

# *The Hermit's Daughter*

Hindu Tales From The Sanskrit

Indian

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*Intermediate*  
*27 min read*

## Chapter I

Near a town in India called Ikshumati, on a beautiful wide river, with trees belonging to a great forest near its banks, there dwelt a holy man named Mana Kanaka, who spent a great part of his life praying to God. He had lost his wife when his only child, a lovely girl called Kadali-Garbha, was only a few months old. Kadali-Garbha was a very happy girl, with many friends in the woods round her home, not children like herself, but wild creatures, who knew she would not do them any harm. They loved her and she loved them. The birds were so tame that they would eat out of her hand, and the deer used to follow her about in the hope of getting the bread she carried in her pocket for them. Her father taught her all she knew, and that was a great deal; for she could read quite learned books in the ancient language of her native land. Better even than what she found out in those books was what Mana Kanaka told her about the loving God of all gods who rules the world and all that live in it. Kadali-Garbha also learnt a great deal through her friendship with wild animals. She knew where the birds built their nests, where the baby deer were born, where the squirrels hid their nuts, and what food all the dwellers in the forest liked best. She helped her father to work in their garden in which all their own food was grown; and she loved to cook the fruit and vegetables for Mana Kanaka and herself. Her clothes were made of the bark of the trees in the forest, which she herself wove into thin soft material suitable for wearing in a hot climate.

1. What do you think it was which made the animals trust Kadali-Garbha?
2. Could you have been happy in the forest with no other children to play with?

## Chapter II

Kadali-Garbha never even thought about other children, because she had not been used to having them with her. She was just as happy as the day was long, and never wished for any change. But when she was about sixteen something happened which quite altered her whole life. One day her father had gone into the forest to cut wood, and had left her alone. She had finished tidying the house, and got everything ready for the midday meal, and was sitting at the door of her home, reading to herself, with birds fluttering about her head and a pet doe lying beside her, when she heard the noise of a horse's feet approaching. She looked up, and there on the other side of the fence was a very handsome young man seated on a great black horse, which he had reined up when he caught sight of her. He looked at her without speaking, and she looked back at him with her big black eyes full of surprise at his sudden appearance. She made a beautiful picture, with the green creepers covering the hut behind her, and the doe, which had started up in fear of the horse, pressing against her.

The man was the king of the country, whose name was Dridha-Varman. He had been hunting and had got separated from his attendants. He was very much surprised to find anyone living in the very depths of the forest, and was going to ask the young girl who she was, when Kadali-Garbha saw her father coming along the path leading to his home. Jumping up, she ran to meet him, glad that he had come; for she had never before seen a young man and was as shy as any of the wild creatures of the woods. Now that Mana Kanaka was with her, she got over her fright, and felt quite safe, clinging to his arm as he and the king talked together.

3. Can you describe just how Kadali-Garbha felt when she saw the king?
4. Do you think it would have been a good or a bad thing for her to live all the rest of her life in the forest?

## Chapter III

Mana Kanaka knew at once that the man on the horse was the king; and a great fear entered his heart when he saw how Dridha-Varman looked at his beloved only child.

“Who are you, and who is that lovely girl?” asked the king. And Mana Kanaka answered, “I am only a humble woodcutter; and this is my only child, whose mother has long been dead.”

“Her mother must have been a very lovely woman, if her daughter is like her,” said the king. “Never before have I seen such perfect beauty.”

“Her mother,” replied Mana Kanaka, “was indeed what you say; and her soul was as beautiful as the body in which it dwelt all too short a time.”

“I would have your daughter for my wife,” said the king; “and if you will give her to me, she shall have no wish ungratified. She shall have servants to wait on her and other young girls to be her companions; beautiful clothes to wear, the best of food to eat, horses and carriages as many as she will, and no work to do with her own hands.”

5. If you had been Kadali-Garbha, what would you have said when you heard all these promises?

6. Of all the things the king said she should have, which would you have liked best?

#### Chapter IV

What Kadali-Garbha did was to cling closely to her father, hiding her face on his arm and whispering, “I will not leave you: do not send me away from you, dear father.”

Mana Kanaka stroked her hair, and said in a gentle voice:

“But, dear child, your father is old, and must leave you soon. It is a great honour for his little girl to be chosen by the king for his bride. Do not be afraid, but look at him and see how handsome he is and how kind he looks.”

Then Kadali-Garbha looked at the king, who smiled at her and looked so charming that her fear began to leave her. She still clung to her father, but no longer hid her face; and Mana Kanaka begged Kadali-Garbha to let him send her away, so that he might talk with the king alone about the wish he had expressed to marry her. The king consented to this, and Kadali-Garbha gladly ran away. But when she reached the door of her home, she looked back, and knew in her heart that she already loved the king and did not want him to go away.

It did not take long for the matter of the marriage to be settled. For Mana Kanaka, sad though he was to lose his dear only child, was glad that she should be a queen, and have some one to take care of her when he was

gone. After this first visit to the little house in the forest the king came every day to see Kadali-Garbha, bringing all kinds of presents for her. She learnt to love him so much that she became as eager as he was for the wedding to be soon. When the day was fixed, the king sent several ladies of his court to dress the bride in clothes more beautiful than she had ever dreamt of; and in them she looked more lovely even than the first day her lover had seen her.

Now amongst these ladies was a very wise woman who could see what was going to happen; and she knew that there would be troubles for the young queen in the palace, because many would be jealous of her happiness. She was very much taken with the beautiful innocent girl, and wanted to help her so much that she managed to get her alone for a few minutes, when she said to her: "I want you to promise me something. It is to take this packet of mustard seeds, hide it in the bosom of your dress, and when you ride to the palace with your husband, strew the seed along the path as you go. You know how quickly mustard grows. Well, it will spring up soon; and if you want to come home again, you can easily find the way by following the green shoots. Alas, I fear they will not have time to wither before you need their help!"

Kadali-Garbha laughed when the wise woman talked about trouble coming to her. She was so happy, she could not believe she would want to come home again so soon. "My father can come to me when I want him," she said. "I need only tell my dear husband to send for him." But for all that she took the packet of seeds and hid it in her dress.

7. Would you have done as the wise woman told you if you had been the bride?

8. Ought Kadali-Garbha to have told the king about the mustard seed?

## Chapter V

After the wedding was over, the king mounted his beautiful horse, and bending down, took his young wife up before him. Holding her close to him with his right arm, he held the reins in his left hand; and away they went, soon leaving all the attendants far behind them, the queen scattering the mustard seed as she had promised to do. When they arrived at the palace there were great rejoicings, and everybody seemed charmed with the queen, who was full of eager interest in all that she saw.

For several weeks there was nobody in the wide world so happy and light-hearted as the bride. The king spent many hours a day with her, and was never tired of listening to all she had to tell him about her life in the forest

with her father. Every day he gave her some fresh proof of his love, and he never refused to do anything she asked him to do. But presently a change came. Amongst the ladies of the court there was a beautiful woman, who had hoped to be queen herself, and hated Kadali-Garbha so much that she made up her mind to get her into disgrace with the king. She asked first one powerful person and then another to help her; but everybody loved the queen, and the wicked woman began to be afraid that those she had told about her wish to harm her would warn the king. So she sought about for some one who did not know Kadali-Garbha, and suddenly remembered a wise woman named Asoka-Mala, who lived in a cave not far from the town, to whom many people used to go for advice in their difficulties. She went to this woman one night, and told her a long story in which there was not one word of truth. The young queen, she said, did not really love the king; and with the help of her father, who was a magician, she meant to poison him. How could this terrible thing be prevented, she asked; and she promised that if only Asoka-Mala would help to save Dridha-Varman, she would give her a great deal of money.

Asoka-Mala guessed at once that the story was not true, and that it was only because the woman was jealous of the beautiful young queen that she wished to hurt her. But she loved money very much. Instead therefore of at once refusing to have anything to do with the matter, she said: "Bring me fifty gold pieces now, and promise me another fifty when the queen is sent away from the palace, and I will tell you what to do."

The wicked woman promised all this at once. The very next night she brought the first fifty pieces of gold to the cave, and Asoka-Mala told her that she must get the barber, who saw the king alone every day, to tell him he had found out a secret about the queen. "You must tell the barber all you have already told me. But be very careful to give some proof of your story. For if you do not do so, you will only have wasted the fifty gold pieces you have already given to me; and, more than that, you will be terribly punished for trying to hurt the queen, whom everybody loves."

9. Do you think this plot against Kadali-Garbha was likely to succeed?

10. Can you think of any way in which the wise woman might have helped the queen and also have gained a reward for herself?

## Chapter VI

The wicked woman went back to the palace, thinking all the way to herself, "How can I get a proof of what is not true?" At last an idea came into her head. She knew that the queen loved to wander in the forest, and that

she was not afraid of the wild creatures, but seemed to understand their language. She would tell the barber that Kadali-Garbha was a witch and knew the secrets of the woods; that she had been seen gathering wild herbs, some of them poisonous, and had been heard muttering strange words to herself as she did so.

Early the next morning the cruel woman went to see the barber, and promised him a reward if he would tell the king what she had found out about his wife. "He won't believe you at first," she said; "but you must go on telling him till he does. You are clever, enough," she added, "to make up something he will believe if what I have thought of is no good."

The barber, who had served the king for many years, would not at first agree to help to make him unhappy. But he too liked money very much, and in the end he promised to see what he could do if he was well paid for it. He was, as the wicked woman had said, clever enough; and he knew from long experience just how to talk to his master. He began by asking the king if he had heard of the lovely woman who was sometimes seen by the woodmen wandering about alone in the forest, with wild creatures following her. Remembering how he had first seen Kadali-Garbha, Dridha-Varman at once guessed that she was the lovely woman. But he did not tell the barber so; for he was so proud of his dear wife's beauty that he liked to hear her praised, and wanted the man to go on talking about her. He just said: "What is she like? Is she tall or short, fair or dark?" The barber answered the questions readily. Then he went on to say that it was easy to see that the lady was as clever as she was beautiful; for she knew not only all about animals but also about plants. "Every day," he said, "she gathers quantities of herbs, and I have been told she makes healing medicines of them. Some even go so far as to say she also makes poisons. But, for my part, I do not believe that; she is too beautiful to be wicked."

The king listened, and a tiny little doubt crept into his mind about his wife. She had never told him about the herbs she gathered, although she often chattered about her friends in the forest. Perhaps after all it was not Kadali-Garbha the barber was talking about. He would ask her if she knew anything about making medicines from herbs. He did so when they were alone together, and she said at once, "Oh, yes! My father taught me. But I have never made any since I was married."

"Are you sure?" asked the king; and she answered laughing, "Of course, I am: how could I be anything but sure? I have no need to think of medicine-making, now I am the queen."

Dridha-Varman said no more at the time. But he was troubled; and when the barber came again, he began at once to ask about the woman who had been seen in the woods. The wicked man was delighted, and made up a

long story. He said one of the waiting women had told him of what she had seen. The woman, he said, had followed the lady home one day, and that home was not far from the palace. She had seen her bending over a fire above which hung a great sauce-pan full of water, into which she flung some of the herbs she had gathered, singing as she did so, in a strange language.

“Could it possibly be,” thought the king, “that Kadali-Garbha had deceived him? Was she perhaps a witch after all?” He remembered that he really did not know who she was, or who her father was. He had loved her directly he saw her, just because she was so beautiful. What was he to do now? He was quite sure, from the description the barber had given of the woman in the forest, that she was his wife. He would watch her himself in future, and say nothing to her that would make her think he was doing so.

11. What should the king have done when he heard the barber’s story?

12. Can you really love anybody truly whom you do not trust?

## Chapter VII

Although the king said nothing to his wife about what the barber had told him, he could not treat her exactly as he did before he heard it, and she very soon began to wonder what she had done to vex him. The first thing she noticed was that one of the ladies of the court always followed her when she went into the forest. She did not like this; because she so dearly loved to be alone with the wild creatures, and they did not come to her when any one else was near. She told the lady to go away, and she pretended to do so; but she only kept a little further off. And though the queen could no longer see her, she knew she was there, and so did the birds and the deer. This went on for a little time; and then Kadali-Garbha asked her husband to tell every one that she was not to be disturbed when she went to see her friends in the forest.

“I am afraid,” said the king, “that some harm will come to you. There are wild beasts in the depths of the wood who might hurt you. And what should I do if any harm came to my dear one?”

Kadali-Garbha was grieved when Dridha-Varman said this, for she knew it was not true; and she looked at him so sadly that he felt ashamed of having doubted her. All would perhaps have been well even now, if he had told her of the story he had heard about her, because then she could have proved that it was not true. But he did not do that; he only said, “I cannot let you be alone so far from home. Why not be content with the lovely gardens all round the palace? If you still wish to go to the woods, I will send one of the game-keepers with you instead of

the lady who has been watching you. Then he can protect you if any harmful creature should approach.”

“If my lord does not wish me to be alone in the forest,” answered the queen, “I will be content with the gardens. For no birds or animals would come near me if one of their enemies were with me. But,” she added, as her eyes filled with tears, “will not my lord tell me why he no longer trusts his wife, who loves him with all her heart?”

The king was very much touched by what Kadali-Garbha said, but still could not make up his mind to tell her the truth. So he only embraced her fondly, and said she was a good little wife to be so ready to obey him. The queen went away very sadly, wondering to herself what she could do to prove to her dear lord that she loved him as much as ever. She took care never to go outside the palace gardens, but she longed very much for her old freedom, and began to grow pale and thin.

The wicked woman who had tried to do her harm was very much disappointed that she had only succeeded in making her unhappy; so she went again to Asoka-Mala, and promised her more money if only she would think of some plan to get the king to send his wife away. The wise woman considered a long time, and then she said: “You must use the barber again. He goes from house to house, and he must tell the king that the beautiful woman, who used to roam about in the forest collecting herbs, has been seen there again in the dead of the night, when she could be sure no one would find out what she was doing.”

Now it so happened that Kadali-Garbha was often unable to sleep because of her grief that the king did not love her so much as he used to do. One night she got so tired of lying awake that she got up very quietly, so as not to disturb her husband, and putting on her sari, she went out into the gardens, hoping that the fresh air might help her to sleep. Presently the king too woke up, and finding that his wife was no longer beside him, he became very uneasy, and was about to go and seek her, when she came back. He asked her where she had been; and she told him exactly what had happened, but she did not explain why she could not sleep.

13. What mistake did the queen make in her treatment of the king?

14. Do you think it is more hurtful to yourself and to others to talk too much or too little?

## Chapter VIII

When the barber was shaving the king the next morning, he told him he had heard that people were saying the beautiful woman had been seen again one night, gathering herbs and muttering to herself. “They talk, my lord,” said the man, “of your own name having been on her lips; and those who love and honour you are

anxious for your safety. Maybe the woman is indeed a witch, who for some reason of her own will try to poison you.”

Now Dridha-Varman remembered that Kadali-Garbha had left him the night before, “and perhaps,” he thought, “at other times when I was asleep.” He could scarcely wait until the barber had finished shaving him, so eager was he to find out the truth. He hurried to his wife’s private room, but she was not there; and her ladies told him she had not been seen by them that day. This troubled him terribly, and he roused the whole palace to seek her. Messengers were soon hurrying to and fro, but not a trace of her could be found. Dridha-Varman was now quite sure that the woman the barber had talked about was Kadali-Garbha, the wife he had so loved and trusted. “Perhaps,” he thought, “she has left poison in my food, and has gone away so as not to see me die.” He would neither eat nor drink, and he ordered all the ladies whose duty it was to wait on the queen to be locked up till she was found. Amongst them was the wicked woman who had done all the mischief because of her jealousy of the beautiful young queen, and very much she wished she had never tried to harm her.

15. Where do you suppose the queen had gone?

16. What mistake did the king make when he heard the queen was missing?

## Chapter IX

In her trouble about the loss of the king’s love Kadali-Garbha longed for her father, for she felt sure he would be able to help her. So she determined to go to him. With the aid of the wise woman who had given her the packet of mustard seed, and who had been her best friend at court, she disguised herself as a messenger, and, mounted on a strong little pony, she sped along the path marked out by the young shoots of mustard, reaching her old home in the forest before the night fell. Great indeed was the joy of Mana Kanaka at the sight of his beloved child, and very soon she had poured out all her sorrow to him. The hermit was at first very much enraged with his son-in-law for the way in which he had treated Kadali-Garbha, and declared that he would use all the powers he had to punish him. “Never,” he said, “shall he see your dear face again; but I will go to him and call down on him all manner of misfortunes. You know not, dear child, I have never wished you to know, that I am a magician and can make the very beasts of the field and the winds of heaven obey me. I know full well who has made this mischief between you and your husband, and I will see that punishment overtakes them.”

“No, no, father,” cried Kadali-Garbha; “I will not have any harm done to my dear one, for I love him with all my

heart. All I ask of you is to prove to him that I am innocent of whatever fault he thinks I have committed, and to make him love and trust me again.”

It was hard work to persuade Mana Kanaka to promise not to harm the king, but in the end he yielded. Together the father and daughter rode back to the palace, and together they were brought before Dridha-Varman, who, in spite of the anger he had felt against his wife, was overjoyed to see her. When he looked at her clinging to Mana Kanaka’s arm, as she had done the first time they met, all his old love returned, and he would have taken her in his arms and told her so before the whole court, if she had not drawn back. It was Mana Kanaka who was the first to speak. Drawing himself up to his full height, and pointing to the king, he charged him with having broken his vow to love and protect his wife. “You have listened to lying tongues,” he said, “and I will tell you to whom those tongues belong, that justice may be done to them.”

Once more Kadali-Garbha interfered. “No, father,” she said; “let their names be forgotten: only prove to my lord that I am his loving faithful wife, and I will be content.”

“I need no proof,” cried Dridha-Varman; “but lest others should follow their evil example, I will have vengeance on the slanderers. Name them, and their doom shall be indeed a terrible one.”

Then Mana Kanaka told the king the whole sad story; and when it was ended the wicked woman who had first thought of injuring the queen, and the barber who had helped her, were sent for to hear their doom, which was—to be shut up for the rest of their lives in prison. This was changed to two years only, because Kadali-Garbha was generous enough to plead for them. As for the third person in the plot, the old witch of the cave, not a word was said about her by anybody. Mana Kanaka knew well enough what her share in the matter had been; but magicians and witches are careful not to make enemies of each other, and so he held his peace.

Dridha-Varman was so grateful to his father-in-law for bringing his wife back to him, that he wanted him to stop at court, and said he would give him a very high position there. But Mana Kanaka refused every reward, declaring that he loved his little home in the forest better than the grand rooms he might have had in the palace. “All I wish for,” he said, “is my dear child’s happiness. I hope you will never again listen to stories against your wife. If you do, you may be very sure that I shall hear of it; and next time I know that you have been unkind to her I will punish you as you deserve.”

The king was obliged to let Mana Kanaka go, but after this he took Kadali-Garbha to see her father in the forest very often. Later, when the queen had some children of her own, their greatest treat was to go to the little

home, in the depths of the wood. They too learnt to love animals, and had a great many pets, but none of those pets were kept in cages.

17. What is the chief lesson to be learnt from this story?

18. Which of all the people in this tale do you like best?

19. What do you think is the greatest power in all the world?

20. If you had been Kadali-Garbha would you have forgiven those who tried to do you harm?

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