

The Ocean of Story

Book I: Kāthapītha

Chapter 3

[M1] Having thus spoken while Kāṇabhūti was listening with intent mind, Vararuchi went on to tell his tale in the wood:

1. *Story of Vararuchi ...*

It came to pass in the course of time that one day, when the reading of the Vedas was finished, the teacher Varsha, who had performed his daily ceremonies, was asked by us: "How comes it that such a city as this has become the home of Sarasvatī and Lakshmi[1]? tell us that, O teacher." Hearing this, he bade us listen, for that he was about to tell the history of the city.

1b. *The Founding of the City of Pātaliputra*

There is a sanctifying place of pilgrimage, named Kanakhala, at the point where the Ganges issues from this hills,[2] where the sacred stream was brought down from the tableland of Mount Uśīnara by Kānchanapāta, the elephant of the gods, having cleft it asunder.[3] In that place lived a certain Brāhman from the Deccan, performing austerities in the company of his wife, and to him were born there three sons. In the course of time he and his wife went to heaven, and those sons of his went to a place named Rājagriha, for the sake of acquiring learning. And having studied the sciences there, the three, grieved at their unprotected condition, went to the Deccan in order to visit the shrine of the god Kārttikeya. Then they reached a city named Chinchinī, on the shore of the sea, and dwelt in the house of a Brāhman named Bhojika, and he gave them his three daughters in marriage, and bestowed on them all his wealth, and having no other children, went to the Ganges to perform austerities. And while they were living there in the house of their father-in-law a terrible famine arose, produced by drought. Thereupon the three Brāhmans fled, abandoning their virtuous wives (since no care for their families touches the hearts of cruel men). Then the middle one of the three sisters was found to be pregnant; and those ladies repaired to the house of Yajnadatta, a friend of their father's; there they remained in a miserable condition, thinking each on her own husband (for even in calamity women of good family do

not forget the duties of virtuous wives). Now in the course of time the middle one of the three sisters gave birth to a son, and they all three vied with one another in love towards him. So it happened once upon a time that, as Śiva was roaming through the air, the mother of Skanda,^[4] who was reposing on Śiva's breast, moved with compassion at seeing their love for their child, said to her husband: "My lord, observe, these three women feel great affection for this boy, and place hope in him, trusting that he may some day support them; therefore bring it about that he may be able to maintain them, even in his infancy." Having been thus entreated by his beloved, Śiva, the giver of boons, thus answered her: "I adopt him as my *protégé*, for in a previous birth he and his wife propitiated me, therefore he has been born on the earth to reap the fruit of his former austerities; and his former wife has been born again as Pāṭalī, the daughter of the King Mahendrarman, and she shall be his wife in this birth also." Having said this, that mighty god told those three virtuous women is a dream: "This young son of yours shall be called Putraka; and every day when he awakes from sleep a hundred thousand gold pieces shall be found under his pillow,^[5] and at last he shall become a king." Accordingly, when he woke up from sleep, those virtuous daughters of Yajnadatta found the gold and rejoiced that their vows and prayers had brought forth fruit. Then by means of that gold Putraka, having in a short time accumulated great treasure, became a king, for good fortune is the result of austerities.^[6] Once upon a time Yajnadatta said in private to Putraka: "King, your father and uncles have gone away into the wide world on account of a famine, therefore give continually to Brāhmins, in order that they may hear of it and return: and now listen, I will tell you the story of Brahmadata:

1bb. *King Brahmadata*^[7]

There lived formerly in Benares a king named Brahmadata. He saw a pair of swans flying in the air at night. They shone with the lustre of gleaming gold, and were begirt with hundreds of white swans, and so looked like a sudden flash of lightning surrounded by white clouds. And his desire to behold them again kept increasing so mightily that he took no pleasure in the delights of royalty. And then, having taken counsel with his ministers, he caused a fair tank to be made according to a design of his own, and gave to all living creatures security from injury. In a short time he perceived that those two swans had settled in that lake, and when they had become tame he asked them the reason of their golden plumage. And then those swans addressed the king with an articulate voice: "In a former birth, O king, we were born as crows; and when we were fighting for the remains of the daily offering^[8] in a holy empty temple of Śiva we fell down and consequently we have been born as golden swans with a remembrance of our former birth." Having heard this, the king gazed on them to his heart's content, and derived great pleasure from watching them.

1b. *The Founding of the City of Pāṭalīputra*

"Therefore you will gain back your father and uncles by an unparalleled gift." When Yajnadatta had given him this advice, Putraka did as he recommended; when they heard the tidings of the distribution, those Brāhmins arrived; and when they were recognised they had great wealth bestowed on them, and were reunited to their wives. Strange to say, even after they have gone through calamities, wicked men, having their minds blinded by want of discernment, are unable to put off their evil nature. After a time they hankered after royal power, and being desirous of murdering Putraka, they enticed him under pretext of a pilgrimage to the temple of Durgā; and having stationed assassins in the inner sanctuary of the temple, they said to him: "First go and visit the goddess alone. Step inside." Thereupon he entered boldly, but when he saw those assassins preparing to slay him he asked them why they wished to kill him. They replied: "We were hired for gold to do it by your father and uncles." Then the discreet Putraka said to the assassins, whose senses were bewildered by the goddess: "I will give you this priceless jewelled ornament of mine. Spare me. I will not reveal your secret; I will go to a distant land." The assassins said, "So be it," and taking the ornament they departed, and falsely informed the father and uncles of Putraka that he was slain. Then those Brāhmins returned and endeavoured to get possession of the throne, but they were put to death by the ministers as traitors. How can the ungrateful prosper?

In the meanwhile that King Putraka, faithful to his promise, entered the impassible wilds of the Vindhya, disgusted with his relations. As he wandered about he saw two heroes engaged heart and soul in a wrestling match and he asked them who they were. They replied: "We are the two sons of the
The Magic Asura Maya, and his wealth belongs to us, this vessel, and this stick,
Articles and these shoes; it is for these that we are fighting, and whichever of us proves the mightier is to take them." When he heard this speech of theirs, Putraka said, with a smile: "That is a fine inheritance for a man!" Then they said: "By putting on these shoes one gains the power of flying through the air; whatever is written with this staff turns out true; and whatever food a man wishes to have in the vessel is found there immediately." When he heard this, Putraka said: "What is the use of fighting? Make this agreement, that whoever proves the best man in running shall possess this wealth." Those simpletons said, "Agreed," and set off to run, while the prince put on the shoes and flew up in the air, taking with him the staff and the vessel. Then he went a great distance in a short time and saw beneath him a beautiful city named Ākarshikā and descended into it from the sky. He reflected with himself: "Courtesans are prone to deceive, Brāhmins are like my father and uncles, and merchants are greedy of wealth; in whose house shall I dwell?" Just at that moment he reached a lonely dilapidated house, and saw a single old woman in it; so he gratified that old woman with a

present, and lived unobserved in that broken-down old house, waited upon respectfully by the old woman.

Once upon a time the old woman in an affectionate mood said to Putraka: "I am grieved, my son, that you have not a wife meet for you. But here there is a maiden named Pāṭalī, the daughter of the king, and she is preserved like a jewel in the upper story of a seraglio." While he was listening to this speech of hers with open ear the God of Love found an unguarded point and entered by that very path into his heart. He made up his mind that he must see that damsel that very day, and in the night flew up through the air to where she was, by the help of his magic shoes. He then entered by a window, which was as high above the ground as the peak of a mountain, and beheld that Pāṭalī, asleep in a secret place in the seraglio, continually bathed in the moonlight that seemed to cling to her limbs: as it were the might of love in fleshy form reposing after the conquest of this world. While he was thinking how he should awake her, suddenly outside a watchman began to chant: "Young men obtain the fruit of their birth when they awake the sleeping one, embracing her as she sweetly scolds, with her eyes languidly opening." On hearing this encouraging prelude, he embraced that fair one with limbs trembling with excitement, and then she awoke. When she beheld that prince, there was a contest between shame and love in her eye, which was alternately fixed on his face and averted. When they had conversed together, and gone through the ceremony of the *gāndharva* marriage,^[9] that couple found their love continually increasing as the night waned away. Then Putraka took leave of his sorrowing wife, and with his mind dwelling only on her, went in the last watch of the night to the old woman's house. So every night the prince kept going backwards and forwards, and at last the intrigue was discovered by the guards of the seraglio. Accordingly they revealed the matter to the lady's father, and he appointed a woman to watch secretly in the seraglio at night. She, finding the prince asleep, made a mark with red lac upon his garment to facilitate his recognition. In the morning she informed the king of what she had done, and he sent out spies in all directions, and Putraka was discovered by the mark and dragged out from the dilapidated house into the presence of the king. Seeing that the king was enraged, he flew up into the air with the help of the shoes, and entered the palace of Pāṭalī. He said to her, "We are discovered, therefore rise up, let us escape with the help of the shoes," and so taking Pāṭalī in his arms he flew away from that place through the air.^[10] Then descending from heaven near the bank of the Ganges, he refreshed his weary beloved with cakes provided by means of the magic vessel. When Pāṭalī saw the power of Putraka, she made a request to him, in accordance with which he sketched out with the staff a city furnished with a force of all four arms.^[11] In that city he established himself as king, and his great power having attained full development, he subdued that father-in-law of his, and became ruler of the sea-engirdled earth. This is that same divine city, produced by magic, together with its citizens; hence it bears the name of Pataliputra, and is the home of wealth and learning.

1. *Story of Vararuchi ...*

When we heard from the mouth of Varsha the above strange and extraordinarily marvellous story, our minds, O Kāṇabhūti, were for a long time delighted with thrilling wonder.

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See [Annex 1](#) for notes on the “Magical Articles” *motif* in folk-lore.

Endnotes

1. I.e. of learning and material prosperity. [<back>](#)
2. Literally the gate of the Ganges: it is now well known under the name of Haridvar (Hurdwar). [<back>](#)
3. Dr Brockhaus renders the passage: "*wo Śiva die Jāhnavi im goldeneu Falle von den Gipfeln des Berges Uśīnara herabsandte.*" [<back>](#)
4. Skanda is Karttikeya and his mother is, of course, Durga, or Parvati, the consort of Śiva. [<back>](#)
5. This may be compared with Grimm's No. 60, "Die zwei Bruder." Each of the brothers finds every day a gold piece under his pillow. In one of Waldau's *Böhmische Märchen*, "Vogelkopf und Vogelherz," p. 90, a boy named Fortunat eats the heart of the Glücksvogel and under his pillow every day are found three ducats. See also "Der Vogel Goldschweif," in Gaal's *Märchen der Magyaren*, p. 195.— M. H. Busk in *Folk-Lore of Rome*, London, 1894, pp. 146-154, tells a story which he says is orally current among the common people of Rome. The heart of a bird swallowed by the elder of two brothers has the effect of producing each morning a box full of sequins, which is always found under his head on awakening. The more usual method of enriching poor people in folk-tales is by means of a gold-producing article or animal. The former is nearly always an inexhaustible purse, while the latter varies considerably. In the *Pañchatantra* (iii, 5) and Æsop the gold-producing animal is a goose; it becomes an ass in Gozenbach's *Sicilianische Märchen* and the *Pentamerone* (1st div.), a ram or bull in Norse tales, a lion in Dozon's *Contes Albanais* (No. 17), a little dog in La Fontaine's *Contes et Nouvelles*, and a serpent in the *Kalmuck Relations of Siddhī Kūr*. In the *Mahābhārata* we read of King Srinjaya, who obtained as a boon a son whose nature was such that everything that issued from his body was pure gold. Cf. also the well-known story of Midas, King of Phrygia.—N.M.P. [<back>](#)
6. In this case the austerities which he had performed in a former birth to propitiate Śiva. [<back>](#)
7. This story is, according to Dr Rajendra Lal Mitra, found in a MS. called the Bodhisattva Avadana (*Account of the Buddhist Literature of Nepal*, [p. 53](#)). [<back>](#)
8. I.e. *bali*, a portion of the daily meal offered to creatures of every description, especially the household spirits. Practically the *bali* generally falls to some crow, hence that bird is called *balibhuj*. [<back>](#)
9. For a description of this form of marriage see my note on pp. [87, 88](#) of this volume.—N.M.P. [<back>](#)

10. Compare the way in which Zauberer Vergilius carries off the daughter of the Sultan of Babylon and founds the town of Naples, which he makes over to her and her children (Simrock's *Deutsche Volksbücher*, vol. vi, pp. 354, 355). Dunlop is of opinion that the mediæval traditions about Vergil are largely derived from Oriental sources. <[back](#)>

11. I.e. infantry, cavalry, elephants and archers. <[back](#)>

END

