

THAKUR Ari Singh was lying on his deathbed surrounded by relatives and friends. He had only one daughter, Lhalarde, who was standing motionless near her father. The atmosphere was tense. There was no hope of survival for Ari Singh.

As it is customary to find out the last wish of a dying man, one of Thakur's relatives asked him for his last wish, in the hopes that the members of his family could fulfill it. Thakur's lamp of life suddenly fluttered and a light twinkled in his eyes. With a soft smile, he said, "I have seen the ups and downs of life. Many of my wishes were fulfilled and I enjoyed and lived life fully, but I still have two wishes which remain unfulfilled." All those around Thakur spoke together assuring him of fulfilling his wishes and requesting him to spell them out.

Ari Singh mumbled, "My first wish is that you go to Gujarat and fetch horses from there. My second wish is that the famous folksong of Rajasthan, *Todarmal* be sung in our house." *Todarmal* is a welcome song sung when a bridegroom comes back to his house with his bride. His relatives suggested that this wish could be fulfilled if he adopted a son, but to fetch the horses from Gujarat was not possible. There was silence all around. His daughter, Lhalarde, suddenly broke this silence and assured him that both his wishes would be fulfilled. Thakur heaved a sigh of

A Worthy Daughter

A Rajasthani Folktale

relief and in the next moment he died peacefully.

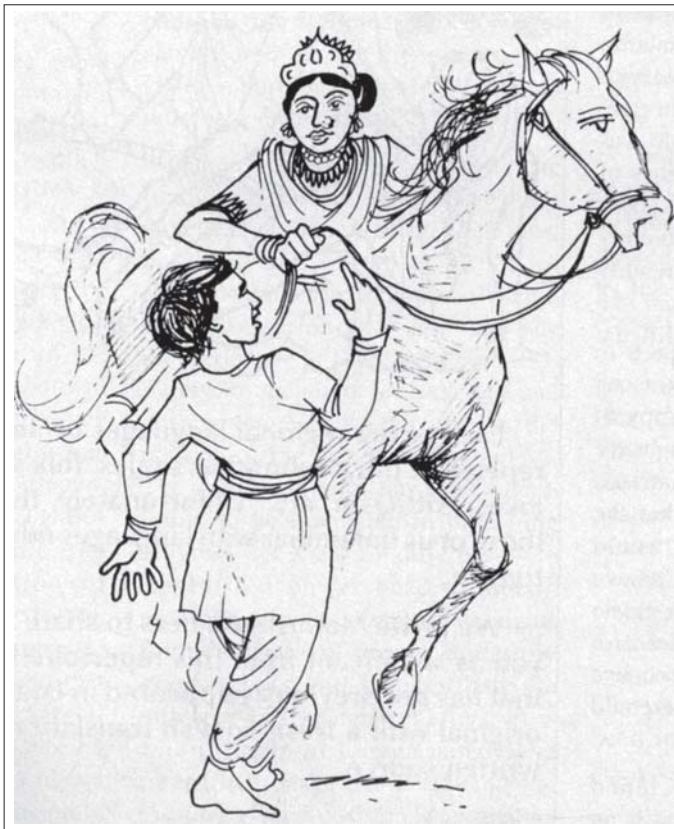
Lhalarde performed all the last rites. The only job left for her to do was to fulfill her father's wishes. She disguised herself as a young man and left for Gujarat riding on a horse. On her way to Gujarat, she came across a Rajput warrior accompanied by a barber. The warrior was also going to Gujarat to get horses. He suggested that since they had a common aim, it

would be better to make a united effort. Lhalarde liked the idea and accepted his suggestion.

The King of Gujarat had a select breed of horses which were known far and wide. They were left free to graze in the green pastures of Gujarat near a big tank. A drum was kept there and if anyone wanted to take the horses, he had to beat the drum. Hearing the drum, brave soldiers of the King would come to fight off the aspirant. If the aspirant won, he could take the horses of his choice.

Lhalarde, the Rajput warrior, and the barber were now near the tank where the horses were grazing. Lhalarde suggested that she would beat the drum and stop the advance of the soldiers. Meanwhile the warrior and the barber could take the horses with them. The warrior and the barber were happy with the plan.

The operation started. Lhalarde beat the drum. The Rajput warrior started gathering up the horses. When the soldiers arrived on the spot with their commander, they found only one person there. The commander



taunted, “You are alone, we never fight with a single man.”

“You can fight singly by turn, and the result can decide your fate.” Still in the disguise of a young man, Lhalarde laughed and then said, “We don’t have to decide the issue by fighting a duel. I suggest another way to settle the matter. I will dart my lance into the earth and if your soldiers can pull it out single-handedly, I will accept my defeat.”

After this challenge was accepted by the commander, the lance was hurled into the earth. Each of the soldiers tried to pull it out but did not succeed. Even the commander tried and failed. Lhalarde won and was free to pick out the horses of her choice.

Now Lhalarde joined the Rajput warrior. They agreed to distribute the horses equally between them, but the number was uneven so one horse was left out. The Rajput warrior wanted the young man to have it, but Lhalarde refused and cut the horse into two with her sword. As she slashed it in two, the barber noticed that Lhalarde was a pretty young lady in the disguise of a young man. He spoke to the warrior about it. The Rajput warrior bluntly questioned the young man who readily disclosed the facts and said that she had to do this in order to fulfill the last wishes of her father.

The Rajput warrior was happy to be in the company of such a brave woman and put a proposal of marriage before her. Lhalarde replied that she would only marry him if he would accept her condition — he would have to wear the clothes of a bride and she would go to his house dressed as a bridegroom and carry him to her house after marrying, so that *Todarmal* could be sung at her house.

The Rajput warrior listened patiently and found himself in an

embarrassing situation. The barber advised him to accept the condition as it was his good fortune to marry such a brave woman. The warrior accepted the proposal. Lhalarde married him and carried him to her house. The *Todarmal* was sung by the women, thus fulfilling the last wish of her father.

Time passed on. Lhalarde had two sons who were so brave that one day they brought a lion from the jungle, catching it by its ear. Their father felt convinced that it was not wrong to

have accepted the condition of Lhalarde.

This story has given rise to a popular saying in Rajasthani:

“Baite sain baiti bhali, je koyi hoye sapoot,

Arsi re Lhalar ni hooti, Arsik jato uoot.”

which mean that Ari Singh’s last wishes would have not been fulfilled, if he did not have a daughter like Lhalarde. So it was better having a worthy daughter than a worthless son. □

Tell us a Story



Each of the regional languages of India has a vast and rich repertoire of grandmother’s tales, folk stories, poems, sayings, jokes, witticism, etc. Unfortunately, these are inaccessible to those of us unfamiliar with languages other than our own mother tongue.

We invite Manushi readers to share with us what has struck you as significant from this repertoire in your mother tongue, that has not previously appeared in English. Please send us the original with a fresh English translation, identifying its oral or written source.

-Editor