

*Old Deccan Days; Or, Hindu Fairy
Legends, Current in South India*

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File Description:

This file collects plot summaries and relevant keywords for selected stories in *Old Deccan Days; Or, Hindu Fairy Legends, Current in South India* (1868) by Mary Frere and Anna Liberata de Souza. Indu Ohri's students developed these materials for an introductory survey course on literature and the visual arts from Romanticism to the modern day during summer 2022 at Boston University.

As part of a class assignment, students created these materials about the folklore collections on the *One More Voice* (OMV) website. Each student read one folktale and devised a short plot summary of important events and characters and 3-5 keywords indicating the folktale's major concepts, themes, or Indigenous terms. In addition, some students contributed extra materials such as keyword definitions, long plot summaries, and an essay that contextualizes the folktale "How Kimyera Became King of Uganda" more fully in terms of social hierarchy.

These collections were frequently the first vehicles for sharing people of color's voices with western readers because colonial administrators would gather folklore from local coauthors/co-creators who they often failed to acknowledge. The materials are meant to guide a general scholarly audience of educators, graduate students, and college students who may be unfamiliar with these folktales as well as to enrich the public's knowledge about Indigenous folklore.

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“Punchkin”

Plot Summary:

“Punchkin” tells the story of seven daughters of the local Rajah, or king. Among these daughters, Balna is the wittiest of them all. After the passing of their mother, the daughters endure constant abuse from their stepmother and, because of her schemes, they end up stranded in the forest after she orders her husband to kill them. All hope seems lost until seven sons of a neighboring Rajah find and wed them. Only Balna has children; therefore, her son is recognized as the heir. However, tragedy strikes when an evil magician called Punchkin sneaks into the palace disguised as a holy man. He falls in love with Balna and captures her. Fourteen years later, Balna’s son hears of the capture of his family and sets out to search for Punchkin. Upon discovering Punchkin’s power is held within a parrot, the young prince finds and slays this parrot, killing Punchkin and freeing his mother.

Keywords: Damsel/knight, Hero’s Journey, and Revenge

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

“A Funny Story”

Plot Summary:

Once upon a time, a Rajah and Raneer were unable to produce children just like a little dog in the palace. Finally, the couple have two children, but strangely, they are puppies. The dog, meanwhile, gives birth to two beautiful human girls. The Raneer often trades the puppies for the girls. Vexed, the dog, decides to raise the girls in the jungle. One day, two princes hunt in the jungle and discover the girls while looking for water. Captivated, they convince the girls to be their wives. Years later, the dog finds her daughters. The elder one rejoices to see her, while the younger one is embarrassed. The dog eventually dies from an injury but turns into a statue made from treasures. With the help of a cobra, the elder sister deceives her husband about the statue's origin. However, the younger sister perishes from the karma of her evil deeds.

Keywords: Cobra, Karma, Jungle, and Grieved

Keyword Definitions:

Cobra: Functions as a testament to one's character.

Karma: Broadly associated with the reward and repercussions of one's deeds.

Jungle: Used in the story as a sanctuary or a place of the supernatural.

Grief: Functions as motivation for several characters, which leads to the development of the story.

“Truth’s Triumph”

Plot Summary:

There was a Rajah with twelve wives and no children. He meets a girl named Guzra Bai and marries her. They have one hundred boys and one girl. His other wives become jealous. They convince the nurse to kill all the children and accuse Guzra Bai of witchcraft. Rajah imprisons Guzra Bai. The children survive, spending years fending for themselves. One day, all the boys are turned into crows by the Rakshas (demons). Later, a young Rajah finds the girl. He names her Draupadi Bai and marries her. They have a son named Ramchundra. Draupadi Bai tells Ramchundra her story. He decides to find the Rakshas and successfully restores the boys as humans. They have a celebration. Draupadi Bai’s father and the twelve wives attend, as well as Guzra Bai. Draupadi Bai explains everything. The wives are burnt, but the nurse, who was the guiltiest, is never punished for her crimes.

Keywords: Truth, Women, Family, Deception, and Bravery

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

“Rama and Luxman; or, The Learned Owl”

Plot Summary:

Rama is from the ruling class, while Luxman is from the serving class. However, Rama's mother wishes that they would stop being friends due to Rama's social status. Rama's mother hires a woman to cause a disagreement between them, which leads to Rama wanting Luxman dead. After a while, he realizes he needs Luxman and decides to make amends by going on a journey after seeing a vision of a princess. After going through trials, Rama marries Princess Bargaruttee. While Luxman stands guard, two owls come and tell him a crucial prophecy. Using this prophecy, he can save the princess from a snake; however, Luxman is turned into stone after it looks like he is trying to have a promiscuous relationship with Bargarutte. When Rama realizes what happened, he regrets his actions and waits for the prophecy to bring Luxman back. The prophecy is complete after Rama's son touches Luxman.

George W. Cox compares the stories of Rama and Luxman to an identical Aryan interpretation of a very similar story meant to signify the interchangeable nature of the story. This contextualizes both stories by comparing many eastern and western influences like the representation of an owl as a mystical figure or god in Greek mythology. However, this source brings up an interesting point with the direct connection of Hindu mythology with Greek mythology, though I personally am not knowledgeable enough to confirm the truthfulness of the statement (Cox 148-152).

Keywords: Wuzeer, Fate, Prophet, and Stone

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

“Little Surya-Bai”

Plot Summary:

Little Surya Bai, a milkwoman’s daughter, was carried away by the Eagles when she was only one year old. The Eagles treat her like a princess; one day, they leave because they want to find a diamond ring for Surya Bai. Because of a cat’s behavior, Surya Bai leaves home. She is then trapped by an old Rakshas and poisoned by a young Rakshas. Soon, a Rajah saves Surya Bai’s life, and they marry. However, a Ranee becomes jealous, so she kills Surya Bai and smears her rival’s old attendant. Surya Bai is then reborn as sunflowers and a mango tree. She goes back to her mother, the milkwoman, as a mango and grows up as a human. Surya Bai meets her old attendant and Rajah; they finally live happily together.

Keywords: Family, Love Triangle, and Fate

Keyword Definitions:

Family: Mother and daughter

Love Triangle: Happiness and harm

Fate: Obstacle and reunion

“The Valiant Chattee-maker”

Plot Summary:

The story is about a man called Chattee-maker (potter). On a stormy night, he is trying to find his donkey. There is a tiger that lies near an old woman’s poor house. Chattee-maker sees the tiger, but he thinks that it is his donkey. Chattee-maker beats the tiger badly and seizes it. His story is heard and spread all over the country. The king makes him the lord of his courts with houses and lands. Chattee-maker could not ride horses, but, unfortunately, he is chosen to be the leader of a war. He accidentally rides the horse and loses control. He tries to hold a banyan tree to get rid of the horse, but since he is traveling at a really high speed, the whole tree comes up by the roots. The sight of him holding a tree makes a powerful impression on the enemy, and they surrender. Chattee-maker’s “achievement” gives him a very happy ending for the rest of his life.

Keywords: Donkey, Horse, and Honor

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

“The Rakshas’ Palace”

Plot Summary:

A Rajah had two princesses, but their mother died, and the stepmother treats them badly. Therefore, they leave home and live in Raksha’s house in the jungle by themselves. Raksha and his wife are not at home when the two princesses arrive. After Raksha returns home, a brave idea appears in the smart younger princess’s head. She kills Raksha and his wife when they are drinking water by pushing them into a well. Then, the two princesses live in Raksha’s house for a while until one day a prince knocks on the door asking for water. The younger princess tells her sister to stay home and disguises herself in ragged clothes and covers her face with charcoal when the stranger comes. However, the prince is brilliant enough to discover her real beauty by pouring water on her face. He brings the older princess with him and marries her. When the younger princess returns home, she goes on a six-month journey to find her sister by following the pearls that her sister has left on the ground. She arrives disguised as an old ugly woman, but the brother of the prince who found her sister sees her real beauty and wants to marry her. When they marry, the old Rajah and Ranee find out that the two princesses look exactly the same. In the end, the two princesses reunite and live happily for the rest of their lives.

Keywords: Intelligence, Girl Power, Independence, Wicked Impulse, and Family Reunion

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

“Muchie-Lal”

Plot Summary:

In this folktale, Rajah and Raneer have no children until one day a small fish who is not yet dead is brought into the kitchen. Raneer keeps the fish as a pet named Muchie-Rajah and feeds him cooked rice twice a day. Muchie-Rajah requests a wife from the Raneer one morning, but everyone she knows claims they would not let one of their daughters marry the Fish Prince except a Fakeer. The Raneer addresses the Fakeer's daughter with kindness and orders that she be transported to a chamber in the palace. She follows a Cobra's instructions to throw stones at Muchie-Rajah and he turns into a handsome prince whom she marries. The new Raneer's stepmother claims to be overjoyed at her stepdaughter's good fortune, but, in truth, she is merely relieved that she has gained control over the Raneer. As a result, she instructs her daughter to drown her stepsister in the river. The wretched Muchie-Rajah searches all throughout the country for his wife, but he learns nothing about her. Then, he encounters a Bangle-seller, who informs him of a mother and her child who live in a Cobra's burrow. The Bangle-seller states that he will visit the Cobra's hole the next day. As the Bangle-seller comes along, jingling his bangles, a gentle voice inside the hole calls out, “Come here, my Muchie-Lal, and try on your bangles.” Then, the Muchie-Rajah kneels at the mouth of the hole and asks the Muchie-Raneer to show him her face, and the reunited family lives happily ever after.

Keywords: Childless, Cobra, Evil Stepmother, and Fish

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

“Chundun-Rajah”

Plot Summary:

“Chundun-Rajah” is about an orphaned princess whose sisters-in-law lie about her wickedness to drive her out of her house. They prohibit her from returning home unless she marries Chundun-Rajah, a deceased King. By coincidence, she stumbles upon the tomb of the Rajah, who returns to life for a few hours every night. He died because a Peri stole a necklace containing his soul. Peri visits him every night, which is when he comes back to life. The princess marries him, becoming the Chundun-Ranee. She then bears a son. One night, when the Peri visits, the Rajah’s son breaks the necklace, allowing the Rajah to return to life. To celebrate, the couple decides to have a wedding to which they invite the Princess’s brothers and sisters-in-law. The Princess exposes the evil sisters-in-law for their lies, and the Chundun-Rajah, Chundun-Ranee, their son, her brothers, and her one kind sister-in-law then live happily together.

Keywords: Peri, Chundun Har, and Wickedness

Keyword Definitions:

Peri: Indian poets adapted peris, a mythical, fairy-like creature from Persian Islamic folklore, into their writing. In “Chundun-Rajah,” a Peri falls in love with the King. She proposes to him, but he rejects her. As a result, she steals his Chundun Har, killing him.

Chundun Har: According to the story, it is a “sacred necklace” that holds the soul of its owner. In Indian culture, and particularly in the Hindu religion, jewelry often carries spiritual meaning. Astrological rings containing different stones are believed to provide different types of protection.

Wickedness: The main theme of “Chundun-Rajah” appears to be that evil never prevails.

Despite the hardships the Chundun-Rajah and the Chundun-Ranee face, they get their happy ending. On the other hand, the wicked sisters-in-law are punished for the lies they make up about the Ranee and the Peri ends up all alone without a partner due to her misdeed.

“Sodewa-Bai”

Plot Summary:

A princess, Sodewa-Bai, is born with a golden necklace and she will die if it is taken off her. She is gifted golden slippers on her fourteenth birthday but loses one. There is a reward for whoever reclaims it. Rowjee (Prince) finds the slipper and his reward is to marry Sodewa-Bai. Rowjee already has a wife and a child. Rowjee’s first Ranee does not like Sodewa-Bai. Rowjee goes on a journey, leaving his two wives at home. Ranee discovers the necklace is the key to Sodewa-Bai’s life. Ranee demands her servant take off the chain and Sodewa-Bai dies. The servant wears the necklace during the day and undresses at night, and, when off, Sodewa-Bai comes back to life, but she is in the tomb. Sodewa-Bai has a son in the tomb. Overnight, Rowjee goes to the tomb to see Sodewa-Bai. Learning that she does not have her necklace, Rowjee imprisons Ranee. Rowjee and Sodewa-Bai live happily ever after.

Keywords: Love, Jealousy, Fairytale, Magic, and Family

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

“How The Three Clever Men Outwitted the Demons”

Plot Summary:

Once, a man shot an arrow so precisely that he could shoot cleanly through his wife's nose ring, and so he did every day. His wife grows tired of this, as she is fearful one day he would miss, and she tells her husband to go out into the world to find a man cleverer than he is, and so he does. He goes out and comes across a man of great strength. The man of strength is also looking for a man cleverer than him and specifically for the man of accuracy. They rejoice and go on together looking for a man cleverer than themselves. They lastly come across a man of intellect, who is looking for a man cleverer than himself, and for the man of accuracy and for the man of strength specifically. They rejoice and go to the home of the man of intellect. After some shenanigans, they come across a demon, and together they are taken to the realm of the demons, where they vanquish the king of them all. The three men are given all the demon's riches and go home happy. They all found more men cleverer than themselves as together they outwitted and vanquished the demons.

Keywords: Indian Mythology, Demons, Domination over the Strange, Clever, and Oral Tradition

Keyword Definitions: There are no definitions for this item.

Work Cited

Cox, George W. *The Mythology of the Arian Nations*. Vol. 1. Longmans, Green, 1870.