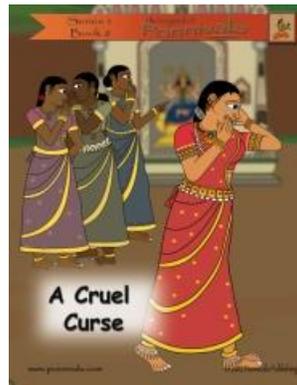


Episode 8 – A Cruel Curse (Sub Stories a, b, and c)

Resource Materials: Graphic comic books, ipad books, + videos)

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



8-a) A WONDEROUS PALACE IS BUILT

The newly rich farmer now sends for a thousand stone masons and carpenters to build his palace. It will be a fine building with many rooms. Lord Vishnu is watching from his couch on the milk sea. He decides to descend to earth and help. Invisibly, for every stone the masons lay, Vishnu lays another thousand. In this way their fine palace is quickly constructed.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: How would you design a palace and what rooms would you have in it? (Do some internet research) How do you think palaces built in India differ from palaces found elsewhere in the world? What is the reason for these differences?

COMMENTARY: Palaces in India are famous for their outer fortification walls. Inside one normally finds a “mini” city, complete with wells, temples, palace animals and many weapons of war. There are many courtyards and open spaces. There are also many ceremonial reception halls for visitors. Old palaces are very hard to find nowadays, especially in the far South. This is because the enemies of a ruler generally destroyed the entire physical space after its conquest. This humiliated the previous ruler and made a comeback by his family that much more difficult. Note: This is exactly what happened to the hero's initial family palace in this Ponnivala story.

8-b) A GRAND CORONATION OCCURS

The farmer's wife calls on Lord Vishnu and announces that she wants to perform a major “inauguration” ceremony. Lord Vishnu suggests that all three monarchs of the South (the well-known Chola, Chera and Pandiya kings) be invited. He also announces that he wants to confer a title on the family. A grand ceremony ensues with many honors accorded the new “king” of Ponnivala. Rather tardily, rival clansmen arrive and pay their respects to the three monarchs. The Chola king then tells them that they must give back all the lands that once belonged to the farmer-king's father. The clansmen agree to do so and quickly leave.

SUGGESTED EXERCISE: Have you ever seen a royal coronation? What kinds of symbols of respect and authority are used? Are European traditions any different from the what one seen in the Ponnivala Story?

COMMENTARY: The king and queen of Ponnivala are actually only “minor royalty” and do not have the same stature as their guests. The Chola, Chera and Pandiya overlords are understood to represent the three great kingdoms known to South Indian history. They were rarely a friendly three-some. Here they are conferring honors on an ally whose overall power is less than theirs. Plenty of information about these three kingdoms is available on the internet.

8-c) **A TRAGIC CURSE: THE QUEEN IS BARREN**

The Chola now turns to the new raja and issues a set of instructions on how to be a wise ruler. Then he leaves for his own territory, hoping that the Ponnivala area will now be ruled with justice and kindness. But the couple lack one vital thing: children. They purchase a pair of fine cows, two handsome horses, and even a male and female pig. But none of these animals bear offspring. Finally the queen grows weary of her barrenness and yearns to visit her natal household. There she can at least see her brother’s children. Her husband is vehemently opposed to this plan. He remembers the way that family “cast them out” at the moment of their marriage. But the queen is determined to go and starts her preparations.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Why is the queen’s barrenness such a big issue? Why are the barren animals important? And is the queen justified in visiting her brothers’ home when her husband has told her not to go?

COMMENTARY: There are many different threads one can follow up on here. Barrenness is the stumbling block to perpetuating the family’s rule of the area. The animals were bought as a kind of “test” of the broader curse that lies on the family (see episode 1-d). If none of them bear offspring then the whole kingdom is covered by the curse, making the situation very serious indeed. And finally the issue of the queen’s “right” to visit her brother is important. This is one “right” that women retain for life. No husband has the authority to keep his wife from visiting her natal family. The “twist” here is that such visits are usually built around the wives pregnancy and then delivery of her children, which by custom should happen in her natal home. In this case she is “barren” so the normal reason for such a visit is absent, even contravened. Furthermore her brothers threw her out at the moment of her marriage, telling her never to return (see episode 5-c). This makes the situation very unclear. One might say that the wife’s and the husband’s logic are equally balanced in this “tug-of-war” scene.