

FAMOUS WITS OF AKBER & BIRBAL



SAHNI'S CLASSICS

Famous wits of

AKBAR

AND

BIRBAL

Adapted by

Subash Sharma

SAHNI PUBLICATIONS

E 4/26, Model Town,
DELHI-110009

Publishers :

SAHNI PUBLICATIONS

E4/26 Model Town

Delhi 110009

Phone : 7136114

7434717,

Edition 1995

Type-set at : Sita Composers Pvt. Ltd.,
A1, Parwana Vihar, Sector 9, Rohini, Delhi 110085.
Tel 7269309

Printed at : **S. V. OFFSET WORKS**
Kartar Nagar, Delhi-110053

Contents

The Palace Is An Inn	5
The Pitcher of Wisdom	8
The Fair Judgement	12
The Emperor Versus God Indra	16
A Daughter's Father is Never Happy	19
The Subtle Comparison	23
The Magic Wand	25
Donkeys Don't Chew Tobacco	28
The Population of Pigeons	29
The Reunion	30
The Taste of the Mango	34
The Cunning Barber Vanquished	37
Lime's Antidote	44
How many Men and Women in the World ? . . .	48
The Recovery of Money	52
The Thought in the Courtiers' Minds	56
The Thief Nabbed	58
Two Months' One Month	65
The Presence of Mind	66
The Loyal Birbal	67
Akbar Turns Lord Ram	69
Why Camel's Neck is Curved	70

Heat By Viewing At It	71
The Human Weakness	74
The Eunuchs' Problem	78
Tit For Tat	81
The Commission Agent	84
The Divine Music	87
The Liquor's Effect	93
The Poetic Justice	99
The Lion's Release	105
The Missing Mohur	109

The Palace Is An Inn

Once Akbar passed strict orders that no one should take shelter near the parapet wall of the emperor's residence. He had to pass this order because many persons, especially the roving mendicants were found taking shelter in the cool surroundings of the emperor's residence. This order created a furore among the mendicants. When Birbal came to know about it he was rather unhappy as this order tarnished the benevolent image of the emperor.

So, one day, disguising himself as a mendicant Birbal reached near the emperor's palace and reclined on the low parapet wall of the emperor's private palace. When the guards posted there requested the mendicant to go away, Birbal didn't budge. Since the palace sentries had been instructed not to harrass holy men in any manner, they could not do much except repeatedly requesting the mendicant to move away. When the mendicant did not heed to their requests they waited for the emperor's return who had gone to have a stroll.

When the emperor returned, he saw a mendicant resting against the boundary wall of the palace. Akbar was annoyed at the temerity of the mendicants. The



sentries told the emperor that despite their best efforts the mendicant did not move away.

The emperor was furious. He went near the mendicant and roared. "Hey... you, sprawled near the palace of my residence. What do you think the palace to be a public inn where all could come and recline against the parapet of my palace's boundary wall."

The disguised Birbal merely looked at the emperor and questioned in an unruffled manner: "Who was staying in this palace before you occupied it?"

"My father, the emperor Humayun," replied the emperor.

"And before him," asked the mendicant.

"My grandfather, the emperor Babar," replied the emperor.

"And before him," asked the mendicant once again.

"Well, there lived the Lodi King Ibrahim Lodi, whom my grandfather defeated him in the pitched battle," the emperor replied with a peevish look. He was now losing temper at the silly questions being asked by the curious mendicant.

"It means many persons were occupying the palace before you moved in," said the mendicant in a firm tone. "Then how can you call this palace exclusively yours. It is a veritable inn or a Dharamshala!" "What do you mean? How it can be?" asked the emperor sternly.

"Don't we call that place to be an inn or Dharamshala where people come and stay for a short while. In fact the whole world is an inn where people come and stay before their departure to the final abode. What is your private property or your personal treasure in this transient, fey and unreal world?"

The wise emperor was immensely pleased with the mendicant's explanation. Suddenly the emperor looked closely at the face of the mendicant and was delighted to see Birbal standing before him in the guise of a mendicant. The emperor said happily: "Thanks a lot, my dear friend, for opening the inner eye of my mind. There is nothing permanent in this temporal world."

The Pitcher of Wisdom

Once the emperor grew unhappy with Birbal and ordered him to leave his empire. Birbal quietly complied with the order and went to live in a remote village.

After some days, the emperor received an epistle from one of the Rajas, a knight in his large empire, which read:—"Please send a pitcherful of wisdom."

The emperor was surprised to receive such a request from his regal subordinates. If Akbar failed to fulfill this demand it would cast a slur on his reputation as the most powerful emperor in the world who had everything. But 'a pitcherful of wisdom!' How could he procure it! And first of all: What it meant?

The emperor was distressed and repented his banishing Birbal from his kingdom. Though he despatched his messengers to find the whereabouts of Birbal, all came back disappointed.

And thus, emperor missed Birbal very much. "If only Birbal were here to-day," he thought.

While thinking continuously to contact Birbal, he hit upon a plan. The next day, the emperor despatched a goat to each of the village under his rule and requested each headman of the villages: "Keep the goat with you

for a month and feed him at my cost. Remember to send it back to me exactly after a month. But make sure that the goat neither gains nor loses her weight. If it happened so, you shall be punished."

All the beadmen of the villages who received the order were flabbergasted at this royal order.

When Birbal, hiding in a remote village, heard about this queer royal order, he at once understood that the emperor was out to trace him.

Then, quietly in the night, he went to the headman of the village of his stay and said: "Mister, I am grateful to you to have allowed to stay in your village anonymously. In return, I wish to help you out from the present predicament. I learnt your emperor has sent a goat to keep it with you for one full month. It is to be fed from the money sent to you from the royal treasury. But I also learnt that that goat should neither gain nor lose her weight during the period she stays with you. Is it correct?"

"Yes, absolutely. I am surprised to receive such a queer royal order. How it is possible? If she falls ill or the fodder here doesn't suit her, she is bound to lose weight. And if our village climate and the fresh leaves are to the goat's liking she might gain in weight. I don't think in either case I can keep her weight standstill. It is impossible!"

"It is possible," assured Birbal. "Do as I, advise you."

"Yes, I'd do that. Please tell me the trick to keep her weight constant. I'd be relieved of the great burden."

"Give the goat her food in adequate measure so that she doesn't starve and lose weight."

"That's not difficult," admitted the headman. "But surely such sort of feeding is likely to increase her weight. How to control it, too."

"I'll tell you how to reduce her enhanced weight or to keep her weight constant," said Birbal: "After she has had her fill of the belly, tie her before the cage of the tiger. The constant state of consternation wouldn't let her add to her weight."

"Wow! It is a great ruse," said the headman in exultation.

The headman obediently followed Birbal's advice verbatim. When the stipulated period of one month was over, he sent the goat back to emperor.

While scrutinising the weight of these four-footers, Akbar only found one goat with no change in her weight whatsoever. The emperor immediately sent his messenger to the headman of the village that particular goat had come from, and ordered him to allow Birbal come back to him pronto.

When Birbal got the message he was delighted to go back to the emperor. Birbal immediately understood that the emperor had employed the goat trick to fetch him back, for he must have confronted a tricky problem

And Birbal was absolutely right. For the moment he reached at the outskirts of the Mughal capital, Agra, he met a royal messenger sent to bring Birbal to the emperor without any delay.

The emperor put before Birbal the letter he had from his one of the subjugated kings.

On seeing the letter, Birbal said: "Yes, we can certainly send him a pitcherful of wisdom."

Birbal then asked his gardener to get him a seed of the pump-kin and sowed it in the earth spread inside the earthen pitcher.

In a couple of days time, the seed got the root and the pumpkin started to grow under the earthen pitcher.

When the pumpkin grew to its full growth, it got stuck up at the mouth of the pitcher because of its size. Then Birbal cut it out from the creeping plant, and closing the pot tightly with a cloth, he brought it before the emperor and said: "Your Majesty, here is your pitcher of wisdom. Now you can send it to the raja with this note: 'The accompanying pot contains the pitcher of wisdom you asked for. Please take it out and return the empty vessel. Make sure you neither crush the vessel to take out the fruit nor mesh the contents inside to take it out. In case you fail to prevent such an eventuality then send us a lakh of gold mohurs or get ready to face the royal army.'"

The raja shook with fright the moment he received the letter. He at once went to the emperor and fell at his feet. There and then he took a vow to never challenge the wit of the royal court of the emperor.

The Fair Judgement

Once Birbal was sitting in the private chamber of the Emperor and they were discussing the penal code of the Mughal Emperor. Birbal said: "Your Majesty! The basic fallacy in all the penal codes is that they don't recognise the individual nature of the culprit. All are treated at par in the eyes of the law. But this is not true with nature. Each one has his or her own limitation and distinct reaction to the punishment meted out to the culprit." The emperor however, disagreed with Birbal and said: "The one who commits a crime has similar reaction to the punishment and hence similar mentality. A thief is a thief irrespective of his individual nature and sensitivity. It is for this reason that the law treats all as equals." But when Birbal insisted, Emperor Akbar acquiesced to Birbal's request and summoned the Kazi (the justice) to say : "Bring all the persons held on a theft charge tomorrow to my court. I would myself punish them."

The day-after-tomorrow the Kazi brought four persons held for the theft charge before the emperor, who asked Birbal to punish them suitably. Birbal studied the records of those persons and began to award them punishment. He only severely reprimanded the first person and then let him go. To the second, he said,

"Ain't you ashamed of yourself." He then asked the executioner to give that person three lashes and dismiss him. To the third person he awarded fifty lashes. When the fourth person's turn came, Birbal said: "Give him a hundred lashes, blacken his face and shave off his head. Then make him seated on the donkey with his face turn backwards and take him through all the streets of the town so that this punishment may act as deterrent to other potential criminals."

All the courtiers present in the royal court were surprised at this punishment meted out to the four persons when their offence was similar. They led their delegation to the emperor and complained about this discriminating punishment awarded by Birbal. The emperor then asked Birbal: "Birbal, you are found wanting in awarding the suitable punishment to these four persons. When their offence was the same why did you punish them this way? Didn't they warrant the same punishment for similar offence. After all, all the four were found committing theft."

Birbal courteously replied: "Your Majesty! I had checked their records. The first one was a shop-keeper, now fallen on evil days. The second one was a poor farmer who came to the town to earn his living but was jobless for past three days. The third one was a pick-pocket and the fourth one a hardened criminal, who was earlier also held for various crimes. I think the punishment for the criminals should act as a deterrent to prevent them indulging in such activities. And I think I have achieved this purpose. Still, I have sent

my sleuths to find out the reactions of the four persons punished by me. They would report after a month. Then we can discuss the matter again." The emperor allowed him the time for investigation and the court adjourned.

After a month Birbal himself went to the emperor with the reports. The emperor was holding the court. Birbal bowed to him respectfully and said: "Your Majesty, the reports on the reactions of the four persons have come on. I have brought them for your kind perusal." The emperor asked them to be read aloud. The reports revealed that the first person who was only reprimanded left the city for good. The second one who received sharp rebuke and three lashes confined himself in his house for the full month and did not come out in sheer repentance. The third person, who received fifty lashes did not come out of his house for a full week. The fourth one who was punished rather severely reacted in an absolutely remorseless manner. When, with his head shaved off, face blackened and sitting astride on a donkey, he happened to reach before his house in his round of the city, he saw his wife standing on the roof and curiously looking at him like many other curious onlookers. She could not recognise her husband in the latter's guise of dishonour. But that fellow was undaunted by the humiliations he was undergoing. He yelled from his position on the donkey and said to his wife: "Hey, don't you recognise me? I'm your husband. Don't be nervous seeing me in my present plight. The round of the city is about to be completed. I'd soon come, washing

my face clean. In the meantime you prepare my food and keep it ready. I am awfully hungry!"

Finishing the report, Birbal said: "Your Majesty, see the different reactions of the persons punished for the same offence. That is why I was saying that we must have provision for the individual nature of the criminal while devising our penal code." The emperor applauded Birbal for his fair judgment. All the courtiers of the royal court were amazed at Birbal's quick insight into the psychology of man.

The Emperor Versus God Indra

The emperor was quite fond of poetry. Every fifteenth day he would invite the high class poets of all languages for a poetic symposium. Once during the recital of poems, a poet asserted that Emperor Akbar was greater than even the Lord of Heavens, Indra.

The emperor, of course, did not say anything, then. But after a few days he did express his heart-felt feeling to his favourite mate Birbal. "Birbal", the Emperor said, "I did not like the comparison made by that poet the other day in the poetic symposium. Well, there is limit to psychophancy. He says I am greater than even Lord Indra. Can any one tell me how it can be so?" There the other courtiers of Emperor Akbar were also present when the emperor put this question. None could venture a plausible explanation. Then Akbar looked sternly towards Birbal who came forward and said: "Your Majesty! Whatever the poet said was not untrue. Even a child would tell you how you are greater and more massive than the Chief of Gods and emperor of the heaven, Indra."

"Birbal, are you serious? I don't think it is so obvious otherwise all my courtiers would have said so.

Since you are more intelligent than them, you must have your reason of justifying that poet's claim."

"Your Majesty, it is like this. When the Lord Almighty wanted to know who was greater between the ruler of the earth and the ruler of the heavens, he put both of them in a scale to weigh them. Because of the massive or greater weight, the hand of the big scale on which you were placed came down and Lord Indra's side went up, thus making him the ruler of the lighter and smaller empire." Looking agape at this blatant psychophancy, one of the courtiers interjected, quite peevishly: "That means our Emperor is even bigger than the gods!"

"Of course, he is," asserted Birbal. Even God won't be able to do what our Emperor will."

"Don't talk non-sense, Birbal," the Emperor said impatiently, "I think you have lost your brains today."

"No, Your Majesty! I know what I'm saying and I can prove the veracity of my statement."

"Then do it now. Let me see how you make me even more competent than God." The emperor said disdainfully.

"Your Majesty. You can always banish a person whenever you want?"

"Yes, if the person's offence warrants this punishment I can always do." The emperor agreed.

"And suppose if the Lord Almighty wants to banish a person, can he? God owns the whole of the universe. No place whether inhabited by beings or not, animate

or inanimate, can he free from his influence. Not an inch of space on the Universe which is not under him. In the circumstances, how can He banish anyone. So, here, my Lord, you score a point over God."

The emperor let out a guffaw at the very cogent analysis of Birbal to stress his point home even if it appeared implausible. The beaming Birbal lowed indulgently.

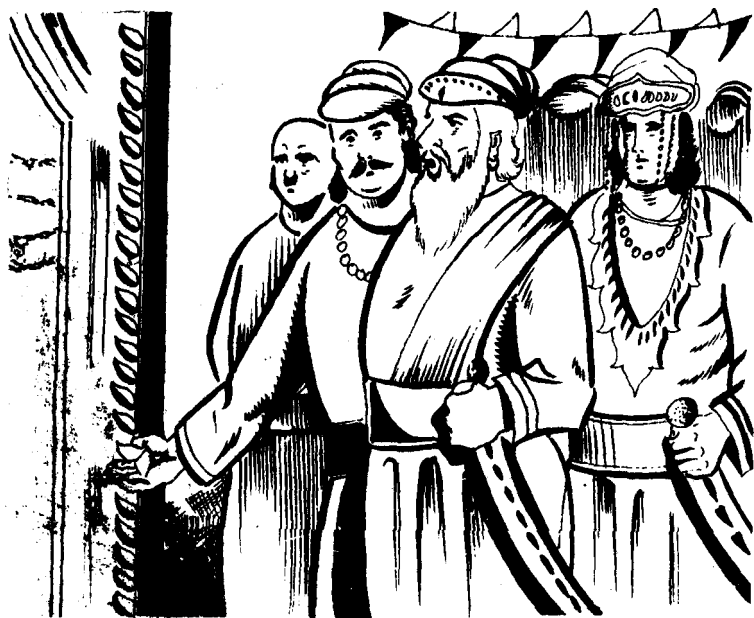
A Daughter's Father is Never Happy

Once when Birbal reached the Royal Court, the Emperor was surprised to see his favourite Minister looking worried and downcast. He had his moustaches drooping down instead of being curled up like Raja Birbal always kept them. Since the change in Raja Birbal's appearance and demeanour was quite conspicuous, the Emperor could not help asking: "What's the matter, Birbal? You look so sad and worried. What happened?"

"Your Majesty, I am a worried man now. My wife gave birth to a daughter yesterday night. And your Highness, a daughter's father is never a happy man in my community!"

"No, Birbal! I do not agree with what you say," declared the Emperor. "There is nothing wrong in being a daughter's father. And I know somewhat about your Hindu Community. I have many kings who are also father of a daughter but they are quite happy!"

"Sarkar! Your Goodself might be having only superficial knowledge about my community and those other Hindu kings. Our society is such that a



daughter's father is not allowed to be happy!" replied Birbal rather in a matter-of-fact way.

"What are those constraints," asked the Emperor, "which makes a daughter's father unhappy?" "You know, My Lord, how difficult it is in my community to find a good groom and a good house. Whatever one does, the groom's father will definitely find some defect in the arrangements made by a daughter's (bride's) father. Hence, right since her birth, a daughter's father busies himself to provide foolproof arrangement for his daughter's marriage but still there remains something to be done. Even after the

daughter's marriage, the father can't rest in peace. That is why I am worried. Now I can't curl up my moustaches ever agains as I am a daughter's father!"

The Emperor advised Birbal to shed off his worries. "Birbal, rest assured. I would do everything to make the arrangements for your daughter's marriage stay foolproof. Why should you worry when you have the support of the Mughal Empire!"

Although the Emperor did his best to boost Birbal's morale, Birbal could not feel tansion-free.

Gradually the days began to pass by and the daughter turned nubile. Now the Emperor asked Birbal to find a groom for his daughter. After many months' search, they could select a groom. Engagement was settled and the date was finalised. Preparation for the marriage began. Since the Emperor had given orders to treat the barat very lavishly and make all the arrangements absolutely fool-proof, nothing was found wanting in that great arrangement. The baratis were given a rousing welcome and the groom was offered tons of gold and other ornaments. Not only this, by the Emperor's especial orders, the baratis were requested to take as many gold mohurs as their two hands could fish out from a gold pitcher kept at the exit of the dining place. Every ceremony passed off peacefully as per schedule and the daughter was happily married off. After the departure of the Barat, Akbar summoned Birbal to the Dewan-i-Khas in Agra. When Birbal came, he again had his moustaches drooping and not curled up.

Akbar said: "Birbal..! Now every ceremony of the marriage is over and the barat too has departed. According to the reports I have received from my sleuths, the whole group of the marriage party went back supremely satisfied. The groom and the groom's father were also very happy. Since you have satisfied them totally, you must keep your moustacheds curled up. Now you are a daughter's happy father!. "No, I am not, Your Highness!" answered Birbal in an unhappy voice: "I can't curl up my moustaches, Sarkar!" There were many persons who remained still dissatisfied!"

"What? Even after all this fool-proof arrangement?" exclaimed Akbar with a touch of surprise.

"Yes, My Lord!" I heard some baratis utter: "The bride's father appears to be a miserly person. He deliberately kept the gold pitcher with a narrow mouth. With the result, it was difficult to put in both hands. Thus, it was a play to prevent us taking as much gold mohurs as we desired!" Birbal narrated all that he had heard.

The Emperor was speechless for a second, and then said:

"You are right Birbal. A daughter's father is never a happy person.

The Subtle Comparison

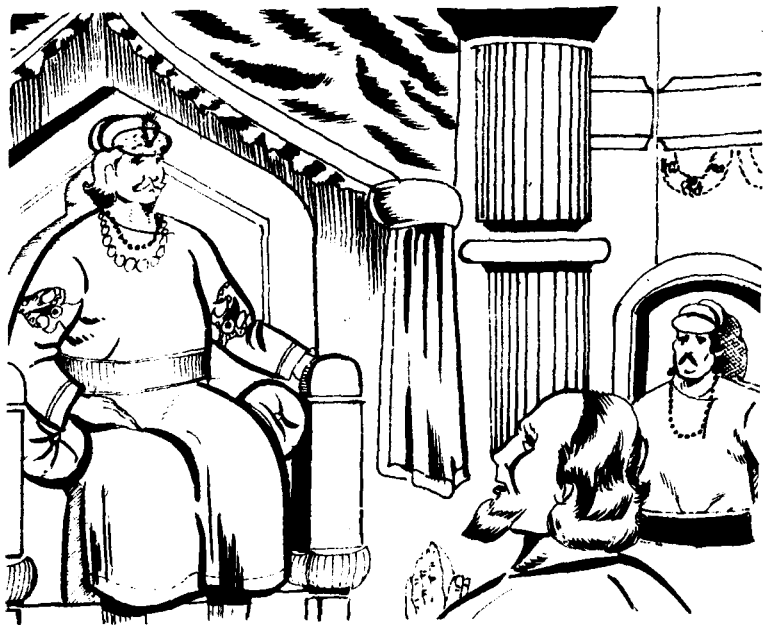
Once Birbal had gone to the Emperor of Iran, with Abul- Fazal, another wise-man among the Emperor Akbar's court's Nine Jewels. There while exchanging humilities, Birbal was supposed to have compared the Iran's emperor's reign to the full moon's glory and that of the emperor Akbar's to the new moon. Abul-Fazal did not like the comparison. He thought that by saying so Birbal had belittled the status of Akbar, the great emperor. When they returned from their sojourn of Iran, Abul-Fazal promptly reported the matter to Akbar, giving reference of the derogative comparison Birbal used to humiliate his Lord Majesty's pride. Akbar blew up when he heard about it. At once he summoned Birbal and said in a threatening voice: "So raja Birbal thinks my rule to be comparable with the tiny new moon and that of the Iran's emperor to the full moon! In what way the raja thinks I'm inferior to that Iranian Emperor. I have my empire five times bigger and own riches that no emperor in the world can hope to possess. The legendary Karoon's treasure would pale into insignificance if compared with my treasure. Can you explain as to what made you commit such a blunder. I'm shocked that the most intelligent man in my empire should commit such a mistake."

All this while Birbal was smiling quietly, seeing which Abul-Fazal was convinced that Birbal would soon be sent to the gallows. When the emperour's query ceased, Birbal made his throat clear to reply the Master. Birbal said: "Your Majesty, I have not committed any felony. I still believe what I said was the fair comparison between the two empires. The full moon is the last stage of moon's growth. It can't grow any further. That is, the empire of Iran is at its zenith. That is the highest stage of exaltation to which the Iranian emperor can aspire. While the new moon is just the beginning of the growth of the moon. That is, your empire has full potential to grow still bigger. If at the highest point of its exaltation the Iranian empire pales into insignificance before your new moon empire, then, O Majesty, judge yourself who was slighted or belittled. The complaint of the derogatory reference should have come from the Iranian Emperor and not from your Majesty, the Mightiest Emperor of the East."

While Birbal was giving his explanation. Akbar was beginning to understand the subtle comparison that Birbal made. Akbar immediately rose and embraced his friend for the subtle comparison he made. Indeed the new-moon was always better than the Full-moon, as far as growth and advancement of an empire was concerned.

The Magic Wand

Birbal was quite renowned for his sharp intelligence and brilliant wit. Once when Emperor Akbar was holding his royal Court, there came a wealthy merchant with a complaint: "Your Majesty, a pouch-ful of my gold mohurs are missing from my house. I kept it securely in my almirah in the night but in the morning I didn't find it there. There is nobody in my house except my four trusted loyal servants. I suspect one of them has stolen the pouch. But I don't want the innocents to be punished. All of them pretend their ignorance and it is difficult for me to nab the culprit. If I physically thrash each of them, I might lose my three trusted servants as they would surely resign in protest. I want only the thief to be nabbed without resorting to physical violence. What should I do? I definitely want my mohurs back as they are worth a fortune." The emperor said, "Well, it is a complicated case. The normal penal procedure is to physically thrash and torture each of them to make the real culprit confess his guilt. But that would mean resorting to violence. Then the emperor looked meaningfully at Birbal, sitting there in the Court, and said: "Birbal, I refer this case to you. You solve the case and find the real culprit, without



punishing the innocent." Birbal said: "Very well, My Lord."

Then Birbal made enquiries about the four servants and summoned them to his private chamber. When each of the servants have recorded their statement pleading not guilty, Birbal said: "Well, it would have been much better had the culprit owned his guilt. Anyway, I would have to use my magic wands to solve the problem." Then Birbal gave each of the servants a wand, saying: "Don't treat it as an ordinary wand. All of you should keep it with you for the night

and bring it back to me in the morning. The special quality of these wands is, they would increase their length by three inches if possessed by a thief during the night." Saying so Birbal dismissed them.

The four servants repaired to their houses with the wands. The real thief among them thought of a trick to hoodwink Birbal. He thought that he would cut the wand by three inches so that even if it grew by that much length during the night he wouldn't be caught. So he cut it by three inches.

The next morning, the four servants reached before Birbal along with their wands. Birbal could immediately spot the thief. In fact there was nothing 'magic' in the wands. They were just ordinary stics. But the guilty consciens of the culprit exposed him. The Emperor Akbar immediately summoned the thief and asked him to disclose the place where he had hidden the mohurs.

The thief was constrained to admit his guilt and the merchant got back his mohurs. All the courtiers of the royal court showered accolades of praises on Birbal who could find the culprit without resorting to violence.

Donkeys Don't Chew Tobacco



Once Emperor Akbar and Birbal were having their morning stroll on the bank of the river Yamuna in Agra. The emperor espied a donkey standing in the field of tobacco. Since Akbar knew about Birbal's fondness of chewing tobacco, he said sarcastically: "Look there, Birbal! The donkey is standing amidst the field of tobacco but not even sniffing at the tobacco leaves. Even donkeys don't chew tobacco!" Birbal added wryly: 'Yes, Your Majesty! The donkey don't chew tobacco!!'

The Population of Pigeons

One day when the emperor occupied his throne in the Court, he shot out a question: "How many crows are there in the city of Agra?"

All the persons in the Court were surprised at such an unusual enquiry. When none could essay an answer, the emperor looked at Birbal. Birbal immediately replied: "Twenty thousand five hundred and nine!"

"Suppose there are more pigeons than you have stated," the emperor questioned again.

"In that case," remarked Birbal: "Some of their relatives must have come to meet their brethren!" "And if they are less," the emperor again asked. "Then your Majesty," Birbal declared, "the city dwelling pigeons must have gone to meet their relatives else where!"

The Reunion

Once the Emperor was very much displeased with his favourite Minister, Birbal, and ordered his exile from Agra. Birbal quietly went out of Agra and began to live in a small village incognito.

There, the Emperor began to miss Birbal rather badly. He had become so used to Birbal's company that he felt discomfited by Birbal's absence. He, then, despatched his sleuths all over the empire to search for Birbal. But Birbal was no where to be found. The Emperor was sorry but he was now helpless as Birbal could not be traced.

One day, he was holding his court when the sentry said: "Your Lordship! A mendicant has come at the gate and willing to be brought before you. He had his two disciples who claimed that their guru was most intelligent man in the world and an erudite scholar". "Since the Emperor was on the look out for such a man to fill the post previously occupied by Birbal, he immediately ordered the sentry to bring that ascetic to his court.

When the ascetic, a man with long tendril locks and brilliant sharp eyes, reached inside the court, the Emperor said:

"O Holy Ascetic, I have heard that you are the most intelligent person in the world. To test your claim I'd ask my senior courtiers to ask questions from you. If you give their correct answer, I'd give you lots of costly things as gifts from the side of the empire and should you like, you might get an exalted post of a Minister in my Royal Court. But if you fail to do so, you shall be beheaded forthwith. Are you willing to take up the test?"

"By all means, Emperor! I'd be delighted to answer your courtiers' questions. But at the outset I wish to make it clear that I don't claim to be the most intelligent person in the world, but people say so. I'm not very much enamoured to undergo the test to prove my intelligence either. But since I enjoy enlightening the people by answering their questions, I'd gladly take up the test."

First one to ask question from the mendicant was Raja Todarmal.

"Who's the best friend of a person in the world?"

"His discretion!"

"What's the best thing in the world?" Faizy, the other 'jewel' asked.

"Knowledge!" replied the mendicant.

"Which is the shallowest pit in the world?" Abul Fazal asked.

"A woman's heart!" replied the mendicant nonchallantly.

"What's that thing which can't be recovered after it is lost?"

"Life!"

"How far the world extends?"

"Upto one's death!"

All were mightily impressed by the mendicant's answers. Then the Emperor asked his famous courtier and the renowned musician Tansen to ask questions.

"What is imperishable in music?"

"The Notes!"

"What sounds sweetest in the depth of night?"

"Prayer to God!"

Now the Emperor asked Raja Mansingh, the ruler of Jaipur and the Commandant-in-chief of the Mughal forces to ask question.

"With what can you compare the wrath of the Emperor?"

"It is like the scolding fire of the lightning!"

"What sustains one's power best?"

"One's courage!"

"What moves faster than the wind?"

"The human imagination!"

"What's sweetest in the world?"

"A child's smile!"

Now all the courtiers admitted the mendicant's superior intelligence. The Emperor then himself decided to ask certain questions from that super intelligent person.

"What's the most essential element in running a state?"

"Diplomacy!"

"Who is the greatest enemy of a king?"

"His selfishness!"

Now the Emperor, too, was convinced of the mendicant's intelligence. Then Akbar offered an exalted seat to the mendicant in his court. Then the Emperor asked.

"Tell me, O Ascetic? Do you have any special power as the ascetics in India are believed to be endowed with?"

"Yes, I have!" replied the ascetic and added, "I can produce any person you want to meet in a trice, before you!"

Then Akbar said: "Produce my ex-Minister, Raja Birbal, if you can." The Emperor thought to utilise the mendicant's especial power for his personal benefit.

But, instead of answering the question, the mendicant began to rub his face and pull at his beard and hair. And lo and behold, Raja Birbal's familiar face emerged from the maize of hair! Akbar was delighted to find his old and lost friend before him. He immediately said: "I had recognised you Birbal, and that's why I asked this question."

The court was adjourned then, and the Emperor went for a stroll in the company of his favourite Minister.

The Taste of the Mango



Once Emperor Akbar sent Birbal on deputation to the Emperor of Iran with a basketful of the choicest mangoes. Since the journey was hazardous and long, when Birbal reached Teheran, the capital of Iran, the mangoes had turned rotten. Now Birbal was in a great fix. For mangoes were not available in Iran and it was impossible to fetch them again from India. Then Birbal thought of a trick. He went to the royal court of Iran and said: "Your Majesty, Emperor Akbar has sent greetings for your welfare. He has too sent a special gift for you which I would present to you at the banquet

to-night." The Iranian Emperor readily accepted the invitation for the banquet and expectantly reached the palace where Birbal was stationed. When the party began, Birbal fed the emperor on the choicest dishes. The during the final course of the banquet, Birbal said: "Your Majesty! Now I present you the choicest and best fruit from India, sent especially for you." And he gestured his cook to bring the fruit. The other members of the delegation were surprised as to why Birbal committing this grave mistake of presenting the rotten managoes before the Iranian Emperor. The emperor tasted them and found them delightful. When the banquet ended, Birbal's assistant asked him: "Sir how could you make the rotten mangoes taste so delightfully?" Then Birbal disclosed his trick. He had the Iranian fruit 'Khubani' (a sort of peach) soaked in the saffron-flavoured sweet sugar juice and added the peel of the palatable mangoes in it. So when the Iranian Emperor tasted it, he could not feel he was eating an Iranian fruit because of the aroma of mango in it. The emperor sent his warm greetings to the Emperor Akbar and expressed his delight at eating a divine fruit.

Once when the Iranian emperor sent his man to India on a courtesy visit, the man was delighted to have tasted beautiful mangoes. On his way back, he thought of taking this king of fruits-mango, for his emperor. But again, owing to the hazard and the length of the journey the mangoes turned rotten. He went before his emperor and said: "My lord there in India I tasted a divine fruit and thought of bringing

some of them to you. But because of the long journey they all had turned rotten. Though I did not have the fruit with me, I can give you the feeling of that delightful taste." Then he asked for the scented sugar juice. Since he was not intelligent as Birbal was, he requested the emperor to suck at his beard soaked in that juice. The emperor got annoyed and asked him to be beheaded at his temerity to make the emperor suck at that fellow's beard. Obviously the mango whose taste he wanted to describe was the famous Langara mango of India whose pulp has more of the hairy substance in it.

Birbal was there when he heard about the Iranian emperor's order. He immediately rushed to that person's house and promised to save his life. Then he went to the Iranian emperor and requested hand-bound: "Sir, as you have in your scriptures, the beard of the devout adherent of Islam is also known as 'Khuda-ka-Noor' [The Divine Light of the Lord Almighty]. That is, a symbol of godly existence. When your messenger asked you to suck at his beard to describe the taste of the Indian mango, he merely requested you to kiss the light of God manifest through his face. I think that is the highest honour a subject of your empire can think of, offering to their emperor." The Iranian emperor was immensely pleased with Birbal's explanation and let that man go unpunished. This way Birbal saved that person's life in Iran.

The Cunning Barber Vanquished

There was a cunning barber in the emperor Akbar's private retinue. Owing to his sharp wit and scheming brain he had become the most favourite person of the emperor. The emperor would listen only to his advice, even when the senior ministers of the empire opined against it. With the result that barber began to enjoy the most enviable position after the emperor in the empire, to the great chagrin of the Rajas and exalted knights. Many a time the barber made the emperor punish an innocent person only because that fellow happen to defy the barber's order. It was much below their (Rajas') dignity to work under the cunning barber but they had no go as the emperor was under that wicked barber's total sway.

When the barber found even Birbal going against him, he thought of a ruse. One day when the royal court was in full session, the barber, who had just shaved and massaged the emperor and while doing so had convinced him to his superior uncanny powers, said: "Your Majesty! Yesterday, in the middle of the night I received a knock at my house. When I woke up and opened the gate I found a mendicant with

white flowing beard standing before my gate. I was surprised and felt the apprehension tickling my spine. Handbound, I asked the mendicant: "O Grand-sire, what has brought you here at such an odd hour." He said "Well, I am the sage Bhrigu. There is some serious problem emerging in the heavens. Since all the intelligent persons have assembled here on the earth, in your emperor's court, we are facing the crisis of intelligence in the heavens. The gods are becoming dunces like the donkeys, the Apsaras behaving like the spoilt girls and the Gandharvas like the quarrelsome pimps. Even the chief of gods, Indra has to bribe the Apsaras and Gandharvas to have the ritual dance and music session performed before the commencement of the divine court. The fire-god and the water-god are daggers drawn at each other. Wherever there is water in the heavens the fire-god sends his flames to evaporate it. A grave calamity has broken loose in the heavens. The Grand-sire Brahma has asked me to get this message conveyed to your emperor that the emperor should soon despatch one of the most intelligent person in the royal court to the heavens at least for two months. It is hoped by the Grand-sire that within that period the intelligence of the most intelligent person in the royal court on the earth would be able to bring peace and order in the heavens. He also added that this job was to be completed as soon as possible or the Grand-sire would be forced to alter the emperor's destiny and might turn him to a pauper."

The entire court was stunned to hear this apparently unbelievable account given by the barber. People

began to exchange notes with each other in subdued voice. Since the account carried the threat to the emperor's position, Akbar became pale in apprehension. He immediately declared: "Tomorrow the most intelligent person of the court will have to depart for the heavens. Now all of you should come out with your suggestion to select the most intelligent person in the court." Since Birbal was known for his sharp wit and intelligence, it was his name that headed the list of the intelligent persons in the court. But the problem arose how to send him to the heavens just for two months. Normally a noble person goes to the heaven after his death. Then how can he be back after two months. The barber said: "I forgot to tell you that the sage also told me how to send the most intelligent person to heavens for just two months. He said that there existed an old well near the northern Ghat of Yamuna. The person should enter the well on the coming full moon day. Exactly after two months that person would emerge out of the same well when the job in the heaven is accomplished."

Whereupon the emperor declared: "Birbal, be ready to enter the well on the coming full-moon day exactly at the mid- night."

Birbal was convinced that this trap had been laid by the barber to get rid of Birbal. For entering the old well full of snakes and scorpions meant sure death. That the sojourn in the heavens was just for two months was the attempt made by the barber to give authenticity to his vision. Birbal knew that the whole plot was devised to make him die. But Birbal was

helpless before the royal order. Still he made schemes to escape this ghastly plot of the cunning barber.

That very night Birbal asked his trusted men to go quietly and clean the well. He also instructed them to make a tunnel to safety from the well.

After a few days when the appointed day dawned, Birbal bade adieu to the emperor and his other colleagues and set out to bring order in the heavens. The king caste a huge Tilak on the forehead of Birbal and put a 'crown of intelligence' on his head. Although the emperor was not very happy at parting company with Birbal for two long months, he had no guts to disobey the divine order, the defiance of which threatened his own existence.

So, Birbal set out for his heavenly journey and exactly at the midnight he entered the well. Jumping in the well, he reached down below and soon came out by the secret tunnel he had got constructed to thwart the move of the cunning barber to kill him.

Coming out of the well, Birbal repaired to his secret hide-out, planned in advance by him. There, in the court, the barber was besides himself with delight having got rid of Birbal. Now he had unfettered right in the empire. Since the emperor was in his complete sway, the barber ruled the roost. The emperor missed Birbal's enlightened company. He eagerly awaited Birbal's return. The barber was convinced that Birbal was gone for ever for he knew that the well was veritably a death-well.

Birbal quietly passed the two months' period in his secret hide-out. Though he lived like a normal being, he neither shaved nor cut his nails. When the two months' period was about to be completed, he re-entered the tunnel and emerged out of the well at the appointed hour. The emperor, believing the diving order to be genuine, waited there expectantly. While the barber was convinced that Birbal wouldn't come alive from the well, he was bewildered and amazed to see Birbal emerging out of the well. The emperor was immensely pleased to see Birbal back. The slogans 'Long-live Raja Birbal' rent the atmosphere. The emperor embraced Birbal and all repaired to the fort amidst great enthusiasm and fanfare.

Reaching the fort, the emperor held his court and asked Birbal to relate his experiences in the heaven. Birbal said: "Your Majesty, the Lord Almighty's benign grace and my intelligence solved all the problems of the heaven and brought back peace and order there. The Grand-sire Brahma sent his blessings to you through me. There, Your Majesty, I also met your ancestors. All were happy there but they faced one problem. They could not trim their locks of hair and get their nails cut because there was no barber there at present. They presented a very filthy and dirty sight. The Grand-sire, Brahma has also asked me to request you to send your royal barber there. The situation there is so alarming that even the gods look like demons with their huge uncut nails and tendril, unkempt locks. The Creator Brahma sent this stern warning

to you: Either you send the best barber you have or you would face the dire consequences."

The emperor was again panicky. Then he asked: "For how many days the barber is required to be there?" Birbal said: "Your Majesty, he has to be there rather permanently for the hair and nails continue to grow and the need for the barber is rather of permanent nature. They said they were trying to get a good barber from other worlds also. If they can get one, it's good, otherwise, I am afraid, our barber friend has to be there for ever."

Now it was the turn of the barber to go panicky. He knew well that what Birbal was telling was all lies. But he had no guts to say so as he himself was the author of this conspiracy. His move boomranged upon him. The emperor then declared: "So my dear barber, be prepared to enter the well on the full-moon day exactly at the mid-night. As soon as I find another intelligent and capable barber, I'd send him to the heaven to bring you back to the mundane world."

In the meanwhile, Birbal had that secret tunnel from the well closed and again got the well filled with many snakes and scorpions. The barber was thinking of finding soon the way out from the well, without knowing that the secret tunnel had been closed. So when the barber entered the well, only his cries of agony and pain reached the persons standing outside the well. Soon the barber in the well expired of snakebite and asphyxiation.

The other ministers and senior knights of the royal court were delighted to get rid of that wicked barber. All praised the intelligence and sharp wit of Birbal who saved them from the ignominy of serving under a scheming barber.

Lime's Antidote

Though the emperor never chewed tobacco, he was fond of chewing betel-leaves prepared with scented catechu and lime. Often after meals he munched them with apparent relish.

One day when his usual 'Paan-maker' was ill, Akbar asked his son to prepare a betel for him. Since he was not an expert in making a betel-leaf with lime and catechu and unknowing the exact quantities of the ingredients, he unknowingly put little extra lime in the 'Paan' for the emperor. When the emperor ate it, the extra lime burnt a part of Akbar's tongue. The burn on the tongue proved so painful that it was difficult for the emperor to taste any salty dish. Akbar lost his temper and ordered: "Make this silly boy drink a full seer of raw lime tomorrow morning. Only then he would realise the gravity of his mistake!"

Now, raw lime is a very hot and injurious thing. When the boy heard about the emperor's order he grew panicky. Immediately he went to his ailing father and disclosed him the cruel order of the emperor. His father, too, was stunned with grave apprehension at knowing about the order. He thought that his young son's end was round the corner. For no one had any



guts to challenge the royal order and seek any amendment in it.

The ailing 'Paan-maker' and his son, then, went to the temple of their chosen deity, Lord Shiva, to make their final prayer. There, as the good luck would have it, they met Raja Birbal, who had also come there for his worship. As soon as the worship was over, the ailing 'Paan-maker' and his son fell flat at the feet of Birbal in utter supplication. Getting full details of the incident, the kind-hearted Birbal said: "Yes a seer of raw lime would definitely end your son's life. I advice

you to procure a seer of pure ghee. Before your son goes to the emperor to get the punishment, make him drink the entire quantity of ghee." Saying so, Birbal left.

The ailing 'Paan-maker' immediately went to a cowman and asked him to give a seer of pure ghee. Having bought ghee both father and son repaired to their home.

The day of punishment dawned. The son rose up from his bed and completing morning rituals he went to his father, the ailing 'Paan-maker'. Chanting the hymns praising Lord Shiva, he made his son drink the while lot of ghee. Then the son was summoned by the emperor.

"So you have arrived. Now drink up this whole seer of lime. This lesson would definitely teach you how to use lime in making your Pann."

The son of the ailing 'Pann-maker' drank the whole lot of lime. Though he felt like vomitting but he had no go, for it was the royal order.

When the punishment was over, the emperor sent one of his sleuths to report the condition of the culprit. The sleuth reported back, saying that the culprit appeared to have suffered not much of discomfiture. The emperor was quite surprised: "How it is possible. A seer of lime must have burnt the whole stomach of that boy. An you say he didn't suffer much. "The sleuth said: "Your Majesty, I have learnt that the boy drunk a special potion before drinking lime on the advice of Raja Birbal." The emperor then summoned Birbal and asked him to confirm whether the Pann-maker's

son ever approached him for his advice. "Yes, Your Majesty. I met them in the Shiva Temple." "And what potion you prescribed him to drink before drinking a seer of lime." The emperor enquired. "A seer of raw ghee. Because only pure raw ghee can douse off the heat likely to be generated by drinking a seer of lime." The emperor was quite pleased to know that Birbal's intelligence saved the life of the Pann-maker's son.

How many Men and Women in the World ?

The Emperor was talking to his favourite eunuch who bore a grudge against Birbal. Because he claimed to be more intelligent and quickwitted hence more deserving for the post of the favourite Minister of the Emperor. But it was not possible with Birbal around. So he used to be always on the look out, to belittle Birbal with whatever arguments he could weave.

So, that day, the Emperor, non-challantly praised Birbal, to the great chagrin of that eunuch. The eunuch lost his control and gave vent to his spleen against Birbal. In extreme rage he went on to say that Birbal was dumbwitted and his presence in the Royal Court was a blot on the reputation of the Mughal Empire. But the Emperor defended his contention, saying "I think Birbal is the most intelligent fellow that I've in my court. His shaprwit and repartees not only entertain me but solve some tricky problems in a trice. No one can match him in worldly wisdom. He is peerless."

"If he is that intelligent, Your Majesty," said the eunuch in a challenging voice, "then please ask him to answer my three simple questions. If he fails to

answer them, successfully, he must be dismissed from the Royal Service and his wealth must be forfeited."

The Emperor agreed to do so. But he was confident that his favourite Minister would not err in whatever riddles this dim-witted Khoja (eunuch) posed. The Khoja then posed the questions:

- "1. How many stars there are in the sky?
2. Which is the centre of the earth?
3. What's the number of men and women in the world separately?"

The Emperor then sent for Birbal and at the latter's arrival told him to solve the above mentioned problems. The Emperor did make it clear that if the Minister failed to offer correct solution to these problem, he might have to surrender his position in the Royal Court and all the riches that he had.

When Birbal heard the questions, he sought an hour's time to solve them. The Emperor readily gave him the desired time.

After an hour Birbal arrived with a robust ram and a huge nail.

He said to the Emperor: "Your Majesty! I've counted the number of stars in the sky. They are exactly thirty three crores, twenty nine lakhs, forty one thousand, none hundred and twenty four. But I think my learned friend Khoja Sahib won't be able to confirm it. It is a tedious and time consuming process to count them. Hence I've brought this ram to make his task easy. The ram has as many bristles on its body as

there are stars in the sky. He may count the bristles to confirm the number of stars in the heaven."

Then Birbal moved a few steps melodramatically, pretending to be lost in deep thought and mental calculation. Suddenly he stopped near a spot and marked the sign of a cross with the muddy chalk he had. Then he embedded the nail exactly on the cross-sign. Beaming, he announced: "Your Majesty, the answer to the second question! The spot where the nail is put into the ground marks the centre of the earth. If my erudite friend has any doubt, he might confirm it by all means!"

Well, it was impossible to confirm it, so the eunuch kept quiet.

"And the answer to the last question is rather difficult to give," admitted Birbal, causing a ripple of surprise in the entire court, to the great delight of the Khoja. "The problem becomes intricate owing to the presence of these eunuchs on the surface of the earth. They create confusion by sometimes claiming themselves to be males and sometimes females. Not until they are massacred or obliterated from the surface of the earth that a fool-proof answer to the question could be given," declared Birbal with a gleam of triumph in his eyes, and added: "Hence my request to you is, Your Highness, that they be massacred forthwith to end the confusion for ever!"

Birbal's ingenious reply stunned the eunuch population and pleased the Emperor. The rest of the

eunuchs began to curse the Khoja who posed such questions. The Khoja fell flat at the feet of Birbal and pleaded for mercy. Birbal magnanimously forgave them and accompanying the Emperor, went for his evening walk!

The Recovery of Money

Dhanpat was a very religious man. When he grew old, he thought of visiting the holy places. Since he had no sons, his going away from his house would have meant leaving his precious 1000 gold mohurs unprotected. So he went to his bosom friend Guljari, whom he met on the way, with the request: "Guljari! I want to go to the places of pilgrimage. Since it is risky to carry my all the wealth, I wish to deposit it with you. Hopefully, I would be back in a year. Then I would take it back from you." Guljari replied: "Dear Dhanpat, don't worry for the security of your wealth. I would keep it in my Tijori (Iron-safe). You can take it back whenever you want."

So with a light heart Dhanpat went to visit the holy places. When he returned after a full year, he straight away went to Guljari's place to get back his 'mohurs'. Guljari welcomed him enthusiastically and enquired about the details of his holy journey. Dhanpat told him about the religious places he had visited and then asked him to return his wealth. Guljari parried his question about money. When Dhanpat insisted, he said. "At present it is difficult to locate them. Come after two days". When Dhanpat went to him again after two days, Guljari came up again with some

excuse. A full month elapsed but Dhanpat could not get back his mohurs from Guljari. Now Guljari started saying that he neither received any thing from Dhanpat, nor he met him last year.

Suspecting his friend's intentions, Dhanpat decided to appeal against him in the royal court of Emperor Akbar. Akbar heard the case patiently and asked Birbal to help Dhanpat.

Birbal brought Dhanpat and heard the full details of the dispute. Then he sent for Guljari and heard his side of the case.

"Do you remember," Birbal asked Dhanpat, "the exact date and time when you gave your mohurs to Guljari."

"Yes sir," replied Dhanpat, "it was on the 10th days of the lunar month of Chaitra. I, actually, met him on the way."

"Can you produce any witness to corroborate your assertion?"

No, when I gave him the mohurs he was on his way to the city. We actually met in a mango orchard where no one was present except the mango trees."

"Under which specific tree the transaction took place."

"Under the huge mango tree in the middle of the orchard."

"Then you have a witness," Birbal said and asked Dhanpat to convey his message to the mango tree that Birbal wanted to see it immediately. Dhanpat was bewildered at this queer order. How could a tree become



a witness? Dhanpat thought Birbal had gone mad. But since the royal authority vested in Birbal, Dhanpat was forced to obey Birbal's orders. He immediately left for the mango tree.

While he was on way to bring the tree as his witness, Guljari was asked by Birbal to continue staying in the chamber of Birbal till Dhanpat returned.

An hour elapsed by there was no sign of Dhanpat. Getting peeved at this delay, Birbal said. "Damn this man. For a little job he is taking such a long time."

"He must not have covered half of the way as yet. The orchard is quite far off."

"I see," Birbal said and kept silent.

Dhanpat could return after two and half hours. He was quite tired and the look of bewilderment still registered at his face. He said to Birbal: "Sir I gave your message to the tree but it had no effect. Didn't I tell you that neither the trees can converse nor move. How can I produce it as my witness?"

"But your witness had already come here to give its statement." Said Birbal.

"What? Did the tree come here?"

"In a way. But my purpose of sending you to the tree has been served." Then turning towards Guljari, Birbal said sternly: "Guljari, I know for certain that you have Dhanpat's mohurs. Or else how you could have known about the exact location of the tree. According to your earlier statement you didn't meet Dhanpat last year. The how could you know which tree Dhanpat had in mind. You are totally exposed. Either return his mohurs or be ready to face sternest punishment along with the penalty."

Guljari immediately fell at Birbal's feet and hand-bound beseeched him not to punish him severely as he was ready to return Dhanpat's 1000 mohurs.

Dhanpat marvelled at Birbal's brilliant ruse and touched his feet in reverence. Then he returned home with his 1000 gold mohurs securely tied round his waist.

The Thought in the Courtiers' Minds

One day, as the emperor occupied his throne, he asked: "Can anyone reveal what my courtiers have in the minds this moment?"

Since the people could not understand what the emperor wanted to know, they kept quite. They looked at each other helplessly and looked at Birbal. For they knew that only Birbal could know what the emperor had in mind.

Beholding the helplessness of the courtiers, Birbal came forward and said: "Your Majesty, I can tell you what all the courtiers have in their minds at present."

"Yes, Birbal, tell me", the emperor said in an encouraging voice, "Your Majesty, they all are thinking at present that may the emperor live long and his empire spread far and wide always." The emperor said: "How can you be so sure about it. How can you say that they are only having this thought in their minds at the moment." "Well, Your Majesty, you can enquire them individually if you want to check the veracity of my reading their minds."

Now which courtier had the temerity to say he wasn't thinking the same though at the moment? For

their saying anything contrary to what Birbal had assessed would have made them culprit for harbouring ill-thoughts about the emperor. Who could have said. "No, we had no such thought!" They all had to admit that Birbal had read their minds correctly. And that was why, when the emperor asked them whether Birbal had known their minds correctly, they all said: "Yes, Your Majesty."

The Thief Nabbed

There lived in a village Basoda, near Agra, a retired soldier of the royal army. He had four sons. When he was about to die, he called his sons near him and said, "Dear sons, in my entire life I could save 1000 gold mohurs which are lying buried unde the plant of Tulsi in the orchard. I want all of you to share equally with one condition. That you'd open the cache containing the treasure exactly after a year of my death. During that year I want you to work youself for you living so that you realise the value of money. If you get it unearned, you wouldn't know its real worth and shall soon squander it away."

After a couple of days the old soldier expired. The four sons set out to earn their living for that year after promising to meet exactly after a year to get the treasure bequeathed by their father.

The first one went to the big merchant of a city and by his deligence and loyalty, he soon won the confidence of his master. The master made him the cashier with all the facilities. He soon became a rich man to start his own business.

The second one went to the nearby capital of a princely state and joined its armed forces. His deftness to

weild various weapons made him the sub-commander of the army there. He began to live regally with all comforts.

The third one joined a renowned Vaidya's (country physician's) service and learnt a lot about herbal medicine. He began his own practice and became a renowned Kavi Raj (The celebrated physician).

"And I had gone to Kashi to learn the tricks of jewellery- craft," said the fourth one when they met after exactly a year, "and I become a famous jeweller. In less than a year I, too, have amassed a substantial measure of wealth."

Whereupon, the eldest brother said: "Okay, brothers. Since we have fulfilled the condition putforth by our late lamented father, I think now we are entitled to open the secret cache buried under the Tulsi plant in the orchard." "Yes, definitely. We must go there," said the other three in chorus. When the plant was located and the eldest one began to take spade and axe in the hand to dig out the earth beneath the Tulsi plant, the youngest one volunteered. "Please, let me do this, respected brother! With the youngest one around it is improper for the elder brother to do this job. Let me do if, please!"

The eldest one happily acquiesced to this request. The youngest one soon began to dig and after say twenty strokes, his spade hit a metallic object. "Hey.. stop there. Now dig out the box by hands. It is a delicate object containing the treasure. We shouldn't take the risks."

The youngest one soon dug in his hands in the pit and came up with a metallic small box. They were delighted to be on the threshold of looking at their inherited fortune. When the eldest one opened the box, the glittering gold coins inside gleamed in the light of the red-rising sun. The four brothers were besides themselves with the joy. But suddenly the eldest one said with a stern face. "Wait a bit... They don't appear to be a thousand gold mohurs but much less. Let's count them over first."

When they counted, the eldest brother's suspicion was found to be correct. They were not 1000 but only 750. One whole share of a brother was missing. They counted once again. Again the same number. The second brother, then, said: "Would it not be possible that our father might have counted it wrongly. I mean, there might be just 750 mohurs only and perhaps in the old age his sight and couch had failed his counting abilities."

"No, it can't be," said the third brother, "Father had saved them one by one from his salary as the royal soldier. And a man who saves them from his salary doesn't err in counting."

"Is it not possible that they might have fallen elsewhere. Let's dig the pit still deeper," the fourth one said.

"No need, my dear. Because father didn't say he has kept them scattered. He only said he had kept them under the Tulsi plant," the eldest pioned.

"Then it is a clear case of theft, and, "the second one declared with a sombre, face,"... the thief is someone amongst us only. Because had it been an outsider's job, why he would have left 750 mohurs there and eloped with 250 only. Moreover, he would not have bothered to cover up the pit after digging. It is someone among us only because the one who stole the mohurs had still this much conscience left in him that he should elope with his rightful share only. He must have thought that if my brothers had agreed that the total number of the mohurs was only 750 and not 1000—as father had suggested owing possibly to his failing eye-sight and the sense of touch—he might get a few mohurs extra if the total lot was again to be divided by four. He is really a clever chap and, unfortunately, he is one of us. So let that fellow confess on his own."

But no body confessed. That created a great problem for them. Then the eldest one suggested: "Let's go to Raja Birbal in whose command our sire had been. He knew father personally also. And he is known to be the most intelligent person in the kingdom and the empire. I am sure he would soon find out the thief amongst four of us."

All the brothers agreed and they went to Raja Birbal who was, fortunately present in his 'Haveli'. Birbal heard their case patiently and said: "Veer Singh (the sons' father) was a very meticulous person and he couldn't have erred in counting. If he said 1000, there ought to be 1000 mohurs only. And I, too, agree with your logic and the thief must be one amongst four of

you. Well, it is a tricky problem. Give me some time to think over it. In the meanwhile you all wait outside the haveli, under the shade of the Neem tree."

After about an hour, Raja Birbal sent for them. The moment the four brothers came there, Raja Birbal said: "Well, I am awfully hungry. Can you fetch some good quality of sweets to me? I think you four are quite familiar with Agra City and you can find the correct shop."

"No, we aren't familiar much with Agra as for the last preceeding year we had to remain outside and earn out living," the eldest one declared. "Hence we are not aware of the changes that might have taken place during the last full year. Certainly we'll have to hunt for the shop selling best quality of sweets."

"So none of you had been in this city for whole of the last year!"

"Yes," they said.

"Now listen," Birbal said: "My other condition is that the sweets must be of the best quality but must not have been tasted by you for last one full year."

"Do you agree," Birbal enquired again.

"Yes", we agree.

"Then proceed to fetch the best quality sweets for me. Return soon."

The four brother went away to bring the sweet they found best, and also be one untasted by them.

The eldest one returned the earliest, with some sweets. The second one also came back an hour after

his eldest brother's arrival with the sweet. The third returned two hours with the sweets. Birbal made them lay the sweets on three different platters and waited for the fourth one to arrive.

It was almost dusk when the youngest one could return. Birbal sternly asked: "Why are you so late? Have you gone out of the City to fetch the sweets for me?"

"No, I was very much in Agra but was searching in all the sweetmeat shops the best quality of the sweet to far untasted by me. Then with much difficulty I could get this sweet."

Birbal asked him to keep the sweets in the fourth platter. Then Birbal tasted the sweets and then declared: "Amongst you four the thief is the youngest one. Because the sweet brought by him is quite inferior to the sweets brought by you three elder brothers. The reason being, he had already tasted the best possible sweets in the town because he had never moved out of his village and reached only Agra. He did nothing. This is all bumpkin that he had gone to Banaras and learnt the jewellery crafts. In fact, he had quietly taken out 250 gold mohurs and lived like a rich man in Agra during the previous year. Obviously he had tasted all the good quality sweets. Hence he had to search the whole city thoroughly to buy this inferior sweet, which appeared better to him from the lot of sweets untasted by him. He is a liar but not a professional one. Hence he couldn't commit the theft with professional expertise. Had he been a hardened criminal he would have taken all the mohurs. Then the people

might not have suspected him. Still he deserves punishment, which he would duly get."

The youngest one had to admit his crime. The three brother went home praising the high level of intelligence of Birbal's brain.

Two Months' One Month

One day Emperor Akbar decided, after a careful thought, that the two months' one unit should be reckoned in the Empire's calendar and not one month's. He summoned Birbal and sought his opinion on the issue. Birbal replied: "The idea is superb, Your Majesty! But there is one minor problem."

"Spell it out, Birbal," said the Emperor rather sternly.

"It would look rather odd to have two full moons in our one new month. People will be rather confused. Then all will long to have two wives on the plea that they have two full moons in one month!", Birbal explained.

The Emperor got his hint and withdrew the idea. For even the Mighty Emperor could not have forced the moon to have only one full moon-night in their proposed two months' one month.

The Presence of Mind

One day to test Birbal's bravery the Emperor deliberately had a mad elephant let loose in the lane through which Birbal normally came to the Red Fort. The Emperor stationed himself in the balcony to have the fully view.

Birbal was not aware of the elephant moving in that lane. He was going to the Red Fort when he saw the mad elephant coming strutting at him. Birbal had no weapons to defend himself. But his quick presence of mind spotted a cur moving about in the lane. He lifted the cur and hurled it at the elephant with great force. The cur began to cry loudly at the impact. She even tried to scratch the elephant's forehead by her paws. The elephant was quite taken aback. The sudden impact and the cur's wailing sound disturbed the elephant's composure and it began to go back. Seizing his opportunity Birbal came out safely. The Emperor praised Birbal's presence of mind and gave him many gifts.

The Loyal Birbal

Once the Emperor was praising the qualities of brinjal as the most tasty and nourishing vegetable. Birbal also supported the Emperor's contention. Not only this, he added one or two epithets from his side also.

When the Emperor saw Birbal praising the vegetable in superlative terms, he thought to test Birbal's conviction about his own contention. After a few days, Emperor again had the vegetable made in the royal kitchen. When the vegetable was served, the Emperor rebuked the serving servant: "Take away this rotten vegetable. This brinjal has no taste and full of seeds. Its consumption only adds to one's fat without giving any energy. Give it to only Birbal who likes it!"

Now, when the vegetable was served to Birbal, he also asked the servant to throw away this rotten vegetable and began to narrate the potential danger that the consumption of Brinjal could cause to the eater's system.

The Emperor heard Birbal's remarks and said: "Why are you cursing Brinjal? Just a few days ago you were praising it greatly!"

"Your Majesty! I praised it when you admired it. Now since you don't like it, I also detest it. Well, I am



faithful to my Emperor and not to Brinjal. Brinjal can offer me no post howsoever I praisise it while you can elevate my position to a very high status. I am the servant of the Emperor and not of Brinjal."

The Emperor laughed heartily at Birbal's remark and at the outspokenness of his favourite Minister.

Akbar Turns Lord Ram

One day the Emperor thought to claim parity with Hindu's god, Lord Rama. He, then, asked Birbal to instruct all the Hindu subjects that they should replace the name of Rama by his name, that is, Akbar.

Birbal immediately understood his Emperor's desire and the unbridled arrogance attached to it. He said: "It is a wonderful idea! But for convincing the subjects we will have to display before them the efficacy of your name." Then he asked a servant to bring a stone, write name of Akbar on it and allow it to float on the water. "Only when the stone floats with your name inscribed on it that you can claim parity with Lord Rama. As you know, Sir, Lord Rama made the stones inscribed with his name float on the sea water!"

The Emperor realised his mistake and kept quite!

Why Camel's Neck is Curved

One day, the Emperor was immensely pleased with Birbal and promised to give him some costly presents. But the Emperor forgot about his promise later. Even when Birbal gave subtle hints many times, the Emperor evaded his reminders to the promise.

Then after many days of the incident, the Emperor was strolling on the bank of Yamuna with Birbal when he spotted a camel passing by. The Emperor said to Birbal: "Birbal! Why is the camel's neck curved".

"Your Majesty. It is mentioned in our scriptures that he who does not fulfill his promise has his neck curved. Surely the camel must have committed this felony to deserve this punishment by God!"

The Emperor was now reminded of his promise and gave the gifts to Birbal as promised.

Heat By Viewing At It

One day the Emperor made the declaration that he would award five thousand rupees to the person who could stay in chest deep waters of Yumuna in a cold winter night. It was the months of January and cold was biting. Ultimately, a poor brahman decided to take up the challenge. He had to marry his daughter off and he was in desperate need of money. He thought he might get a kingly sum (those Five Thousand Rupees are equal to Five Lakhs of the modern time).

So the brahman passed through the ordeal successfully. In the morning when he went to collect his reward, Akbar asked: "Did take help from any heat-source?"

"Not exactly ... But I did watch the burning lamp on the ramparts of the Red Fort to imagine the feeling of warmth."

"Then it is unfair! You will not get the award. You should have stood there without any help!"

That brahman was bewildered at the Emperor's illogical argument. But no one was ever allowed to question the Emperor's judgment. Crest-fallen, he came back his home.



When Birbal heard the incident, he was piqued by the Emperor's injustice. So, he decided to find a trick to impress upon the Emperor the injustice the latter had committed.

The very next day, the Emperor decided to go on a hunting expedition. He then summoned Birbal to accompany him. Birbal had this message conveyed to the Emperor: "I am preparing khichadi for me. Soon I would be coming to pay my obeisance to you, Your Majesty!"

But despite sending repeated messages to Birbal Birbal could not go. The Emperor, then, asked angrily: "What the hell this fellow doing while preparing his

khichadi. For last two hours I have been sending message after message to him!"

When Birbal didn't appear even after a long wait the Emperor reached the spot where Birbal was preparing his khichadi. He was surprised to see the khichadi material kept at a very high tripod made of bamboos and a tiny fire, about twenty feet below from the bottom of the vessel, was burning weakly!"

Akbar laughed derisively at Birbal's arrangement to cook the khichadi.

"So, this is how you wish to cook your khichadi. You may go on cooking if for hours together but not even a grain of the khichadi can be cooked. The tiny fire is unable to provide any heat to the container... How, then, your khichadi can be cooked?"

"Well I've heard that heat transmits itself merely by viewing at it. And if that brahman could derive heat from the lamp burning at the ramparts of the Red Fort merely by looking at it from Yamuna—about 1 kos (two miles) away, why can't this tiny fire heat and cook my khichadi when the pot is only ten hands length away from it?"

The emperor immediately realised his mistake and summoning the brahman, gave him Rupees five thousand as the award and Rs. 1000/- extra as ex-gratia payment from the royal treasury for his daughter's marriage. Repeatedly bowing before the Emperor, that brahman gave a thousand blessing to the Emperor. The Emperor was happy that Birbal's wisdom could save him from forfeiting the due money of a poor brahman.

The Human Weakness

Once while walking on the lawns of the red-fort in Agra, the emperor said to Birbal that majority of the persons in his empire were honest. Birbal countered this contention by saying: "Your Highness, the sense of honesty and dishonesty very much depend on the exigency of the circumstances. Man is normally honest only when he is in the dread of the consequence if acting otherwise. That is, if the dishonesty is beneficial to him without being punitive, all men are by nature dishonest." "No, Birbal," said the emperor, "You are wrong."

Then Birbal said: "All right, Your Highness. Let us devise a test. We will make the public announcement that all are required to put a jugful of milk in the newly dug out pond near the fort. So that we may have a pond full of milk. Then we'd watch the individual reaction of the citizens."

The emperor agreed. Soon the announcement was made: "All persons of the city are being informed through this announcement that they should put a jugful of milk in the newly dug out pond near the fort. Tomorrow in the morning the Emperor would declare the pond open for the public." People of the city were rather taken aback. For nowhere in the world existed

such a pond! They were not very happy with this royal announcement but they had no other go.

When the dusk fell Birbal went near the pond to see it himself. The pouring of the milk had not yet commenced. But the preparations were afoot to make an easy access to the pond to help the persons pour milk in the pond.

While on his way home, Birbal found his gardener rather distressed. He had a large family and milk was always falling short to the family need. On the top of it, they were now being asked to part with a jugful of milk by the royal order. "If I could get some extra milk by your grace, my this problem will be solved."

"No problem. You can have it as much as you want. But I think, even if you miss out pouring milk in the pond, who would be able to detect it? Surely a jugful less milk would make no difference in the surface level of the milk in the pond. I think, you can safely solve your this problem all by yourself." Giving the subtle hint to the gardener, Birbal went home.

The gardener was overjoyed to find such a simple solution to this problem. He went and confided his intentions into his puzzled wife. She too thought it to be a wonderful idea. "I must tell my father too, how to save a jugful of milk. Pour water instead. Afterd all, if one jugful milk is equally undetectable, then surely two jugful of the milk is equally undetectable by the level of milk in the pond." She then immediately rushed to her father and advised him accordingly. Her father was also delighted. Since the whole of



the city was planning to pour milk in the pond, the milk prices had run high. The father of the gardener's wife mused, "Well it is a God-sent opportunity for the cowmen like I am. At the moment, the more milk I save to-day, the more profit I'd rake in it."

When he was having a talk with his daughter, his neighbour overheard their conversation. He also liked the idea immensely and thought of saving a jugful of milk himself too. This way the idea travelled far and wide.

Since the milk was to be poured in the darkness of the night, all began to make the bee-line for pouring the milk in the pond. When the morning dawned, the guards placed around the pond were surprised to see pond filled much less than expected, that too by plain water!

They immediately rushed to Birbal. Beaming, he repaired to the royal palace. Then he asked the emperor, "Your Majesty, let's go to the pond and learn how honest our citizens are!" "Yes, why no," replied the emperor. "I was waiting for you only. Let's go."

When the emperor reached near the pond with Birbal, he was shocked to find no milk and only plain water in the pond. 'Birbal, this atrocious! I must punish them.'" Birbal said: "No your majesty, you shouldn't. We have no intention of having a pond filled with milk in our capital". It is sheer waste of milk. It was only to test the veracity of my assertion that I devised this test. Your Majesty, a man basically dishonest unless frightened into honesty by the stringent measures of the law."

The emperor had to agree with Birbal and praise his empiric wisdom.

The Eunuchs' Problem

One day the eunuchs, while giving their play's performance before the Emperor uttered some such vulgar remarks that the Emperor blew up and ordered the eunuch to leave his empire within a week's time. And, he further ordered, that if they fail to do so within the stipulated time they all would be hanged till death.

But the poor eunuchs could not go anywhere. They had no place to go. Whatever possibility was there of their earning any money, it was in the capital itself where they had their separate quarters. When five days had elapsed to the promulgation of the royal order and they could not escape, the head of the eunuch group stealthily met Raja Birbal and disclosed his problem. "Raja Sahib... we have no place to go... where can we go". For many hundred years we have been living here only. I admit our play was slightly 'louder' than it should have been. But the Emperor's order is rather harsh. Now advise us... what should we do?"

Raja Birbal said: "Well your problem is really grave. Give me few hours time to brood over the problem. Come back to me in the night."



The eunuchs returned to come back in the night. Raja Birbal then gave them a piece of his advice and they returned happily to their quarters.

The very next day the Emperor was going on a hunting expedition early in the morning with Birbal and other Ministers. When Emperor found many persons climbed atop the trees and perched on the branches, he asked his assistant to find out the purpose of these tree climbing persons. The assistant went there and reported: "Your Majesty! They are all eunuchs. They say they are doing so on royal order."

"Eunuchs!", asked the astonished Emperor. "Why haven't they left my empire? I ordered them to do so! Bring their head before me. I'd have all of them beheaded," roared Akbar in furious rage.

The head of the eunuch came before the Emperor, shuddering in fear "I asked you to leave my empire," thundered the Emperor, "why are you still here?"

"Your Highness," said the eunuch head hand bound, "we tried to go out. But the whole world appears to be under Your Majesty's, rule. Where can we go? It is only in compliance with your order, Sir, that we are sitting perched atop the trees, so that we may be away from the land you rule over!"

The Emperor was pleased with their answer. Apparently the head of the eunuch spoke on Raja Birbal's advice. The Emperor, then pardoned the eunuchs and they began to dwell happily there.

Tit For Tat

There were many persons in the royal court of Akbar who bore a grudge against Raja Birbal. Many of them did not like Birbal's closeness to the Emperor. One of the jealous persons was Abdul Karim, a one eyed-man. He was always on the look out of finding an excuse to hold Raja Birbal guilty in the Emperor's eyes. For many years he was waiting for an opportunity.

One day he found Birbal spitting the tobacco-juice on the walls of the royal building. Now, Raja Birbal was addicted to chewing tobacco and he did not mind spitting out its 'peek' on the walls. But Abdul Karim got a point. He immediately went to the Emperor and made his complaint: "Your Majesty! Your favourite Minister, Raja Birbal is disfiguring the beauty of the royal buildings here by spitting the betel juice on them. He ought to be taken to task for being negligent and callous about the grandeur of our Majestic Buildings."

The Emperor said he would warn Raja Birbal about it. When Akbar met Birbal, he said: "Today morning Abdul Karim was making a complaint against you. He says you have been callously spitting on the walls of these beautiful buildings and ruining their beauty. You should be cautious about spitting your tobacco

juice. Spit it always at some place which is useless and its beauty is of no consequence!"

"Very well, Your Highness! Henceforth I'd be cautious about it. I apologise for my callousness," said Birbal and the matter ended. Then the Emperor busied himself in the matters of state, assisted by his favourite Minister and friend Raja Birbal.

Next day, while the Emperor was sitting on the open terrace of the Red Fort and basking in the mild winter sun, there arrived Abdul Karim weeping in pain and anguish.

"Mercy...! Mercy...! Your Highness! Raja Birbal has spitted the tobacco juice inside my eye. I am feeling greatly humiliated and insulted. Please punish Birbal!" Emperor was amazed. He could not imagine his most worldwise Minister committing such sort of silly actions. He immediately summoned Birbal.

"Birbal, I am shocked to see you behaving in such childish manner. Why did you spit your tobacco juice in the eyes of Abdul Karim? He is crying in pain and agony! Why did you do it?"

"Emperor Sir, I did so following your instructions," replied Raja Birbal, totally impervious to the Emperor's anger. "What," said Akbar in dismay: "I never ordered you to spit in the eye of Abdul Karim. Have you gone mad?"

"No, Your Highness," replied Raja Birbal and added, "I have not gone mad. You did tell me to spit on something useless whose beauty is of no consequence. I did exactly the same. I spitted the tobacco

juice in Abdul Karim's blind eye Surely that eye is useless and its beauty is certainly of no consequence," concluded beaming Raja Birbal. He had settled his score with Abdul Karim. The Emperor also secretly admired Birbal's ingenuity and kept quiet.

The Commission Agent

One day Emperor Akbar was going on an elephant for his joy ride, late in the moonlight night. Birbal was also with him.

While they were passing through an empty stretch of the road, they saw a person yelling aloud. When they reached near him, the fellow, dead-drunk, shouted: "Hey Ye Elephant Man! Would you like to sell this elephant to me. I am prepared to give you two gold coins for it. Now tell me, would you like to sell it?"

In his drunken state, the fellow failed to recognise the Emperor who was seething in rage at that fellow's temerity. Before the Emperor could say anything, Birbal quietly signalled the Emperor and said to that drunken man.

"Yes I am willing to sell this elephant to you, but not now, as I am going for some important work. Tomorrow in the morning you can have this elephant against your payment of two gold coins. Do you agree?"

"Oh it's fine! But don't forget to send the elephant to me early in the morning. My address is: Kucha Awwal, Shahi Darwaja, Agra!" And with these instructions the

drunken man departed. Now the Emperor gave vent to his spleen! "How dare you allow that person go when I wanted him arrested and whipped?"

"Your Highness?" replied Birbal "that man was dead drunk. There was no use punishing him at that time because he was not in his senses. A sober man would realise his mistake more quickly than a drunken man. We have his address. We will summon him tomorrow morning and then you can punish him!"

Early in the morning Birbal sent for that man. Now he was a sober saint! When he reached before Raja Birbal, the Raja reminded him of his foolishness last night. The man began to shudder in fright. He begged Raja Birbal, "Raja Sahib! Please save me... I promise I won't touch liquor any more." Then Raja Birbal gave him the piece of his advice.

No soner did that man reach his home then he received the royal summon to present himself in the court. He went there. Emperor was still very angry with that person. Akbar said sarcastically: "Well, Janab! Still you want to buy that elephant in two gold mohurs".

"No Your Highness...! Now don't want to buy."

"Why?"

"Because the buyer is gone. I was just a commission agent speaking on behalf of my client!" The man, in trying to save himself, put the entire blame on the liquor—the buyer!

The Emperor enjoyed this remark and the quick wit of that man. Then he looked meaningfully at Birbal and smiled indulgently. The man was released without any punishment whatever!

The Divine Music

Akbar, the Emperor of India, was very fond of music. He had all the time best musician of the world, "Tansen, in his royal court. Everyday, in the night, the musician would sing to the great delight of his Emperor. Birbal was also very fond of music.

One day, when the music programme was over and the Emperor was strolling with Birbal on the lawns of the Red Fort in the moon-lit night, Akbar said: "Birbal! Tansen's singing provides a great solace to my soul. The sweet notes coming out of his throat create a ripple of ecstasy for me. I think he is the greatest musician in the world!"

"No doubt, Your Majesty!" admitted Birbal and added: "But Tansen does not admit so. He still says that the greatest musician ever born in the world is his guru Swami Haridas. It is only he who can sing divine music, capable of enchanting all the animate and inanimate beings alike".

"Is that so?" questioned the Emperor, rather unbelievably. Then he immediately summoned Tansen to his place and said: "Tansen! I've heard that your guru, Swami is the best musician ever created by Lord

Almighty. He sings even better than you. I can't believe that any one can sing even better than you!"

"You Highness!", replied Tansen with great reverence and said: "My Guru is believed to be the incarnation of the divine musician Tumbura. No mortal man can sing better than him now or ever!"

These reverential utterances made by Tansen aroused great interest in the heart of the Emperor. He asked Tansen to call his guru before him. Handbound, Tansen requested: "Your Majesty! My Guru operates on a level higher than humans can approach. He can't be summoned anywhere. Wherever he goes, he goes it will. No power on the earth can restrict and control his movement!"

The Emperor was somewhat peeved by Tansen's expressing such remarks which indirectly made the Emperor look inferior. The Emperor kept quiet for a moment. But his desire to hear such divine music made him say again: "Then how can you make me hear that divine music, Tansen, of your Guru!"

"I'm afraid, Lord, there is no way but to make you go to his Ashram at Vrindavan. Only then Your Highness can listen his music!", said Tansen, rather diffidently.

The Emperor then gave orders to Raja Mansingh to arrange for his visit.

When all the arrangements had been made, Raja Mansingh requested the Emperor to ride the special chariot. Tansen, then immediately took Raja Birbal aside and confided: "Raja Sabib! If the Emperor goes

to meet my guru with the entire royal and the attendant paraphernalia, I suspect my guru might refuse to meet the Emperor. His abode is an hermitage of a sage. Please make the Emperor go without all these attendants."

Birbal agreed. He went to the Emperor and said: "Your Majesty! Remember you are going to visit a sage's Ashram and not to a king's place. Hence, my request is that Your Highness may better go there with least persons so that the peace of the Ashram be not disturbed!"

The point sank home with the wise Emperor. He ordered: "Barring a squad of the security personnel, no one else shall go with me. I will be going with Tansen and will have Birbal only with me!"

The Emperor's orders were quickly carried out and Akbar departed in that big chariot with Birbal and Tansen.

When they reached Mathura, they stopped to rest for the night.

Early next morning they departed for Vrindavan. When Vrindavan was not far away, on Birbal's advice, they began to track the remaining distance on foot. Tansen went ahead to see whether his Guru was ready to grant them audience or not. Birbal and Akbar stayed-put under a tree. Then Tansen came and escorted them to his Guru.

Swami ji was a man with advanced age and grey hair. Tansen touched his feet and introduced his Emperor and Birbal to his Guru. Then Akbar ex-



pressed his willingness to listen to the Swami's music. Swami ji replied: "O Emperor! I don't sing on people's demand. It is something inside me which bursts out of me in the form of music." Swami Haridas's refusal to sing disturbed the Emperor greatly. He was angry at the temerity shown by Tansen's Guru. Then Birbal thought of a plan. He took Tansen aside and advised him: "O Royal Singer! Now your Guru has refused to sing before the Emperor. How can you make your Guru sing before the Emperor?"

"Well," Tansen said: "There is only one way. If anybody sings an off-key song before the guru, he might start singing to make the person sing correctly." "Then, you go in," Birbal said, 'and start singing a Raga wrongly. When you do so, your Guru will have to sing to correct you. Then our Emperor can listen his music secretly. I'd stand near this huge tree with the Emperor. It is near your Guru's room in the hermitage and we can easily listen him."

Having made this arrangement, Birbal went to the Emperor and told about it. Akbar was quite happy. Then they patiently waited near the tree to hear the Guru sing.

There, inside the hermitage, Tansen began to sing a famous Bhajan of Surdas set to Raja Bhairavi: "Charan Kamal Bandon Hari Rai!" [I bow to thy lotus feet O Almighty God!]

While singing Tansen deliberately voiced a discordant note. "What are you doing Tanu!" rebuked the Swami. "Sing properly and follow me. You appear to have forgotten the lesson I taught you!" And saying so, the Swami began to sing himself.

Akbar felt he was getting drowned in the sonorous voice's mellifluousness. He felt a blissful stupor permeating in his whole self. They continued to listen for more than an hour. When the singing stopped Akbar felt as though he had come back to the earth from the heavens. So ecstatic he felt that he rushed in and touched the feet of Swami Haridas in a fit of reverence.

Swami Haridas blessed the Emperor and they began to return Agra.

On his way back, Akbar asked Tansen: "Why can't you sing this class of music yourself?"

"Even if I try my level best," admitted Tansen, "I can't sing that good!"

"Why?" questioned the Emperor.

Tansen could not easily answer. He looked meaningfully at Birbal and Birbal said: "Your Majesty! I know the reason. But I can only express that if you excuse me for my outspokenness!"

"Yes... Yes!" said the Emperor. "Give me the reason!"

"Although Tansen's music is no less good than his Guru's," began Birbal, "the question of the pristinity of feeling decides their category in music. While Tansen sings to please you—an Emperor but a mortal being, Swami ji sings to please the Lord Almighty! The difference in the quality of their music verily signifies the difference in the status between your Majesty and the Lord Almighty!"

Birbal's this bold analysis made Akbar realise his ephemeral status. He admired Birbal for making this subtle distinction! He was wise now.

The Liquor's Effect

The Emperor used to remain so busy in the court that he hardly had time for relaxation. Even when he had comparatively free time, his mind used to be so dawdled that it was difficult for him to sleep. Then on the advice of his beloved christian queen, he began to drink liquor after concluding his state-work for the day. Since the effect of the drink was quiet soothing, the Emperor took to boozing with a vengeance. With the result, he began to spend less and less time in the state-work and more and more in boozing in the company of his favourite queens and other females. The Emperor's negligence began to tell adversely on the State's administration. The faithful Ministers were rather alarmed.

One day, Raja Man Singh, the Commandant-in-Chief of the Mughal forces had a heart to heart talk with Raja Birbal. Man Singh requested Birbal to do something about improving the administration of the State especially by making the Emperor drop this dirty habit of drinking liquor. Birbal agreed to take up this problem in right earnest.

Birbal immediately passed the clandestine order that no intoxicating drink to be supplied in the Red Fort. But he was surprised that despite the stoppage

of the supply of liquor, the Emperor appeared still to be all the time drunk. When Birbal's sleuth failed to find the source of this supply, Birbal decided to quietly find about it himself.

So, in accordance with his plan Birbal pretended to be ill and took long leave. Since there was no check on Birbal's entry to the ladies' section of the palace, Birbal decided to search the Emperor's private chamber quietly in the absence of the former. So, in an winter afternoon when the Emperor was busy enjoying the company of his favourite queen in a little private garden, Birbal stealthily entered the Emperor's chamber. He put upside down everything he saw there to find the secret of the Emperor's intoxicated state. After a great search, he found a large bottle kept below the Emperor's bed in a jewelled container. It bore a label having some foreign language inscribed over it. Well, Birbal was quite versed in Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Persian. The inscription appeared to have been written in English language. "So this must be the handiwork of that Christian Queen of the Emperor. She is making the Emperor, addicted to drinking the powerful drink!" So thinking, Birbal quietly tried to pocket the bottle but it was rather big. So he put it in the cavity of his armpit, and covering himself with a long robe, left for his house rapidly.

But as the bad luck would have it, he was seen by the Emperor, quitting quietly. The Emperor yelled for him. Now, Birbal had to stop. Reaching near Birbal, Akbar said: "What made you enter my chamber in my absence. And what is that you are hiding in your

arm-pit?" Birbal kept quiet. Then the Emperor again insisted "Why don't you speak out Birbal? You are causing suspicion. You are hiding, something. Speak out!" When the Emperor asked again, Birbal said in a wry tone: "Yes... I have a parrot!" Akbar again said, being dissatisfied with Birbal's answer: "Why don't you tell me frankly what you have. Is it may occasion to cut joke?"

This time Birbal quickly said: "O God's shadow on the earth!, I've a horse!"

Now the Emperor was annoyed. He asked with a frown: "I see you growing inpertinent day by day. Behave yourself. What do you have?" Birbal replied: "An elephant!"

Akbar thundered in rage: "Have you eaten Bhang? What have you on your person?"

"I've a donkey, Your Majesty?" Now it was beyond Emperor to control his temper. He roared: "Birbal! you are behaving not only insolently but insanelly too. I think I must order my guards to take you to the gallow! Now I ask you for the last time, Birbal. Tell me plainly what you have without beating about the bush!"

"Your Majesty! I've a liquor bottle"! And saying so, Birbal showed that bottle to the Emperor. The Emperor was dismayed to find a bottle of liquor with Birbal, a very religious and noble person known for his pious conduct. He quietly asked Birbal to accompany him to his private chamber.



When the Emperor reached his chamber he was annoyed to see all his things littered on the floor. The whole of the room appeared to have been ransacked. The Emperor could immediately realise that Birbal had entered his chamber to steal this bottle. Akbar then questioned Birbal in a stern voice: "Birbal! you appeared to have taken the large dose of this drink yourself which made you utter all those nonsensical things. When you had the bottle kept hidden in your armpit's cavity, why were you madly saying that you had a

donkey, horse, elephant, etc. I am really sorry to see my ablest minister behaving in such a silly manner!"

Birbal replied sarcastically: "Your Highness! Although I did not drink even one drop of this foul thing, its proximity was sufficient to drive me mad. I wonder," Birbal said in the tongue-in-cheek style, "what adverse effect it must be causing on the mind of the person who regularly drinks it!"

Birbal made his point and the Emperor was somewhat ashamed of his addiction. But Birbal continued: "Your Majesty! This bottle has six pegs. When a person takes the first peg, he does so quietly without caring for the person or place. The second peg causes him to prattle like a parrot, eccentrically! The third peg's effect makes one behave like a horse neighing in ecstasy. The fourth one makes him behave like an elephant madly strutting in his ecstatic delight. The fifth peg makes the drunkard lose all his sense and act as a silly donkey. When he consumes his sixth peg he becomes unconscious and comes back to his senses only after getting a dose of strong rebuke or sound thrashing. If you recollect Your Highness! I behaved exactly the same manner giving answer in the same order. First I kept silent, then said I had a parrot, a horse, an elephant, a donkey and told you what I had in reality when you rebuked me sternly and threatened to send me to the gallows! I just behaved this way to impress upon you, Your Highness, the evil effect of drinking liquor. Under its evil effect one loses ones sense of priority, ones balance of mind. Even the mightiest of the kings, under the foul effect, becomes

in different to his prime duty and start behaving like a silly man. O God's Grace on the earth! There was no other way through which I could have explained you the evil effect of this rotten drink. You rule over a few crores of persons and you have no right to be indifferent to their affairs. I am sorry if you feel I acted impudently before Your Highness!"

Birbal's explanation had the desired effect on the Emperor's mind. He was speechless for some moments in sheer remorse, then said: "Dear Birbal! I am fortunate to have you as my Minister who is faithfully enough to bring his Emperor on the right track even at the cost of his life. I admit I was so much angry that time that I could have really sent you to the gallows if you would have given one more incomprehensible answer. But I am glad that destiny checked me from committing such a blunder. I am not at all angry at your behaviour, now! On the other hand, you shall be awarded handsomely for your faithfulness and intelligence!"

Birbal thanked the Emperor and both of them left for their routine walk when Raja Man Singh noticed the desired change in the Emperor's behaviour, he thanked Birbal for having saved the Mughal Empire from the possible collapse!.

The Poetic Justice

During the Mughal Reign, there lived a greedy miserly but very wealthy merchant in the city of Agra, the Mughal capital. But since he was rich, many persons used to flock to his Haveli in the hope of getting some help from him. Although he never gave any reward, yet he always kept persons in good humour by giving them false promises.

One day a poor poet happened to reach his house. The merchant welcomed him warmly and offered him an exalted seat. Then he asked: "What can I do for you?"

"Sir, I am a poet," Raidas, the poet replied, "I came here to recite to you some of my poems."

"Oh, sure....sure! why not? I am very fond of good poetry. Please, start your recitation."

The poet recited his poems. Apparently the merchant liked them immensely because he showered on Raidas bouquets of praises. "Really you are a great poet! I like your poems. The last poem was superb in which you likened me to Kuber, the legendary most moneyed god!"

Those days were the high time for sychophancy and flattery. Many people earned their bread and butter

by singing praises of the influential and moneyed persons. And the rhymsters or pseudo poets had the field day. But Raidas was a genuine poet. He expressed his gratitude at that merchant's liking his poems. Then the merchant said: "Well, I want to give you something as my token of the esteem I feel for you! Please come tomorrow and collect it!"

The poet, Raidas departed with a happy heart.

But next day when he came the merchant refused to recognise him, first. When the poet reminded him about his meeting him yesterday and reciting him poems, the merchant said: "Oh I see! So you've come. But, you might be a good poet still you don't have an iota of sense to understand other's reaction. If I was genuinely interested in awarding you for your poems, I would have presented them to you yesterday itself! I just casually said that to please you, to make you happy, albeit temporarily. I adhere to the dictum "If you can't make any one happier, don't leave him sadder than before. You came here unnecessarily!"

Raidas was stunned at this person's brazenness. But he was helpless as he did not have any genuine claim on those promised gifts. It was just a casual remark and the merchant could not be forced to shell out those gifts on the legal grounds either. Raidas had to leave! He couldn't have offered any plausible reason to establish his claim.

Crest-fallen, Raidas came out of that merchant's house. But as his good luck would have it, he saw Raja Birbal going alone on a horse. He immediately

fell flat and cried: "Save me Raja Sahib! I've been duped on a false promise!"

"What's the matter?", asked Birbal, getting down from his horse.

Raidas narrated him his tale of vow. Birbal was quite touched. Reassuring the poet, he said: "Don't worry Raidas. This was clearly the case of breach of promise. Now come to my Haveli. We'll discuss the matter there in details."

Saying so, Birbal left and Raidas followed him. When they were inside the Diwankhana of Birbal, he said: "Look Raidas. It is not a legal case. But it is more damaging. It involves immorality and is a question of trust. Now I tell you what you should do." "It is for this only that I came here Raja Sahib," voice choking in gratitude, Raidas said.

"Do you have any trusted friend of yours in Agra? Birbal asked.

"Yes, I have," answered Raidas.

"Then go to him. If he is not well-off, then don't mind taking these five gold mohurs from me," paused Birbal. When Raidas had accepted the mohurs, Birbal continued: "Ask him to arrange a gala feast on the coming full-moon night and don't forget to invite that merchant in the party. Other details of the plan will be disclosed to you as and when required."

Raidas left with those five mohurs and reached Mayadas's house. Mayadas was his most trusted friend right since his childhood. Giving the mohurs to him, Raidas gave him the details of the plan. "But

make sure that merchant is invited to it." Mayadas willingly agreed. Now, five gold mohurs was a great sum in those days when a mound of wheat was available in 1/8th of a gold mohur. With five gold mohurs under his belt, Mayadas felt like a Raja. He made serious effort and immediately found the place and address of the merchant's stay. Since that merchant was greedy also in equal measure he made this offer to that merchant: "We shall be very glad to have you amongst us. Please have your dinner with us on the coming full-moon day, two ghatis after the sun set. We always serve our guest in gold vessels which are also presented to them after their thorough cleaning after the feast!"

The merchant fell in the trap. He sent his acceptance to the invitation enthusiastically and began to eagerly await the rise of the full-moon.

At due day the moon rose to its full glory and the merchant, bedecked with very costly gems and diamonds, went to attend the dinner party.

When he reached the venue of the party, he was surprised to find not many people there. There were just two persons. One of them was Mayadas and other Raidas. Both of them escorted the merchant inside and began to talk.

They went on talking and talking and talking. Now the merchant was famished. He did not have anything in the day because he wanted to eat as much of food as possible at Mayadas's place to save his food-expense. So he was awfully hungry. But neither Mayadas

nor Raidas were hungry as they sat there after having their sumptuous dinner.

When it grew midnight and the merchant saw no movement for laying the table and serving the food, he couldn't keep himself from asking: "Well! If you don't mind, I want my food to be served now. I'm hungry."

Mayadas mocked at him: "Food...? What food?"

"Didn't you invite me for dinner today?" "What proof you have to suggest that we invited you for the dinner?" Raidas countered.

Now it was the merchant's turn to keep quiet. During those days the invitations were usually conveyed through word of mouth. And which had no record (during those times).

"And even if we admit," Mayadas said: "that we did invite you for the dinner, it was just to please you, to make you happy, albeit momentarily. Because we all adhere to the dictum: "If you can't make any one happier don't leave him sadder than before."

Now the merchant cut a very sorry figure. Then suddenly (as per the plan) Birbal happened to reach Mayadas's house.

"Do you remember, these were your words".

"Yes I do", said the hungry merchant.

"Do you still say you don't owe to Raidas a few gifts that you had promised him?", asked Raja Birbal thundering with authority.

Now the merchant stood totally exposed. He had no guts left to maintain the lie. He cried and said: "No ...No! Raja Birbal? Please don't add insult to my injury. I am really sorry for my meanness. I should have given the gifts there and then to Raidas. After all, he never demanded them. I promised that of my own accord. In a way, he deserves them. His poem was really very good. But," stopped the cunning merchant mid-way as though to maintain the suspense. Then he spoke again: "But, if I offer the gems equivalent to those gift here and now, will I be served," he again kept quite for a few seconds and then said loudly, "...food!"

When Birbal allowed the bargain, the merchant had food to his heart's content and then removed a pearl necklace from his neck and offered to Raidas dramatically offering it to him with profuse anology.

Raidas then praised Birbal to no end. When Akbar heard these details he was proud of his most able and the trusted 'Jewel'.

The Lion's Release

During the period when Akbar was the Mughal Emperor in India, there ruled a popular Emperor in Persia. Both the Emperors had good friendship and each of them used to send gifts to the other. At times they would also exchange practical riddles to test the intelligence of each other. It was a prevalent habit in those days.

Once the Emperor of Persia sent a huge cage having an artificial lion. But the lion was so well made that it looked almost live. When the cage reached Akbar's court many of the courtiers were stunned with fear. Some of them even tried to hide themselves behind the huge columns. Even the Emperor missed his one or two heart beats. The cage was huge and the lion looked really ferocious. It had its mouth open and two teeth protruding out. It had very velvety looking mane and incisive paw-nails. And the lion itself was larger than life. The maker of the lion really took pains. Had it been visible in the night, many onlookers would have collapsed out of the sheer shock!

The messengers from Persia, respectfully bowed before the Emperor and said: "O Emperor of India! Our Emperor has sent this lion to you. He wants you and your courtiers to apply their brains and solve this

riddle. The riddle is: This lion has to be taken out of the cage without either breaking the cage or disturbing the position of lion by physical force. Can any of your courtiers do it?"

Now, this was a very difficult puzzle. It appeared an impossible task. The Emperor asked his courtiers to think over the problems and offer their solutions. It involved the prestige of court. Losing a riddle-battle was reckoned to be equivalent to losing a war. And that was abhorrible to the Mighty Mughals.

Akbar surely missed his most able Minister, Birbal's services at the moment. At that time, unfortunately, Birbal had gone on his journey to the sacred places. It was impossible to send him the message and order his return because, in those days, there were no telephones and telegram's services available. Even if the Emperor wanted he had to send a messenger who could go only on a horse, the fastest vehicle available. Since according to his programme Birbal was somewhere deep in the south, his possible return would have meant a delay in solving the riddle by at least a month, while the time available to solve the puzzle was just fifteen or 20 days. Akbar was worried man. He had much less faith in the ingenuity and intelligence of his courtiers.

On the third day when the court reassembled, the Emperor asked his courtiers to offer their solution one by one. Only Abul Fazal and Faizy came forward but their solution involved the breaking up of either the lion's body or the cage which was not only against the rules of solving the puzzle, it was quite an impossibility.



Because the lion appeared to have been made of some metal and the cage itself had powerful iron bars. The Emperor dismissed them disdainfully and sat brooding over the puzzle.

But as the good luck would have it, Birbal returned much earlier than expected. Since his wife could not bear the wet heat of the southern provinces and repeatedly fell ill, he thought it better to come back to Agra. The moment he arrived he received the royal summons. Immediately he reached before the Emperor. Akbar then showed him the caged lion and

asked him to find a solution to empty the cage and take the lion out. Birbal scrutinised the cage and the lion minutely and asked the Emperor to grant him a day's time. Emperor had no objection. But now Akbar had some satisfaction that he had approached the right man.

Although Birbal found the lion, made of some metal quite sturdy and powerful, he detected that the beasts feet were rather unusually flat. And when he touched the lion by his hand, inserting his hand inside the criss-cross bars of the cage, he immediately hit upon the solution. "So this lion is made of some special wax having a coating of the metal paint," he thought to himself.

Next day, when he came in the court he had a thick iron rod in his hand. The Emperor was surprised. But ignoring his surprise, Birbal asked one of the assistants of the court to heat the rod till it is fully red. The rod had a wooden handle to hold it. When the rod was red hot, Birbal took the rod in his hand and brought it near the lion. Lo and behold! The lion began to melt. And the heated rod melted the entire body of the wax-made lion in a couple of minutes. The lion was not in the cage now. The riddle had been solved. When Birbal explained the trick, the Emperor was delighted and publicly admired Birbal. The Emperor's most trusted and intelligent minister solved the problem in a trice. The entire court gave Birbal a standing ovation.

The Missing Mohur

One day, when the Emperor was holding his court and gossiping with his courtiers, there arrived a mendicant like looking fellow. He reached inside the court and bowed before the Emperor: "O Emperor! I've heard great things about your court. People say that your court has the collection of nine human jewels whose intelligence, erudition, prowess in arts and worldliwiseness beat every one hollow. Now I give you a problem. If your courtiers are able to solve it, I'd bless your continued prosperity. If not, then I'd cast my curse on your head for spreading the false propaganda!"

The mandicant's declaration created a furore in the court. Some even suggested that the mendicant should be put behind the bars for his temerity to challenge the intelligence of the courtiers of the Mighty Mughal's court, while some were willing to take up the challenge. Then Emperor Akbar confabulated with Birbal before giving his orders. "Your Majesty!", advised Birbal with a sombreface, "these sort of mendicants are verily the human volcanoes. They have supreme powers which they receive by their great penance and worship. They could be eccentric a bit but not powerless. I hope there is no harm in accepting his challenge.

If we refuse it at the very outset, he might become angry and curse us. Maybe, we are able to solve the problem he poses before us. The solution of the problem might add feather to your Majesty's already glittering cap. My advice is that we must accept the challenge."

Since the Emperor had implicit faith in his trusted Minister's advice, he asked the mendicant to spell out his problem.

"O Emperor! This problem, though simple yet appears quite intricate. And this is the problem.

"Three way-farers happened to reach an inn at the dusk and asked the inn-keeper to provide a room for each of them.

The inn-keeper replied that he did not have three vacant rooms but if they desired they could stay in one room having three cots. The way-farer agreed. Then the inn-keeper took thirty bronze coins as the rent of the room and asked them to occupy the room. The threesome went to the room and began to relax.

"When during the night, the accountant of the inn-keeper came to keep the account, he informed the inn-keeper that he had overcharged the rent of the room by five coins. The rent of the room was just twenty five coins. Since the inn-keeper was an honest man, he immediately asked one of his innservants to return the five bronze coins to the travellers. The servant was not a very honest person. He mentally calculated that it was impossible to divide the five coins equally in three parts. How was he able to return the precise

amount to each traveller? Then he hit upon a solution. To avoid the dispute he quietly pocketed two coins and returned one coin each to the travellers."

"No the problem is: they were thirty coins in all. Two were pocketed by the servant and twenty seven (nine into three) were charged from the travellers only. So, out of the thirty coins, twenty seven were paid by the travellers and two pocketed by the servant. That makes only twenty nine coins in all. Where disappeared the thirtieth coin?"

Although the problem apparently looked not so difficult yet its solution was hard to get. All the courtiers including the Emperor thought over it but in vain. They made repeated calculation: two pocketed by the servant and the twenty seven coins were given by the travellers. That made only twenty nine. Where vanished the missing coin?"

When the stipulated time was nearing its end, the Emperor asked Birbal to offer a solution. Because all the other courtiers had failed to offer any. And the whole empire's prosperity depended on the correct solution to the problem! Otherwise the mendicant might cast his curse on the court. All looked at Birbal hopefully. But Birbal was quite unperturbed. He had the solution at his lips. He began. "O Mendicant! I am sorry to say that you tried to hoodwink the court's intelligence by the play of words to make the problem appear so difficult. It is simple. According to the problem the way-farer paid thirty coins and received back three coins. So, we can assume easily that they paid only twenty seven coins. The accountant had to

account for these twenty seven coins only. The accounts is simple. Out of the twenty seven coins paid by the way-farers, the servant pocketed just two coins and the remaining twenty five coins were received by the inn as the rent against the room. The question of missing coin is just a gimmick to put the solve of the problem on the wrong track. I hope you are satisfied with this solution!" concluded Birbal with a beaming countenance.

"Fine! well done, Birbal!, exclaimed the mendicant and added: "You are really very sharp and intelligent." Then turning towards the Emperor, the mendicant said that his right hand raised high, in a gesture of blessing. "O Emperor! I bless that you would be the most famous Emperor of your Dynasty! And the anecdotes manifesting your this Minister, Birbal's intelligence shall regale the country for many handred years!"



A.H.W.
SAHNI SERIES

FAMOUS CHILDREN'S CLASSICS

- * Gulliver's Travels
- * The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe
- * Ali Baba and Forty Thieves & Other Stories
- * Leaving the Heart Behind & Other Stories
- * Famous Folk Tales
- * Romantic Tales
- * Shattered Love & Other Stories
- * David Copperfield
- * Famous Wits of Akbar and Birbal

FAMOUS WITS OF AKBAR & BIRBAL



SAHNI PUBLICATIONS