

Panchatantra: THE BHARUNDA BIRDS

In the tree lived a crow named Swift. One morning he started toward the city in search of food. But he saw a hunter who lived in the neighborhood and who was already near the tree, approaching to trap birds. He was hideous in person, flat of hand and foot, bare to the calf of the leg, dreadfully ugly of complexion, had bloodshot eyes, was accompanied by dogs, wore his hair in a knot, carried snare and club in his hand why spin it out? He seemed a second god of destruction, noose in hand; the incarnation of evil; the heart of unrighteousness; the teacher of every sin; the bosom friend of death.

When Swift saw him, he was disturbed in spirit and reflected: "What does he mean to do, the sinner? To hurt me? Or has he some other purpose?" And he clung to the hunter's heels, being filled with curiosity.

Now the hunter picked a spot, spread a snare, scattered grain, and hid not far away. But the birds who lived there were held in check by Swift's counsel, regarded the rice-grains as deadly poison, and did not peep.

At this juncture a dove-king named Gay-Neck, with hundreds of dove retainers, was wandering in search of food, and spied the rice-grains from afar. In spite of dissuasion from Swift, he greedily sought to eat them and alighted in the great snare. The moment he did so, he and his retainers were caught in the meshes. Nor should he be blamed. It happened through hostile fate. As the saying goes:

How did Ravan fail to feel
That 'tis wrong, a wife to steal?
How did Rama fail to see
Golden deer could never be?
How Yudhishtir fail to know
Gambling brings a train of woe?
Clutching evil dims the sense,
Darkening intelligence.

And again:

When once the mind is gripped by fate,
The judgment even of the great,
In mortal meshes fettered, wends
To unintended, crooked ends.

So the hunter gleefully lifted his club and ran forward. Then Gay-Neck and his retainers, seeing him advancing, were distressed by their disastrous position in the snare. But the king, with much presence of mind, said to the doves: “Have no fear, my friends. For

Provided judgment does not fail,
Whatever the distress,
Men reach the farther shore of woe,
And rest in happiness.

We must all agree in purpose, must fly up in unison, and carry the snare away. This is not possible without united action. For death befalls those of disunited purpose. As the saying goes:

Bharunda birds will teach you why
The disunited surely die:
For, single-bellied, double-necked,
They took a diet incorrect.”

“How was that?” asked the doves. And Gay-Neck told the story of

THE BHARUNDA BIRDS

By a certain lake in the world lived birds called “Bharunda birds.” They had one belly and two necks apiece.

While one of these birds was sauntering about, his first neck found some nectar. Then the second said: “Give me half.” And when the first refused, the second neck angrily picked up poison somewhere and ate it. As they had one belly, they died.

“And that is why I say:
Bharunda birds will teach you why,

and the rest of it. Thus union is strength.”

When the doves heard this, being eager to live, they united their efforts to carry the snare away, flew just an arrow-shot into the air, formed a canopy in the sky, and proceeded without fear.

When the hunter saw the snare carried away by birds, he looked up in amazement, thinking: "This is unprecedented." And he recited a stanza:

So long as they agree, they may
Carry the fatal snare away;
But they will quickly disagree,
And then those birds belong to me.