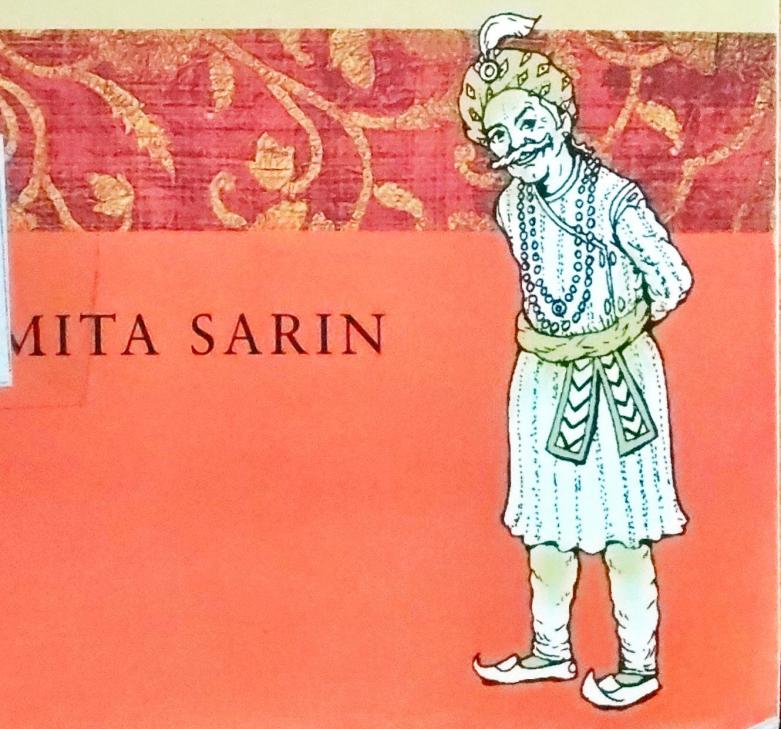
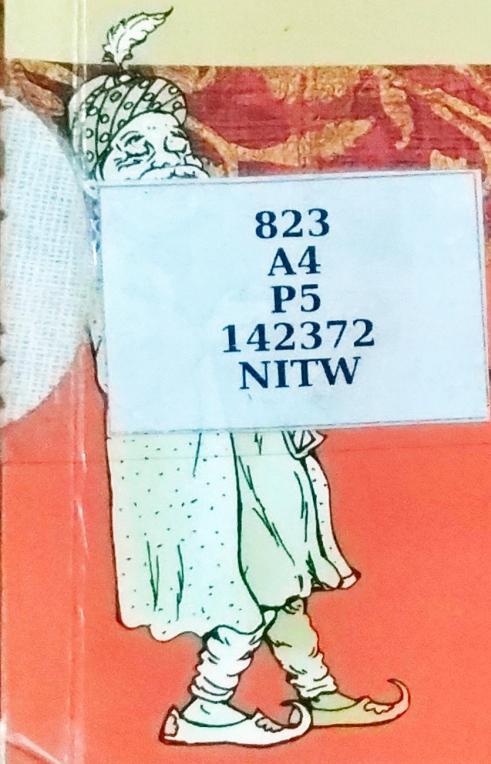




Akbar and Birbal

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The Magic Sticks

Once, a wealthy merchant came to seek his friend Birbal's advice. He had noticed that every now and then, a money bag or two would be missing from his storeroom. As the room had not been broken into, it was obvious that someone who was familiar with the house was stealing the money. It had to be one of his ten servants. But which one? The merchant was a kind man who could not bear to accuse any of his trusted men of stealing unless he was absolutely sure. If he complained to the authorities, they would arrest all ten men, and question and beat them until one of them confessed.

Birbal came to his rescue and promised to help him catch the thief. He accompanied the merchant to his home and asked him to assemble all his servants. In his

hand he held a bundle of sticks, all of equal length. He gave one stick to each of the men.

'These are magic sticks,' he told the servants. 'Someone has been stealing money from this house. We do not believe that anyone of you is guilty, but these sticks will find the real thief. The stick that is held by the thief will grow one inch longer overnight. Tomorrow morning, when we compare the sticks, we will have the answer.'

The servants were led to separate rooms to spend the night. The next morning, Birbal examined each man's stick and measured them all. One stick turned out to be an inch shorter than the others. Birbal pounced on the owner.

'This is our thief! His stick is one inch shorter than the rest.'

'But . . . but . . .' the man blustered, 'you said that the guilty man's stick would *grow* one inch, not become shorter.'

'I said that because I knew that the guilty man would try to cut his stick short, thinking that it would grow one inch at night!' Birbal said triumphantly. 'By cutting the stick short, you revealed your guilt.'

The thief hung his head; he had nothing to say. The merchant was filled with admiration.

'Birbal, your common sense saved me from a good deal of trouble and these nine honest men from dishonour. No wonder the emperor prizes you as he does!'

The Magic Sticks.

A wealthy merchant came to seek his friend Bilbal's advice. He had noticed that a money bag was missing from his store room. The merchant was sure that someone in the house was stealing the money. He had ten servants, but he didn't know which one. The merchant was a kind man, so he didn't want to accuse anyone unless he was absolutely sure.

Then Bilbal came into the picture, went near all ten servants, and gave each servant a stick of equal length, claiming they were magical. He said that the thief's stick would grow an inch overnight. The next morning, Bilbal measured the sticks, and one was shorter. The servant refused and said the thief's stick should have grown longer, not shorter. Bilbal said, "That's not magical sticks: I knew that after listening to my words, the thief would cut the stick one inch shorter." Thus the thief revealed his guilt. He hung his head; he had nothing to say.

By
Umeha Anjum
QURESHI BOAGG.