

# *The Magic Shoes and Staff*

Hindu Tales From The Sanskrit

Indian

---

*Intermediate*  
*35 min read*

## Chapter I

Far, far away in a town of India called Chinchini, where in days long gone by the ancient gods in whom the people believed are said sometimes to have appeared to those who called upon them for help, there lived three brothers of noble birth, who had never known what it was to want for food, or clothes, or a house to live in. Each was married to a wife he loved, and for many years they were all as happy as the day was long. Presently however a great misfortune in which they all shared befell their native country. There was no rain for many, many weeks; and this is a very serious thing in a hot country like India, because, when it does not rain for a long time, the ground becomes so parched and hard that nothing can grow in it. The sun is very much stronger in India than it is in England; and it sent forth its burning rays, drying up all the water in the tanks and changing what had been, a beautiful country, covered with green crops good for food, into a dreary desert, where neither men nor animals could get anything to eat. The result of this was that there was a terrible famine, in which hundreds of people and animals died, little children being the first to suffer.

Now the three brothers, who had none of them any children, got frightened at the state of things, and thought to themselves, "If we do not escape from this dreadful land, we shall die." They said to each other: "Let us flee away from here, and go somewhere where we are sure of being able to get plenty to eat and drink. We will not

take our wives with us; they would only make things worse for us; let us leave them to look after themselves.”

1. What do you think of the behaviour of the three brothers? Was there any excuse for their leaving their wives behind them?

2. Do you think the wives themselves can have been to blame in any way in the matter?

## Chapter II

So the three wives were deserted, and had to manage as best they could without their husbands, who did not even trouble to wish them goodbye. The wives were at first very sad and lonely, but presently a great joy came to one of them which made the other two very happy as well. This joy was the birth of a little boy, whose two aunts loved him almost as much as his mother did. The story does not tell how they all got food whilst the famine was going on, though it is very evident that they were not starved, for the baby boy grew fast and was a strong healthy little fellow.

One night all the three wives had the same dream, a very wonderful one, in which the god Siva, who is very much honoured in India, appeared to them. He told them that, looking down from Heaven, he had noticed how tenderly they cared for the new-born baby, and that he wished them to call him Putraka. Besides this he astonished them by adding that, as a reward for the unselfish way in which they had behaved, they would find one hundred thousand gold pieces under the little child's pillow every morning, and that one day that little child would be a king.

3. Do you think the three women wanted to be rewarded for loving the baby?

4. Is it a good thing to have a great deal of money?

## Chapter III

The wonderful dream was fulfilled, and the mother and aunts called the boy Putraka. Every morning they found the gold pieces under his pillow, and they took care of the money for him, so that when he grew up he was the very richest man in the whole country. He had a happy childhood and boyhood, his only trouble being that he did not like having never seen his father. His mother told him about the famine before he was born, and how his father and uncles had gone away and never come back. He often said, “When I am a man I will

find my father and bring him home again.” He used his money to help others, and one of the best things he did was to irrigate the land; that is to say, he made canals into which water was made to flow in times when there was plenty of rain, so that there was no danger of there being another famine, such as that which had driven his father and uncles away. The country in which he lived became very fruitful; everybody had enough to eat and drink; and Putraka was very much loved, especially by the poor and unhappy. When the king who ruled over the land died, everybody wanted Putraka to take his place, and he was chosen at once.

5. Will you describe the kind of man you think Putraka was?

6. Do you know of any other country besides India in which everything depends on irrigation?

#### Chapter IV

One of the other wise things Putraka did, when he became king, was to make great friends with his Brahman subjects. Brahmans are always very fond of travelling, and Putraka thought, if he were good and generous to them, they would talk about him wherever they went, and that perhaps through them his father and uncles would hear about him. He felt sure that, if they knew he was now a king ruling over their native land, they would want to come back. He gave the Brahmans plenty of money, and told them to try and find his father and uncles. If they did, they were to say how anxious he was to see them, and promise them everything they wanted, if only they would return.

7. Do you think it was wise of Putraka to be so anxious to get his father and uncles back, when he knew how selfish they had been in leaving his mother and aunts behind them?

8. Can you suggest anything else Putraka might have done in the matter?

#### Chapter V

Just what the young king hoped came to pass. Wherever the Brahmans went they talked about the country they came from and the wonderful young king who ruled over it. Putraka’s father and uncles, who were after all not so very far off, heard the stories about him, and asked the Brahmans many questions. The answers made them very eager to see Putraka, but they did not at first realize that he was closely related to them. Only when they heard the name of his mother did they guess the truth. Putraka’s father knew, when he deserted his wife, that

God was going to give her a child soon; which made it even more wicked of him to leave her. Now, however, he forgot all about that, only thinking how he could make as much use as possible of the son who had become a king. He wanted to go back at once alone, but the uncles were not going to allow that. They meant to get all they could out of Putraka too; and the three selfish men, who were now quite old, set off together for the land they had left so long ago.

They arrived safely, and made their way to the palace, where they were received, with great rejoicings. None of the wives, said a word of reproach to, the husbands who had deserted them; and as for Putraka, he was so overjoyed at having his father back, that he gave him a beautiful house to live in and a great deal of money. He was very good to his uncles too, and felt that he had now really nothing left to wish for.

9. Do you think Putraka showed strength or weakness of character in the way he received the travellers?

10. How do you think the king ought to have behaved to his father and uncles?

## Chapter VI

The three wives very soon had good reason to wish their husbands had stayed away. Instead of being grateful for all Putraka's generosity, they were very unkind and exacting, never pleased with anything; and whatever they had given them, they were always trying to get more. In fact, they were silly as well as wicked; for they did not realize that this was not the way to make the king love them or wish to keep them with him. Presently they became jealous of Putraka, and began to wish to get rid of him. His father hated to feel that his son was king, whilst he was only one of that king's subjects; and he made up his mind to kill him, hoping that if he could only get rid of him he might rule over the country in his stead. He thought and thought how best to manage this, and did not at first mean to tell his brothers anything about it; but in the end he decided he had better have them on his side. So he invited them to go with him to a secret place to talk the matter over.

11. What qualities did Putraka's father show in this plot against his son?

12. Was there any other way in which the king's father could have gained a share in governing the land?

## Chapter VII

After many meetings the three wicked men decided that they would pay some one to kill the king, first making

the murderer they chose swear that he would never tell who had ordered him to do the terrible deed. It was not very difficult to find a man bad enough to take money for such an evil purpose, and the next thing to do was to decide where and when the deed was to be done. Putraka had been very well brought up by his mother, and he often went to a beautiful temple near his palace to pray alone. He would sometimes stop there a long time, winning fresh wisdom and strength to do the work he was trusted with, and praying not only for himself, but for his father, his mother, his aunts and uncles, and for the people he loved so much.

The murderer was told to wait in this temple, and when the young king was absorbed in prayer, to fall suddenly upon him and kill him. Then, when Putraka was dead, he was to take his body and bury it far away in the depths of the forest where it could never be found. At first it seemed likely that this cruel plot would succeed. To make quite sure, the murderer got two other men as wicked as himself to come and help him, promising to give them a share in the reward. But the god who had taken care of Putraka ever since he was born, did not forget him now. As the young king prayed, forgetting everything in his earnest pleading for those he loved, he did not see or hear the evil men drawing stealthily close to him. Their arms were uplifted to slay him, and the gleam of the weapons in the light that was always kept burning flashed upon him, when suddenly the heavenly guardian of the temple, who never left it day or night, but was generally invisible, appeared and cast a spell upon the wicked men, whose hands were arrested in the very act to strike.

What a wonderful sight that must have been, when Putraka, disturbed in his prayers, looked round and saw the men who had come to kill him, with the shadowy form of the guardian threatening them! He knew at once that he had been saved from a dreadful death by a messenger from the god he had been worshipping. As he gazed at the men, the guardian faded away and he was left alone with them. Slowly the spell cast on them was broken, and they dropped their weapons, prostrated themselves, and clasped their hands in an appeal for mercy to the man they had meant to destroy. Putraka looked at them quietly and sadly. He felt no anger against them, only a great thankfulness for his escape. He spoke to the men very sternly, asking them why they wished to harm him; and the chief murderer told him who had sent them.

The knowledge that his father wished to kill him shocked and grieved the young long terribly, but he controlled himself even when he learnt the sad truth. He told the men that he forgave them, for they were not the most to blame; and he made them promise never to betray who had bribed them to kill him. He then gave them some money and told them to leave him.

13. What do you think the most beautiful incident in this account of the scene in the temple?

14. What do you suppose were the thoughts of the murderers when they left the temple after Putraka forgave them?

### Chapter VIII

When Putraka was alone, he threw himself upon the ground and wept very bitterly. He felt that he could never be happy again, never trust anyone again. He had so loved his father and uncles. It had been such a joy to him to give them pleasure, and yet they hated him and wished to kill him. He wondered whether he was himself to blame for what had happened, and began to think he was not worthy to be king, if he could make such a mistake as he now feared he had made in being so generous to those who could have such hard thoughts of him as to want to take his life. Perhaps after all it would be better for his country to have another king. He did not feel as if he could go back to his palace and meet his father and uncles again. "What shall I do? What shall I do?" he cried, his sobs choking his voice. Never in all his life had he thought it possible to be so miserable as he was now. Everything seemed changed and he felt as if he were himself a different person. The only thing that comforted him at all was the thought of his mother, whose love had never failed him; but even that was spoiled by the remembrance that it was her husband who had wished to kill him. She must never know that, for it would break her heart: yet how could he keep it from her? Then the idea came to him that the best thing he could do would be to go away and never see his own people again.

15. What do you think was wrong in Putraka's way of looking at the past?

16. Was his idea of leaving his country and his people a sign of weakness or of strength?

### Chapter IX

In the end the poor young king decided that he would go right away as his father and uncles had done; and his

mind being made up, he became more cheerful and began to think he might meet with some interesting adventures in a new country, where nobody knew anything about him. As soon as it was light, he wandered off into the forest, feeling, it is true, very lonely, but at the same time taking a certain pleasure in being entirely his own master; which a king can never really be, because he has to consider so many other people and to keep so many rules.

After all Putraka did not find the forest so very lonely; for he had not gone far in it before his sad thoughts were broken in upon by his coming suddenly to a little clearing, where the trees had been cut down and two strong-looking men were wrestling together, the king watched them for a little while, wondering what they were fighting about. Then he called out, "What are you doing here? What are you quarrelling about?"

The men were greatly surprised to hear Putraka's voice, for they thought that they were quite alone. They stopped fighting for a minute or two, and one of them said: "We are fighting for three very precious things which were left behind him by our father."

"What are those things?" asked Putraka.

"A bowl, a stick and a pair of shoes," was the reply. "Whoever wins the fight will get them all. There they lie on the ground."

"Well, I never!" cried the king, laughing as he looked at the things, which seemed to him worth very little. "I shouldn't trouble to fight about such trifles, if I were you."

"Trifles!" exclaimed one of the men angrily. "You don't know what you are talking about. They are worth more than their weight in gold. Whoever gets the bowl will find plenty of food in it whenever he wants it; the owner of the stick has only to write his wishes on the ground with it and he will get them; and whoever puts on the shoes can fly through the air in them to any distance."

17. Which of these things would you rather have had?

18. What lesson do you learn from what the men said about the things on the ground?

Chapter X

When Putraka heard the wonders which, could be done with what he had thought not worth having, he determined to get possession of the three treasures for himself; not considering that it would be very wrong to take what did not belong to him. "It seems a pity to fight," he said, "why don't you race for the things, and let whichever wins the race have them? That banyan tree over there would make a good winning post and I will be the umpire."

Instead of guessing what Putraka had in his mind, the brothers, who were very simple fellows, said at once: "All right. We won't fight, we'll race instead, and you can give us the start." Putraka agreed, and directly they were off he lost not a moment, but picked up the bowl and the staff, put on the shoes, and flew straight up into the air with the treasures. When the brothers came back, disputing about which of them had won, there was not a sign of Putraka, the bowl, the stick, or the shoes. They guessed at once what had happened; and after staring up in the air for a long time, they went home, feeling very much enraged with the man who had cheated them, and ashamed of having been so stupid as to trust him.

19. What do you think of Putraka's behaviour in this matter?

20. If you could have had one of the three things Putraka stole, which would you have chosen?

## Chapter XI

On and on flew Putraka, full of eager delight in the new power of flight. How he loved rushing through the air, cleaving it like a bird on the wing! All he wanted to make him perfectly happy was someone to enjoy his new powers with him. Presently he found himself above a beautiful city with towers and pinnacles and minarets gleaming in the sunshine. "Ah!" he thought, "that is the place for me. I will go down there, and see if I can find a nice house to live in, and some people to make friends with, who will not try to kill me or to cheat me, but love me and be grateful to me for any kindness I show them."

As Putraka was hovering in the air above the town to which he had taken such a fancy, he noticed a little house which rather pleased him; for though it was poor-looking, there was something cheerful and home-like about it. Down he sped and alighted at the door. Only one poor old woman lived in the house, and when Putraka knocked and asked if he might come in, she said "Yes" at once. He gave her some money, and told her he would like to live with her, if she would let him do so. She was only too glad to consent, for she was very lonely; and

the two lived happily together for a long time.

21. Do you think that if Putraka had flown home on his wonderful shoes, taking his staff and bowl with him, his, father and uncles would still have tried to kill him?

22. How could Putraka have prevented them from doing him harm if he had returned to his home?

## Chapter XII

The old woman grew very fond of Putraka, caring for him and waiting on him as if he had been her own son. She was so anxious that he should be happy that she became afraid he would become tired of living alone with her. So she said to him one day: "My dear adopted son, you ought to have a wife to keep you company. I know the very one for you, the only one really worthy of you. She is a princess, and her name is Patala. She is so very lovely that every man who sees her falls in love with her and wants to carry her off. So she is most carefully guarded in the top rooms of a great palace, as high as the summits of the loftiest mountains." When Putraka heard this he was all eagerness to see the princess, and at once determined to go forth to seek her. He was more than ever glad now that he had stolen the shoes, because he knew that they would carry him even to the top of the highest mountains.

23. What qualities did the old woman show when she told Putraka about the Princess?

24. What faults of character did the young king show when he decided at once to leave the old woman who had been so good to him?

## Chapter XIII

The very evening of the day when Putraka heard about the princess, he started on his journey, taking with him his bowl and staff. The old woman gave him very careful instructions which way to go, and begged him to come back to tell her how he had got on. He promised he would, thanked her for all she had done for him, and flew away in a great state of excitement. She watched him till he was quite out of sight, and then went sadly into her lonely home, wondering if she would ever see him again.

It was not long before Putraka came in sight of the palace. It was a beautiful night, and the moon was shining full upon the room in which the princess was asleep. It was a very big one, with costly furniture and priceless

tapestry hung round the walls, and there were doors behind the tapestry leading to other apartments, in some of which the attendants on Patala slept, whilst others kept watch lest anyone should intrude upon their mistress. No one thought of guarding the windows, for they were so high up that only a bird could reach them.

The young king alighted on the ledge of the window of the princess' room, and looked in. There, on a golden bed, amongst soft cushions and embroidered coverings, lay the most lovely creature he had ever beheld, so lovely that he fell in love with her at once and gave a loud cry of delight. This woke the princess, who started up and was about to scream out aloud in her terror at seeing a man looking in at the window, when Putraka with the aid of his magic staff made himself invisible. Then, thinking she had been dreaming, Patala lay down again, and the king began talking to her in a low voice, telling her he had heard of her beauty and had flown from far away to see her. He begged her to allow him to show himself to her, and added: "I will go away again directly afterwards if you wish it."

Putraka's voice was so gentle, and it seemed to Patala so wonderful that a man could fly and make himself invisible, that she was full of curiosity to see him and find out all about him. So she gave her consent, and immediately afterwards the young king stood within the room, looking so noble and so handsome that she too fell in love at first sight. Putraka told her all about his life and adventures, which interested her very much. She was glad, she said, that he was a king; but she would have loved him just as well, whoever he might have been.

After a long talk, Patala begged him to leave her for fear her attendants should discover him and tell her father about him. "My father would never let me marry you," she declared, "unless you were to come with many followers as a king to ask my hand; and how can you do that when you are only a wandering exile?"

25. Was there any reason to fear that Putraka would be discovered when he could make himself invisible at any moment?

26. What do you think would have been the right thing for Putraka and Patala to do when they found out that they loved each other?

## Chapter XIV

It was very difficult to persuade Putraka to go, but at last he flew away. Every night after that, however, he came to see Patala, spending the days sometimes in one place, sometimes in another, and using his magic

bowl to supply himself with food. Alas, he forgot all about the dear old woman to whom he owed all his happiness, and she slowly gave up hope of ever seeing him again. He might quite easily have flown to her cottage and cheered her with his presence; but he was so wrapped up in his love for Patala that everything else went out of his head. This selfishness on his part presently got him into serious trouble, for he became careless about making himself invisible when he flew up to the princess' window. So that one night he was discovered by a guardian of the palace. The matter was at once reported to the king, who could not at first believe such a thing was possible. The man must have seen a big bird, that was all. The king, however, ordered one of his daughter's ladies to keep watch every night in an ante-room, leaving the door open with the tapestry, in which there was a slit, drawn carefully over it, and to come and tell him in the morning if she had seen or heard anything unusual.

Now the lady chosen loved the princess, and, like many of her fellow-attendants, thought it was very cruel of the king to punish his own child for being so beautiful, by shutting her up as he did. It so happened that the very first night she was on guard, Putraka had flown a very, very long way, not noticing where he was going, because he was thinking so earnestly of Patala. When at last he flew in at her window, he was so weary that he sank down on a couch and fell fast asleep. The princess too was tired, because she had lain awake talking to her lover so many nights running that she had had hardly any rest. So when the lady peeped through the slit in the tapestry, there, by the light of the night lamp, she saw the young king lying unconscious, whilst the princess also was asleep.

Very cautiously the attendant crept to the side of Putraka, and took a long, long look at him. She noticed how handsome he was, and that he was dressed in beautiful clothes. She especially remarked the turban he wore, because in India the rank to which men belong is shown by the kind of turbans they wear. "This is no common man," she thought, "but a prince or king in disguise. What shall I do now? I will not raise an alarm which might lead to this beautiful young lover being killed and the heart of my dear mistress broken."

27. If you had been the lady who found Putraka in Patala's room, what would you have done?

28. What could Putraka have done to guard against being discovered?

Chapter XV

After hesitating a long time, the lady made up her mind that she would only put some mark in the turban of Putraka, so that he could be known again, and let him escape that night at least. So she stole back to her room, fetched a tiny brooch, and fastened it in the folds of the turban, where the wearer was not likely to notice it himself. This done, she went back to listen at the door.

It was nearly morning when Putraka woke up, very much surprised at finding himself lying on the couch, for he did not remember throwing himself down on it. Starting up, he woke Patala, who was terribly frightened, for she expected her ladies to come in any minute to help her to dress. She entreated Putraka to make himself invisible and fly away at once. He did so; and, as usual, wandered about until the time should come to go back to the palace. But he still felt too tired to fly, and instead walked about in the town belonging to Patala's father.

The lady who had been on guard had half a mind to tell her mistress that her secret was discovered. But before she could get a chance to do so, she was sent for by the king, who asked her if she had seen or heard anything during the night. She tried very hard to escape from betraying Patala; but she hesitated so much in her answers that the king guessed there was something she wanted to hide, and told her, if she did not reveal the whole truth, he would have her head shaved and send her to prison. So she told how she had found a handsome man, beautifully dressed, fast asleep in Patala's room; but she did not believe her mistress knew anything about it, because she too was asleep.

The king was of course in a terrible rage, and the lady was afraid he would order her to be punished; but he only went on questioning her angrily about what the man was like, so that he might be found and brought before him. Then the lady confessed that she had put the brooch in the turban, comforting herself with the thought that, when the king saw Putraka and knew that Patala loved him, he might perhaps relent and let them be married.

When the king heard about the brooch, he was greatly pleased; and instead of ordering the lady to be punished, he told her that, when the man who had dared to approach his daughter was found, he would give her a great reward. He then sent forth hundreds of spies to hunt for the man with a brooch in his turban, and Putraka was very soon found, strolling quietly about in the market-place. He was so taken by surprise that, though he had his staff in his hand and his shoes and bowl in the pocket of his robes, he had no time to write his wishes with the staff, or to put on the shoes, so he was obliged to submit to be dragged to the palace. He did all he could to

persuade those who had found him to let him go, telling them he was a king and would reward them well. They only laughed at him and dragged him along with them to the palace, where he was at once taken before the king, who was sitting on his throne, surrounded by his court, in a great hall lined with soldiers. The big windows were wide open; and noticing this, Putraka did not feel at all afraid, for he knew he had only to slip on his shoes and fly out of one of the windows, if he could not persuade the king to let him marry Patala. So he stood quietly at the foot of the throne, and looked bravely into the face of his dear one's father.

This only made the king more angry, and he began calling Putraka all manner of names and asking him how he dared to enter the room of his daughter. Putraka answered quietly that he loved Patala and wished to marry her. He was himself a king, and would give her all she had been used to. But it was all no good, for it only made the king more angry. He rose from his throne, and stretching out his hand, he cried:

“Let him be scourged and placed in close confinement!”

Then Putraka with his staff wrote rapidly on the ground his wish that no one should be able to touch him, and stooping down slipped on his magic shoes. The king, the courtiers and the soldiers all remained exactly as they were, staring at him in astonishment, as he rose up in the air and flew out of one of the windows. Straight away he sped to the palace of Patala and into her room, where she was pacing to and fro in an agony of anxiety about him; for she had heard of his having been taken prisoner and feared that her father would order him to be killed.

29. What do you think would have been the best thing for the king to do when Putraka was brought before him?

30. If Putraka had not had his shoes with him, how could he have escaped from the king's palace?

## Chapter XVI

Great indeed was the delight of Patala when her beloved Putraka once more flew in at her window; but she was still trembling with fear for him and begged him to go away back to his own land as quickly as possible.

“I will not go without you,” replied Putraka. “Wrap yourself up warmly, for it is cold flying through the air, and we will go away together, and your cruel father shall never see you again.”

Patala wept at hearing this, for it seemed terrible to her to have to choose between the father she loved and

Putraka. But in the end her lover got his own way, and just as those who were seeking him were heard approaching, he seized his dear one in his arms and flew off with her. He did not return to his own land even then, but directed his course to the Ganges, the grand and beautiful river which the people of India love and worship, calling it their Mother Ganga. By the banks of the sacred stream the lovers rested, and with the aid of his magic bowl Putraka soon had a good and delicious meal ready, which they both enjoyed very much. As they ate, they consulted together what they had better do now, and Patala, who was as clever as she was beautiful, said:

“Would it not be a good thing to build a new city in this lovely place? You could do it with your marvellous staff, could you not?”

“Why, of course, I could,” said Putraka laughing. “Why didn’t I think of it myself?” Very soon a wonderful town rose up, which the young king wished to be as much as possible like the home he had left, only larger and fuller of fine buildings than it. When the town was made, he wished it to be full of happy inhabitants, with temples in which they might worship, priests to teach them how to be good, markets in which food and all that was needed could be bought, tanks and rivulets full of pure water, soldiers and officers to defend the gates, elephants on which he and his wife could ride, everything in fact that the heart of man or woman could desire.

The first thing Putraka and Patala did after the rise of their own town, which they named Patali-Putra [1] after themselves, was to get married in accordance with the rites of their religion; and for many, many years they reigned wisely over their people, who loved them and their children with all their hearts. Amongst the attendants on those children was the old woman who had shown kindness to Putraka in his loneliness and trouble. For when he told Patala the story of his life, she reproached him for his neglect of one to whom he owed so much. She made him feel quite ashamed of himself, and he flew away and brought the dear old lady back with him, to her very great delight.

31. Which of the people in this story do you like best?

32. Do you think Putraka deserved all the happiness which came to him through stealing the wand, the shoes and the bowl?

33. Can you suggest any way in which he could have atoned for the wrong he did to the brothers whose property

he took?

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

Read more fairy tales on [Fairytalez.com](http://Fairytalez.com)