

The Three Dancing Goats

'This evening I am going to tell you the tale of the three dancing goats' began Baba Trinco as he squatted on the floor and greeted us with his broad smile.

'Once upon a time it happened that a hard-working young peasant was lucky enough to possess three dancing goats. He was lucky because they brought him all he desired—a little comfort for his widowed mother, and a pretty wife.

He and his mother lived in a little bamboo hut and had a small plot of grazing land. Their entire wealth consisted of a couple of cows. When a year of drought came they were in great trouble, so that one morning the widowed mother with tears in her eyes said to her son:

"Sindhu, we shall have to get rid of the two cows. So go to the market-town and sell them."

The thought of selling the cows they loved so much distressed the boy. It was a pity that they had not enough fodder; but what could they do?

So Sindhu set out with the two cows and said to himself that he was not going to sell them to a butcher and that he would beg their purchaser to take great care of them.

Before coming to the market-town he met a woman who was also going to market to sell her three goats. Both Sindhu and the woman rested under a tree and both plucked leaves from it to feed their pets.

The old woman looked at the boy compassionately as he was feeding the cows, and said:

"Tell me, my lad, what is troubling you. I know it is not a good time for the peasants."

"What can I do? I have to sell the two cows we love so much," murmured Sindhu.

The old woman asked him all sorts of questions and at last came close and said:

"My dear lad, I like you and admire your love for your cows. Let me have them and I promise they shall be well cared for. You take my three goats."

"Nonsense," replied Sindhu. "What can we do with your goats, my dear woman? We must have grain for our own meals, and how can I feed your goats?"

"But these goats are much better than money, and they will someday bring fortune to you," the old woman said in a solemn voice.

Then she drew a little bamboo flute from her willow basket and began to play. Would you believe it? The three goats began to dance to the tune!

They were lovely goats from the Himalayan region, quite different from the ones we see in the plains. They had long hair, long flapping ears and round noses. The old woman called them Chapu.

Sindhu was greatly amused at the performance of the dancing goats, and he believed what the old woman said about them. They might not bring him a fortune, but he would certainly be able to earn a few pennies every day by entertaining the village folk. Thus he argued in his own mind and accepted the offer.

"Be content with what you have got, my son," the old woman said gently, "Here is the flute and there are my beloved goats. God bless you all." Then she took Sindhu's two cows and went her way.

And Sindhu? Wasn't he pleased with the bargain! He played the flute and the goats danced to the tune. Joyfully he made his way along the path across the meadow in order to reach home as quickly as he could.

But when his mother saw what he had brought back, she was unhappy. Sindhu played the flute and the three goats danced as merrily as ever, but it only made her sad. She thought her son had been cheated by the wicked market-folk or perhaps he had lost his senses.

"Are you sure you have not been cheated, my son?" she cried. "We have hardly enough food to keep ourselves from starvation. What will you do with these silly goats?"

"Don't be afraid, mother", implored Sindhu. "I am neither mad nor light-hearted. The dear old woman who exchanged these wonderful goats for our cows said to me that they would someday bring us luck. And I believe her. If they do not bring in a few pennies for our livelihood, they will certainly fetch a handsome price from our landlord."

Now Sindhu's landlord lived close to the village. His daughter, a girl of great beauty, soon heard of the dancing goats and wanted her father to summon the peasant for her entertainment.

So one day Sindhu took his flute and goats and went to the landowner's house. He played his flute as well as he possibly could, and the three dancing goats danced as merrily as ever. Their lovely long ears flapped rhythm, and the movements of their limbs were graceful. It was an enchanting performance.

The landowner's daughter offered to buy one of the goats and asked what price Sindhu wanted for it.

"It cannot be purchased with money, dear lady," declared Sindhu, adding that if she really wanted his precious pets, she would have to pay a visit to his widowed mother and take her a barrel of foodstuffs. For he lived and laboured for his mother's happiness and comfort.

The girl was so eager to have a goat that she agreed to go to the peasant's hut with a barrel of foodstuffs.

Sindhu and his mother were very happy to welcome this beautiful daughter of their landlord in their humble cottage, and the girl was delighted to own a dancing goat.

A few days later another summon came from the landowner, and Sindhu went with his flute and the two goats.

The girl came out and said: "*You* see, dear lad, I have not been able to make my goat dance at all. I have had expert musicians from the Temple to play for him, but he won't dance. Our village soothsayer says the goat will never dance without a companion. Will you *let* me have another goat?"

Sindhu was delighted both for the sake of his mother and for himself; also he was enchanted by the beauty of the girl.

"Of course, you can have another of my pets, but this time I would ask for that gold ring you wear, as well as a barrel of foodstuffs," replied Sindhu very politely.

The girl was pleased, and without hesitation took off her favourite ring and gave it to Sindhu. By the time he returned home a barrel of foodstuffs had reached his mother.

But, again, after a few days, one of the girl's maids brought a message from her, saying that her goats still refused to dance and no longer responded to the sound of music, so she was very sad.

Sindhu went to see her and took his third goat with him. She was on the doorstep of her house waiting for him. She said: "What am I to do now? The village priest says that my goats will dance if you will give me the third goat; but I hate to ask you for it, as it is the only pet left to you!"

"My dear lady," Sindhu said humbly, "I would willingly part with my last goat if it would make you happy. But let me play my flute and see them dance once again."

So he played the flute and the three goats danced merrily to the tune. As soon as the music ceased, the girl exclaimed gleefully, "Now I know, my dear lad! Now I see! It was the magic of the flute that made the goats dance! Will you let me have the flute as well as the third goat?"

Sindhu looked at her for a moment and said: "Yes, I will gladly give them to you, my charming lady; but now that you have discovered my secret, I would ask you

to tell me the meaning of the three different coloured stones set in the gold ring you gave me. When I know that secret I shall only ask for a barrel of foodstuffs in exchange for my last goat and my magic flute."

The girl was rather embarrassed, and hesitated for a little while. "Can this peasant aspire to marry me?" she wondered. "Why is he curious to know the meaning of these three stones? Anyhow, I am not the girl to give up a thing once I have set my mind on it, I must have the goat and the flute." So ran her thoughts.

"Yes," she said in a whisper, "I will tell you meaning. There are three strange strands of hair hidden among my black silken tresses. One is pure white, the colour of a diamond; one is dark red, the colour of a ruby; and one is bright green, the colour of an emerald. So in my ring there are three stones of similar colours. But all this is secret, dear lad."

"I understand, beautiful lady," said Sindhu. "Here is my flute and there is my goat. I take my leave and hope you will now be happy with the three dancing goats."

Before he returned home, a barrel of foodstuffs had reached his mother. But she was still very distressed. All this time they had lived on the foodstuffs Sindhu received in exchange for the goats, but what would happen to them when this supply of foodstuffs was finished?

Sindhu had no such worry. He believed in the words of the old lady who had taken his cows in exchange for the goats. The three dancing goats would bring him luck.

Meanwhile, Sindhu worked as a labourer on his landowner's farm. He was happy because he could thus catch just a moment's glimpse of the landowner's daughter.

Then one day it came to pass that the landowner announced his intention of finding a suitable bridegroom for his lovely daughter, and made it known that whoever could name the three strands of hair hidden among her black silken tresses should have her for bride.

It was a curious way of finding a bridegroom, wasn't it?

Many young men from all parts of the country came to try their luck, but not one of them could make the right guess.

Sindhu had heard about this strange offer and wondered if he should take this opportunity of marrying the girl he loved so much. But would the landowner allow his daughter to be married to a peasant? Perhaps the girl herself would dislike being the wife of a poor farm labourer.

These thoughts tormented and angered him. Poor Sindhu! But, one day as he was watching the dance of the three goats, his mind was made up. The thought of that old woman who had given him the goats awakened in him a strange hope of success.

Presently he met a handsome but very gaily dressed young man on the village highroad.

"What's the best way to go to the manor house?" said he as he saw Sindhu passing by. "It is a long way from here, far across the meadows. I will show you the way, sir, if you like." Sindhu answered politely.

As they were walking along, Sindhu muttered aloud to himself and sighed: "Alas! I am just a poor peasant, otherwise I would certainly have won the hand of our landowner's daughter."

"What!" exclaimed the young man. "What are you saying? Are you mad?"

"No sir, I am not mad. I happen to know the secret of those three strange strands of hair. But of what use is that to me?" replied Sindhu.

"Tell me what they are, my good fellow; and I will reward you well," said the young man impatiently.

Sindhu answered haltingly: "You see, master, I can't tell you the secret unless I am brought into the presence of the girl... How can I enter the house?"

The young man suggested that he would find a rich livery for Sindhu, who should enter the house as his servant.

So as they returned to the village, the young man ordered a beautiful livery with a silk turban. And Sindhu looked very attractive in his gay attire.

Once on the village highroad, they found a conveyance, and within a short time arrived at the manor house.

The hall was crowded with a number of suitors, all trying to guess riddle. The girl sat by her father on a raised platform. She was dressed simply; her beauty, grace, and charm did not require the refinements of luxury.

Nobody recognised Sindhu. He stood calmly by his master, who was constantly pressing him to whisper the secret to him. Then all of a sudden Sindhu declared in a solemn voice:

"The noble lady has one hair pure white, the colour of a diamond; one dark red, the colour of a ruby; and one bright green, the colour of an emerald. These three strands of hair are hidden among her black silken tresses."

"That is correct, that is a splendid guess," exclaimed the landowner. Sindhu then took off his disguise and appeared before the landowner. The young man who had engaged Sindhu as his servant started up in dismay: "What! What! Impossible!" The other suitors, too, were astonished.

But the landowner, although distressed at the prospect of such a son-in-law, calmly asked Sindhu:

"Now tell us how you came to know this secret."

Sindhu caught a glimpse of the girl and felt happy. Then he related the story from the very beginning and the landowner found the ring was the one that had belonged to his daughter.

So he turned to his daughter and said: "Since you have given him the ring and told him the secret, you are his bride."

The disappointed suitors began to jeer at Sindhu, and someone cried aloud: "This is an error of destiny, trick of fate--perhaps a curse of God."

Sindhu replied in a quiet but firm voice: "No, gentlemen, this is a triumph of faith, love and patience."

'So the pair married and lived happily ever after.'

'That is the story of the three dancing goats, beloved children,' said Baba Trinco as he rose to good night to us.

- **Anonymous**

About the Story

'The Three Dancing Goats' is a story about love, patience and faith. A poor, hard working young peasant Sindhu, and his mother are in great trouble when a year of drought comes. His mother advises him to sell their cows. Sindhu gets three dancing goats in exchange for the cows from an old woman. The old woman says that the goats will someday bring fortune to him. Sindhu succeeds in marrying a beautiful and rich landlord's daughter.

A folk tale is a popular story that forms a part of oral tradition and does not have a single, identifiable author. It can have both a moral and a philosophical aspect, as well as entertainment value. The folktales are passed down from one generation to the next. They often reflect the values and customs of the culture from which they come.

Glossary

distressed: much troubled, upset, worried.

compassionately: sympathetically.

meadow: a piece of flat grass land.

starvation: suffering caused by lack of food.
solemn: grave, serious.
implore: to make an emotional request.
barrel: a container made of wood or metal.
cease: to stop.
gleefully: with great joy, in a joyous manner, joyfully.
aspire: to have a great desire.
ruby: a precious stone of red colour.
emerald: a precious stone of beautiful green colour.
tresses : locks of human hair.
Manor house: a large house with lands, the house of a manor.
mutter: to speak in a low voice.
livery: a special uniform worn by a servant.
suits: candidates willing to marry.
prospect: the possibility of some future event occurring.
triumph: victory.

COMPREHENSION

(A) Tick the correct alternative:

1. The narrator of the story is –
 - (a) Sindhu
 - (b) Sindhu's mother
 - (c) the old woman
 - (d) Baba Trinco
2. When sindhu's mother saw the goats, she was –
 - (a) happy
 - (b) unhappy
 - (c) excited
 - (d) surprised
3. The land lord's daughter agreed to go to the peasant's hut because-
 - (a) she wanted to meet sindhu's mother.
 - (b) she liked sindhu.
 - (c) she was very eager to have a goat.
 - (d) her father wanted her to do so.

(B) Answer to the following questions should not exceed 10 -15 words each:

1. What did Sindhu get in exchange for his two cows?
2. Why did Sindhu and his mother want to sell their cows?
3. Why did the landlord's daughter want her father to summon Sindhu?
4. Who was eager to have the three dancing goats from Sindhu?
5. What did the land lord's daughter ask for along with the third goat?
6. What promise was made by the old woman regarding Sindhu's cows?

(C) Answer to the following questions should not exceed 20-30 words each:

1. Why did Sindhu accept the offer made by the old woman?
2. What did the land lord's daughter decide after watching the dance of the goats first time?
3. What price did Sindhu ask for the third goat and the flute?
4. What did the village soothsayer tell the girl about the goats?
5. Why was Sindhu happy to work as a labourer on the land lord's farm?

(D) Answer to the following questions should not exceed 60- 80 words each:

1. What did the three different colours of the stones set in the ring mean?
2. How did the other suitors react to Sindhu's success?
3. How did Sindhu explain his success? Did he have full faith in old woman's promise of good fortune?

E. Say whether the following statements are True or False. Write 'T' for True and 'F' for False in the bracket :

1. Sindhu sold his cows to a butcher. []
2. The old woman and Sindhu plucked leaves from the tree to feed their pets. []
3. Sindhu believed that the three dancing goats would bring him good luck. []
4. Many young men from all parts of the country came to try their luck. []
5. Sindhu entered the land lord's house as a servant of a rich suitor. []
6. When Sindhu entered the land lord's house, the land lord immediately recognized him. []