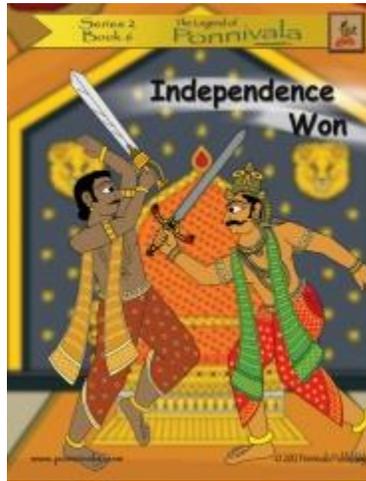


Episode 16 – The Homecoming (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

Resource Materials: Individual comic books, a graphic novel set, or 26 videos
VISIT our SHOP: Choose the retelling that works best for you



16-a A Goddess Visits The Couples' Humble Home

The goddess takes the boys on her shoulders and sets out on foot to search for their parents. After several inquiries and some wandering she finally hears that the boys' family is living in a hunter king's horse stall. She leaves the twins at the local temple in the hunters' main village and cautions them to stay put while she goes on an unspecified errand. Soon her shadow crosses the doorstep of the couple's living space. They rush out to find this most unexpected visitor.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you have a story about a surprise house guest? Who was it and did the person bring some important and startling news?

COMMENTARY: There are plenty of traditional stories like this, when a magical or divine visitor arrives at a person's home. Sometimes it is in a dream or vision, instead of being portrayed as an actual event, like it is in this story. She also brings news that the couple find hard to believe. It takes a while for them to "adjust" their thinking and become accustomed to the idea that they actually have three children (including two sons). One can also talk about the multiple lines the goddess draws at the boys' feet when she asks them to wait at the local temple for her return. This has a direct parallel in the great Ramayana story where the brother of the hero draws lines on the ground to indicate that his sister-in-law should not leave the spot where she has been told to wait for her husband's return. This use of "magical" barriers can be related to "boundaries" parents need to set for their children's behaviour.... anywhere. At a more "scientific" level one could cite the boundaries set for some dogs by "invisible electric fences" nowadays, or for cattle using a single electrified wire.

16-b The Queen Asks For Proof of Her Sons' Legitimacy

At first the queen does not believe that she could have two sons. But the goddess asks her and her husband to come to the nearby temple to see for themselves. Both the king and the queen are overjoyed at the beauty of the two young boys they find waiting there. But the queen refuses to believe

the goddess' assurance that these children belong to her. She calls upon Vishnu to verify the matter. He proves the goddess' word by staging a magical demonstration. He makes milk from the queen's breasts pass through seven cloth veils to reach her sons' mouths and then spill into her sons' mouths. The couple are overjoyed and realize that it is now time for them to return to their old palace and reclaim their ancestral lands.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: How would you “prove” that a child belongs to you and not to someone else? Can you think of ways people did this before the world had blood tests and other genetic indicators of kinship that doctors and scientists could use?

COMMENTARY: The “magical” test of kinship that Lord Vishnu devises is significant in several ways. For one it uses milk, which is considered “the” substance which links a mother and child definitively. Secondly, the seven cloths are like “seven veils.” They provide modesty for the queen, since women of high status were expected to keep their breasts well covered (in medieval times for sure and also frequently in the present). Indeed breast covering was used as a sign of status, as traditionally low status women did not supposed to wear “blouses” (an upper caste privilege). Technically most of the women in this story (except the queens) should be drawn without blouses (if the medieval period in this region of India is to be portrayed accurately). However, because of the sensitivity of this topic every woman in this story has been given a modern-style blouse. The number seven is a sort of magical “formula.” Many things occur in sevens, in Indian stories as well as in European ones. And furthermore, because this is a kind of “sacred ritual” the queen must bathe properly before undertaking this breast-milk “test.”

16-c **The Royal Couple Return From Exile With Three Children Instead of One**

The couple return to Ponnivala with all three children and reclaim their ancestral lands. Their palace is cleaned and redecorated. Soon the two boys meet their key guardian for the first time. He is the magical son of a poor family living nearby. They also meet the offspring of many important animals in the kingdom (horses, goats, etc.) that they will interact with again later.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know a story about a child who enters a new land and a new life.... and shows eagerness to explore the changed surroundings? Did they have fun? What did they learn?

COMMENTARY: This is the episode where the twin brothers start to explore their lands and learn about their heritage. Their learning is very physical and they interact a lot with this animals. They also are given an assistant who will be with them for life. The relationship the story describes is both very traditional and interesting. The assistant is actually from a very low ranking caste (he is technically an “untouchable”) yet he is greatly honored and respected by the young heroes. This bond between a land owning family of rank and a low ranking family of near-by workers is very traditional. It can be seen in other cultures too, Something very similar is described by a recent award winning novel about Afghanistan: [The Kite Runner](#).

16-d **The Couple Arrange Their Sons' Weddings**

All three children grow up happily, but the king and queen now begin to worry about their own deaths and want to arrange their sons' weddings. The two boys resist, but finally agree to their mother's wishes. However, they set out one key condition: they will never touch their wives or look at their faces. (Of course this implies there will be no offspring from these promised formal unions). The queen is horrified but has to agree to this wish in order to strike a bargain with her two sons.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know a story about someone who didn't want to marry but their parents "pushed" them into it. What was the result? Did the marriage go badly or even "break up" soon afterwards?

COMMENTARY: The sister, though technically the same age as her brothers is not in question here. Normally "elder" brothers would be married before their "younger" sister. Here we can guess that the parent's concern is with the family inheritance. The married sons will be able to hold on to the family lands. The sister can be married a little later, if necessary after they have passed on. The very strange "condition" that is set for the joint wedding and for lack of contact with the two brides has something to do with the sons wish to maintain their maximum virility. This is a way of satisfying "the letter of the law" (marriage is required) without any physical results (love making and the birth of offspring). The unions become purely symbolic. One could compare the "no physical touch" condition to the rule some U.S. football teams have that specifies (or used to specify) "no sex" for the male players on the night before a big game. (Loss of semen can be understood to equate to a loss of power. Stored up semen, in Hindu thinking, equates to increased supernatural and spiritual power)