

# *The Poisoned Food*

Tales Of The Sun Or Folklore Of Southern India

Indian

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*Advanced*  
*6 min read*

## Fifth Part

When Manuniti had concluded his story of the wonderful mango-fruit, king Alakesa ordered his four ministers to approach the throne, and then, with an angry countenance he thus addressed Bodhaditya:—

“What excuse have you for entering my bedchamber without permission, thus violating the rules of the harem?”

Bodhaditya humbly begged leave to relate to his majesty a story of how a Brâhma×fed a hungry traveller and had afterwards to endure the infamy of having caused that traveller’s death, and on king Alakesa signifying his consent, he thus began:—

### Story of the Poisoned Food.

There was a city called Vijayanagara, to the north of which flowed a small river with mango topes(clumps of trees) on both banks. One day a young Brâhmi×pilgrim came and sat down to rest by the side of the stream, and, finding the place very cool and shady, he resolved to bathe, perform his religious ablutions, and make his dinner off the rice which he carried tied up in a bundle.

Three days before there had come to the same spot an old Brâhmi×whose years numbered more than three

score and ten; he had quarrelled with his family, and had fled from his house to die. Since he had reached that place he had tasted no food, and the young pilgrim found him lying in a pitiable state, and placed near him a portion of his rice. The old man arose, and proceeded to the rivulet in order to wash his feet and hands, and pronounce a holy incantation or two before tasting the food.

While thus engaged a kite, carrying in its beak a huge serpent, alighted upon the tree at the foot of which was the rice given by the pilgrim to the old man, and while the bird was feasting on the serpent some of its poison dropped on the rice, and the old Brâhmi, in his hunger, did not observe it on his return; he greedily devoured some of the rice, and instantly fell down dead.

The young pilgrim, seeing him prostrate on the ground, ran to help him, but found that life was gone; and concluding that the old man's hasty eating after his three days' fast must have caused his death, and being unwilling to leave his corpse to be devoured by kites and jackals, he determined to cremate it before resuming his journey. With this object he ran to the neighbouring village, and, reporting to the people what had occurred on the tope, requested their assistance in cremating the old man's body.

The villagers, however, suspected that the young pilgrim had killed and robbed the old Brâhmi; so they laid hold of him, and, after giving him a severe flogging, imprisoned him in the village temple of Kâlî. Alas! what a reward was this for his kind hospitality! and how was he repaid for his beneficence!

The unhappy pilgrim gave vent to his sorrows in the form of verses in praise of the goddess in whose temple he was a prisoner; for he was a great Pañît, versed in the four Vêdas, and the six âstras, and the sixty-four varieties of knowledge. On hearing the pilgrim's verses, the rage of the goddess descended upon the villagers, who had so rashly accused and punished him for a crime of which he was innocent. Suddenly the whole village was destroyed by fire, and the people lost all their property, and were houseless. In their extremity they went to the temple of Kâlî, and humbly requested the goddess to inform them of the cause of the calamity which had thus unexpectedly come upon them. The goddess infused herself into the person of one of the villagers, and thus responded:—

“Know ye, unkind villagers, that ye have most unjustly scourged and imprisoned in our presence an innocent, charitable, and pious Brâhmi. The old man died from the effects of the poison, which dropped from a serpent's mouth on some rice at the foot of a tree when it was being devoured by a kite. Ye did not know of this;

nevertheless ye have maltreated a good man without first making due inquiry as to his guilt or innocence. For this reason we visited your village with this calamity. Beware, and henceforward avoid such sins.”

So saying, Kâlî departed from the person through whom she had manifested herself. Then the villagers perceived the grievous error into which they had fallen. They released the good pilgrim and implored his forgiveness, which he readily granted. And thus was an innocent man charged with murder in return for his benevolent actions.

“Even so,” continued Bodhaditya, “my most noble sovereign, I have this day had to endure the infamy of having violated the harem for saving your valuable life.”

He then sent for a thief who was undergoing imprisonment, and gave him the handful of rice which he had the preceding day snatched from the king at dinner, and the thief having eaten it, instantly died. He next caused a servant to go to the royal bed-chamber, and fetch from the canopy of the couch the pieces of the serpent and his little finger-tip, which he laid before the wonder-struck king and the counsellors, and then addressed his majesty as follows:—

“My most noble king, and ye wise counsellors, it is known to you all that we four ministers keep watch over the town during the four quarters of the night, and mine is the first watch. Well, while I was on duty the day before yesterday, I heard a weeping voice in the direction of the temple. I proceeded to the spot, and discovered the goddess sobbing bitterly. She related to me how three calamities awaited the king on the morrow. The first of them was the arrows despatched by the king of Vijayanagara as sweetmeats to our Sovereign; the second was the poisoned rice, and the third the serpent. In trying to avert these calamities, I have committed the offence of entering the harem.”

And he thereupon explained the whole affair from first to last.

King Alakesa and the whole assembly were highly delighted at the fidelity and devotion of Bodhaditya; for it was now very evident that he had done nothing amiss, but had saved the life of the king on three occasions, and indeed also the life of the queen by wiping off the serpent’s poison which had fallen on her bosom. Then Alakesa related the following story in explanation of the proverb:—

Next: VII. Eating up the Protector

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