

Mr. Mighty-of-his-Mouth

Tales Of The Sun Or Folklore Of Southern India

Indian

Intermediate
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In two adjoining villages there lived two famous men. The one was called Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth—one that could accomplish wonders with words alone. The other was called Mr. Mighty-of-his-hands—one who could make no use of that glib instrument the tongue, but was able to bear burdens, cut wood, and perform other physical labour.

It so happened that they agreed to live together in the house of the Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth, to try and see which of them was the superior. They accordingly kept company for several months, till the great feast of the nine nights (navarâtrî) came on. On the first day of the feast Mr. Mighty-of-his-hands wanted to sacrifice a goat to the goddess Kâlî. So he said to Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth,

“My dear friend, we both are mighty in our way, and so it would be shameful for us to buy the goat, that we want to sacrifice, with money. We should manage to get it without payment.”

“Yes, we must do so, and I know how,” replied Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth, and he asked his friend to wait till that evening.

Now there lived a shepherd at one ghaṅkâ's (hour's) distance from their house, and the two friends resolved to go to his fold that night and steal away one of his goats. Accordingly, when it was dark, they approached his fold. The shepherd had just finished his duties to the mute members of his flock, and wanted to go home and have his rice hot. But he had no second person to watch the flock, and he must not lose his supper. So he

planted his crook before the fold, and throwing his blanket (kambalî) over it, thus addressed it:

“My son, I am very hungry, and so must go for my rice. Till I return do you watch the flock. This wood is rich in tigers and goblins (bhûtas). Some mischievous thief or bhûta—or kûta may come to steal away the sheep. Watch over them carefully.” So saying the shepherd went away.

The friends had heard what the shepherd said. Of course, Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth laughed within himself at this device of the shepherd to impress upon would-be robbers that he had left some one there to watch his sheep, while really he had only planted a pole and thrown a blanket over it. Mr. Mighty-of-his-hands, however, did not see the trick, and mistaking the stick to be an actual watchman sitting at his duty before the fold, spoke thus to his friend:

“Now what are we to do? There is a watchman sitting in front of the fold.” Thereon, Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth cleared away his doubts by saying that it was no watchman, but a mere stick, and entered the fold with his friend.

It had also so happened that on that very night a bhûta (goblin) had come into the fold to steal away a sheep. It shuddered with fear on hearing the shepherd mention the kûta, for having never heard of the existence of kûtas, it mistook this imaginary being to be something superior in strength to itself. So thinking that a kûta might come to the fold, and not wishing to expose itself till it knew well what kûtas were, the bhûta transformed itself into a sheep and laid itself down among the flock. By this time the two Mighties had entered the fold and begun an examination of the sheep. They went on rejecting one animal after another for some defect or other, till at last they came to the sheep which was none other than the bhûta. They tested it, and when they found it very heavy—as, of course, it would be with the soul of the bhûta in it—they began to tie up its legs to carry it home. When hands began to shake it the bhûta mistook the Mighties for the kûtas, and said to itself:—

“Alas! the kûtas have come to take me away. What am I to do? What a fool I was to come into the fold!” So thought the bhûta as Mr. Mighty-of-his-hands was carrying it away on his head, with his friend following him behind. But the bhûta soon began to work its devilish powers to extricate itself, and Mr. Mighty-of-his-hands began to feel pains all over his body and said to his friend:

“My dear Mighty, I feel pains all over me. I think what we have brought is no sheep!” Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth was inwardly alarmed at the words of his friend, but did not like to show that he was afraid. So he said:

“Then put down the sheep, and let us tear open its belly, so that we shall each have only one-half of it to carry.”

This frightened the bhûta, and he melted away on the head of Mr. Mighty-of-his-hands, who, relieved of his devilish burden, was glad to return home safe with his friend.

The bhûta, too, went to its abode and there told its fellow-goblins how it had involved itself in a great trouble and how narrowly it had escaped. They all laughed at its stupidity and said, “What a great fool you are! They were not kûtas. In fact there are no kûtas in the world. They were men, and it was most stupid of you to have got yourself into their hands. Are you not ashamed to make such a fuss about your escape?” The injured bhûta retorted that they would not have made such remarks had they seen the kûtas. “Then show us these kûtas, as you choose to call them,” said they, “and we will crush them in the twinkling of an eye.” “Agreed,” said the injured bhûta, and the next night it took them to the house of the Mighties, and said from a distance: “There is their house. I cannot approach it. Do whatever you like.” The other bhûtas were amazed at the fear of their timid brother, and resolved among themselves to put an end to the enemies of even one member of their caste. So they went in a great crowd to the house of the Mighties. Some stood outside the house, to see that none of the inmates escaped, and some watched in the back-yard, while a score of them jumped over the walls and entered the court-yard.

Mr. Mighty-of-his-hands was sleeping in the verandah, adjoining the courtyard, and when he heard the noise of people jumping about, he opened his eyes, and to his terror saw some bhûtas in the court. Without opening his mouth he quietly rolled himself along the ground, and went to the room where Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth was sleeping with his wife and children. Tapping gently at the door he awoke his friend and said:

“What shall we do now? The bhûtas have invaded our house, and will soon kill us.”

Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth told him quietly not to be afraid, but to go and sleep in his original place, and that he himself would make the bhûtas run away. Mr. Mighty-of-his-hands did not understand what his friend meant, but not wishing to argue rolled his way back to his original place and pretended to sleep, though his heart was beating terribly with fright. Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth now awoke his wife, and instructed her thus:

“My dearest wife, the foolish bhûtas have invaded our house, but if you act according to my advice we are safe, and the goblins will depart harmlessly. What I want you to do is, to go to the hall and light a lamp, spread leaves on the floor, and then pretend to awake me for my supper. I shall get up and enquire what you have ready to give me to eat. You will then reply that you have only pepper water and vegetables. With an angry face I shall say, ‘What have you done with the three bhûtas that our son caught hold of on his way back from school?’ Your reply must be, ‘The rogue wanted some sweetmeats on coming home. Unfortunately I had none in the house, so he roasted the three bhûtas and gobbled them up.’”

Thus instructing his wife Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth pretended to go to sleep. The wife accordingly spread the leaves and called her husband for his supper. During the conversation that followed, the fact that the son had roasted three goblins for sweetmeats was conveyed to the bhûtas. They shuddered at the son’s extraordinary ability, and thought,

“What must the father do for his meals when a son roasts three bhûtas for sweetmeats?”

So they at once took to their heels. Then going to the brother they had jeered at, they said to him that indeed the kûtas were their greatest enemies, and that none of their lives were safe while they remained where they were, as on that very evening the son of a kûta had roasted three of them for sweetmeats. They therefore all resolved to fly away to the adjoining forest, and disappeared accordingly. Thus Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth saved himself and his friend on two occasions from the bhûtas.

The friends after this went out one day to an adjoining village and were returning home rather late in the evening. Darkness fell on them before half the way was traversed, and there lay before them a dense wood infested by beasts of prey: so they resolved to spend the night in a high tree and go home next morning, and accordingly got up into a big pîpal. Now this was the very wood into which the bhûtas had migrated, and at midnight they all came down with torches to catch jackals and other animals to feast upon. The fear of Mr.

Mighty-of-his-hands may be more imagined than described. The dreaded bhûtas were at the foot of the very tree in which he had taken up his abode for the night! His hands trembled. His body shook. He lost his hold, and down he came with a horrible rustling of leaves. His friend, however, was, as usual, ready with a device, and bawled out:

“I wished to leave these poor beings to their own revelry. But you are hungry and must needs jump down to catch some of them. Do not fail to lay your hands on the stoutest bhûta.”

The goblins heard the voice which was already very familiar to their ears, for was it not the kûta whose son had roasted up three bhûtas for sweetmeats that spoke? So they ran away at once, crying out:

“Alas, what misery! Our bitter enemies have followed us even to this wood!”

Thus the wit of Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth saved himself and his friend for the third time.

The sun began to rise, and Mr. Mighty-of-his-hands thrice walked round Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth and said:

“My dear friend, truly you only of us two are mighty. Mere physical strength is of no use without skill in words. The latter is far superior to the former, and if a man possess both, he is, as it were, a golden lotus having a sweet scent. It is enough for me now to have arrived at this moral! With your kind permission I shall return to my village.” Mr. Mighty-of-his-mouth asked his friend not to consider himself under any obligation, and, after honouring him as became his position he let him return to his village.

The moral of this short story is that in man there is nothing great but mind.

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