

Charity Alone Conquers

Tales Of The Sun Or Folklore Of Southern India

Indian

Intermediate
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In the town of Têvai there lived a king called Sugaᳵa. He had an excellent minister named Dharmaᳵla. They ruled for a long time in prosperity over the kingdom. Both of them had sons. The prince's name was Subuddhi. He was a noble prince, and quite in keeping with his name, was always bent upon doing good to the world. The minister's son was named Durbuddhi, a most wicked boy, whose only delight was teasing beasts and birds from his infancy, and which ripened into all sorts of wickedness as he grew to boyhood. Notwithstanding the difference between their temperaments the prince and the minister's son were the best of friends. The motto of the prince was Dharmamê jayam—Charity alone conquers. That of the minister's son was Adharmamê jayam—Absence of Charity alone conquers. When rising from their beds, when beginning their prayers, when sitting down for meals or study, and, in fact, before beginning to do anything, each repeated his motto. The people had great hopes in Subuddhi, whom they fully expected to see a good and benevolent king; but the minister's son all thoroughly hated. Even the minister himself, his father, hated his son for his vile turn of mind, which he found impossible to change. His only friend, as we have already said, was the prince, who, notwithstanding all his faults, loved him sincerely. Both of them had grown up together from their very cradle, had played in the same dust, had read their lessons side by side in the same school under the same teachers. Fortune so ordained that the prince's mind should take such a bent, while the mind of the minister's son turned in a crooked way.

Nor was Durbuddhi insensible to the disgust and dislike which every one manifested towards him. He was well aware of all that was going on around. Still he would not change.

"I have no friend in this world excepting yourself, my dear Subuddhi," exclaimed Durbuddhi one day to his royal friend while they were riding together.

"Fear nothing. I shall ever stand by you as your true friend," replied Subuddhi.

"My very father hates me. Who else would like me then? On the other hand, every one likes you. You may soon get yourself married to some beautiful lady, while I must remain a bachelor; for no girl would marry me. You may soon rise to the place of a king; but I cannot become your minister, as the people do not like me. What can I do?" So said the minister's son, and hung down his head, as if conscious for a time of the utter hatred with which the people regarded him.

Subuddhi replied, "Heed it not, I will make you my minister, give you everything you want, and see you well provided for."

"If so, will you give me your wife one day, at least, if you happen to get married before me, and if I remain a bachelor after you," were the words which the wretched Durbuddhi shamelessly uttered to the face of his only friend.

These words were enough in themselves to enrage the prince's mind. But he was of so good a nature that instead of becoming angry, he smiled at the stupidity of his companion, and agreed that he would thus give him his wife one day in case he got married first. Thus took place an agreement between Subuddhi and Durbuddhi while they were still quite young.

Several years passed after this agreement, when one day the prince went to hunt in a neighbouring forest. His inseparable companion, the minister's son, and several hunters followed him to the wood. The prince and the minister's son both gave chase to a deer. They rode so much in advance of the hunters that they lost themselves in a thick jungle, where the latter could neither see nor follow them. The hunters returned after dark, and informed the king and the minister about the disappearance of their sons. They thought that as their sons were grown-up men they need not fear for their safety.

The two friends chased the deer and found themselves in the midst of a thick forest in the evening. Except a slight breakfast in the early morning they had tasted no other food. Hunger was pinching them severely. The hot chase had awakened a severe thirst, to quench which they were not able to find a drop of water. In utter hopelessness of life they resigned themselves to the course of their steeds. The beasts seemed very well to understand the wants of their royal riders. They went on trotting, and at last, about midnight, stopped on the banks of a large tank.

The riders, who were almost dead with thirst, opened their closed eyes when the horses stopped. All of a sudden, and to their great joy, they found themselves on the banks of a large tank. Their joy knew no bounds.

“Surely God takes care of His children. Had it not been for His kind care how could we have come to this tank, when we had given ourselves up to the guidance of our horses?” thought Subuddhi to himself, and got down from his horse.

The minister’s son, who had become more exhausted by that time than his companion, also alighted. Subuddhi, true to the nobility of his mind, took both the steeds first to water, and, after satisfying their thirst and loosening them to graze by the side of a grassy meadow, he went into the water to quench his thirst. The minister’s son also followed. After a short prayer Subuddhi took some handfuls of water, and returned to the bank. Durbuddhi also returned. They chose a clean spot, and sat down to rest during the remaining part of the night. The prince, when taking his seat, pronounced his usual motto, “Charity alone conquers,” and the minister’s son also repeated his, “Absence of Charity alone conquers.”

These words fell like venom into the ears of the prince at that time. He could not control his anger then, notwithstanding his mild disposition. The hardships of the day, their fortunate arrival on a tank in the dead of night to have their thirst quenched, were fresh in Subuddhi’s mind, and the prayers that he was offering to God were not yet over. That the minister’s son should never think of all this, and go on with his own stupid motto even at that time was intolerable to Subuddhi.

“Vile wretch! detested atheist! have you no shame, to utter your wicked motto even after such calamities? It is not too late even now. Mend your character. Think of the God that saved you just now. Believe in Him. Change your motto from this day.” Thus spoke the angry prince to the minister’s son.

Durbuddhi, who was naturally of a wicked and quarrelsome temperament, flew into a rage at once at the excellent advice of the prince.

“Stop your mouth. I know as well as you do; you cannot wag your tail here. I can oppose you single-handed in this forest.”

Thus saying, the minister’s son sprang like an enraged lion at Subuddhi, who, as he never dreamt of any such thing, was completely overpowered by the wicked Durbuddhi. The prince was thrown down in the twinkling of an eye, and the minister’s son was upon him. He severely thrashed his royal master, and, taking hold of a twig that was lying close by, tore out the prince’s two eyes, filled up the sockets with sand, and ran away with his

horse, thinking that he had completely killed him.

Subuddhi was almost dead; his body was bruised all over; his eyes were no more; his physical pain was unbearable.

“Is there a God over us all?” thought Subuddhi. The night was almost over. The cool and sweet breeze of the morning gave him some strength. He rose up, and, crawling on the ground, felt his way to the entrance of a temple. He crept in, shut the gates, and fastened the bolt.

It happened to be a temple of the fierce Kâlî. She used to go out every morning to gather roots and fruits, and to return at evening. That day, when she returned, she found her gates shut against her. She threatened with destruction the usurper of her temple. A voice, and we know that it was Subuddhi’s, replied from within:

“I am already dying of the loss of my eyes. So, if in anger you kill me, it is so much the better; for what use is there in my living blind? If, on the contrary, you pity me, and by your divine power give me my eyes, I shall open the gates.”

Kâlî was in a very difficult position. She was very hungry, and saw no other way of going inside than by giving Subuddhi his eyes.

“Open the gates; your request is granted,” said Kâlî. No sooner were these words uttered than the prince recovered his eyes. His delight may be better imagined than described. He opened the gates and vowed before Kâlî that he would from that day continue in that temple as her servant and worshipper.

The wretched Durbuddhi, after his horrible act, rode on composedly, following the footsteps of his horse, and reached the forest where he had been hunting the day before in company with the prince. He thence returned home all alone. When his father saw him coming back he suspected something wrong to the prince, and asked his son what had become of him.

“We chased a deer, and he rode so much in advance of me that he was out of sight, and finding all search vain, I returned alone,” was Durbuddhi’s reply.

“This I would have believed from anyone but yourself. Never plant your feet in these dominions till you bring back the prince again. Run for your life,” was the order of the minister, and Durbuddhi accordingly ran off,

fearing the anger of his father.

Thus the Prince Subuddhi served in the Kâlî temple; and Durbuddhi, fully confident that he had killed his friend, roamed about from place to place, as he saw no possibility of returning to his own country without the prince.

Thus passed several months. The goddess Kâlî was extremely delighted at the sincere devotion of Subuddhi, and, calling him one day to her side, said:

“My son! I am delighted with your great devotion to me. Enough of your menial services here. Better return now to your kingdom. Your parents are likely to be much vexed at your loss. Go and console their minds.” Thus ended Kâlî, and Subuddhi replied:

“Excuse me, my goddess, my mother, I no more regard them as my parents. This wood is not a large place if they wished to search for me. As they were so careless about me, I shall also from this day disregard them. You are my father and mother. Therefore permit me to end my days here in your service.” So saying, Subuddhi begged Kâlî to allow him to stay, and the goddess agreed accordingly, for some time at least.

After a few more months, Kâlî called the prince again to her, and addressed him thus:

“My boy! I have devised another plan. Better not, then, go to your parents, as you do not wish to go now. At a short distance from this place, in the Kâvêrî country, reigns a staunch devotee of mine. His daughter had small-pox, and as he forgot to do proper respect to me, I have blinded both her eyes. The king has issued a proclamation that he will give the whole kingdom and his daughter in marriage to him who would cure her of her defect. He has hung up a bell (ghaṅṅâ) at which every physician who wishes to try the case strikes. The king comes running as soon as he hears the sound, takes home the doctor and shows him the case. Several persons have tried in vain; for who could repair a defect inflicted by the displeasure of the gods? Now I mean to send you there. That king is a staunch worshipper of my feet. Though I have punished him, still I pity the sad calamity that has come upon his daughter. You had better go there and strike the bell. He will take you and show you the case. For three consecutive days apply my holy ashes to her eyes. Though fools may deride these ashes, still by them a true devotee can work wonders. On the fourth day her eyes will be perfectly restored. Then you will secure her hand, and, what is more, the country of Kâvêrî. Reign there, for you are born to reign,

being a prince, and not to spend your time here in this wood. If you do not do so you will commit a sin, and, what is more, incur my displeasure.”

Thus ended Kâlî, and the prince could not refuse; for he feared the anger of the goddess. Agreeing to her words, and with her manifold blessings, he started and reached the kingdom of Kâvêrî.

He struck the bell. The king came running to welcome the new doctor. All the previous physicians had tried by medicines external and internal. The new doctor—Prince Subuddhi—proposed to treat the case by mantras—incantations. The old king, who was very religious, fully believed that the new doctor might effect the cure, and, just as he expected, on the fourth day his daughter’s sight was completely restored. The king’s joy knew no bounds. He enquired into the parentage of the doctor: and when he came to know that he had princely blood in his veins, that he was as honourably descended as himself, his joy was greatly increased. He sent up a thousand prayers to the god for giving him a royal son-in-law. As promised in his notice, he would have to give his daughter to anyone, whatever he might be, who effected the cure. The lowest beggar, the lowest caste-man, if he had only succeeded in curing her, would have had as much claim to her hand as the prince-physician. So when the person that effected the cure proved to be a prince, the king was extremely delighted, and at once made all arrangements for the marriage of his daughter, and gave her to Subuddhi: and, himself being very old, he gave the kingdom also to the prince at the same time.

Thus by the favour of Kâlî, Subuddhi had a princess for his wife and a kingdom to govern. Subuddhi, as we know, was an excellent man. Though he became king now, he consulted his father-in-law in all matters, and, in fact, acted only as manager for the old man. Every evening he used to consult him for an hour or two before disposing of intricate cases. The duty of signing, too, he reserved for the old man. Thus even on those days when there were no cases he used to go to his father-in-law to get papers signed. Thus passed on a couple of years or so.

One evening, while sitting in company with his wife in the loftiest room of his palace after the duties of the day, he cast his eyes to the east main street and contemplated the bustle of that part of the town. Carts creaking under the load of merchandise, the flourish with which the goods and wares were exposed for sale, fashionable gentlemen in their fanciful evening costumes walking to and fro, the troublesome hawkers that stand by the roadside questioning every one as to what they would buy, and several other things interested

him, and for a time made him somewhat proud even, that he ruled over such a rich country. But sweetness is not always unaccompanied with bitterness. He saw in that same street a man whose face was very familiar to him, but whom he could not at once make out. A black man was sitting on a projecting pial of a corner of a shop, and was mending some torn gunny bags. Subuddhi looked at him carefully.

“Is it the minister’s son, Durbuddhi? No; he is not so black; rather was not when I saw him last,” thought Subuddhi with himself, and examining his face, he at last exclaimed, “It is he! It is he! It is my friend and companion.” “Who is it?” exclaimed the princess, and rushed at once to his side. She had most carefully watched her husband’s face for the past few minutes while he was in deep contemplation. “It is my friend, the minister’s son, by name Durbuddhi. We were companions from our birth; we played in the same dust, read in the same school, and were ever inseparable companions. I do not know what has brought him to the condition in which I see him now,” said Subuddhi, and sent some one to fetch him. Of the wicked and base act of the vile Durbuddhi he did not care to inform his gentle wife, who now retired to her inner apartments, as decorum did not allow her to be in company with her husband when he was receiving others.

The persons sent brought in Durbuddhi. Whatever might have been the cruelty that he had received from the hands of the minister’s son, the prince began to shed tears when he saw his old companion ushered in, not in that blooming cheerful red complexion in which he had seen him last, but in a weather-beaten dark skin and dejected colour of a coolie in which he saw him a few minutes ago.

“I excuse you all your faults, my dear Durbuddhi. Tell me quickly what has brought you to this wretched plight,” asked Subuddhi, and while asking he began to cry aloud. The minister’s son also shed tears copiously, and cried or pretended to cry; for be it known that he was a perfect scoundrel, born to no good in the world.

“My own mischief has brought me to this plight. When I returned to our country, after putting out your eyes and thinking that I had killed you, my father banished me from our dominions, and ordered me never to plant my feet within their limits without bringing you back. As I thought I had put an end to your life I never came back to that tank in search of you. I engaged myself as a coolie in the streets of this town after trying several other places without success, and I now stand before you.” Thus ended Durbuddhi, and the prince quite forgot his cruelty to him. He ordered his servants to get the minister’s son bathed, and attired in as rich robes as he himself wore. Then he related to him his own story, without omitting a single point, and at once made him his

minister.

The whole story of Durbuddhi, excepting the single point of his having put out his eyes, the prince related to his wife, father, and mother-in-law.

Thus was Durbuddhi again restored to his high position, through the liberal kindness of Subuddhi. Subuddhi did not stop even at this. He began to send him with papers and other things to the old king for signature. This went on for some months. All the while Durbuddhi was as obedient as might be, and by his vile tricks had completely won over the heart of the old king.

One evening, after the signatures were over, Durbuddhi stopped for a while as if desirous to speak. "What do you want?" said the old king. "Nothing but your favour," was the only reply, after which he retired. Thus he went on for some days and weeks. Every day he stopped for a few minutes after the state business was over, and when the old king asked the reason for it went on giving evasive answers. At last one evening the old king was extremely provoked. The cunning Durbuddhi had purposely intended this.

"What a big fool are you to stop every day as if wishing to speak and never to utter a word," broke out the old king.

"I beg pardon of your honour; I was thinking all the while whether I should let out my secret or not. At last, I have come to the conclusion that I will keep it to myself," replied the diabolical Durbuddhi.

"No, you shall let it out," roared the old king, whose curiosity was more roused than abated by the words, purposely obscure, of the minister's son. Durbuddhi, after simulating much reluctance at disclosing the supposed secret, loudly began his harangue:

"My lord, ever since I came here I have been making enquiries about the nobility of your family, about the sacrifices that you and your ancestors have performed, about the purifications that you and your elders have undergone, and about a thousand other particulars, each of which is enough to secure you and your descendants the place of Achyuta (Achyutapada) himself. These delighted me for a time—I say for a time—for listen, please, to what follows. When I compared with the pure fame of your famous family, that of your son-in-law, my heart began to pain me. Indeed the pain which began at that moment has not yet ceased. Know, then, that your son-in-law is not a prince. No doubt he has royal blood in his veins, which makes him look like

a king. How came he to be so skilful in medicine. Just enquire the cause. To be no more in the dark, the king of my country—over which my father is the minister—set out one day on savâr. While passing a barber's street he saw a beautiful damsel of that caste. Bewitched by her beauty the king wanted to include her in his harem, notwithstanding her low position in society. The child of that woman, is your son-in-law. He being the son of a barber-mother acquired thus easily the art of medicine. That a king was his father makes him look like a prince. If he had been of pure birth why should he leave his kingdom, and come here to effect the cure of your daughter? Except this prince, or supposed prince, all those that came here were mere doctors by caste." Thus ended the vile Durbuddhi, and taking in his hand the papers, vanished out of the room quickly, like a serpent that had stung.

The sweet words in which the minister's son clothed his arguments, the rising passion at the thought that he had been falsely imposed upon by a barber's son, the shame—or rather supposed shame—that he thought had come over his family, and a thousand other feelings clouded for a time the clear reason of the old king. He saw no other way of putting an end to the shame than by the murder of his dear daughter and son-in-law first, and of his own self and queen afterwards. At once he sent for the executioner, who came in. He gave him his signet-ring, and commanded him to break open the bed-room of his son-in-law that midnight, and murder him with his wife while asleep. The hukums, or orders given with signet-rings, can never be disobeyed. The executioner humbled himself to the ground, as a sign of his accepting the order, and retired to sharpen his knife for his terrible duty.

Neither Subuddhi nor his affectionate wife had any reason to suspect this terrible mandate. The old queen and the treacherous Durbuddhi had equally no reason to know anything about it. The old man, after issuing the hukum, shut himself up in his closet, and began to weep and wail as if he had lost his daughter from that moment. Durbuddhi, after kindling the fire, as says the Tamil proverb, by means of his treachery, came back with the papers to the prince. A thought occurred in his mind that Subuddhi's fate was drawing near. He wanted to carry out the agreement between himself and the prince about the latter's wife. The excellent Subuddhi, who always observed oaths most strictly, was confused for a time. He did not know what to do. To stick to the oath and surrender his wife to another; or to break it and preserve the chastity of his own wife. At last, repeating in his own mind, "Charity alone conquers," and also thinking that Heaven would somehow devise to preserve his wife, he went to her, explained to her how the matter stood, and ordered her to go to the

minister's son. She hesitatingly consented; for, as a good wife, she could not disobey her husband's commands. Subuddhi then told Durbuddhi that he might have his wife as his own.

The princess went to her mother, crying that her husband had turned out mad. "Or else who would promise to give his wife to another. What does he mean by that?"

"My daughter! fear nothing, perhaps, in his boyhood, he made this rash promise without thinking. The promise once made now pains him. Unable to break it, and leaving it to yourself to preserve your chastity, he has so ordered you. And he would, nay must, excuse you, if you by some means or other save yourself, and apparently make good your husband's promise also. A thought just comes to me how to do that. There is your foster-sister, exactly resembling you. I shall send her in your place." So consoling her daughter, the old queen at once made all the requisite arrangements. And, of course, Subuddhi had no reason then to know anything about them.

In the middle of the night his door is forced open, and a ruffian with a drawn sword, blazing like lightning, rushes in, and murders the pair. Thus in that very night in which Durbuddhi had reached the topmost point of his vice, he was cut down by the supreme hand of God. For, it is said, that when crime increases, God himself cannot tolerate it.

The morning dawned. Subuddhi rose from his couch, and after his morning prayers was sitting in the council hall. The princess and her mother rose from their beds, and were attending to their business. A servant just at that time came running to the old queen, and said:

"Our king is weeping in his room that his daughter is now no more. I think that there is something wrong with his majesty's brains to-day. Come and console him."

The queen, who knew nothing of what had happened, ran to her husband's room, quite astonished at the change. The husband reported everything to her—the sage-looking minister's son, the barber's son-in-law, and everything, and then concluded that their daughter and son-in-law were no more.

"What! compose yourself. Our son-in-law is sitting in his durbar. Our daughter is just adorning herself in her dressing-room. Were you dreaming? Are you in your right senses?" said the queen.

The king ordered the executioner to bring the heads, which, on examination, proved to be those of the minister's son and of the foster-sister. The queen told everything of the one-day-wife-giving engagement, and her own arrangements about it. The old king could not understand what all this meant. He drew out his sword and ran to the durbar like a maddened lion, and stood armed before his son-in-law.

“Relate to me your true origin, and everything respecting yourself. Speak the truth. How came you to learn medicine? If you are a prince why should you leave your own dominions and come down here? What about this wicked agreement of giving your wife to another? Who is this minister's son?”

Subuddhi, without omitting a single point, related everything that had taken place, even to the putting out of his eyes. The old man threw down his sword, took his son-in-law in his arms almost, for so great was his joy at the excellent way which fate had prepared for his escape, and said:

“My son, my life, my eye. True it is, true it is. Dharma alone conquers, and you that hold that motto have conquered everything. The vile wretch whom, notwithstanding the series of rogueries that he practised upon you, you protected, has at last found out that his Adharmam never conquers. But he never found it out. It was his Adharmam that cut him off on the very night of his supposed complete conquest by it.”

Letters were sent at once to Têvai, inviting Suguṅga and Dharmaṅga to the happy rejoicings at the prince and princess's delivery, and a re-marriage was celebrated with all pomp, in honour of their lucky escape.

Dharmaṅga, as he disliked his son, never shed a single tear for his loss. Subuddhi lived for a long time, giving much consolation to his own and his wife's parents. Through the blessings of Kâlî they had several intelligent sons.

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