

The Brâhma×Priest who became an Amildâr

Tales Of The Sun Or Folklore Of Southern India
Indian

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In the Karnâta dê×a there reigned a famous king named Châmun×a, who was served by an household priest, named Gun×appa, well versed in all the rituals at which he officiated.

Châmun×a, one day, while chewing betel-leaves, thus addressed Gun×appa, who was sitting opposite him:—

“My most holy priest, I am greatly pleased at your faithfulness in the discharge of your sacred duties; and you may ask of me now what you wish and I shall grant your request.”

The priest elated replied: “I have always had a desire to become the Amildâr(Headman of the village) of a district and to exercise power over a number of people; and if your Majesty should grant me this I shall have attained my ambition.”

“Agreed,” said the king, and at that time the Amildârship of Nañja×gô×happening to be vacant, his Majesty at once appointed his priest to the post, thinking that his priest, who was intelligent in his duties, would do well in the new post. Before he sent him off, however, he gave Gun×appa three bits of advice:—

(1). Mukha kappage irabêku.

(2). Ellâru kevianna kachchi mâtan âu.

(3). ellâr juu kayyalii irabêku.

The meaning of which is:

(1). You should always keep a black (i.e. frowning) countenance.

(2). When you speak about State affairs you should do it biting the ear (i.e. secretly—close to the ear).

(3.) The locks of every one should be in your hand (i.e. you must use your influence and make every one subservient to you).

Gunappa heard these words so kindly given by the king, and the way in which he listened to them made his Majesty understand that he had taken them to heart. So with a smiling face the king gave the letter containing the appointment to Gunappa, who returned home with an elated heart.

He told his wife about the change that had come over his prospects, and wished to start at once to take charge of the new post. The king and his officers at once sent messengers to Nañjagô informing the officers of the Amildârî that a newly appointed Amildâr would be coming soon. So they all waited near the gate of the town to pay their respects to the new Amildâr and escort him into it.

Gunappa started the very next morning to Nañjagô with a bundle containing clean clothes, six by twelve cubits long, on his head. Poor priest! Wherever he saw the ku grass on the road, he was drawn to it by its freshness, and kept on storing it up all the way. The sacred grass had become so dear to him, that, though he would have no occasion to use it as Amildâr of Nañjagô, he could not pass by it without gathering some of it. So with his bundle of clothes on his head and his beloved ku grass in his hands, Gunappa approached the city of Nañjagô about the twentieth ghâikâ of the day.

Now, though it was very late in the day, none of the officers, who had come out to receive the Amildâr had returned home to their meals. Everyone was waiting in the gate and when Gunappa turned up, no one took him to be anything more than a priest. The bundle on his head and the green ritual grass in his hands

proclaimed his vocation. But everyone thought that, as a priest was coming by the very road the Amildâr would take, he might bring news of him—whether he had halted on the road and would or might be expected before the evening. So the next officer in rank to the Amildâr came to the most reverend priest and asked him whether he had any news of the coming Amildâr; on which our hero put down his bundle and taking out the cover containing the order of his appointment with a handful of kuᅁa grass, lest his clothes be polluted if he touched them with his bare hands informed his subordinate that he was himself the Amildâr!

All those assembled were astonished to find such a wretched priest appointed to so responsible a post, but when it was made known that Gunᅁappa was the new Amildâr the customary music was played and he was escorted in a manner due to his position, into the town. He had been fasting from the morning, and a grand feast was prepared for him in the house of the next senior official, which Gunᅁappa entered for a dinner and rest. He there informed the officials that he would be at the office at the twenty-fifth ghaᅁikâ of the evening. From the way in which he issued the order all thought that he was really an able man, and that he had come in the guise of a simple priest in order to find out the real state of his district. So every officer went home, bathed, had his meal in haste and attended at the office.

The chief assistant took the Amildâr to his house, and entertained his guest as became his position. Gunᅁappa, being a priest, was a very good eater, for never for a day in his life had he spent money out of his own pocket on meals, so what reason had he to enquire about the price of provisions? It was at the expense of others he had grown so fat! And doing more than full justice to all the good things, much to the secret amusement of his host and assistant, Gunᅁappa rose up from his food, and washed his hands. He then wanted betel-leaves though to ask for these before the host offers them is very impolite. But his subordinate interpreted it as an order from a master and brought the platter containing the necessary nutmeg, mace, nut, leaves, and chuᅁam (lime).

“Where is the dakshiᅁa?(donation fees given to priests)” next asked the Amildâr. His host did not quite understand whether this was meant in earnest or in joke, but before he could solve the question in his mind:—

“Where is the dakshiṅ?” reiterated the Amildâr, and his assistant, thinking that his new superior was prone to taking bribes, at once brought a bag containing 500 mohars and placed it in the platter. Now a dakshiṅ to a Brâhmiṅ is not usually more than a couple of rupees, but should an Amildâr ask for one, his assistant would naturally mistake him, and think he was hinting at a bribe!

Gunṅappa greatly pleased at a princely dakshiṅ such as he had never seen before in all his life, at once opened the bag and counted out every gold piece in it, carefully tying them up in his bundle. He then began to chew his betel, and at one gulp swallowed up all the nutmeg and mace in the platter! All this made his assistant strongly suspect the real nature of the new Amildâr; but then there was the order of the king, and it must be obeyed! Gunṅappa next asked his assistant to go on in advance of him to the office, saying that he would be there himself in a ghaṅikâ. The assistant accordingly left a messenger to attend on the Amildâr, and being very anxious to see things in good order, left his house for the office.

Gunṅappa now remembered the three bits of advice given by the king, the first of which was that he should always put on, when in office, a black countenance. Now he understood the word “black” in its literal sense, and not in its allegorical one of “frowning,” and, so going into the kitchen, he asked for a lump of charcoal paste. When this was ready he blackened the whole of his face with it, and covering his face with his cloth—as he was ashamed to show it—entered the office. With his face thus blackened and partly covered with a cloth, the new Amildâr came and took his seat. Now and then he would remove the cloth from his eyes to see how his officers were working, and meanwhile all the clerks and others present were laughing in their sleeves at the queer conduct of their chief.

The evening was drawing to a close, and there were certain orders to be signed: so taking them all in his hand the assistant approached the Amildâr, and stood at a respectful distance. Gunṅappa, however, asked him to come nearer, and nearer the assistant came.

“Still nearer,” said Gunṅappa, and nearer still came the assistant.

The second bit of advice from the king now rushed into the Amildâr’s mind that he should bite the ears of his officials when he enquired into State affairs, and as Gunṅappa’s want of sense always made him take what was said literally, he opened his mouth and bit the ear of his assistant, while in a muffled voice he asked him

whether all his people enjoyed full prosperity! The assistant, now in very fear of his life, roared out that all the people were enjoying the greatest prosperity. But Gun×appa would not let go his ear till the poor assistant had roared out the answer more than twenty times. The poor wretch's ear soon began to swell enormously, and leaving the office in disgust, he started to report to the king the insane acts of the new Amildâr.

Two out of the three bits of advice from the king had now been duly obeyed, but the third, that the locks of all the people must be in his hands, remained unfulfilled, and Gun×appa wished to carry out that also quickly. Night had now set in, and as the Amildâr still remained in his seat, all his officers were compelled to do the same. In this way the tenth gha×ikâ of the night approached, and still the Amildâr would not get up, but sat with his black face secured in his cloth, now and then peeping out to see whether they were all asleep or awake. The fact was, he was waiting for an opportunity to have all the locks of his officers in his hand! As soon as all his officers fell asleep he intended to cut off all their locks, as usual understanding the words in their literal sense! At about midnight, never dreaming of the stupid act that the Amildâr was contemplating in his mind, every one fell asleep, and Gun×appa rose up, and with a pair of scissors cut off all the locks of his officers. He then tied them all up in a bundle and returned to his assistant's home late at night, where the servants gave him something to eat; after which he started with his bag of mohars and bundle of locks to his king to inform him of how well he had obeyed his orders!

In the early morning he reached the presence of his Majesty only a nimisha after his assistant had arrived. Seeing the Amildâr he was too afraid to lodge any complaint, but his swollen ear drew the attention of every eye in the assembly.

Gun×appa now stood before the king with the charcoal on his face and said:—

“Most noble king, you ordered me to blacken my face for my new duty. See, I have not even yet removed the dye! You ordered me next only to speak while biting an ear. Look, please, at my assistant's ear, who stands before you and tell me whether I have not obeyed you!! And as for having the locks of my officers in my hands; why here they are in this bundle!!!”

Never had the king seen a similar instance of such stupidity, and the thought that Gun×appa had shorn so many respectable heads of their locks, and had really bitten the ear of a worthy gentleman, brought much shame to his heart. He begged pardon of the injured man and from that day forward was very careful in the choice of his

officers! Poor Gunappa was dismissed even from the priestship, and his belly grew lean from having no longer the privilege of eating rich food at others' cost!

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