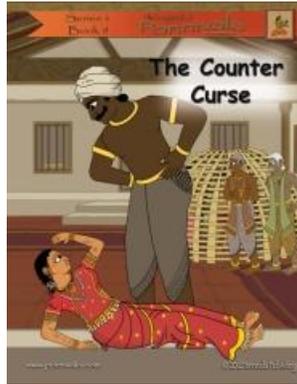


## Episode 9 – The Counter Curse (Sub Stories a, b, and c)

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

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



### 9-a) A BARREN “WITCH” IS SPOTTED

The queen orders the jewelers to come and prepare necklaces for her nieces and nephews. She also has lovely boxes made to carry these and her other lovely gifts. Then, early one morning, she awakens her husband to tell him that she is leaving for her brother’s place. Once more the king again tells her not to go but she is determined. She bravely sets out with a group of servants. After much hardship en route the weary travelers arrive. At that moment the two sisters-in-law of the queen spot the strangers. Asking who they are and why they have come, these ladies discover that their husband’s sister has arrived. Remembering that this woman had been forbidden ever to return to their place they rush back to the palace to warn their husbands. Fearing her evil spells (because she is barren) together they make a plan to hide all the children under some large baskets.

**SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES:** What stories to you know about people rejecting strangers and being afraid of them? How does this story resemble (or differ) from ideas about foreigners being dangerous that some people have?

**COMMENTARY:** The queen’s status is beautifully ‘ambiguous’ in this encounter. She has been made into a “foreigner” by an act of expulsion that occurred at the moment of her marriage. But she can still claim her right as a “blood sister” of the two men who now live in her old palace home.

### 9-b) THE SISTER IS REFUSED ENTRY TO HER NATAL HOME

The palace guard has been instructed to refuse entry to the visiting sister. Instead the gate is locked and she is severely beaten when she knocks on the door. The crying woman calls on Lord Vishnu and asks for a magic fireball. Vishnu asks permission for this from Lord Shiva and when the great god consents, the angry woman receives her fire ball and with it she burns the palace.

**SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES:** Brother/sister arguments are common around the world. Do you know of a story where a brother locked his sister out? How did she respond?

**COMMENTARY:** This story can be discussed as a metaphor for many kinds of anger that can come between a brother and sister. In India the social reputation of the sister is a matter of honor for the brother. In this story it is the sister's barrenness that has her brothers frightened and angry. But other reasons for worry about a sister's reputation are more common, especially worries that she has been defiled or polluted in some way. Brothers are supposed to protect their sisters from harm, so this story presents a shocking "inversion" of the correct behaviour of a brother. It is "natural" for a sister to respond to this moral misbehavior of her brothers with anger that seems as "hot" as real fire. In this sub-story the sister has a moral right to expect hospitality from her brothers. Her barrenness is not her fault, their violent treatment of her is reprehensible. Nonetheless, one can understand why (given their beliefs about barren women) they are afraid of her.

**9-c) THE SISTER CURSES HER BROTHERS  
AND (TEMPORARILY) KILLS THEIR CHILDREN**

The angry sister kills all fourteen children inside the palace by throwing some magical handfuls of earth in their direction. Finally she erects two stones near the palace and inscribes a curse on them that is to lie on her brother's family. She also goes to the temple of the fierce goddess Kali. Kali feels sorry for the badly beaten lady and thinks about what she can do to help.

**SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES:** There is a wide spread festival in India (and other rituals are practiced as well) during which brothers and sisters ceremonially honor each other. This is an interesting festival which students can be assigned to research on the internet. In one area (the state of Bihar) these rituals also include the sister having to ritually swear at her brother to start things off. Then they "make up" afterwards. What might be the idea behind this peculiar custom?

**COMMENTARY:** Ironically the brothers in this story believe that their sister may harm their children out of jealousy, because she has no children of her own. This is exactly what the sister does end up doing, but that was not the intention she had on arrival. In planning her trip she had jewelry made for each child and she had planned to honor them. The sister's violent act is caused by her emotional anger after her brothers first make the moral mistake of mistreating her. There can be a deeply hidden jealousy and discord between opposite-gendered siblings. This is one of the less obvious but sociologically important themes that run through many episodes of this Legend of Ponnivala story (see sub-story 2-b).