In a certain village there lived an old Brâhmiṇ who had three sons and a daughter. The girl being the youngest was brought up most tenderly and became spoilt, and so whenever she saw a beautiful boy she would say to her parents that she must be wedded to him. Her parents were, therefore, much put about to devise excuses for taking her away from her youthful lovers. Thus passed on some years, till the girl was very nearly grown up, and then the parents, fearing that they would be driven out of their caste if they failed to dispose of her hand in marriage before she came to the years of maturity, began to be eager about finding a bridegroom for her.

Now near their village there lived a fierce tiger, that had attained to great proficiency in the art of magic, and had the power of assuming different forms. Having a great taste for Brâhmiṇ’s food, the tiger used now and then to frequent temples and other places of public refreshment in the shape of an old famished Brâhmiṇ in order to share the food prepared for the Brâhmiṇs. The tiger also wanted, if possible, a Brâhmiṇ wife to take to the woods, and there to make her cook his meals after her fashion. One day, when he was partaking of his meals in Brâhmiṇ shape at a satra, he heard the talk about the Brâhmiṇ girl who was always falling in love with every beautiful Brâhmiṇ boy.

Said he to himself, “Praised be the face that I saw first this morning. I shall assume the shape of a Brâhmiṇ boy,
and appear as beautiful can be, and win the heart of the girl."

Next morning he accordingly became in the form of a great Śâstrin (proficient in the Râmâyâna) and took his seat near the ghâṭ of the sacred river of the village. Scattering holy ashes profusely over his body he opened the Râmâyâna and began to read.

"The voice of the new Śâstrin is most enchanting. Let us go and hear him," said some women among themselves, and sat down before him to hear him expound the great book. The girl for whom the tiger had assumed this shape came in due time to bathe at the river, and as soon as she saw the new Śâstrin fell in love with him, and bothered her old mother to speak to her father about him, so as not to lose her new lover. The old woman too was delighted at the bridegroom whom fortune had thrown in her way, and ran home to her husband, who, when he came and saw the Śâstrin, raised up his hands in praise of the great god Mahêśvara. The Śâstrin was now invited to take his meals with them, and as he had come with the express intention of marrying the daughter, he, of course, agreed.

A grand dinner followed in honour of the Śâstrin, and his host began to question him as to his parentage, &c., to which the cunning tiger replied that he was born in a village beyond the adjacent wood. The Brâhmiṇ had no time to wait for further enquiries, and as the boy was very fair he married his daughter to him the very next day. Feasts followed for a month, during which time the bridegroom gave every satisfaction to his new relatives, who supposed him to be human all the while. He also did full justice to the Brâhmiṇ dishes, and swallowed everything that was placed before him.

After the first month was over the tiger-bridegroom bethought him of his accustomed prey, and hankered after his abode in the woods. A change of diet for a day or two is all very well, but to renounce his own proper food for more than a month was hard. So one day he said to his father-in-law, “I must go back soon to my old parents, for they will be pining at my absence. But why should we have to bear the double expense of my coming all the way here again to take my wife to my village? So if you will kindly let me take the girl with me I shall take her to her future home, and hand her over to her mother-in-law, and see that she is well taken care of.”
The old Brāhmiṇ agreed to this, and replied, “My dear son-in-law, you are her husband, and she is yours, and we now send her with you, though it is like sending her into the wilderness with her eyes tied up. But as we take you to be everything to her, we trust you to treat her kindly.”

The mother of the bride shed tears at the idea of having to send her away, but nevertheless the very next day was fixed for the journey. The old woman spent the whole day in preparing cakes and sweetmeats for her daughter, and when the time for the journey arrived, she took care to place in her bundles and on her head one or two margosa leaves to keep off demons. The relatives of the bride requested her husband to allow her to rest wherever she found shade, and to eat wherever she found water, and to this he agreed, and so they began their journey.

The boy tiger and his human wife pursued their journey for two or three ghaṭikâs (an Indian hour = 24 min.) in free and pleasant conversation, when the girl happened to see a fine pond, round which the birds were warbling their sweet notes. She requested her husband to follow her to the water's edge and to partake of some of the cakes and sweetmeats with her.

But he replied, “Be quiet, or I shall show you my original shape.”

This made her afraid, so she pursued her journey in silence until she saw another pond, when she asked the same question of her husband, who replied in the same tone.

Now she was very hungry, and not liking her husband's tone, which she found had greatly changed ever since they had entered the woods, said to him,

“Show me your original shape.”

No sooner were these words uttered than her husband's form changed from that of a man. Four legs, striped skin, a long tail, and a tiger's face came over him suddenly and, horror of horrors! a tiger and not a man stood before her! Nor were her fears stilled when the tiger in human voice began as follows:—

“Know henceforth that I, your husband, am a tiger—this very tiger that now speaks to you. If you have any regard for your life you must obey all my orders implicitly, for I can speak to you in human voice, and understand what you say. In a couple of ghaṭikâs we shall reach my home, of which you will become the mistress. In the front of my house you will see half-a-dozen tubs, each of which you must fill up daily with
some dish or other, cooked in your own way. I shall take care to supply you with all the provisions you want.”
So saying the tiger slowly conducted her to his house.

The misery of the girl may more be imagined than described, for if she were to object she would be put to
death. So, weeping all the way, she reached her husband's house. Leaving her there he went out and returned
with several pumpkins and some flesh, of which she soon prepared a curry and gave it to her husband. He went
out again after this and returned in the evening with several vegetables and some more flesh, and gave her an
order:—

“Every morning I shall go out in search of provisions and prey, and bring something with me on my return; you
must keep cooked for me whatever I leave in the house.”

So next morning as soon as the tiger had gone away she cooked everything left in the house and filled all the
tubs with food. At the tenth ghaṭikā the tiger returned and growled out,

“I smell a man! I smell a woman in my wood.” And his wife for very fear shut herself up in the house.

As soon as the tiger had satisfied his appetite he told her to open the door, which she did, and they talked
together for a time, after which the tiger rested awhile, and then went out hunting again. Thus passed many a
day, till the tiger's Brāhmiṇ-wife had a son, which also turned out to be only a tiger.

One day, after the tiger had gone out to the woods, his wife was crying all alone in the house, when a crow
happened to peck at some rice that was scattered near her, and seeing the girl crying, began to shed tears.

“Can you assist me?” asked the girl.

“Yes,” said the crow.
So she brought out a palmyra leaf and wrote on it with an iron nail all her sufferings in the wood, and requested her brothers to come and relieve her. This palmyra leaf she tied to the neck of the crow, which, seeming to understand her thoughts, flew to her village and sat down before one of her brothers. He untied the leaf and read the contents of the letter and told them to his other brothers. All the three then started for the wood, asking their mother to give them something to eat on the way. She had not enough rice for the three, so she made a big ball of clay and stuck it over with what rice she had, so as to make it look like a ball of rice. This she gave to the brothers to eat on their way, and started them off to the woods.

They had not proceeded long before they espied an ass. The youngest, who was of a playful disposition, wished to take the ass with him. The two elder brothers objected to this for a time, but in the end they allowed him to have his own way. Further on they saw an ant, which the middle brother took with him. Near the ant there was a big palmyra tree lying on the ground, which the eldest took with him to keep off the tiger.

The sun was now high in the horizon and the three brothers became very hungry. So they sat down near a tank and opened the bundle containing the ball of rice. To their utter disappointment they found it to be all clay, but being extremely hungry they drank all the water in the pond and continued their journey. On leaving the tank they found a big iron tub belonging to the washerman of the adjacent village. This they took also with them in addition to the ass, the ant, and the palmyra tree. Following the road described by their sister in her letter sent by the crow, they walked on and on till they reached the tiger’s house.

The sister, overjoyed to see her brothers again, ran out at once to welcome them.

“My dearest brothers, I am so glad to see that you have come here to relieve me after all, but the time for the tiger’s coming home is approaching, so hide yourselves in the loft, and wait till he is gone.”

So saying, she helped her brothers to ascend into the loft. By this time the tiger returned, and perceived the presence of human beings by the peculiar smell. He asked his wife whether any one had come to their house. She said, “No.” But when the brothers, who with their trophies of the way—the ass, the ant, and so on—were sitting upon the loft, saw the tiger dallying with their sister, they were greatly frightened; so much so that the youngest, through fear, began to quake, and they all fell on the floor.

“What is all this?” said the terrified tiger to his wife.

“Nothing,” said she, “but your brothers-in-law. They came here a watch(three hours) ago, and as soon as you
have finished your meals they want to see you.”

“How can my brothers-in-law be such cowards,” thought the tiger to himself.

He then asked them to speak to him, whereon the youngest brother put the ant which he had in his hand into the ear of the ass, and as soon as the latter was bitten, it began to bawl out most horribly.

“How is it that your brothers have such a hoarse voice?” said the tiger to his wife.

He next asked them to show him their legs. Taking courage at the stupidity of the tiger on the two former occasions, the eldest brother now stretched out the palmyra tree.

“By my father, I have never seen such a leg,” said the tiger, and asked his brothers-in-law to show their bellies. The second brother now showed the tub, at which the tiger shuddered, and saying, “such a harsh voice, so stout a leg, and such a belly, truly I have never heard of such persons as these!” He ran away.

It was already dark, and the brothers, wishing to take advantage of the tiger's terror, prepared to return home with their sister at once. They ate up what little food she had, and ordered her to start. Fortunately for her her tiger-child was asleep. So she tore it into two pieces and suspended them over the hearth, and, thus getting rid of the child, she ran off with her brothers towards home.

Before leaving she bolted the front door from inside, and went out at the back of the house. As soon as the pieces of the cub, which were hung up over the hearth, began to roast, they dripped, which made the fire hiss and sputter; and when the tiger returned at about midnight, he found the door shut and heard the hissing of the fire, which he mistook for the noise of cooking muffins.

“I see,” said he to himself, “how very cunning you are; you have bolted the door and are cooking muffins for your brothers. Let us see if we can't get your muffins.”

So saying he went round to the back door and entered his house, and was greatly perplexed to find his cub torn in two and being roasted, his house deserted by his Brâhmi wife, and his property plundered; for his wife, before leaving, had taken with her as much of the tiger's property as she could conveniently carry.

The tiger now discovered all the treachery of his wife, and his heart grieved for the loss of his son, that was now no more. He determined to be revenged on his wife, and to bring her back into the wood, and there tear her into many pieces in place of only two. But how to bring her back? He assumed his original shape of a young
bridegroom, making, of course, due allowance for the number of years that had passed since his marriage, and next morning went to his father-in-law's house. His brothers-in-law and his wife saw from a distance the deceitful form he had assumed, and devised means to kill him. Meanwhile the tiger Brâhmi n approached his father-in-law's house, and the old people welcomed him. The younger ones too ran here and there to bring provisions to feed him sumptuously, and the tiger was highly pleased at the hospitable way in which he was received.

There was a ruined well at the back of the house, and the eldest of the brothers placed some thin sticks across its mouth, over which he spread a fine mat. Now it is usual to ask guests to have an oil bath before dinner, and so his three brothers-in-law requested the tiger to take his seat on the fine mat for his bath. As soon as he sat on it, the thin sticks being unable to bear his weight, gave way, and down fell the cunning tiger with a heavy crash! The well was at once filled in with stones and other rubbish, and thus the tiger was effectually prevented from doing any more mischief.

But the Brâhmi girl, in memory of her having married a tiger, raised a pillar over the well and planted a tula shrub (herb) on the top of it. Morning and evening, for the rest of her life, she used to smear the pillar with sacred cow dung, and water the tula shrub.

This story is told to explain the Tamil proverb, “Śummâ irukkiraya, śuruvattai kâ×a×uma,” which means—“Be quiet, or I shall show you my original shape.”

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