

# *The Brahmarâkshas and the Hair*

Tales Of The Sun Or Folklore Of Southern India  
Indian

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*Intermediate*  
*6 min read*

In a certain village there lived a very rich landlord, who owned several villages, but was such a great miser that no tenant would willingly cultivate his lands, and those he had gave him not a little trouble. He was indeed so vexed with them that he left all his lands untilled, and his tanks and irrigation channels dried up. All this, of course, made him poorer and poorer day by day. Nevertheless he never liked the idea of freely opening his purse to his tenants and obtaining their good will.

While he was in this frame of mind a learned Sanyâsi paid him a visit, and on his representing his case to him, he said:—

“My dear son,—I know an incantation (mantra) in which I can instruct you. If you repeat it for three months day and night, a Brahmarâkshas will appear before you on the first day of the fourth month. Make him your servant, and then you can set at naught all your petty troubles with your tenants. The Brahmarâkshas will obey all your orders, and you will find him equal to one hundred servants.”

Our hero fell at his feet and begged to be instructed at once. The sage then sat facing the east and his disciple

the landlord facing the west, and in this position formal instruction was given, after which the Sanyâsi went his way.

The landlord, mightily pleased at what he had learnt, went on practising the incantation, till, on the first day of the fourth month, the great Brahmarâkshas stood before him.

“What do you want, sir, from my hands?” said he; “what is the object of your having propitiated me for these three months?”

The landlord was thunderstruck at the huge monster who now stood before him and still more so at his terrible voice, but nevertheless he said:—

“I want you to become my servant and obey all my commands.”

“Agreed,” answered the Brahmarâkshas in a very mild tone, for it was his duty to leave off his impertinent ways when any one who had performed the required penance wanted him to become his servant; “Agreed. But you must always give me work to do; when one job is finished you must at once give me a second, and so on. If you fail I shall kill you.”

The landlord, thinking that he would have work for several such Brahmarâkshas, was pleased to see that his demoniacal servant was so eager to help him. He at once took him to a big tank which had been dried up for several years, and pointing it out spoke as follows:—

“You see this big tank; you must make it as deep as the height of two palmyra trees and repair the embankment wherever it is broken.”

“Yes, my master, your orders shall be obeyed,” humbly replied the servant and fell to work.

The landlord, thinking that it would take several months, if not years, to do the work in the tank, for it was two kos long and one kos broad, returned delighted to his home, where his people were awaiting him with a sumptuous dinner. When enemies were approaching the Brahmarâkshas came to inform his master that he had finished his work in the tank. He was indeed astonished and feared for his own life!

“What! finished the work in one day which I thought would occupy him for months and years; if he goes on at

this rate, how shall I keep him employed. And when I cannot find it for him he will kill me!" Thus he thought and began to weep; his wife wiped the tears that ran down his face, and said:—

"My dearest husband, you must not lose courage. Get out of the Brahmarâkshas all the work you can and then let me know. I'll give him something that will keep him engaged for a very very long time, and then he'll trouble us no more."

But her husband only thought her words to be meaningless and followed the Brahmarâkshas to see what he had done. Sure enough the thing was as complete as could be, so he asked him to plough all his lands, which extended over twenty villages! This was done in two ghaṅḁkâs! He next made him dig and cultivate all his garden lands. This was done in the twinkling of an eye! The landlord now grew hopeless.

"What more work have you for me?" roared the Brahmarâkshas, as he found that his master had nothing for him to do, and that the time for his eating him up was approaching.

"My dear friend," said he, "my wife says she has a little job to give you; do it please now. I think that that is the last thing I can give you to do, and after it in obedience to the conditions under which you took service with me, I must become your prey!"

At this moment his wife came to them, holding in her left hand a long hair, which she had just pulled out from her head, and said:—

"Well, Brahmarâkshas, I have only a very light job for you. Take this hair, and when you have made it straight, bring it back to me."

The Brahmarâkshas calmly took it, and sat in a pîpal tree to make it straight. He rolled it several times on his thigh and lifted it up to see if it became straight; but no, it would still bend! Just then it occurred to him that goldsmiths, when they want to make their metal wires straight, have them heated in fire; so he went to a fire and placed the hair over it, and of course it frizzled up with a nasty smell! He was horrified!

"What will my master's wife say if I do not produce the hair she gave me?"

So he became mightily afraid, and ran away.

This story is told to explain the modern custom of nailing a handful of hair to a tree in which devils are supposed to dwell, to drive them away.

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