

As You Sow, So Shall You Reap



IN a certain village there dwelt a weaver. He was very poor, sometimes he would eat once a day, sometimes half a meal, and sometimes he was forced to starve.

He had a daughter. Day by day, she grew like the waxing moon and she was beautiful as a fairy. When she grew up, her father got her married to another poor weaver. In her husband's house too she did not get enough to eat.

One day she said to her husband : "How long shall we continue to live like this, in such desperate poverty ?"

"What alternative do we have ?" asked the weaver.

"If you get me a spinning wheel and some cotton I will do something to better our condition."

The following day, the weaver took a loan and bought a spinning wheel and some cotton for her. The weaver's wife was just as intelligent and skilled as she was beautiful. She spun yarn and began to weave splendid things on the loom. Beautiful *dhotis* and multicoloured garments. She attached beautiful borders to the *dhotis* and created varied designs on the clothes. People were amazed at her handiwork. In a short while, their poverty was a thing of the past.

The weaver's wife's skill grew famous throughout the land. Great princes and nobles began to place orders for cloth. The wealthy gentry bought clothes at any price that she asked.

Once, the weaver's wife prepared an exceedingly beautiful rug. Never before had such a rug been seen in this world.

The whole kingdom was depicted on the rug. Towns and villages, fields and forests, hills and streams, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field and a host of other things were to be seen there.

When the rug was ready, she gave it to her husband and said : "Go and sell this to the king. If the king asks what the price is, don't name a price. Say that the rug will name its own price. Or else, take whatever the king gives you."

The weaver put the rug over his shoulder and set off for the court. On the way, a wealthy merchant stopped him and asked : "How much will you take for this rug, brother?"

"I don't know", said the weaver, "The rug will name its own price."

The merchant kept thinking this over but he could not fix a price.

Just then, a second merchant came up. And then a third. Then a fourth and a fifth and a sixth. Soon, a whole horde of merchants had gathered. All were astounded by the rug but not one of them could decide on a price.

Just then, the prime minister happened to be passing by in his carriage. Seeing a crowd gathered, he came up to see what the matter was. The crowd immediately made way for him, When he saw the rug he was very pleased. "This rug is fit for the king's court", he thought. "Where did you get this rug ?" the prime minister asked the weaver.

"My wife made it", replied the weaver.

"Well, how much does it cost ?" asked the prime minister. "I don't know",

said the weaver, "My wife told me to take it to the king's court, and to say that the rug would name its own price, or else to take whatever the king gave me."

"You are right", said the prime minister, "Who but the king can put a price to this rug ? Here, are two lakh gold coins for you."

The weaver took the coins, gave the rug to the prime minister, and set off for home. The prime minister took the rug and went straight to the king. The king was amazed to see his entire kingdom pictured on the rug.

When he lay down at night he could not sleep. He could not stop thinking of the woman who, had woven the rug. How beautiful must she be, thought he, who had woven such an exquisite rug ! If only he could see her and marry her.

Thus he passed the night. Day dawned. The king disguised himself as a commoner, and set out for the weaver's village. After much searching, he found the weaver's house. He knocked on the door. The weaver's wife opened. The king was struck dumb by the sight of her. It was as if a fairy stood before him. Not a word could he utter.

The weaver's wife was surprised by this strange behaviour. She waited a while for him to speak but when he remained silent, she took hold of him by the shoulders, turned him around, and then shut the door.

The king was very upset. "Why did I come alone ?" he thought, "if I had brought the army along I would have carried her off and made her my queen. It

is not right that such a beautiful woman should stay in the home of a weaver.”

The king returned to the palace. His mind was full of evil thoughts. By hook or by crook, he was determined to get hold of the weaver’s wife.

Then the king called the prime minister and said to him : “I wish to marry the weaver’s wife. If you help me I will bestow half the kingdom upon you. But if I do not get this woman I will have you thrown into a furnace.”

The prime minister was deeply perplexed when he heard this. What should he do ? Several days passed. Night and day, he was lost in thought. But no plan occurred to him. He began to be sorrowful. He was in the habit of bathing in the Ganga both morning and evening. He used to go to the river bank, bathe and worship there.

Now, the poor fellow began to lapse from his routine. Whenever he remembered his rule, he would go to the shore of the Ganga, bathe, and then sit there, silent.

A shepherd used to feed his flocks nearby. He had always seen the prime minister come to bathe and to worship, very early in the morning. Now he noticed that the prime minister looked anxious and careworn, and came to bathe, sometimes in the forenoon, sometimes in the afternoon. Finally, one day, he asked the prime minister : “Sir, why do you look so sorrowful of late ? You used to come here every day, very early in the morning, but for the last few days this routine has slackened. What is the matter ?”

“Oh brother, what can I tell you ?” said the prime minister, “What good will it do to tell you ? What can you do about it ? The king has created a problem for me that is past all telling.” “Do tell me”, said the shepherd, “I will try my best to help you. After all, intelligence is not the exclusive property of any one. Sometimes a small man may achieve great things. And even if I cannot be of any use to you I can’t make things any worse for you. You can quite frank with me.”

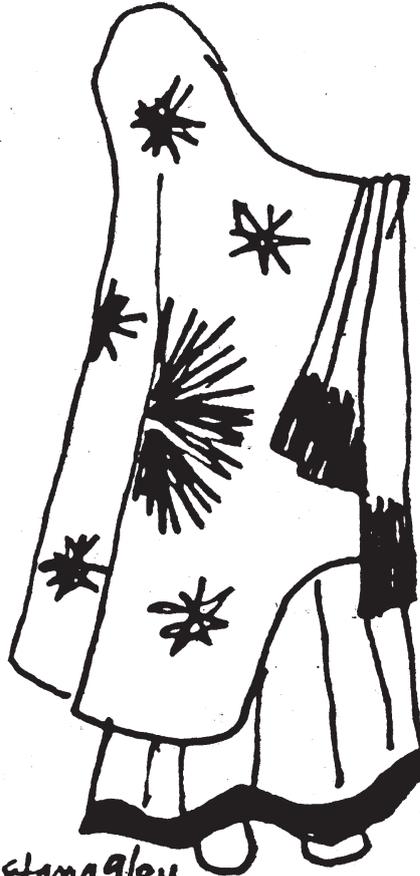
The prime minister thought that the

shepherd was right. There could be no harm in telling him. Who can understand the mysterious ways of god ?

So the prime minister recounted the whole story.

“Sir”, said the shepherd, “Follow this plan. Perhaps it will work. Men of the weaver caste are very simple. If this man’s wife is also a simple woman, the matter may be easily managed. You must do something to befuddle them completely. Tell the king that he should ask the weaver to go to heaven and find out how the king’s father is faring there. If he agrees to go he will have a hard enough time reaching heaven and once he does reach there he will certainly not return.”

The prime minister thought this was good advice. Next day, he appeared in court and said to the king : “Your majesty, I have thought of a way to separate the weaver from his wife.”



The king was very pleased. The prime minister explained his plan. The king immediately gave orders for the weaver to be produced in court.

When the weaver came, the king said : “You have always served me with great honesty. I have never heard a complaint against you. I am now in need of a true and good man like you. I am assigning you a very important task. You must go to heaven and find out how my father is doing there. When you return with the news, I shall reward you richly. If you do not go, I will have you impaled.”

The weaver turned faint with fear. “I will think it over and give you an answer”, said he.

When he returned home he was pale with anxiety. “Why are you so sad ?” asked his wife, “What’s the trouble ? I’ll think of a way out.” The weaver told her about the king’s order.

“Is that all ?” said she, “That’s a very simple job. Have your dinner and go to sleep. A plan revealed at night never works well. Tomorrow morning, I will tell you what to do.”

The weaver awoke early next morning. His wife gave him some food for the journey. She also gave him a gold ring. Then she said : “Go to the king and ask him to send the prime minister along, with you so that he can act as a witness that you have really been to heaven. If he agrees, take the prime minister with you, and roll this ring along the road. The ring will roll ahead and you must follow wherever it leads. When the ring stops you will have reached heaven.”

The weaver took the bundle of food and the ring, went straight to the king and asked that the prime minister be sent along with him. The king could not refuse. The prime minister and the weaver set off for heaven.

The weaver rolled the ring along and it led the way. Following it, they crossed open fields, forests, hills, streams, rivers, canals and heaven knows what else. Whenever they felt tired they stopped to eat something from the bundle, then on they went again. They measured a very long distance in this manner. The

prime minister was dropping with fatigue. Just then, they entered a huge forest, absolutely uninhabited. Not a sound was to be heard. The ring came to a stop.

The weaver and the prime minister sat down to eat and drink. They saw an old man come by, drawing a big cart laden with wood. He was doubled over with the strain and was gasping for breath. Two brutal looking men were mercilessly whipping him on.

“Who is this old man ?” the weaver asked the prime minister, “Can you recognise him? I cannot.”

“It’s the king’s father”, cried the prime minister in horror, “What a state he is in !”

“Stop, Oh minions of Dharmraj*”, cried the weaver, “Let the man have a rest. I want to talk to him.” . .

The two messengers of death turned their bloodshot eyes on him and said : “We cannot afford to stop. Who will drag these logs of wood ?” “Don’t worry about that”, replied the weaver, “This man, who is with me, will take the old man’s place.”

The minions of death agreed. They

freed the old man and yoked the prime minister. When the prime minister showed reluctance they began to whip him on ferociously. The poor prime minister bent double and began to draw the cart.

The weaver asked the king’s father : “Your majesty, how are you doing here?”

“Oh, my good brother”, said the king’s father, “I am in a very bad state here. As I sowed so am I reaping. It is truly said in the Ramayana ‘As you sow so must you reap.’ So, brother, when you return to the city remind my son of my fate and tell him not to oppress the people otherwise he too will have to suffer in hell as I am suffering. When one dies one’s deeds are reckoned up.”

They talked a long while. The minions of death unloaded their wood and returned with the empty cart. The weaver bade the king’s father farewell. Then the weaver and the prime minister returned to the city.

They went straight to the king’s palace. When the king set eyes on the weaver he flew into a rage and said : “How have you come back so soon ?”

“Your majesty”, said the weaver, “I have met your father in heaven. He told me to tell you that he is having a very bad time there. If you do not wish to suffer like him do not oppress the people.”

This infuriated the king even more. “What proof is there that you actually went to heaven and met my father ?” he demanded.

“Your majesty”, said the weaver, “The prime minister was with me. Have a look at his back. Look at the wounds the minions of death have inflicted on him with their whips.”

When the king looked at the prime minister’s back he got a shock. His eyes were opened. He began to repent of his doings. He begged the weaver’s pardon and vowed that never again would he do such an ill deed.

The king released the weaver’s wife. The weaver went home with his virtuous wife and they lived happily ever after.

—from *Kar Bhala, Hoga Bhala* (Maithili folk tales) edited Bhagwanchandra Vinod. Translated from Hindi by Manushi.

*Yamraj, god of death, who is also Dharmraj, god of justice

