

How Raja Rasâlu Was Born

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Indian

Intermediate

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Once there lived a great Raja, whose name was Sâlbâhan, and he had two Queens. Now the elder, by name Queen Achhrâ, had a fair young son called Prince Pûran; but the younger, by name Lonâ, though she wept and prayed at many a shrine, had never a child to gladden her eyes. So, being a bad, deceitful woman, envy and rage took possession of her heart, and she so poisoned Raja Sâlbâhan's mind against his son, young Pûran, that just as the Prince was growing to manhood, his father became madly jealous of him, and in a fit of anger ordered his hands and feet to be cut off. Not content even with this cruelty, Raja Sâlbâhan had the poor young man thrown into a deep well. Nevertheless, Pûran did not die, as no doubt the enraged father hoped and expected; for God preserved the innocent Prince, so that he lived on, miraculously, at the bottom of the well, until, years after, the great and holy Guru Goraknâth came to the place, and finding Prince Pûran still alive, not only released him from his dreadful prison, but, by the power of magic, restored his hands and feet. Then Pûran, in gratitude for this great boon, became a *faqîr*, and placing the sacred earrings in his ears, followed Goraknâth as a disciple, and was called Pûran Bhagat.

But as time went by, his heart yearned to see his mother's face, so Guru Goraknâth gave him leave to visit his native town, and Pûran Bhagat journeyed thither and took up his abode in a large walled garden, where he had often played as a child. And, lo! he found it neglected and barren, so that his heart became sad when he saw the broken watercourses and the withered trees. Then he sprinkled the dry ground with water from his drinking vessel, and prayed that all might become green again. And, lo! even as he prayed, the trees shot forth leaves, the grass grew, the flowers bloomed, and all was as it had once been.

The news of this marvellous thing spread fast through the city, and all the world went out to see the holy man who had performed the wonder. Even the Raja Sâlbâhan and his two Queens heard of it in the palace, and they too went to the garden to see it with their own eyes. But Pûran Bhagat's mother, Queen Achhrâ, had wept so long for her darling, that the tears had blinded her eyes, and so she went, not to see, but to ask the wonder-working *faqîr* to restore her sight. Therefore, little knowing from whom she asked the boon, she fell on the ground before Pûran Bhagat, begging him to cure her; and, lo! almost before she asked, it was done, and she saw plainly.

Then deceitful Queen Lonâ, who all these years had been longing vainly for a son, when she saw what mighty power the unknown *faqîr* possessed, fell on the ground also, and begged for an heir to gladden the heart of Raja Sâlbâhan.

Then Pûran Bhagat spoke, and his voice was stern,—'Raja Sâlbâhan already has a son. Where is he? What have you done with him? Speak truth, Queen Lonâ, if you would find favour with God!'

Then the woman's great longing for a son conquered her pride, and though her husband stood by, she humbled herself before the *faqîr* and told the truth,—how she had deceived the father and destroyed the son.

Then Pûran Bhagat rose to his feet, stretched out his hands towards her, and a smile was on his face, as he said softly, 'Even so, Queen Lonâ! even so! And behold! *I am Prince Pûran, whom you destroyed and God delivered!* I have a message for you. Your fault is forgiven, but not forgotten; you shall indeed bear a son, who shall be brave and good, yet will he cause you to weep tears as bitter as those my mother wept for me. So! take this grain of rice; eat it, and you shall bear a son that will be no son to you, for even as I was reft from my mother's eyes, so will he be reft from yours. Go in peace; your fault is forgiven, but not forgotten!'

Queen Lonâ returned to the palace, and when the time for the birth of the promised son drew nigh, she inquired of three Jôgis who came begging to her gate, what the child's fate would be, and the youngest of them answered and said, 'O Queen, the child will be a boy, and he will live to be a great man. But for twelve years you must not look upon his face, for if either you or his father see it before the twelve years are past, you will surely die! This is what you must do,—as soon as the child is born you must send him away to a cellar underneath the ground, and never let him see the light of day for twelve years. After they are over, he may come forth, bathe in the river, put on new clothes, and visit you. His name shall be Raja Rasâlu, and he shall be known far and wide.'

So, when a fair young Prince was in due time born into the world, his parents hid him away in an underground palace, with nurses, and servants, and everything else a King's son might desire. And with him they sent a young colt, born the same day, and a sword, a spear, and a shield, against the day when Raja Rasâlu should go forth into the world.

So there the child lived, playing with his colt, and talking to his parrot, while the nurses taught him all things needful for a King's son to know.

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