



ASECA CHANNEL

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Website: www.allindiaaseca.org

E-mail: contact@allindiaaseca.org

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Editorial

On 2nd October 2014, Government of India launched 'Swachh Bharat Mission' to spread the awareness on and propagate the importance of cleanliness and the virtues of maintaining cleanliness in and around the surroundings of one's as well as the collective life.

As part of the initiative Prime Minister took the lead in administering the pledge on that day. For the benefit of readers the same is reproduced below:

“Mahatma Gandhi dreamt of an India which was not only free but also clean and developed.

Mahatma Gandhi secured freedom for Mother India.

Now it is our duty to serve Mother India by keeping the country neat and clean.

I take this pledge that I will remain committed towards cleanliness and devote time for this.

I will devote 100 hours per year, that is two hours per week, to voluntarily work for cleanliness.

I will neither litter nor let others litter.

I will initiate the quest for cleanliness with myself, my family, my locality, my village and my work place.

I believe that the countries of the world that appear clean are so because their citizens don't indulge in littering nor do they allow it to happen.

With this firm belief, I will propagate the message of Swachh Bharat Mission in villages and towns.

I will encourage 100 other persons to take this pledge which I am taking today.

I will endeavour to make them devote their 100 hours for cleanliness.

I am confident that every step I take towards cleanliness will help in making my country clean.”

The relevance and processes are well accepted and appreciated by majority of the people. It is worthwhile to mention the age old practice of some community to remain clean and tidy. The adivasi community's practices and the norms to remain neat and tidy are part of their culture. The Santal community in particular keeps its houses as well as the surrounding with proper care and with utmost sincerity. It will not be out of place to mention that on daily basis upkeep and maintenance of their houses, courtyard and even the common through fare places like roads and corridors are the common norm. Early in the morning, the habitat places are cleaned and dusted with broom and also the places are plastered as well as sprinkled with the solution of cow dung and water. Usually it is seen that people only keep their sacred places with utmost care, but in case of Santal people they take care of their hearth and home similar to a sacred place. The discipline and the dedication to remain neat and clean was/is there from time immemorial in the Santal community and is part of their daily life. It is this reality due to which a Santal village is recognised easily by their immaculate use of colours, paintings and pattern of whitewashing on the wall. The virtues are being felt now in light of the national agenda to remain neat and tidy. This has brought to light one aspect that Santal community par se is forward looking and what people emphasize now has been part of their life from very old days. The requirement to keep one's own sphere should be emulated and encouraged at all levels. The involvement of people in this noble initiative would bring in a sense of self dignity and at the same time it will also promote good health and hygiene.

Folklore of the Santal Parganas

Translated by Cecil Henry Bompas of the Indian Civil Service, 1909

{ASECA CHANNEL intends to publish the stories in order to familiarize the stories among the general public for their better appreciation}

{Continued from November 2014 issue}

XVII. Kuwar and the Raja's Daughter.

Now Kuwar's wife was very fair to see and the Raja saw her and fell in love with her and made a plot to get possession of her. So when the centre post had been planted and still no water came he said "We must see what sacrifice is required to make the water come. I have animals of all kinds; one by one they shall be offered and you shall sing and dedicate them." So first an elephant was led down into the bed of the tank and the people sang

"Tank, we will sacrifice to you an elephant
Let clear water bubble up, O tank,"

but no water came.

Then they led down a horse and sang a similar song, but no water came; and then in succession a camel, a donkey, a cow, a buffalo, a goat and a sheep were offered but no water came; and so they stopped. Then the Raja asked why they stopped and they said that they had no more animals. Then the Raja bade them sing a song dedicating a man, to see if that would bring the water; so they sang and as they sang water bubbled up everywhere from the bottom of the tank and then the coolies were stricken with fear for they did not know which of them would be sacrificed.

But the Raja sent his soldiers and they seized Kuwar and bound him to the post in the middle of the tank; and then a song was sung dedicating him to the tank and as the water rose around him the princess wept bitterly; but the Raja said "Do not cry I will arrange for your support and will give you part of my kingdom and you shall live in my palace." The princess said "Yes: hereafter I may stay with you, but let me now watch Kuwar till he is drowned;" so Kuwar fixed his eyes on the princess and tears streamed down his face until the waters rose and covered him; and the princess also gazed at him till he was drowned. Then the Raja's soldiers told her to come with them and she

said "Yes, I am coming, but let me first offer a libation of water to my dead husband;" and on this pretext she went into the water and then she darted to the place where Kuwar had been bound and sank beneath the surface. The Raja bade men rescue her but all were afraid to enter the water and she was seen no more. Then the Raja gave all the coolies a feast and scattered money among the crowd and dismissed them. And this is the end of the story.

XVIII. The Laughing Fish.

There was once a merchant who prospered in his business and in the course of time became very rich. He had five sons but none of them was married. In the village where he lived was an old tank which was half silted up and he resolved to clean it out and deepen it, if the Raja would give it to him; so he went to the Raja and the Raja said that he could have the tank if he paid forty rupees. The merchant paid the money and then went home and called his family together and said that they would first improve the tank and then find wives for all his sons. The sons agreed and they collected coolies and drained off the water and began to dig out the silt. When they had drained off the water they found in the bed of the tank a number of big fish of unknown age: which they caught and two of them they sent to the Raja as a present. When the fish were carried into the presence of the Raja they both began to laugh: then the Raja said "What is the meaning of this? Here are two dead fish, why are they laughing?" And he told the men who brought the fish to explain what was the matter or else to take them away again. But they could give no explanation. Then the Raja called all his officers and astrologers and asked them what they thought it meant: but no one could give him any answer. Then the Raja told the men to take the fish away again, and to tell the merchant that, if he could not explain why the fish laughed, he would kill him and all his descendants; and he wrote a letter to the same effect, and fixed a day by which the merchant was to explain the matter. When

the merchant read the letter he fell into the greatest distress and for two or three days he could not make up his mind whether to go on with the work on the tank or no; but in the end he resolved to finish it so that his name might be held in remembrance. So they finished the work and then the merchant said to his sons: "My sons I cannot arrange for your marriages, for the Raja has threatened to kill us all, if I cannot explain why the fish laughed; you must all escape from here so that our family may not die out;" but the younger sons all answered "We are not able to take care of ourselves, either you come with us to protect us or we will stay here." Then the merchant told his eldest son to escape alone so that their family might not become extinct.

So the eldest son took a supply of money and went away into a far country. After travelling a long time he came to a town where a Raja lived and decided to stay there; so he first went to a tank and bathed and sat down on the bank to eat some refreshment; and as he sat the daughter of the Raja came down to the tank to bathe and she saw the merchant's son and their eyes met. Then the princess sent her maid-servants to ask him where he came from; and he told them where he came from and that he meant to make a stay in that town, and he promised them a rupee if they could persuade the princess to uncover her face. They went and told their mistress all this and she answered "Go and get your rupee from him, I will uncover my face; and ask him what he wants." And when they went, she drew aside the cloth from her face; then he gave them the rupee, and they asked him whether he had seen her and what his intention was; then he said that his wish was to marry the princess and live with her in her father's house! When the princess heard this she said "Yes, my heart has gone out to him also;" so then she bathed and went home and lay down in her room and would not get up, and when her father asked her what was the matter, she made no answer. Then they asked her maidens what was the matter and they said that she had seen a stranger by the tank and wished to marry him. The Rani asked whether the stranger was still there and they said that they had left him by the tank. So two men were sent to fetch the stranger or to find out where he had gone. The two servants went and found the merchant's son just ready to continue his journey, and they asked him who he was and what he wanted. He said that he was looking for employment but would like best to marry and live in the house of

his father-in-law. Then they told him not go away and they would arrange such a marriage for him, so they took him to a house in the town and left him there and went back to the Raja. They told the Raja that the stranger had gone away but that they could follow him and bring him back if he gave them some money for their journey. So the Raja gave them two rupees; then they went off but only ate their dinner at home, and then they brought the merchant's son to the Raja, pretending that they had overtaken him a long way off. He was questioned about himself and he told his whole history except that the Raja had threatened to cut off his family, and his account being satisfactory it was arranged that he should marry the princess. Musicians were sent for and the marriage took place at once. After his marriage the merchant's son was much depressed at the thought of his brothers' fate and in the middle of the night he used to rise up and weep till the bed was soaked with his tears; the princess noticed this and one night she pretended to go to sleep but really lay awake and watched her husband; and in the middle of the night saw him rise quietly and begin to sob. She was filled with sympathy and went to him and begged him to tell her what was the matter and whether he was sorry that he had married her; and he answered "I cry because I am in despair; in the daytime I restrain my tears before others with difficulty but in the night they cannot be kept back; but I am ashamed for you to see me and I wait till you are asleep before I give way to my feelings."

Then she asked what was the cause of his sorrow and he answered "My father and mother and brothers and sisters are all doomed to die; for our Raja has sworn to kill them by a certain day if he is not told why two fish, which my father sent to him as a present, laughed when they were brought before him. In consequence of this threat my father sent me from home that one of the families might survive and although I may be safe here the thought of them and their fate makes me weep." The princess asked him what was the day fixed for the mystery to be explained; and he told her that it was at the full moon of a certain month. Then the princess said "Come take me to your father's house: I shall be able to explain why the fishes laughed." The merchant's son joyfully agreed to start off the next day; so in the morning they told the Raja why they wished to go, and he said to his

daughter “Go and do not be afraid; go in confidence, I promise you that you will be able to explain why the fishes laughed.”

So they made ready and journeyed to the merchant’s house; and when they arrived they told the merchant to go to the Raja and ask him to collect all the citizens on a certain day to hear the reason why the fishes laughed. The merchant went to the Raja and the Raja gave him a letter fixing the day and all the citizens were assembled in an open plain; and the princess dressed herself as a man and went to the assembly and stood before the Raja.

Then the Raja bade her explain why the fishes laughed, and the princess answered “If you wish to know the reason order all your Ranis to be brought here;” so the Ranis were summoned; then the princess said “The reason why the fishes laughed was because among all your wives it is only the eldest Rani who is a woman and all the others are men. What will you give me if this is not proved to be true?” Then the Raja wrote a bond promising to give the merchant half his kingdom if this were proved to be true. When enquiry was made it was found that the wives had really become men, and the Raja was put to shame before all his people. Then the assembly broke up and the merchant received half the Raja’s kingdom.

XIX. How the Cowherd Found a Bride.

There was once a Goala who was in charge of a herd of cattle and every day he used to bring the herd for their midday rest to the foot of a peepul tree. One day the peepul tree spoke and said to him “If you pour milk every day at my roots I will grant you a boon.” So thenceforward the Goala every day poured milk at the roots of the tree and after some days he saw a crack in the ground; he thought that the roots of the tree were cracking the earth but the fact was that a snake was

buried there, and as it increased in size from drinking the milk it cracked the ground and one day it issued forth; at the sight of it the Goala was filled with fear and made sure that the snake would devour him. But the snake said “Do not fear: I was shut up in the nether world, and you by your kindness have rescued me, I wish to show gratitude to you and will confer on you any boon for which you ask.” The Goala answered that the snake should choose what he would give him; then the snake called him near, and breathed on his hair which was very long and it became glistening as gold, and the snake said that his hair would obtain for him a wife and that he would be very powerful; and that whatever he said would come to pass. The Goala asked what sort of things would come to pass. The snake answered “If you say a man shall die he will die and if you say he shall come to life, he will come to life. But you must not tell this to anyone; not even to your wife when you marry; if you do the power will vanish.”

Some time afterwards it happened that the Goala was bathing in the river; and as he bathed one of his hairs came out and the fancy took him to wrap it in a leaf and set it to float down the stream. Lower down the river a princess was bathing with her attendants and they saw the packet come floating down and tried to stop it but it floated straight to the princess and she caught it and opened it and found the hair inside. It shone like gold and when they measured it, it was twelve fathoms long. So the princess tied it up in her cloth and went home and shut herself up in her room, and would neither eat nor drink nor speak. Her mother sent two of her companions to question her, and at last she told them that she would not rise and eat until they found the person to whom the golden hair belonged; if it were the hair of a man he should be her husband and if it came from a girl she would have that girl come and live with her.

{To be continued....}

FROM:

If undelivered please return to:
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 SFS Flat No. 326, Pocket 10,
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