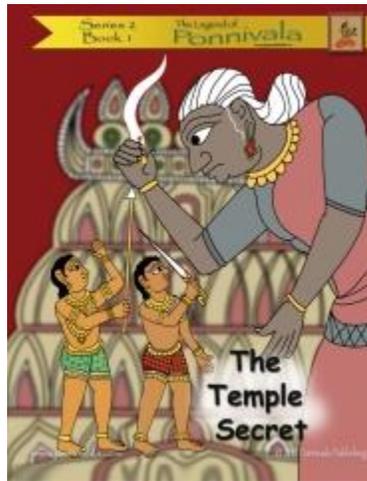


Episode 14 – The Temple Secret (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

Resource Materials: Individual comic books, a graphic novel set or 26 videos

VISIT our SHOP: Choose the retelling that works best for you



14-a **A Midwife Is Bribed By Greedy Clansmen**

Several clan relatives of the ruling family in Ponnivala hear rumors that triplets (two sons and one daughter) will soon be born to the queen. They decide to bribe the local midwife, asking her to kill the two baby boys before their mother ever sees them. She is to “stuff any male babies down a rat hole” leaving only baby girls to survive. But Lord Vishnu hears about the plan from his seat on the milk sea and decides to help the queen. He alerts the local family goddess and asks her to dig a secret tunnel that will connect the palace birthing room to her nearby temple.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Sometimes malicious plans are carried out secondhand, by someone who has been bribed or otherwise drawn in to serve as a “henchman.” Do you know a story about someone, like this midwife, who agreed to execute a plan without being the crook who is really “behind it all?”

COMMENTARY: The midwife is a “classical” example of someone who gets blamed for malicious (or careless) work. In this story the midwife is a hunchback, and she is also elderly, both characteristics that can be used to stigmatize someone. But really the midwife is just a “worker” pressed into service by her powerful superiors. She is not in a position to say “no.” (See the parallel with the hunchback Manthara from India’s classical epic *The Ramayana*).

14-b **Two Magical Heroes Are Born!**

Then Vishnu takes the form of a fly on the wall of the birthing room. The midwife blindfolds the queen, telling her that “this is her first experience of childbirth” and that the blindfold will help her not to be scared. While she sharpens her knife in an adjacent room Vishnu transforms into his true self and performs a magical Caesarian on the queen. He lifts out the twin boys who are already strong and warlike. They first “kick the evil” out of

the midwife, straightening her back (which earlier had 18 bends).

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: A Caesarian birth is a sort of “magical” event, even when performed by a human doctor. Were you, or was anyone you know born in this way? Imagine how much more magical these heroes’ births were... since the “operation” was performed by a god.

COMMENTARY: This magical birth of twins has many classical parallels. Many cultures treat the birth of twins as very special. Twins are often thought to have magical powers. Certainly they do in this episode as they are born fully active, dressed, able to speak, and they hold weapons they can already use. In this first “glimpse” of their characters we already see that there will be difference between the elder twin who is the more patient and peaceful, and his younger brother who is much more active and aggressive. The young hero, Shankar, kicks the midwife who is present in a side room because he “knows” (due to his magical powers) that she has had thoughts of killing him at his birth. So he kicks her to “get those evil thoughts to leave her.” He aims his kicks at her hunch and succeeds in straightening it, symbolizing his success in transforming her inner character.

14-c **A Shocked Mother Learns The Truth About Her Only New Born**

Then the goddess appears in the room and lifts the two boys in her arms. She whisks them thru her secret tunnel to her local shrine where they will now live safely hidden under her protection. Meanwhile, the queen gives birth naturally to the third in the series, a baby girl. When her blindfold is finally untied the new mother is shocked to learn that she has only one baby girl.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: How would you feel if you had been told you would give birth to triplets and only one child showed up? Could this ever happen in the “real world,” especially before the age of the ultra sound machine?

COMMENTARY: The fact that the goddess is raising the twin heroes in her underground “cave” is important. It gives them a kind of “implied” contact with the powers of the underworld. Of course it also associates them with the temple and with the powers of the goddess herself. At the same time the fact that the two male children are raised secretly, in an off-site location, links the story to many other folktales and myths where “first born” males are subject to a threat of death. Jesus is said to have been taken into Egypt by his parents for this very reason. Because inherited power and wealth is generally understood to descend from father to first born son (here and in many other societies... but not universally) it is the young boys who are at risk. Infant girls normally escape such threats.

14-d **The Twin Heroes Are Raised By A Goddess**

The king and queen graciously accept their fate and commit to raising their daughter well. She introduces her to the family goddess and welcomes her into palace life. Meanwhile, the local goddess is secretly raising the girl’s twin brothers in a

cave-like space under her temple. There she feeds the boys on the milk of tigers and elephants. Soon they will grow mature and be endowed with magical powers. But all this happens without the knowledge of the royal couple.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The king and queen are gracious and good. They accept the fact that they have only a daughter and they decide to raise her well. Do you know a story about a family that was very happy to have a girl child? Do you know a family that wasn't and really wanted to have boys, but then when they got a girl anyway they "adjusted" and discovered that girls are wonderful?

COMMENTARY: Sometimes children get separated from their biological parents at a very young age, either by accident or deliberately. Though in real life this is generally considered unfortunate, there are times when the child is exposed to a better life than the real parents could have given it. Here the two boys are really "blessed" by the goddess. She is able to feed them very special foods and help to develop their magical strength and powers. Their stay with her is one of the many ways we come to know that these are no ordinary children, but rather two young lives that reincarnate important aspects of divinity itself.