



**story**  
weaver

# Crackers in a Pot

**Author:** Sukumar Ray

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Level 4

## About the Author

Sukumar Ray was born on the 30th of October in 1887 and went on to contribute a great deal of creativity and freshness to the genre of children's literature. He was a celebrated writer and poet from Calcutta who was born to Upendrakishore Ray, a famous painter, illustrator, musician and a Bengali writer himself, and Bidhumukhi Devi. Sukumar Ray studied the art of photography, lithography and printing technology at the School of Photo-Engraving and Lithography in London and became the pioneer of the same in India.

His illustrations, writing and unique sketches often found their way in Sandesh, a children's magazine which was launched by his father in 1913. He opened up a refreshing genre of nonsense literature that combined a great sense of humour, absorbing wit and a sharp ability of observation that fascinated both children and adults alike. Some of the famous and quirky fictional characters he invented include Kumropotash, Huko Mukho Hangla, Pagla Dashu, Hijibijbij and so on. Abol Tabol is a popular collection of his rhymes and poems for children which first appeared in Sandesh but was later published as a book.

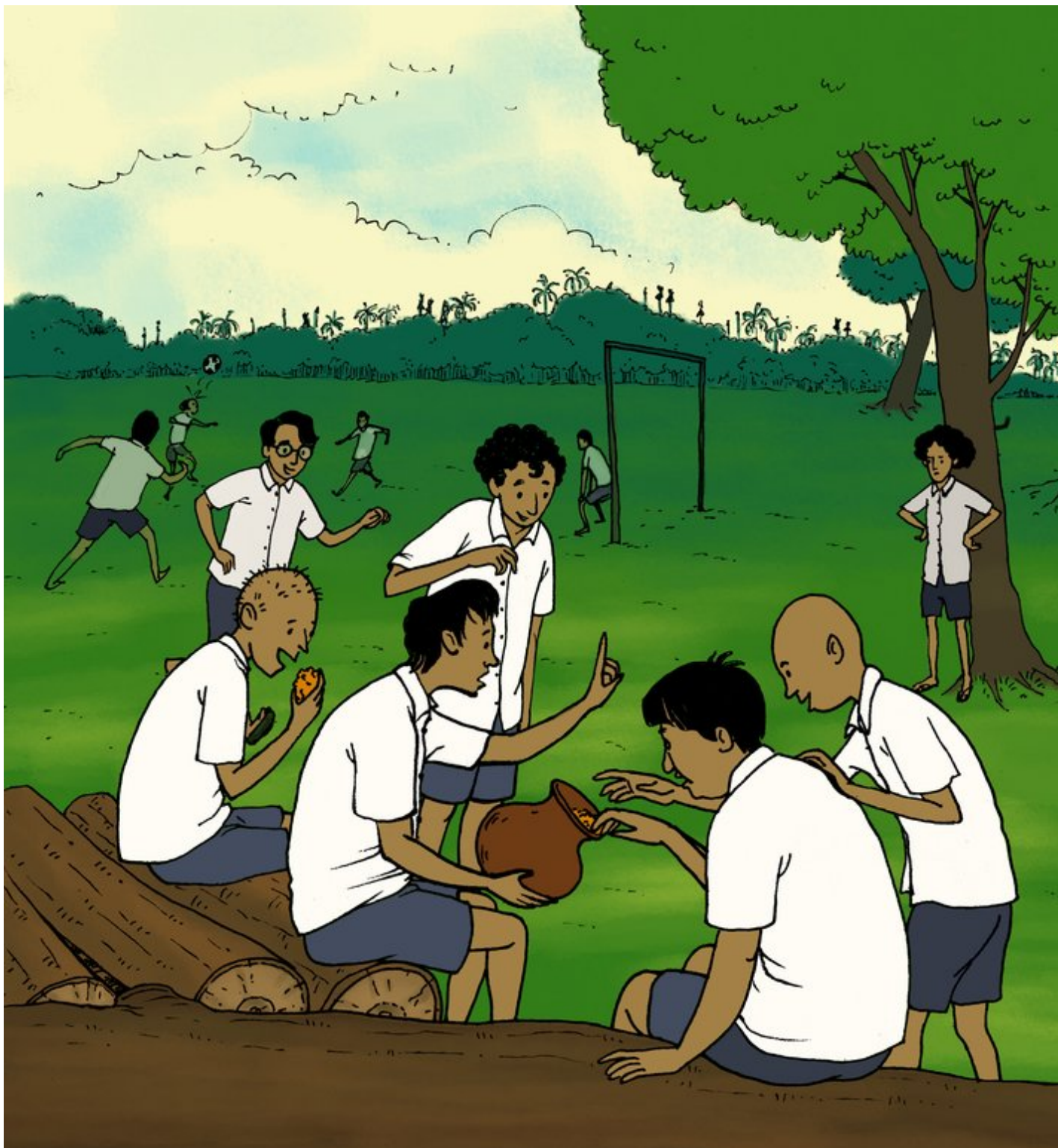
Sukumar Ray passed away on the 10th of September in 1923, leaving behind his son, Satyajit Ray.

## About the Series

Pagla Dashu, a fictional character created by Sukumar Ray, is a free-spirited boy who has adorned Bengali Literature with the projections of his whimsical mind and the corresponding manifested pranks. A major riddle to the narrator, he is the protagonist of several of Ray's stories. The stories, being set in and around school, include a majority of the pranks being played on teachers as they are the favourite adversaries of school children all over the world. Dashu's way with words make it almost impossible for anyone to punish him in a manner more severe than hitting his head or boxing his ears. Pagla Dashu was first published in 1940.

## About the Story

*Crackers in a Pot*, translated from *Chinepotka*, revolves around the minute school rivalries that often lead to funny incidents that include consciously or unconsciously, a prank pulled on the teacher. This story is a part of the four-book Pagla Dashu series and revolves around the titular character and his enemy, Ramapada who refuses to share his birthday sweets with Dashu. Wrought with many native words and sounds, the story is a fun read as it brilliantly portrays the slapstick humour throughout the narrative.

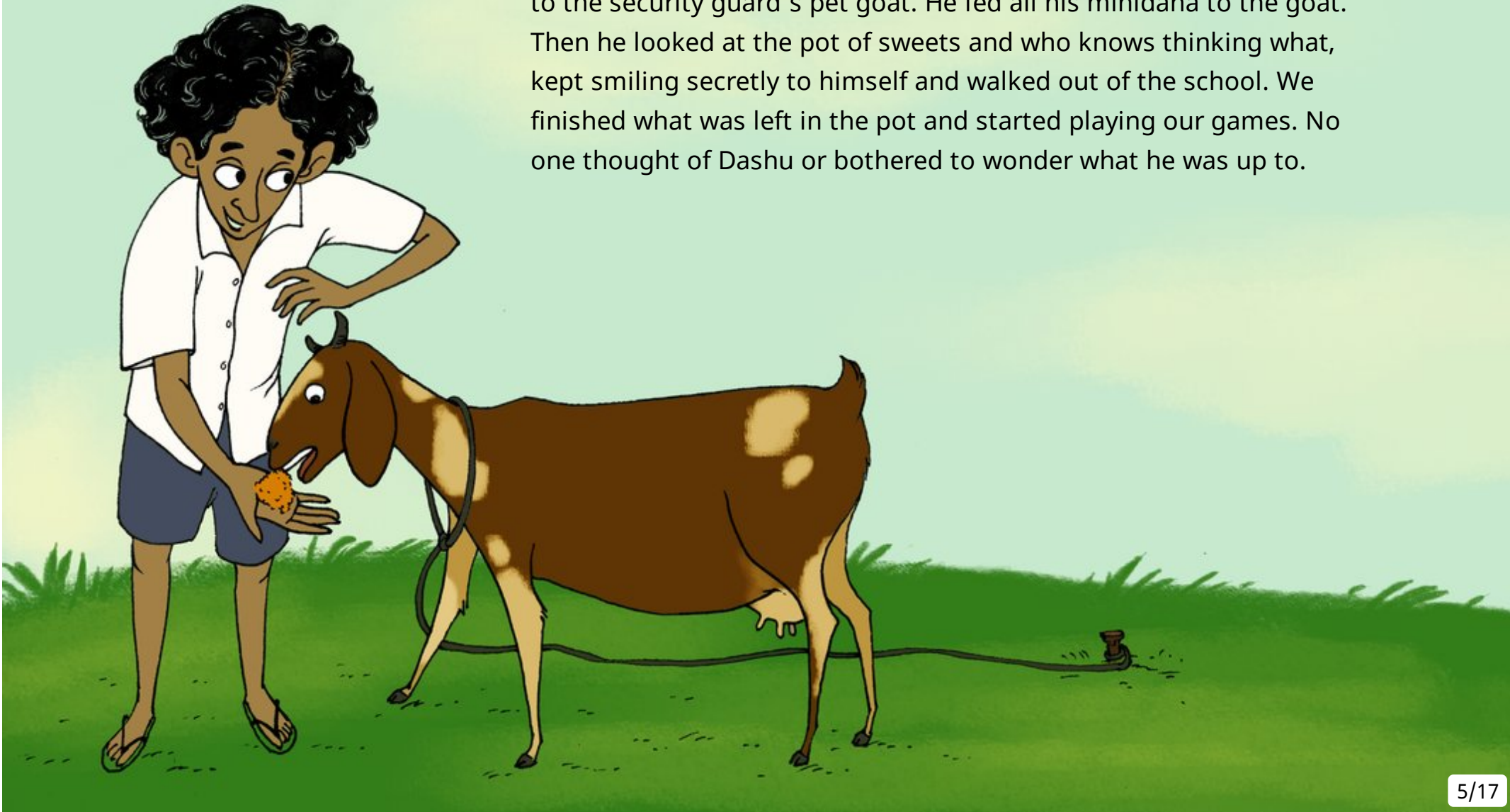


It was our friend Ramapada's birthday. He came to school with a big pot of *mihidana*. As soon as the bell rang for break time, we crowded around him and took turns dividing the sweets amongst us. The only one who would not take a share was Dashu the Crazy. It's not like Dashu does not like *mihidana*. But he and Ramapada are enemies, and they are often fighting about something or the other. We all told Ramapada, 'Give a little *mihidana* to Dashu.' Ramapada went to Dashu and said, 'Hey Dashu, want to eat? But see that you never fight with me again, okay? I will give you some sweets then.'

*\*\*Mihidana: An Indian sweet originating from Burdwan, West Bengal where 'mihi' means fine and 'dana' means grain.*



If anyone talks like this, who will not get angry? But Dashu did not say a word. He solemnly took a handful of the sweets and called out to the security guard's pet goat. He fed all his mihidana to the goat. Then he looked at the pot of sweets and who knows thinking what, kept smiling secretly to himself and walked out of the school. We finished what was left in the pot and started playing our games. No one thought of Dashu or bothered to wonder what he was up to.





After the tiffin break, when we returned to class, we found Dashu sitting quietly in a corner, solving sums. I could not help but wonder what he was planning. I asked him, 'Have you done something?' Dashu looked all innocent and said, 'Yes, two GCM sums.' I said, 'Oh, who wants to know about maths? Are you planning a prank?'

Hearing this, Dashu got really angry. *Panditmoshai* had just come into the classroom and he meant to go complain to him about us. Somehow we calmed Dashu down and made him sit in his seat.

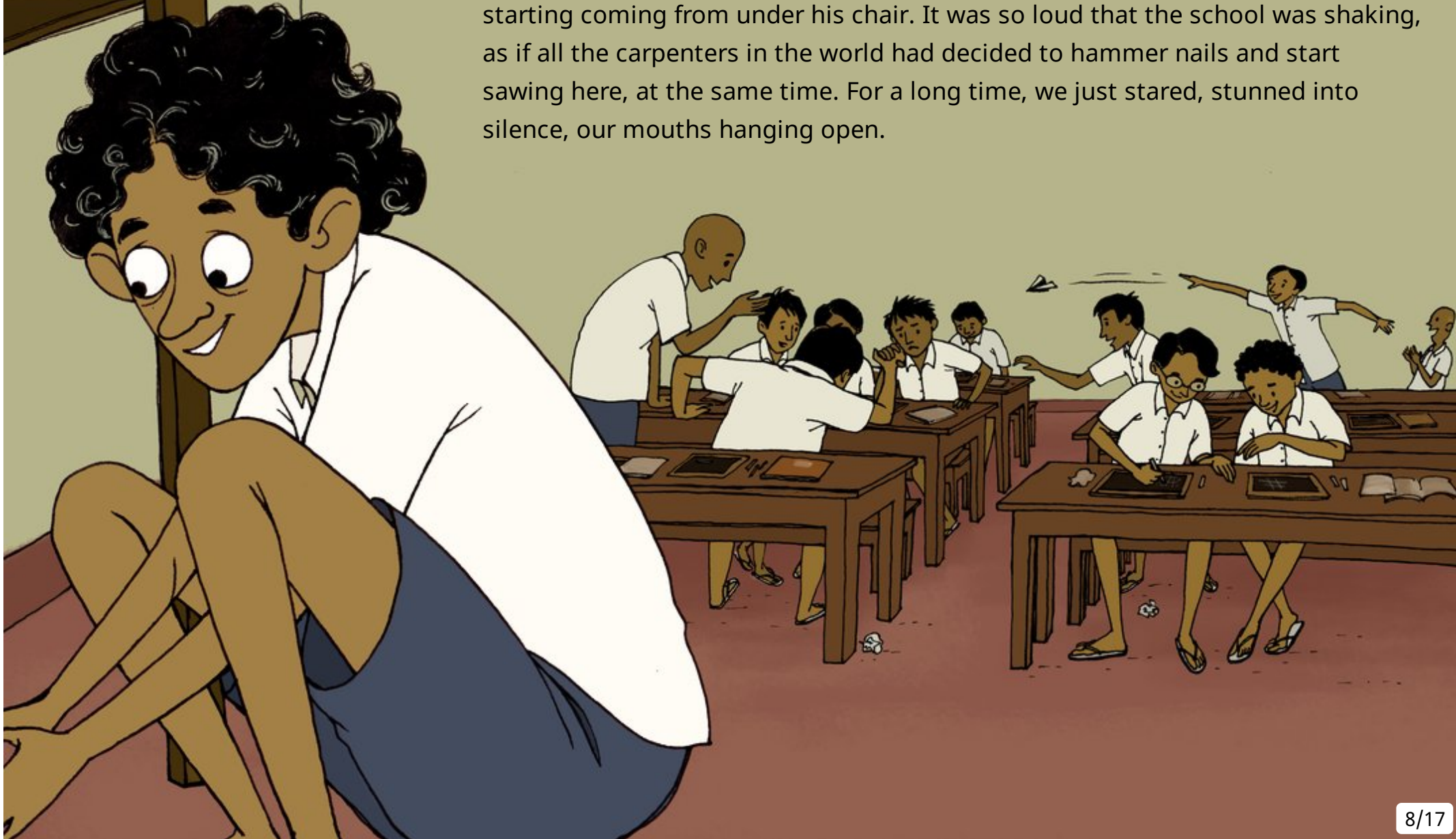
*\*\*Panditmoshai: Teacher, mentor.*



Our Panditmoshai was not a bad sort. He was usually in no hurry to start with the lessons. Only, if we were too noisy, he would suddenly get very angry. At that time, his temper would rise rapidly and he would scold us terribly. That day, he sat down and told us to work on our grammar. Then he settled back comfortably and fell fast asleep. We all opened our books and pretended to read aloud. In reply, we got the *ghrrr-ghrrr* sound from his nose. We loved this sound, as we then knew he had floated away nicely into sleep-land. We took out our slates and started playing noughts and crosses and tic-tac-toe. Whenever the snoring sound went down, we quickly whipped out our books and in a calming lullaby recited the verbs. That sent him right back to sleep like a baby.



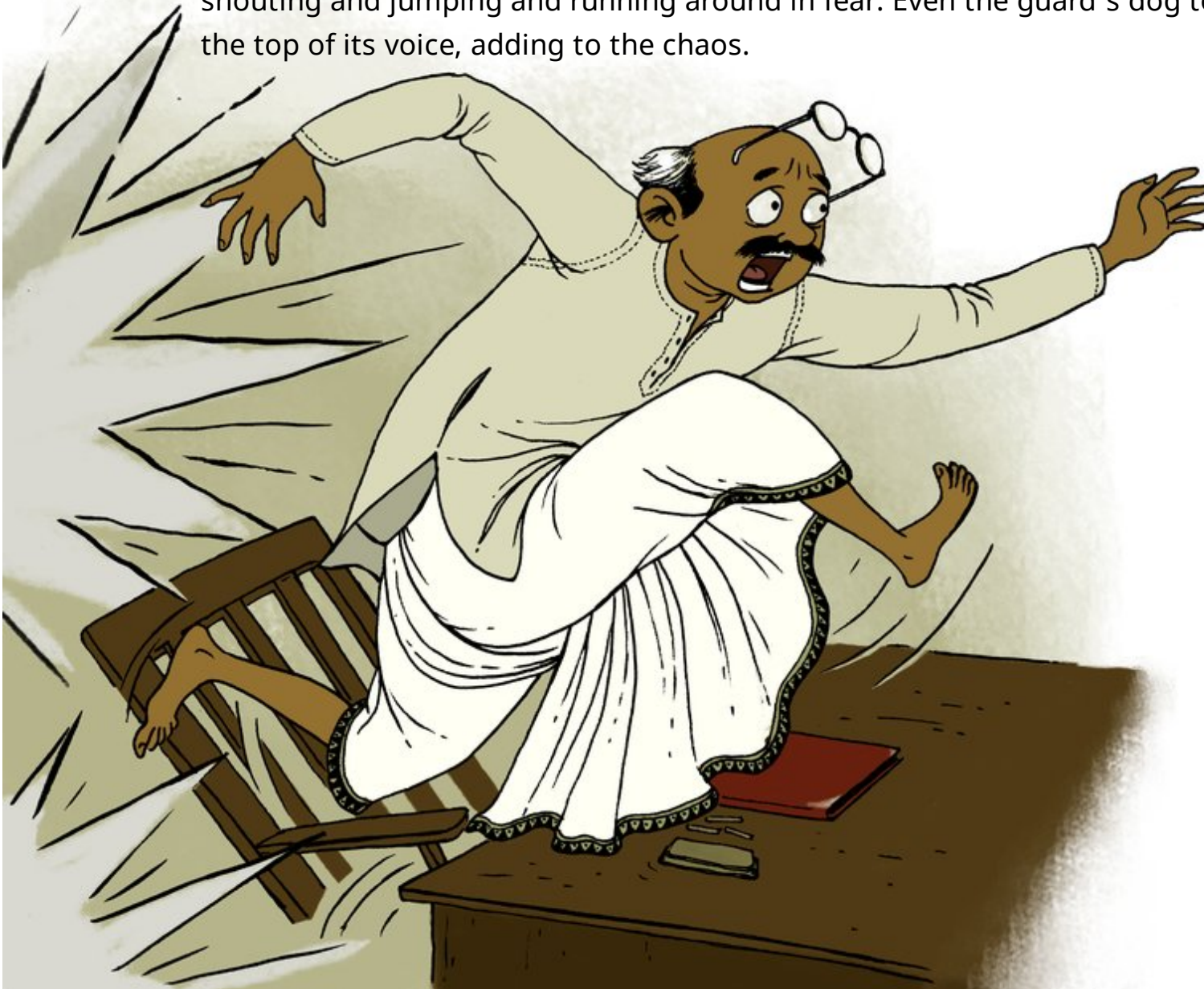
While everyone was busy playing, Dashu was sitting in a corner doing something. None of us paid him the least attention. After a while, a 'phutt' sound came from under the platform on which Panditmoshai's chair was placed. He sat up and looking around sleepily, uttered an annoyed 'oh!' He looked like he was getting ready to say more, when 'Dhadam! Crack! Pop! Fizz!' -all sorts of loud sounds starting coming from under his chair. It was so loud that the school was shaking, as if all the carpenters in the world had decided to hammer nails and start sawing here, at the same time. For a long time, we just stared, stunned into silence, our mouths hanging open.







Panditmoshai jumped up in the air and with a horrible yell, leaped across the table and landed right in the middle of the classroom. We had seen the inter-school high-jump champ Nabin Pal doing many fantastic jumps, but even he had never attempted such a jump ever. In the next room, the younger classes were shouting out their five times tables. They stopped in alarm. Everywhere in the school, people started shouting and jumping and running around in fear. Even the guard's dog took up the refrain and barked at the top of its voice, adding to the chaos.





After five minutes of this awful noise, when it became quiet, Panditmoshai asked in a very angry voice, 'Where did that noise come from?' The guard came with a long stick and poked under the platform. He pushed out a pot. It was Ramapada's pot of sweets. Stray bits of mihidana were still stuck around its mouth.

Panditmoshai frowned terribly and asked, 'Whose pot is this?'

Ramapada spoke up, 'Sir, it is mine.'



That's it, two hands immediately seized his two ears and gave them a nice twist. 'What did you bring in the pot?' our teacher demanded to know.



Now Ramapada understood that he was going to get blamed for all that had happened. Poor thing quickly tried to explain. 'But sir, there was mihidana in that. I don't-'

Before he could finish Panditmoshai roared, 'And those mihidana turned themselves into crackers and started bursting themselves, is it?' Along with that *dhap-dhap*, two tight slaps landed on Ramapada's cheeks.





By now the other teachers had all gathered in our classroom as well. They, too, looked ready to land a few slaps on him. Poor Ramapada! He was going to get badly punished for no fault of his. Suddenly Dashu picked up my slate and said, 'Sir, see. While you were sleeping, they were all playing noughts and crosses.'

My name could be seen clearly on the slate, so Panditmoshai raised his hand to give me one huge slap as well. But then he stopped. He glared at Dashu. 'And who said I was sleeping?'

Dashu stared at him, puzzled. Then he said, 'But, you were snoring...'

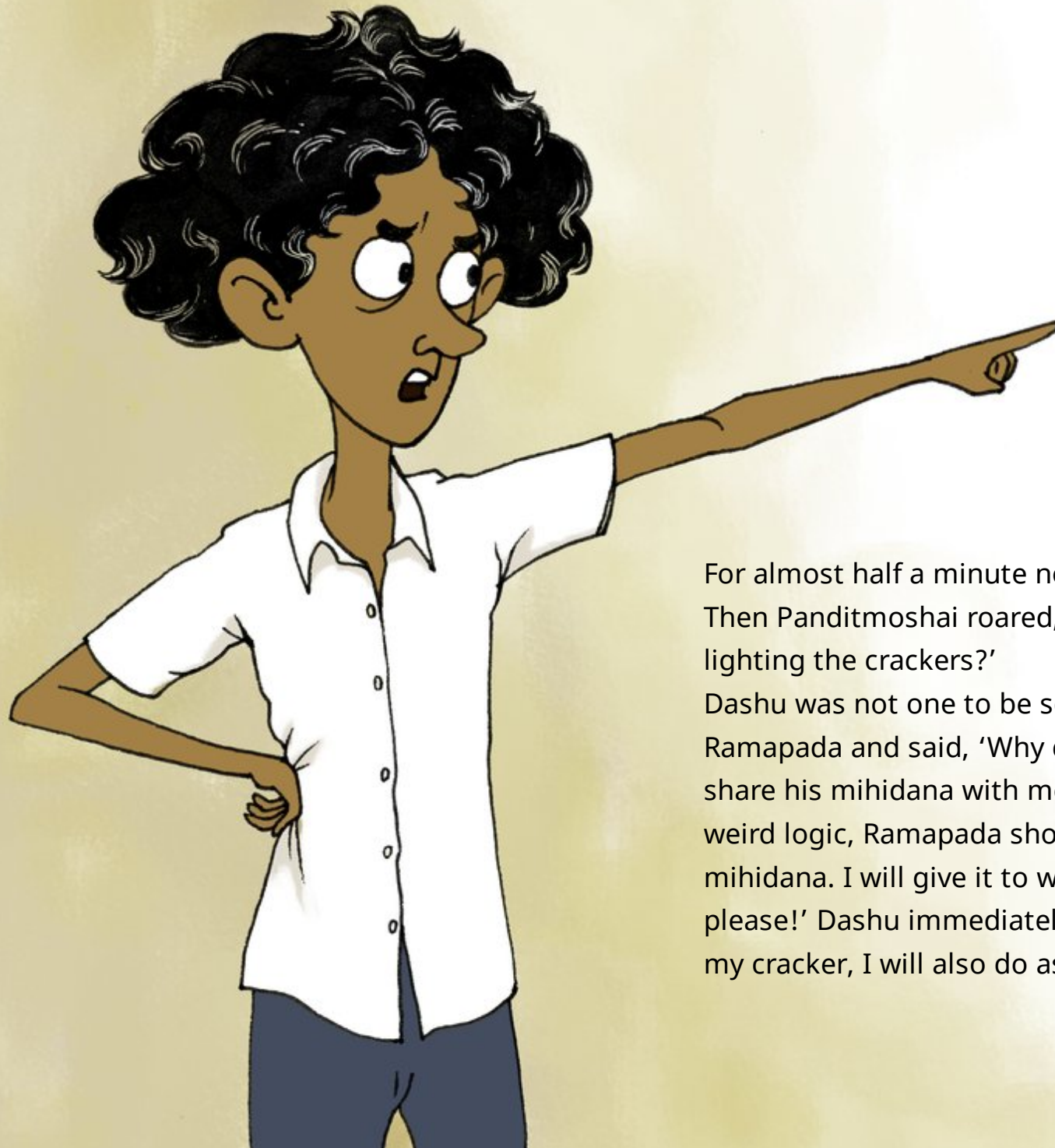
Panditmoshai quickly changed his tune. 'And what were you doing? While they were all playing?'

Dashu was not at all scared. 'Oh I was lighting the crackers, of course!'

Everyone stared at him. What was the boy saying!







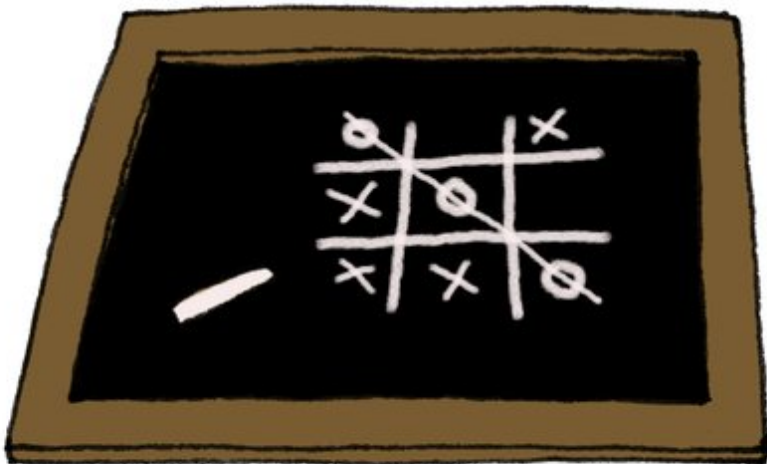
For almost half a minute no one said anything. Then Panditmoshai roared, 'Why were you lighting the crackers?'

Dashu was not one to be scared. He pointed to Ramapada and said, 'Why did he not want to share his mihidana with me?' Hearing this weird logic, Ramapada shouted back, 'It's my mihidana. I will give it to whoever I please!' Dashu immediately replied, 'Then it is my cracker, I will also do as I please.'

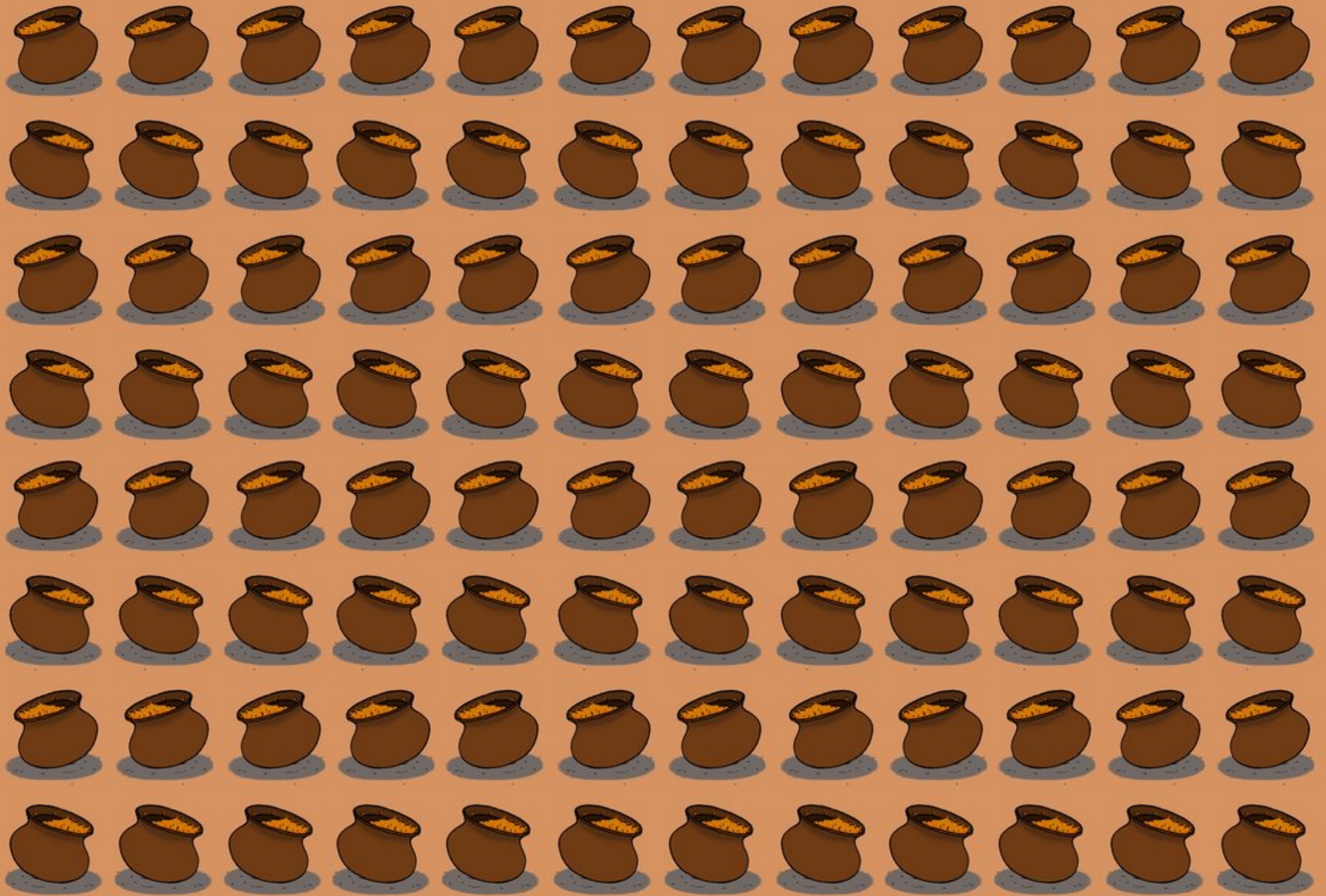


Who can argue with such a crazy person? All the teachers gave us a last few rounds of scolding and left for their classrooms. Because Dashu is 'The Crazy One', he was not punished. After school was done, we all tried to explain to Dashu why he was wrong. But he just did not agree. He said, 'My crackers, Ramapada's pot of sweets. If I am to blame, Ramapada has to share it too. He should have had his ears boxed. *Bas!*'

*\*\*Bas: Here, can be loosely translated as 'that's it!' Generally used to end an argument abruptly.*









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# Crackers in a Pot

(English)

It is Ramapada's birthday, Dashu's greatest rival in school. Ramapada walks in with a pot filled with delicious sweets and shares them with everyone but Dashu. Dashu isn't known to be crazy for no reason! What prank does Dashu come up with in return this time?

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.



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