not stop up at that. He said, "Mausi, if some *saunf* is put, the porridge would smell so sweet ! What to talk of this hamlet, even the people on the road would smell it and look this way." As usual he again said, "Don't worry Mausi. If you do not have *saunf*, forget it. I will manage."

Immediately the old lady got up, went to the kitchen and brought half a spoon of saunf. Saunf is also known as panmahuri or ainseed.

Now children, you can imagine how tasty the sweet porridge must have become. If you do not know ask your mother or sister who cooks god dishes to try Nabagat's recipe. I can now feel saliva flowing in my mouth. You can imagine how the old lady and the young traveller must have enjoyed the khiri to their fill. And you know, if somebody has a tasty item to his fill he feels sleepy.

So the traveller enjoyed a good sleep at the Sahukar's house at the fringe of the jungle.

But my story has not come to an end. Nabagat felt sleepy and began to spread his mat on the floor.

The old lady immediately bent down and lifted his mat up. Are you kidding, my son? You can't sleep on the floor. Get that cot this side." pointing to the bed lying in the corner, the old lady said.

One who could prepare sweet porridge out of knife should not be allowed to sleep on earth, the old lady felt and said so in so many words. She was full of gratitude to the young traveller.

Next morning when the young traveller prepared himself to make further journey the old lady made a very good breakfast for him. When Nabagat stepped out of her door, the old lady thanked him, "My son, you have done a very good cooking. You have given a new recipe *chhuri khiri*. At least I can satisfy Dhanias's father with my new cooking.

"My dear children, now you know how it is not difficult to make knife porridge. Only if you have the right amount of raw rice, salt, sugar, milk and panmahuri.

The old lady looked on to the road the young traveller took.

How Poverty was overcome

Cannot tell you when poverty came to this world. But I can tell you how and why poverty lies submerged among us, eager to pounce upon the unwary.

The story relates to two brothers who lived not long ago.

The younger brother remained in the village. He was very poor and lived in a thatched house. The elder brother was a rich business man and lived in a town nearby.

The poor brother was named Garib and the rich one Dhani.

One day Garib, the poor brother went to his rich brother and asked for help. "Bhai, we are becoming poorer and poorer. My wife and children are going without meals. Would you please help me?"

"Well. Stay here for a week and work in my house." Dhani said. Dhani did not like to give gifts. Garib worked for almost a week. He tended the bullocks, he fed the cows. He brought fuel-wood from the jungle. Dhani had no other worries than managing the shop. Garib managed every thing and managed well. He worked from early morning to late evening. Dhani gave him what he took as food and also some clothes to wear. At the end of the week he gave Garib 7 kilogrammes of rice and 7 units of money.

He was so much obliged to his elder brother that while paying him respects he touched his feet. He was about to leave the door when he was called back. Dhani said, "Wait. Day after tomorrow is my birthday. We will have a grand feast. If you are going to home, please bring your children. Don't forget to bring your wife too."

When Garib told his wife about his brother's party, she flatly declined, "No, I would not go. Many rich families will come to his house. Dressed poor as we are, I would not fit in. It will not look nice for us to be among them? Your brother will feel offended."

Garib tried much to make his wife agree to the invitation. At last, they along with the children went to Dhania's house. That was really a grand birthday party. There were people and people. Some rich businessmen had come with

gaily dressed ladies. Some of them were godown owners. There were varieties and varieties food. There were also varieties of drinks. The dining table seemed to be breaking with the heavy load of dishes decorated with scented herbs. None of the invitees ever made a glance at Garib or his wife. They were standing in a corner. Nobody even asked them if they had taken anything.

When it was time to return the guests lined up to say 'Thank You' to Dhania for his excellent arrangements. They were all smiles. But Garib and his wife were feeling the pangs of hunger. Their children were in tears.

Garib thought, "Why should I keep silent ? I should also thank my brother and leave this place." While he was thinking what to do, somebody within him seemed to say, "Yes, yes ! Do that."

Garib asked, "Who are you ?"

The voice within said, "I am Poverty." A picture flashed before his eyes, it was that of a very old man, toothless and sunken cheeks.

He looked so frail, like a thin bamboo stick. It was he who was speaking. The voice seemed to come from within himself.

Do you know why the younger brother was named Garib ? Garib means poor. His father had a blind belief that if the son is named Garib the Yama or the God of Death would not touch him till He has finished taking lives of richer fellows. He did not know that Yama, if he at all exists, is no respecter of persons.

True to his name he was a skeleton, as if he had no food for months together. Poverty accompanied Garib, his wife and his children on their journey to Garib's village.

On the way, Poverty saw a wine shop and asked them to take him to the wine shop. Garib said, "I have no money to pay for wine."

Poverty had overheard Garib's discussion with his wife. He said, "Liar ! You told your wife that your brother has given you seven kilogrammes of rice and seven units of money. You have enough to eat and make merry."

Suddenly Garib's fingers felt the fold in his loins clothe. He had kept the seven coins in a fold of his clothe at the loins. He felt that Poverty of a chap knew every thing. Caught for lying, Garib had to agree to Poverty's request.

Hardly had they reached the house, Garib got a tap on his back. It was Poverty. As soon as his eyes met Poverty's the latter said, "You have a beautiful village. You must have a very good excise vendor's shop here. Let us visit that."

Garib could not shake Poverty off his shoulders. Poverty also hang on until Garib gave him a glass of wine. He had to take Poverty to the shop at the end of the village. He advised Poverty not to take to drinking and showed him how most of the villagers disliked drunkards and that was why the shop was at the end of the village. At least he should not be branded by village youth and women as a regular visitor to the excise shop.

Poverty explained, "Don't worry. That is the way the poor people say, for they cannot tolerate others having a drink. They think it is the cause of poverty among people. I tell you it is not. Once you have a drink you feel the bliss of the Heavens."

Within a few days Garib spent whatever he had. When Poverty asked for another drink next day, Garib said, "How do we go empty handed ? Nobody gives a drop of wine free."

But the Poverty was not a person to leave them at that. He advised, "Why don't you sell your cart ? Don't sell the whole cart. You can now sell the chassis. Get some extra money and use it for next cultivation. Only when you get enough crop will you need the bullock cart. That is a long away off. Now you do not need the chassis."

Garib sold the chassis of his cart. He had enough money to pay for drink. In a drunken state they had a world of hallucination which they called happiness.

One day they exhausted money. When Poverty asked Garib to go to the excise vender's shop, Garib said, "I do not have any more money. How do we have drinks ?"

Immediately Poverty replied, "Why ? Don't you have two wheels ? Sell them. You will have enough money and enough drinks for a long period. As I have said, you do not need the cart till you have harvesting and that is a long away off."

Garib said, "You have been having drinks since you came with me. I have spent all my wealth. I cannot bear any longer."

Poverty as usual persuaded Garib for another session of drinking. This time Garib was adamant that he would not spend a single paisa more from his pocket.

But Poverty was not poor in ideas. He said, "Why do you worry ? Sell your plough. You do not need the plough till Akshay Trutiya." Akshaya Trutiya is the day when the farmers in Orissa begin the monsoon agricultural operations.

Garib took his advice. He sold his plough.

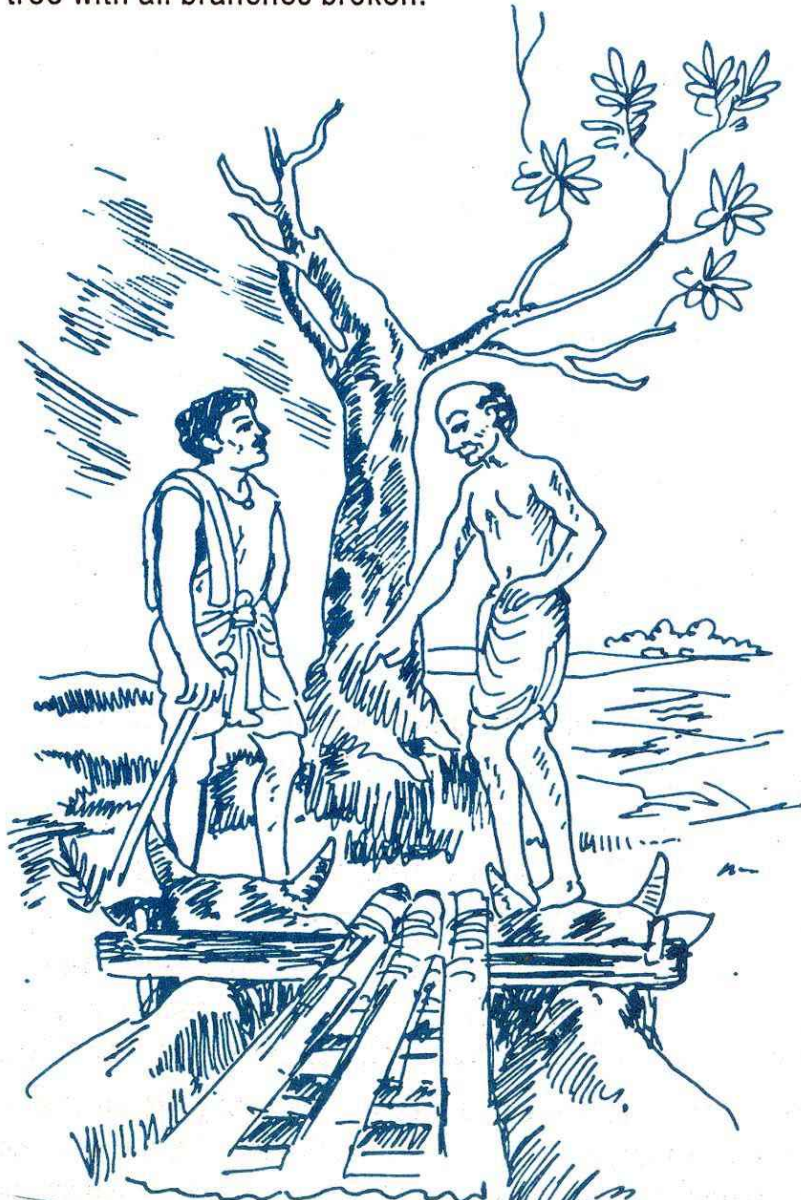
All of them had a few more days of drinks and made merry.

Again they were ran short of money. But Poverty was so addicted to drinks that he found out some excuse or the other to take Garib for a drink. When he again proposed a drink at the village wine shop, Garib avoided him. He did not reply to his requests. But he murmured within himself. "Am I to bear the expenses always ? This fellows does not spend a single paisa. And all the while he sits in my house as my guest."

Poverty had uncanny ability to sense what others thought, and he could hear the lowest voice. He sensed what Garib murmured and said, "Don't think I do not know what you are thinking. I understand your difficulties. Do not spend any more from your pocket. I will get you some riches." He advised Garib to borrow a bullock cart from his neighbour and come with him.

Garib went to his neighbour and pleaded with him for sparing of his bullock cart with the pair of bullocks to enable him to bring some fuel wood from the jungle.

The neighbour lent his cart and Garib went with Poverty as per the latter's directions. They reached an open space inside the village jungle. Poverty showed Garib a tree with all branches broken.



He asked Garib to unyoke the bullocks and start digging the roots of the branchless tree. Garib went on digging. It was hard soil. He was sweating. Poverty went on prodding him to dig further.

“The tree might fall.”

“Yes, it should be uprooted, only then will you find the treasure”, Poverty said.

Garib was happy when he could fell the tree. Lo and behold ! Garib saw a number of pots. He found each pot full of old and silver. He loaded them on the cart.

Poverty was all smiles and said, “Now you won’t object to my taking drinks. I have got you so much, it will last you a whole generation. And I will have drinks to my heart’s content.”

Garib was poor indeed but he was not poor in mind, he was all while thinking of ways to eliminate Poverty. But he did not talk to any body lest Poverty should sense it. He was afraid, the way Poverty spent on drinks all the gold and silver would one day be finished. Again he would be as poor as he was before.

He went on digging again. He did not stop even when Poverty asked him to stop.

Poverty asked, “What are you digging again ?”

Garib replied, “I do not feel like leaving this place. I see some more gold and silver below. Would you help me get them ?”

“Do you see some more gold and silver ?” Poverty asked.

Garib said, “The hole is getting deeper and also narrower. You are so lean and thin. You can get down and inside. Get me more gold and silver.

As soon as Poverty got down into the hole, Garib took up the uprooted tree and put it straight into the hole and Poverty remained down under. Under heavy weight of the tree, Poverty remained there and could not come up.

Garib returned home. He made a new house. He purchased lots of lands. He employed many men to raise crops. He had cattle sheds and horse stables full of draught animals. In no time he was the richest man of the village.

He thought of celebrating his birthday. Just as his elder brother did in the town. As his wife advised he invited his brother Dhani.

Dhani was amazed to hear that he had become so rich. He wanted to know how he could become so rich. The younger brother was all smiles and replied it was because of his friend Poverty.

Dhani thought it strange, some body called Poverty could help him get so rich.

Garib saw amazement writ large in the eyes of Dhani. He explained him how he got the company of Poverty from the day he returned from his house and how he unearthed pots of gold and silver as guided by Poverty.

Dhani became curious and wanted to know where he could find Poverty. He advised his brother, Dhani, which road he should take and which tree he was look for. He said, "If you go to that place you will still find Poverty there. He would be under the tree trunk."

The townsman brother reached the spot. He saw Poverty in that hole under the heavy weight of the tree. He removed the tree trunk. No sooner had he lifted the tree than Poverty jumped on to his shoulder.

Dhani was taken aback. He wanted to befriend Poverty, but Poverty did not separate himself from Dhani. Rather he scolded him, "Ungrateful wretch ! What have I not done for you ? I got you so much wealth and you have dumped me here in a hole under the heavy load of the tree. This time I am not going to leave you."

Poverty did not know that it was not Garib but Dhani. And Dhani could not understand anything. He explained that it was not his fault and that he should not be caught for the fault of his younger brother.

Nevertheless, Poverty did not leave him. Everyday he took Dhani to the excise vender's shop and drank to his heart. He also forced Dhani to have drinks.

Now Dhani realised that until he could drive Poverty away there was no way no escape becoming a beggar some day. All the while Dhani had kept Poverty's company a secret.

But he was very worried. His wife saw his worries in the wrinkles of his forehead. She asked, "What is the matter?"

Dhani explained how Poverty had become a mill stone around his neck. "Unless we drive this man Poverty, poverty will soon overpower us and we will soon become beggars."

His wife was very clever. She said, "Next time Poverty asks you to go to wine shop, tell him first to have a game of hide and seek. If he wins, then only you will go to the wine shop. You start the game and I will do my work. You will see how I control the fellow."

Dhani did exactly what he was told by his wife. Poverty was addicted to drinks so badly that he used to feel like a mad person without wine. He had to agree for sake of getting drinks soon.

So the game was on.

First Dhani hid himself. Poverty could immediately find him out. It was then the turn of Poverty. Dhani could not see and therefore find where Poverty hid himself. But his wife was marking every movement of Poverty from a distance. As soon as Poverty went inside the big jar meant to store grains, Dhani's wife jumped to the spot and covered the mouth of the jar with a heavy lid. Then she plastered the lid with mud and tied the whole jar with strong ropes.

Dhani thanked his wife for the peace of mind she could bring. Both joined together and took the closed jar to the nearest river and threw it there. Both of them said, "Let Poverty drown himself."

From that day onwards the elder brother again became a prosperous businessman.

But remember, children, Poverty did not die nor did he drown himself.

Next time another person plucked the jar from the waters and wanted to know what was inside it, Poverty overcame him.

From that day poverty lives within us. While one drives poverty out, another falls prey to it. Until everybody drives poverty out it will still be among us.

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