

# *The Story of Appayya*

Tales Of The Sun Or Folklore Of Southern India

Indian

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In a remote village there lived a poor Brâhma×and his wife. Though several years of their wedded life had passed, they unfortunately had no children, and so, being very eager for a child, and having no hope of one by his first wife, the poor Brâhma×made up his mind to marry a second. His wife would not permit it for some time, but finding her husband resolved, she gave way, thinking within herself that she would manage somehow to do away with the second wife. As soon as he had got her consent the Brâhma×arranged for his second marriage and wedded a beautiful Brâhma×girl. She went to live with him in the same house with the first wife, who, thinking that she would be making the world suspicious if she did anything suddenly, waited for some time.

I×vara himself seemed to favour the new marriage, and the second wife, a year after her wedding, becoming pregnant, went in the sixth month of her pregnancy to her mother's house for her confinement. Her husband bore his separation from her patiently for a fortnight, but after this the desire to see her again began to prey upon his mind, and he was always asking his first wife when he ought to go to her. She seemed to sympathise fully with his trouble, and said:—

“My dearest husband, your health is daily being injured, and I am glad that your love for her has not made it worse than it is. To-morrow you must start on a visit to her. It is said that we should not go empty-handed to

children, a king, or a pregnant woman; so I shall give you one hundred apûpa cakes, packed up separately in a vessel, which you must give to her. You are very fond of apûpas and I fear that you will eat some of them on the way; but you had better not do so. And I will give you some cakes packed in a cloth separately for you to eat on your journey.”

So the first wife spent the whole night in preparing the apûpa cakes, and mixed poison in the sugar and rice-flour of those she made for her co-wife and rival; but as she entertained no enmity against her husband the apûpas cakes for him were properly prepared. By the time the morning dawned she had packed up the hundred apûpas in a brass vessel which could be easily carried on a man's head.

After a light breakfast—for a heavy one is always bad before a journey on foot—the Brâhma×placed the brass vessel on his head, and holding in his hand the kerchief containing the food for himself on the way, started for the village of his second wife, which happened to be at a distance of two days' journey. He walked in hot haste till evening approached, and when the darkness of night overtook him the rapidity of his walk had exhausted him, and he felt very hungry. He espied a wayside shed and a tank near his path, and entered the water to perform his evening ablution to the god of the day, who was fast going down below the horizon. As soon as this was over he untied his kerchief, and did full justice to its contents by swallowing every cake whole. He then drank some water, and being quite overcome by fatigue, fell into a deep slumber in the shed, with his brass vessel and its sweet, or rather poisonous, contents under his head.

Close by the spot where the Brâhma×slept there reigned a famous king who had a very beautiful daughter. Several persons demanded her hand in marriage, among whom was a robber chieftain who wanted her for his only son. Though the king liked the boy for his beauty, he thought that he was only a robber for all that prevented him from making up his mind to give his daughter in marriage to him. The robber chief, however, was determined to have his own way, and accordingly despatched one hundred of his band to fetch away the princess in the night without her knowledge while she was sleeping, to his palace in the woods. In obedience to their chieftain's order the robbers, on the night the Brâhma×happened to sleep in the shed, entered the king's palace and stole away the princess, together with the bed on which she was sleeping. On reaching the shed the hundred robbers found themselves very thirsty—for being awake at midnight always brings on thirst. So they placed the cot on the ground and were entering the water to quench their thirst; just then they smelt the apûpa cakes, which, for all that they contained poison, had a very sweet savour. The robbers searched about the shed,

and found the Brâhma× sleeping on one side and the brass vessel lying at a distance from him, for he had pushed it from underneath his head when he had stretched himself in his sleep; they opened the vessel, and to their joy found in it exactly one hundred apûpa cakes.

“We have one here for each of us, and that is something better than mere water. Let us each eat before we go into it,” said the leader of the gang, and at once each man swallowed greedily what he had in his hand, and immediately all fell down dead. Lucky it was that no one knew of the old Brâhma×’s trick. Had the robbers had any reason to suspect it they would never have eaten the cakes; had the Brâhma× known it he would never have brought them with him for his dear second wife. Lucky was it for the poor old Brâhma× and his second wife, and lucky was it for the sleeping princess, that these cakes went, after all, into the stomachs of the villainous robbers!

After sleeping his fill the Brâhma×, who had been dreaming of his second wife all night, awoke in haste to pursue the remainder of his journey to her house. He could not find his brass vessel, but near the place where he had left it he found several men of the woods, whom he knew very well by their appearance to be robbers, as he thought, sleeping. Angered at the loss of his vessel he took up a sword from one of the dead robbers and cut off all their heads, thinking all the while that he was killing one hundred living robbers, who were sleeping after having eaten all his cakes. Presently the princess’s cot fell under his gaze, and he approached it and found on it a most beautiful lady fast asleep. Being an intelligent man he perceived that the persons whose heads he had cut off must have been some thieves, or other wicked men, who had carried her off. He was not long in doubt, for not far off he saw an army marching up rapidly with a king at its head, who was saying, “Down with the robber who has stolen away my daughter.” The Brâhma× at once inferred that this must be the father of the sleeping princess, and suddenly waking her up from her sleep spoke thus to her:—

“Behold before you the hundred robbers that brought you here a few hours ago from your palace. I fought one and all of them single-handed, and have killed them all.”

The princess was highly pleased at what she heard, for she knew of all the tricks the robbers had previously played to carry her off. So she fell reverently at the Brâhma×’s feet and said:—

“Friend, never till now have I heard of a warrior who, single-handed, fought one hundred robbers. Your valour is unparalleled. I will be your wife, if only in remembrance of your having saved me from falling into the hands

of these ruffians.”

Her father and his army was now near the shed, for he had all along watched the conduct of the robber chieftain, and as soon as the maid-servants of the palace informed him of the disappearance of the princess and her bed, he marched straight with his soldiers for the woods. His joy, when he saw his daughter safe, knew no bounds, and he flew into his daughter's arms, while she pointed to the Brâhma×as her preserver. The king now put a thousand questions to our hero, who, being well versed in matters of fighting, gave sound replies, and so came successfully out of his first adventure. The king, astonished at his valour, took him to his palace, and rewarded him with the hand of the princess. And the robber chieftain, fearing the new son-in-law, who, single-handed, had killed a hundred of his robbers, never troubled himself about the princess. Thus the Brâhma×s first adventure ended in making him son-in-law to a king!

Now there lived a lioness in a wood near the princess's country, who had a great taste for human flesh, and so, once a week, the king used to send a man into the wood to serve as her prey. All the people now collected together before the king, and said:—

“Most honoured king, while you have a son-in-law who killed one hundred robbers with his sword, why should you continue to send a man into the wood every week. We request you to send your son-in-law next week to the wood and have the lioness killed.”

This seemed most reasonable to the king, who called for his son-in-law, and sent him, armed to the teeth, into the wood.

Now our Brâhma×could not refuse to go, for fear of losing the fame of his former exploit, and, hoping that fortune would favour him, he asked his father-in-law to have him hoisted up into a big banyan tree with all kinds of weapons, and this was done. The appointed time for the lioness to eat her prey approached, and as she saw no one coming for her, and as sometimes those that had to come used to linger for a short time in the tree in which the Brâhma×had taken refuge, she went up to it to see that no such trick has been played upon her this time. This made the Brâhma×tremble so violently that he dropped the sword he held in his hand. At that very moment the lioness happened to yawn, and the sword dropped right into her jaws and killed her. As soon as the Brâhma×saw the course which events had taken, he came down from the tree, and invented a thousand stories of how he had given battle to the terrible lioness and overcome her. This exploit fully established his

valour, and feasts and rejoicings in honour of it followed, and the whole country round blessed the son-in-law of their king.

Near this kingdom there also reigned a powerful emperor, who levied tribute from all the surrounding countries. To this emperor the father-in-law of our most valorous Brâhma×, who, at one stroke, had killed one hundred robbers, and, at another, a fierce lioness, had also to pay a certain amount of tribute; but, trusting to the power of his son-in-law, he stopped the tribute to the emperor, who, by the way, was named Appayya Râja, and who, as soon as the tribute was stopped, invaded his dominions, and his father-in-law besought the Brâhma× for assistance.

Again the poor Brâhma× could not refuse, for, if he did, all his former fame would have been lost; so he determined to undertake this adventure also, and to trust to fortune rather than give up the attempt. He asked for the best horse and the sharpest sword, and set out to fight the enemy, who had already encamped on the other side of the river, which flowed at a short distance to the east of the town.

Now the king had a very unruly horse, which had never been broken in, and this he gave his son-in-law; and, supplying him with a sharp sword, asked him to start. The Brâhma× then asked the king's servants to tie him up with cotton strings tight on to the saddle, and set out on the expedition.

The horse, having never till then felt a man on its back, began to gallop most furiously, and flew onwards so fast that all who saw it thought the rider must lose his life, and he too was almost dead with fear. He tried his best to curb his steed, but the more he pulled the faster it galloped, till giving up all hopes of life he let it take its course. It jumped into the water and swam across to the other side of the river, wetting the cotton cords by which the Brâhma× was tied down to the saddle, making them swell and giving him the most excruciating pain. He bore it, however, with all the patience imaginable. Presently the horse reached the other side of the river, where there was a big palmyra tree, which a recent flood had left almost uprooted and ready to fall at the slightest touch. The Brâhma×, unable to stop the course of the horse, held fast on to the tree, hoping thus to check its wild career. But unfortunately for him the tree gave way, and the steed galloped on so furiously that he did not know which was the safer—to leave the tree or to hold on to it. Meanwhile the wet cotton cords hurt him so that he, in the hopelessness of despair, bawled out appa! ayya!(Oh! Ah!) On went his steed, and still he held on to the palmyra tree. Though now fighting for his own life, the people that were watching him from a

great distance thought him to be flying to the battlefield, armed with a palmyra tree! The cry of lamentation, appa ayya, which he uttered, his enemy mistook for a challenge, because, as we know, his name happened to be Appayya. Horror-struck at the sight of a warrior armed with a huge tree, his enemy turned and fled. Yathâ râtâ tathâ prajâh—"As is the king so are the subjects,"—and accordingly his followers also fled. The Brâhma× warrior (!) seeing the fortunate course events had again taken pursued the enemy, or rather let his courser have its own furious way. Thus the enemy and his vast army melted away in the twinkling of an eye, and the horse, too, when it became exhausted, returned towards the palace.

The old king had been watching from the loftiest rooms of his palace all that had passed on the other side of the river, and believing his son-in-law had, by his own prowess, driven out the enemy, approached him with all pomp. Eager hands quickly cut the knots by which the victorious (!) Brâhma× had been held tight in his saddle, and his old father-in-law with tears of joy embraced him on his victory, saying that the whole kingdom was indebted to him. A splendid triumphal march was conducted, in which the eyes of the whole town were directed towards our victorious hero.

Thus, on three different occasions, and in three different adventures, fortune favoured the poor Brâhma× and brought him fame. He then sent for his two former wives and took them into his palace. His second wife, who was pregnant when he first started with the apûpa cakes to see her, had given birth to a male child, who was, when she came back to him, more than a year old. The first wife confessed to her husband her sin of having given him poisoned cakes, and craved his pardon; and it was only now that he came to know that the hundred robbers he killed in his first adventure were all really dead men, and that they must have died from the effects of the poison in the cakes, and, since her treachery had given him a new start in life, he forgave her. She, too, gave up her enmity to the partners of her husband's bed, and all the four lived in peace and plenty for many a long day afterwards.

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