



How Raja Rasâlu Played Chaupur With King Sarkap

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Indian

Intermediate
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Now, when evening came, Raja Rasâlu went forth to play chaupur with King Sarkap, and as he passed some potters' kilns he saw a cat wandering about restlessly; so he asked what ailed her that she never stood still, and she replied, 'My kittens are in an unbaked pot in the kiln yonder. It has just been set alight, and my children will be baked alive; therefore I cannot rest!'

Her words moved the heart of Raja Rasâlu, and, going to the potter, he asked him to sell the kiln as it was; but the potter replied that he could not settle a fair price till the pots were burnt, as he could not tell how many would come out whole. Nevertheless, after some bargaining, he consented at last to sell the kiln, and Rasâlu, having searched through all the pots, restored the kittens to their mother, and she, in gratitude for his mercy, gave him one of them, saying, 'Put it in your pocket, for it will help you when you are in difficulties.'

So Raja Rasâlu put the kitten in his pocket, and went to play chaupur with the King.

Now, before they sat down to play, Raja Sarkap fixed his stakes. On the first game, his kingdom; on the second, the wealth of the whole world; and on the third, his own head. So, likewise, Raja Rasâlu fixed his stakes. On the first game, his arms; on the second, his horse; and on the third, his own head.

Then they began to play, and it fell to Rasâlu's lot to make the first move. Now he, forgetful of the dead man's warning, played with the dice given him by Raja Sarkap; then, in addition, Sarkap let loose his famous rat, Dhol Raja, and it ran about the board, upsetting the chaupur pieces on the sly, so that Rasâlu lost the first game, and gave up his shining armour.

So the second game began, and once more Dhol Raja, the rat, upset the pieces; and Rasâlu, losing the game, gave up his faithful steed. Then Bhaunr Irâqi, who stood by, found voice, and cried to his master—

'I am born of the sea and of gold;

Dear Prince! trust me now as of old.

I'll carry you far from these wiles—

My flight, all unspurr'd, will be swift as a bird,

For thousands and thousands of miles!

Or if needs you must stay; ere the next game you play,

Place hand in your pocket, I pray!

Hearing this, Raja Sarkap frowned, and bade his slaves remove Bhaunr Irâqi, since he gave his master advice in the game. Now when the slaves came to lead the faithful steed away, Rasâlu could not refrain from tears, thinking over the long years during which Bhaunr Irâqi had been his companion. But the horse cried out again—

'Weep not, dear Prince! I shall not eat my bread

Of stranger hands, nor to strange stall be led.

Take thy right hand, and place it as I said.'

These words roused some recollection in Rasâlu's mind, and when, just at this moment, the kitten in his pocket began to struggle, he remembered the warning which the corpse had given him about the dice made from dead men's bones. Then his heart rose up once more, and he called boldly to Raja Sarkap, 'Leave my horse and arms here for the present. Time enough to take them away when you have won my head!'

Now, Raja Sarkap, seeing Rasâlu's confident bearing, began to be afraid, and ordered all the women of his palace to come forth in their gayest attire and stand before Rasâlu, so as to distract his attention from the game. But he never even looked at them; and drawing the dice from his pocket, said to Sarkap, 'We have played with your dice all this time; now we will play with mine.'

Then the kitten went and sat at the window through which the rat Dhol Raja used to come, and the game

began.

After a while, Sarkap, seeing Raja Rasâlu was winning, called to his rat, but when Dhol Raja saw the kitten he was afraid, and would not go farther. So Rasâlu won, and took back his arms. Next he played for his horse, and once more Raja Sarkap called for his rat; but Dhol Raja, seeing the kitten keeping watch, was afraid. So Rasâlu won the second stake, and took back Bhaunr Irâqi.

Then Sarkap brought all his skill to bear on the third and last game, saying—

‘O moulded pieces, favour me to-day!

For sooth this is a man with whom I play.

No paltry risk—but life and death at stake;

As Sarkap does, so do, for Sarkap’s sake!’

But Rasâlu answered back—

‘O moulded pieces, favour me to-day!

For sooth it is a man with whom I play.

No paltry risk—but life and death at stake;

As Heaven does, so do, for Heaven’s sake!’

So they began to play, whilst the women stood round in a circle, and the kitten watched Dhol Raja from the window. Then Sarkap lost, first his kingdom, then the wealth of the whole world, and lastly his head.

Just then, a servant came in to announce the birth of a daughter to Raja Sarkap, and he, overcome by misfortunes, said, ‘Kill her at once! for she has been born in an evil moment, and has brought her father ill luck!’

But Rasâlu rose up in his shining armour, tenderhearted and strong, saying, ‘Not so, O king! She has done no evil. Give me this child to wife; and if you will vow, by all you hold sacred, never again to play chaupur for another’s head, I will spare yours now!’

Then Sarkap vowed a solemn vow never to play for another’s head; and after that he took a fresh mango branch, and the new-born babe, and placing them on a golden dish, gave them to the Prince.

Now, as Rasâlu left the palace, carrying with him the new-born babe and the mango branch, he met a band of prisoners, and they called out to him—

‘A royal hawk art thou, O King! the rest

But timid wild-fowl. Grant us our request—

Unloose these chains, and live for ever blest!’

And Raja Rasâlu hearkened to them, and bade King Sarkap set them at liberty.

Then he went to the Murti Hills, and placed the new-born babe, Kokilan, in an underground palace, and planted the mango branch at the door, saying, ‘In twelve years the mango tree will blossom; then will I return and marry Kokilan.’

And after twelve years, the mango tree began to flower, and Raja Rasâlu married the Princess Kokilan, whom he won from Sarkap when he played chaupur with the King.

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