



IN a certain village, there lived a brahman. He was a great scholar and a good man. His wife too was intelligent, and skilled in managing the household. A daughter was born to them. Both parents loved her dearly. Day by day, the girl grew. Soon, she came to maturity. One day, the brahman's wife said to him : "Look for a husband for our daughter. She should get married now."

The father had not realised that he would so soon have to start searching for a groom for his daughter. Anxiety overwhelmed him. When he looked at the calendar, he found that the auspicious day for her marriage fell that month. After that, there would not be another auspicious day for three years. When he saw this, he grew perplexed. His wife too was upset. She thought for a while, then said : "We still have 20 days. You should be able to find a boy. If the girl is fortunate, you will find him in 10 days."

The brahman replied : "You are right, but we do not have any money. How can we get her married ?" The husband and wife sat up late that night, thinking over the problem.

In that city there dwelt a king.* He had constructed a palace which was so exceedingly chilly that it was hard to stay in it even for a couple of hours. Even in summer, one could not survive in that palace. The king issued a proclamation that anyone who succeeded in spending

The Princess Wins, The King Loses

a night in that palace would be richly rewarded. Tempted by the reward, many people lost their lives in the palace. Anyone who entered it at dusk emerged a cor-pse at dawn. The brahman remembered the promised reward.

He said to his wife : "Trusting in god, I will spend a night in the king's cold palace and will get enough money to get our dear daughter married." Frightened, his wife said : "Many people have lost their lives there. What will become of us if anything happens to you ?"

But the brahman had made up his mind. "Leave the future to god", he said, "There is no other solution to our problem. Let me go. If god wills, I will come out safely from this chilled palace, as the kittens did from the potter's kiln."

The brahman proceeded to the king's court, and said: "Your majesty, I will pass this night in your chilled palace." The king tried to dissuade him, saying : "Oh worthy brahman, you will not be able to survive even a couple of hours there." Since the brahman refused to change his mind, the king was forced to have him locked into the chilled palace that evening.

When night fell, the brahman opened a window facing the royal palace. He could see a light burning on the roof of the palace. All night, he kept his eyes fixed on that light.

Day dawned. When the guards unlocked the door, they found the brahman alive. They took him to court. The king was astounded to see him. He asked : "Sir, will you tell me how you spent the night in that chilled palace?"

The brahman said : "Oh king, I kept my eyes fixed on the light that burns on your palace roof. And the night passed."

Shaking his head, the king replied, "So that is how you escaped. Not one person has emerged alive from that palace. How could you, a 60 year old brahman, emerge safe and sound ? Your body must have been warmed by the light. So you do not deserve to get the prize."

Disappointed, the brahman returned home. News of this injustice perpetrated by the king spread through the town. In this town there also lived a prince. He dwelt in fear of the king. The prince thought : "Now that the king has become so unjust, he will definitely attack me too,



sooner or later." As he sat, drowned in these melancholy thoughts, his daughter came in. She asked him why he was so sad. He tried to evade the question but when she persisted, he told her of his

ears. "It seems I will have to leave this kingdom and go elsewhere", he said. "The king has become very unjust. That is why I am sad, daughter."

"Please do not worry about this", replied his daughter, "I will make the king give the brahman his reward. Please go and ask the king, all his court officials and the whole army to come to dinner tomorrow. You feed the officials and the soldiers. I will cook the king's meal with my own hands."

Knowing that his daughter was a very clever girl, the prince followed her advice, and despatched an invitation to the king. The king accepted the invitation. The following day, the king, all his officials and the army came to the prince's house.

The prince fed all the officials and soldiers, distributed betel, and saw them off with every mark of respect. To the king, he said : "My daughter is cooking your meal with her own hands. Please go and eat in her palace."

The king, with his bodyguards, went off to the girl's palace and began to enquire about his meal. The princess welcomed him and showed him great courtesy. "Your majesty, it will not take a moment", she said. "Everything is ready. Only the rice pudding remains to be cooked. Look, there it is, on the fire."

The king saw a brass pot on a hook suspended from the ceiling. About eight or nine feet below it there burnt a fire. "Princess," said the king. "The rice pudding will never be cooked, at this rate. How can the heat of the fire reach the vessel at such a distance ?"

Smiling, the princess replied : "Your majesty, if a brahman locked in your cold palace can be warmed by a light burning in your other palace, why cannot the rice pudding cook at a distance of eight or nine feet from the fire ?"

The king understood the whole plan. He had not a word to say in reply. Defeated by the princess, he called the brahman and richly rewarded him.

(extracted from *Rani Jiti, Raja Hara*, in *Kar Bhala, Hoga Bhala, Maithili folk tales*, ed. Bhagwanchandra Viaod, published Sasta Sahitya Prakashan).



Muslim Women Protest

About 15 Muslim women demonstrated against the oppression of women in the name of Shariat, on June 22, 1985, in the streets of Calicut town. Many of them were clad in parda with placards listing various demands in their hands. This attracted the attention of many, especially because of the tense situation created all over Kerala by the controversy going on in the wake of a Muslim woman having been accused of committing adultery and consuming liquor, by Beema Palli Jamaat Committee, in Trivandrum.

The slogans raised in the demonstration were : Oppose treating woman as a mere commodity of consumption ; Oppose the dowry system not laid down in Shariat but practised by Muslim brothers : Give maintenance to divorced women, at least in the name of humanity.

This kind of protest, that too by Muslim women against injustice and

atrocities perpetrated in the name of religion, seems to be a new chapter in the history of women's struggle in Kerala.

—Gopinath Meppayil

Two Women

*There is a woman climbing
a glass hill*

*Of clothes and dishes on'a dusty
floor ;*

*Today surmounted, tomorrow
towers till .*

*There is a woman
opening like a door.*

Many come in

but only she is bitch

Empty, is filled,

then empty as before.

*There are two women, standing,
and on each*

Is smiled salvation

or is howled damnation,

And saved, or damned,

must still be within reach.

Until the end,

When all are served,

the sermons and the omens,

The preachers served,

the children and the elders,

And still they come,

And still demand,

And still stand on her floor

and ask for more.

And still the clipped wing

leans against

Her eagle of experience.

—Naomi Replansky, 1952