first and Vasanta of the second bird. Now when the two brothers were straying apart from one another for a short while, the royal elephant of a neighbouring king's stall came near Çita; the animal held a string of diamond of the value of nine lakhs by its trunk. The king of that country had died leaving no issue; the minister and the people relied upon Providence to give them a king, and the elephant was let loose on their decision that whomsoever it would bring to the palace on its back, he should be taken to be their king, elected by God. The elephant kneeled down before Çita is elected a king. Çita, put the string of diamond round his neck by its proboscis and carried him on its back to the palace. Çita was thus installed as the king of that country. Vasanta wandered in the jungle in quest of his brother fruitlessly. He passed through great hardships and trials. Once he was taken for a thief of fruits and of horses, and arrested. After escaping from this danger, he came to a merchant who gave him shelter willingly, as to his great surprise he found that the handsome youth presented him with a diamond every day. The avaricious merchant made up his mind to extort from him information as to where his extraordinary treasure lay and insisted on his drinking wine so that in a drunken state he might make the disclosure. Now the condition
Vasanta loses his power of producing diamonds.

of his receiving a diamond every day was that this power would fail if he drank wine. Being obliged to drink in the above way, he lost his power; and the merchant finding that he no more gave him any diamond, drove him away. He thus wandered about like a helpless man and was in great distress. The merchant had grown very rich by selling the diamonds and he now purchased a ship and planned to go on a sea-voyage for trade. But it so happened that, on the eve of starting, the ship would not float on the sea, and the captain said that unless a human sacrifice was offered, there was no chance of the ship moving on the waters. The merchant's men went to secure a person to be offered as sacrifice, and whom should they secure but the unfortunate youth Vasanta whom no kith or kin claimed as their own? The merchant's wife remonstrated, as he was a very handsome youth, but the relentless merchant would not listen to her words. He was dressed in red robes and garlanded. When led to the execution-ground, however, he begged of the merchant to spare his life, as he felt confident that if he simply touched the ship it would float by the grace of the Almighty. Vasanta was required to prove what he said. As
he touched the ship it floated like a thing of
cork. But Vasanta was not set
at liberty, as the captain said
that if the ship should again
get stuck on the shore, his services might be
required.

So Vasanta was on board the ship, and the
merchant's daughter took a fancy for him and
asked her mother to marry her to him. The
merchant treated the request with contempt.
Laden with merchandise, the ship came to the
Chinese shore. The Chinese princess happened
to see Vasanta from the window of her palace,
and begged of her father to get her married to
him. The king called the merchant to him and
proposed the marriage. He would not listen
to anything to the contrary. So the marriage
took place with the usual pomp. And the
princess with her large dowry started on another
ship with her husband. The merchant paid a
visit to them in their ship, and, one day, when
they were passing through the
vast ocean, pushed down Vasanta into the bottomless
deep. He now asked the
princess to marry him. The princess had thrown
a tumbā for the support of her husband, and
declared that she would be right glad to marry
the merchant after the expiry of a year, the
term of her vow. Vasanta, with the help of the
tumbā floated on the sea and made a narrow escape from being seized and carried off by a great sea-bird. Once a crocodile had even swallowed him, but he came out with the help of the tumbā. He floated through the milk-sea, the butter-sea, the red-sea, the blue-sea, in fact all the seven seas, till some nymphs, taking pity on him, took him to Indra's heaven where the god granted him the boon that his evil destiny would soon be over. When he returned to earth, after passing through further vicissitudes of fortune, he came to the garden of a flower-woman, which was lying as a waste-land and desert for many years. But as Vasanta entered it, the withered plants all flowered and looked fresh and smiling. The flower-woman, coming to the spot at that time, felt as if some god had visited her deserted garden and worked wonders. She welcomed Vasanta, called him nephew, and treated him with great hospitality. This flower-woman had a means of access into the merchant's harem where the Chinese princess was kept. Getting a clue to this, Vasanta sent a message to her. And she now expressed a wish to celebrate the rites by which her vow was to be completed. The merchant was very glad that on the completion of her vow she would accept him as her husband. Invitation-letters were issued to all princes and Çīta who was now a king, and Adanās, the father of Çīta and Vasanta, as well
as other princes of the country and its influential and rich merchants assembled to witness the function. The condition of the ceremony required that one who would be able to tell the whole story of the princes Çīta-Vasanta, would alone be privileged to hold the priestly office. Drummers were appointed to announce the condition laid down by the princess by beat of drums, and Vasanta came forward to accept the condition declaring that he fully knew the story. So before the assembled kings and merchants, he commenced to narrate the story of Çīta-Vasanta even from the time when their mother had seen the future of her sons in the fate of the young ones of a bird. As he related the story of his great miseries, one by one, the eyes of each one of that illustrious audience became tearful and many a time he himself had to stop to clear his voice, choked with emotion. A violent feeling was raised in that vast assembly, as brother recognised brother, and the king, his sons. The gladsome news of the lost being found again was announced by the music of nahabat orchestra. The king ordered his wicked wife and the merchant to be beheaded and the order was carried out then and there. The king elected Çīta to be his successor and Vasanta was made his prime minister. The Chinese princess
was brought to the palace. Vasanta, however, had to take a second wife, for the merchant's daughter had loved him with a whole heart, though her father had treated him cruelly.

We shall now briefly review another version of the story of Çīta-Vasanta by a Hindu writer. This compiler has tried his best to maintain his dignity as a writer of classical style, and the folk-tale he heard in his childhood he has thoroughly recast on a pouranic model, giving it an air of a full-fledged Sanskritic story, and eliminating all traces of its rural origin.

The story is not called Çīta-Vasanta. Somehow or other the author did not like the name of Çīta; he has changed it into Vijaya. So that the story in this version goes by the name of Vijaya-Vasanta.

The author is well known in Bengal as a saint and a writer of spiritual songs. In the colophon of these, he subscribes himself as Fikir Chand Fakir. This is, however, his nom de plume; his real name is Harinath Majumdar, but he is more familiarly known as Kāngal Harinath.

He wrote the story in 1859, when its first edition was published, and a fourteenth edition was called for in 1913, long after the death of the author. The book Vijaya-Vasanta was very popular at one time. The author's chief credit lies in his power of creating pathos in an
extraordinary manner. No one can read the book without being literally swept away by emotion and by a feeling of compassion for the sufferings of the two forlorn children, especially Vasanta, the youngest child. But we are not concerned with the pathos of the story. A brief summary of this version is given below.

Parikshit, the king, one day went to the forests for hunting. He put a dead serpent round the neck of a saint, who, merged in contemplation, had not heard the king's request to give him some drinking water. The sage's young son Črṇgi came to the spot that moment, and, seeing his father insulted by the king, cursed him saying that he would be stung by a serpent within a week and die. Now the sage heard this curse uttered by his son and reprimanded him for this cruelty. He referred to a curse once uttered by two young ascetics, leading to disastrous consequences in respect of the Gandharva King Chitraratha, his wife and brother. The king sporting in a river with his wife had not paid heed to the young sages, and had thrown out water on the persons of their Holinesses in course of his sports. Chitraratha and his brothers were born into the world of mortals as Vijaya and Vasanta. Chitraratha's former wife became in the world a princess who was married to Vijaya in his youth. "What were
the sufferings of these three?” asked Çrngî and his father gave the following account.

“The king Jayasen of Jaypur got two sons, Vijaya and Vasanta. The good queen, their mother, died shortly after, and the king was disconsolate over her death for some time and his minister gave him a course of advice to alleviate his grief. Sometime after, the king, at the advice of his family-priest Dhauma, took another wife. The old maid-servant of the house Çántâ took charge of the young princes and was very devoted to them. Durlatâ, a maid-servant of the new queen, advised her to take prompt steps to remove Vijaya and Vasanta from the palace for ever, by means fair or foul. For these children would, she said, stand in the way of her own sons, when born, succeeding to the throne. The queen took her advice and shut herself up in the “room of anger,” and, when the king enquired about the cause of her sorrow, gave out a false story stating how she had been insulted by the children. The king, who was helpless in her hands, ordered the kotwal to arrest them and execute them in the morning. When they were bound with chains, Vasanta who was only four years old, said, “I will tell pappa how you treat me; see my hands are bleeding.” Çántâ interposed and tried to take away the children from the kotwal
who kicked her out. The boys were thrown into a dungeon and Vasanta said to Vijaya, "Brother, take away my chains. I cannot bear the pain." Vijaya heard him lament, and swooned away in grief. The next day they were brought before the king who gave the order to behead them at once. Vijaya said, "Punish me, sire, as you will like, but not Vasanta, innocent as innocence itself." Vasanta showed the blood on his hand and said, "Pappa, punish the kotwal and take me to your care. See I am in great fear and pain." But the king did not even look at the princes and was inexorable; his order must be carried out at once. The courtiers were greatly moved and they interceded in behalf of the princes. But the king said, "If some body else had insulted the queen, what would be his fate? I cannot show partiality towards my own children; that would not be just." So the just monarch's order was on the point of being executed, but the prime minister strongly condemned it, and the king had to yield a little. Order of execution was changed to one of banishment for life. The two boys were let loose in a jungle, far off from the capital. They came to the foot of a mountain where the valley was pleasant to see, with a spring of pure and transparent water. Vijaya left Vasanta for a little time and went in quest of food. The latter sat
there waiting, and tasted a fruit that had dropped from a near tree and became senseless,—the fruit was poisonous. When Vijaya saw his little brother in that condition on his return, he concluded that he must have been stung by a serpent. Seeing no help, he lamented, saying, "My darling, pappa did not show you any affection when you appealed to him; is it for this that, in wounded feelings, you are leaving this world? Wait, I am coming to you; alas, where now is Çāntā?" Saying this, he resolved to commit suicide. Just at that moment an ascetic appeared there and said, "Desist, my child, from the mad course. Self-murder is unrighteous." He gave some medicine to Vasanta by which he recovered, for he was not dead, but senseless. The sage gave the brothers shelter for the night. In the morning they again started in quest of some habitation of men. For miles and miles there spread a deep jungle from which they found no way out. In the night they climbed a tree, and hisses of cobra and the yell of wolves and a mingled uproar of other ferocious animals were heard around. Vijaya realised the situation and looked greatly embarrassed. Vasanta, who thought himself quite safe in the care of his brother, just as a baby in the arms of its mother, said, "Brother, if there is any danger, why not call Çāntā to our aid?" In the morning Vasanta felt so thirsty that he could not speak. Upon
this Vijaya went in quest of a little drinking water, and when leaving Vasanta alone, he prayed, "Oh god, keep my little brother safe, do whatever you like with me." But as Vijaya had gone some way, an elephant gorgeously caparisoned ran towards him, and, gently taking him up by his trunk, placed him on the rich hāvadā on its back. It then walked rapidly towards the city. The people there on the death of the king, had set the elephant of the Royal stall to find out a king in that way, and when Vijaya entered the city, loud were the exclamations of joy in the public streets and he was immediately installed as king.

The elder brother is installed as a King.

The folk-tale ends here, and the remaining portion, tagged to it, is purely a creation of the writer's fancy on a classical model; though at the end, following the spirit of the folk-tale, he makes Vijaya, and Vasanta to be restored to the old king their father, who becomes repentant and receives them cordially. The wicked queen is punished as a matter of course.

The next version of this story we find in the Rev. Lalbehary De's folk-tales. It is called Çwet-Basanta; but the right word is 'Çita' which means 'cold' and not 'Çwet' which means 'white.' This ancient story is still told in the backward villages of Bengal and there we find the
name as 'Çita.' Besides there is a sense in the names Çita and Vasanta as each signifies a season. The story told by Lalbehary De may be briefly summarised as follows.

Once a merchant married a remarkable girl, who was born of an egg of a bird called *tun-tuni*. She was very handsome and accomplished, and gave birth to two sons, Çita and Vasanta. But unfortunately she died not long after the twin brothers had been born. The merchant married again, and after a few years lost all affection for the sons of his former wife. Çita had by this time grown into manhood and married a beautiful girl.

About this time a fisherman brought a fish of wonderful properties. "If any one eats it," said he, "when he laughs, *manik* will drop from his mouth, and when he weeps, pearls will drop from his eyes." The two brothers Çita and Vasanta secured the fish and partook of it. Their step-mother was very jealous of them as they were sure to inherit the wealth of the merchant after his death. So she frequently quarrelled with them and one day she expressed her resolution at a moment of great anger, "Wait, wait, wait, when the head of the family comes home, I will make him shed the blood of you both before I give him water to drink." The brothers took fright at this utterance of their step-mother knowing what an influence she had 

The brothers fly away from the capital.
over their father. So they fled from home in the night and Çita's wife also accompanied them. They wandered about in the wilderness and as Çita's wife was awfully thirsty, her husband left them in order to seek water somewhere near; but just as he had gone a few paces, an elephant gorgeously caparisoned, came to him, and taking him gently by its trunk, placed him on its back and then ran swiftly towards the city. The elephant was the 'king-maker' in that country. But for sometime past a tragic event occurred in the palace every morning.

Çita is installed as a king. The elephant carried a man on its back every day and he was duly installed as king. He spent the night with the queen and it was found every morning that the king had died in the night. Çita was also duly installed as king and was in the room of the queen that night. He, however, did not sleep but watched. In the depth of the night a thin thread-like substance came out of the left nostril of the queen; it increased in bulk till it assumed the shape of a terrible cobra and approached the new king. Before however, it could reach him, Çita drew out his sword and cut it to pieces. The next morning the people of the city expected to see the corpse of the king, as usual, but they were glad beyond measure to see him living. He told them of what had happened to the former kings elected, and showed them the proof of his
valorous act by bringing the cup in which the serpent's body, cut to pieces, was preserved by him in the night previous.

Vasanta and his brother's wife, left alone, became tired of waiting for Cita, and as the wife was very thirsty as well as anxious for news about her husband, Vasanta left her, to make enquiries about his brother and to fetch water, if available, from some neighbouring tank. He stood near a river, and not meeting his brother began to shed tears; these became pearls instantly. A merchant saw him in that condition, seized him with his pearls and carried him away in his ship. Cita's wife was in extreme distress and all alone in that wilderness she gave birth to a son. She became senseless in consequence; and the kotwal of the neighbouring city seeing her in unconscious state, lying in the forest with an extraordinarily beautiful baby by her side, kidnapped the baby and fled away. The kotwal had no child and he adopted the baby as his son. Time passed on, and the boy grew to manhood. He overheard a conversation at this stage of affairs, between two calves in the cow-shed attached to his house, in which his whole family-history was revealed to him. He came to know that his mother had been saved from a tragic end by a compassionate Brahmin in whose house she still served as a maid servant. He also came
to know how his uncle Vasanta was kept confined and was alternately flogged and tickled by the merchant, in order to yield pearls and rubies, for his tears produced the one and his laughs the other. The young man instantly applied to the king who was none else than Çīta himself. He listened to the strange story with attention and then sent men to the merchant's house to search his dungeon. As Vasanta was brought out from there, Çīta instantly recognised him though he looked greatly reduced and pale. From the Brahmin's house the king recovered his lost wife. How glad was he now to find again his own wife, brother and son so long known as the kotwal's son. The merchant, who had so cruelly treated Vasanta was buried alive in a pit which was filled up with earth and thorns.

Yet a fourth version of the story of Çīta-Vasanta we find in the collections of Babu Dakshina Ranjan Mitra Majumdar. It is in his first series of folk tales that appeared under the name of "Thakurmar jhuli," or "the grandmother's bag." The story runs thus:

A king had two wives, the more favoured one was the Suo Rāṇī, who had three sons; they were lean like jute stalks or bamboo-leaves. But the less lucky wife, the Duo Rāṇī had two sons, handsome as cherubs. They were called Çīta and Vasanta. Their step-mother was very
jealous of them. So she first tried to remove their mother from the palace. One day as both the queens were bathing, the Suo Rāṇī on the pretext of doing the hair of her co-wife, tied a magic root with her hair; the Duo Rāṇī instantly turned into a bird called the tun-tuni and flew away. The Suo Rāṇī gave the report that her co-wife was drowned; and the king was now absolutely in her hands. She one day told a false story against the brothers Čīta and Vasanta, complaining that they had grossly insulted her. She demanded of the king an order for the immediate execution of the brothers and the king saw no way but to comply with her wishes. The executioner took them to a deep forest and said “Princes, I was present in the palace when you were born; I was at one time in charge of you; I cannot apply sword to your throat, whatever may befall me. Here take this bark-dress. No one will recognise you as princes in this dress. Go as fast as your legs can carry you to the farthest end of this jungle, and choose a safe place.” Saying so, he unbound them, and set them at liberty. The executioner took a quantity of blood, killing a dog and a jackal on the spot, and made it over to the queen who was now satisfied that Duo Rāṇī’s sons were now removed from this world for good.

The step-mother’s witch-craft and the order of execution on the brothers.
Now the two princes went on, but the end of the forest was not seen. Vasanta became very thirsty and wanted Čita to get for him some water from the neighbourhood. He was not only thirsty, but so exhausted that he could not proceed any further. Čita left him there and went in quest of water. He saw water-fowls coming from some place and understood by that sign that water was near. But on his way he saw a white elephant running towards him with a rich howdâ on its back. The elephant took him by the trunk and, placing him on its back, quickly walked towards the near city. This white elephant was the 'king-maker' and as the king of that country had died without leaving an heir to succeed to his throne, it was let loose to find out a king for the people. The elephant wandered about, from place to place every day, and returned in the evening without carrying any one on its back, for he could not discover the mark of royalty in any person up to now. The sagacious animal after a long search found such signs in Čita, so as soon as he was brought to the city, he was duly installed on the throne. All this time Vasanta was in great distress and was on the point of death by starvation and thirst, when an ascetic took care of him and kept him in his hermitage.

Čita made a king. Now the bird tun-tuni, to which the Duo Râni was transformed by Suo Râni's witchcraft,
was caught by a princess named Rūpavatī. The king, her father, had proclaimed her sayamvara, or election of a bridegroom by herself from an assembly of invited princes. Many kings had come there and many a prince and nobleman stood suitors for the hand of Rūpavatī. But Rūpavatī, before she visited the court to elect her bridegroom, had asked the tuntuni bird “Whom shall I elect as my husband, bird?” The tuntuni gifted with the power of speech, said, “One that will bring you a rare pearl that grows on the head of an elephant on the sea-coast, will be your bridegroom, and none other.” So before the assembled princes, Rūpavatī declared her condition, but she added, “He who will seek the pearl but fail, will be my slave.” Many a prince went to the sea-shore and saw the elephant but could not secure the pearl. They became slaves of the princess Rūpavatī.

Now when Çīta, who was the paramount king in that country, heard all these, he was very angry and said, “Why should she make the sons of my feudal chiefs, the Bhuiā kings, slaves?” He accordingly got Rūpavatī arrested and kept her in a compartment of the palace all alone. Now Vasanta one day overheard the conversation of two birds, Çuka and Çāri. In this conversation they disclosed the secret by which the pearl on the head of the elephant could be secured. There was a favoured spot
in the milk-white sea, in which there grew a thousand lotuses in full bloom. The one in the middle was of the colour of gold. There the white elephant with the pearl on its head played with the lotus of golden hue. Vasanta learned the secret. He took from the ascetic, in whose hermitage he lived, his magic trident, and with it succeeded in reaching that spot in the milk-white sea. As soon as the sea was touched by the trident, it became dry. The elephant itself turned into a golden lotus, with the rare pearl inside it. Vasanta took it up and when marching over the sands of the sea he heard a cry, “We are your brothers transformed into fish; take us with you.” Vasanta dug the sands and found three golden fish. He took them with him.

Now after Çita and Vasanta were driven from the palace of their father, he lost his kingdom and fled away in order to hide his shame. The Suo Rāni, reduced to abject poverty, begged from door to door with the three princes, her sons, for livelihood. She came in this way to the seashore. The sea roared in rage and coming over the banks swallowed them by its waves. These three princes had been reduced to the shapes of fish, whom the prince Vasanta now took with him.
Now the king Çita one day had gone a-hunting into the depth of a forest; he came near a big tree which he at once recognised to be the very one under which he had left Vasanta, and had gone from there in quest of water, years ago. The recollection of his brother came back to him and he was overpowered by grief. His men, however, came to his help and took him to his capital, where he shut himself up in a compartment of the palace, and for seven days saw no one, nor ate anything,—for his grief was great.

At this time Vasanta came up to the palace and said to the royal guard, that he wanted to visit the king. He had come with the pearl which Rūpavatī wanted, besides he had brought the three golden fish with him. The guard requested him to wait for seven days. This he did and when the king broke his fast, the three golden fish were presented to him. They were made over to a maid servant of the palace. As soon as she tried to cut one of the fish and dress it she heard it saying, "I am the king's brother, do not kill me." The astonished maid servant brought this to the notice of the king, who wanted to see the man who had presented the fish. Vasanta came before Çita, and there was great pathos as brother recognised brother. And as soon as they touched the fish, these assumed their own forms as their step-brothers.
“And where is our mother, Suo Rāni?” asked Čīta and Vasanta. And the reply of the princes was “Our mother died of grief.” “Where is our father, the king?” He lost his kingdom and has gone away, nobody knows where.”

Čīta and Vasanta shed tears of joy at meeting with each other, and of sorrow over the fate of their parents alternately. Vasanta now asked his brother to release Rūpavatī, which was fortwith done. Vasanta knocked at her doors and exclaimed, “See, bride, I have come with the rare pearl that you wanted, make me your husband.” Rūpavatī turned to the tuntuni and asked if the youth had really got the pearl and was to be her bridegroom. “O yes” cried the bird. Whereon Rūpavatī welcomed him and put the garland of flowers, that she had wreathed, round his neck as a sign of choosing him to be her husband. Rūpavatī was so glad that out of gratitude to the bird who had helped her to get such an excellent husband, she bathed it in milk and scented it with perfumes with her own hands; and in doing so she found something tied with the feather on its head. She took it out and lo! as soon as she had done so, the Duo Rāni once again gained her own form. She said that she was the mother of Čīta and Vasanta and the news spread with the
speed of lightning, throughout the whole city. And Čīta and Vasanta and their step brothers were in a moment down upon their knees before her, weeping in joy to meet their mother whom they had taken to be dead. The old king who had been wandering like an ascetic came back to meet his lost family. Čīta and Vasanta and the three young princes, their step-brothers, helped him to gain his lost kingdom back and they lived long years in happiness and prosperity.

It will appear from the four tales summarised above, that there is little room for doubting that all of these are different versions of one and the same story. An alien influence is distinctly marked in the Muhammadan version. The way in which the step-mother shamelessly offered her love to the two princes has not been mentioned in my summary for the sake of decency. The wickedness of the woman, her unrestrained passion, coquetry and vulgarity are of a shocking character. Such a tale could not be told in a Hindu household. The way in which the merchant’s daughter and the Chinese princess declared their love for Vasanta in the Muhammadan version also discloses a lack of that self-control which characterises the heroines of the Hindu folk-tales. We need not comment on the language of the Muhammadan version. It is no doubt Bengali but bears in a large measure
an admixture of Arabic and Persian words. As a specimen we may quote a few lines:

উজির নাজির ওমরা সকলে হাজির।
রাজারে বুঝাই সবে না কর ফিকির।
এই হাল দেখ জাহ সকল সংসার।
ছনিয়াতে খালি মায়া গেরেষ্টার করে।
আপে দুই ফরজনেরে করিবে মেহের।
কাহেক আনেশ গম কর বেবের।
পেরাসনি না হইবে শুন আলস্যন।
ছনিয়া জাহানে আলা করিবেক ফান।
এতেক ছনিয়া সাহা হাস্য হাস্য করে।
দেলে দর্ক মুখে আহা চোখে পানি বরে।

Nor is the next version—that by Harinath Mazumdar—less interesting from the point of view of the changes and innovations introduced into a simple folk-tale. The author is resolved upon improving the rural story by his pedantry and scholarly knowledge of Sanskrit. A tale, to possess an air of authority, and classical dignity, in his opinion, must be derived from Paurānic sources. So he altogether conceals the fact that he had heard the story originally from the old women of the country-side. He puts the whole story in the mouth of that unweary sage Vaisampayana, who has from age to age added to and replenished the store of tales in the Mahāvārata. Vaisampayna tells
and Janmejaya hears. From hoary antiquity down to the year 1859, when Vijaya-Vasanta was written by Harinath Mazumdar, the teller and the listener had sat facing each other; and we are not sure which to admire the most—the power of narration without a limit, or that of attentive hearing which knows no fatigue or weariness. The Gandharva king is introduced; and following the characteristic traditions of the Paurānic Renaissance that all evils of the world are brought on by the curses of Brahmns, Harinath traces the career of Čīta and Vasanta before they were born on the earth, and makes them victims to Brahmnic ire. But the changes are not merely these. All descriptions of men and women and of nature are indebted to Sanskritic sources for their elegance and classical style. The characters cite Paurānic stories by way of reference in their daily conversations. They are all up-to-date and show a liking for modern topics as well. Dissertations on patriotism are given on p. 80, on female education on pp. 107-110, on widow remarriage on p. 85. Other burning questions of the day are also treated by the author whenever an opportunity presents itself. The king Vijaya-

The up-to-date ques-
tions.

chandra and his wife Bimalā visit the prison-houses of their capital and give sermons to improve the morals
of the prisoners. His Majesty makes a laudable and vigorous effort to spread a knowledge of science and general geography amongst his people. In one place (p. 84) we find a character crying hoarse against the rite of Sāti on the lines of Rājā Ram Mohan Roy. The names of the characters are elegant Sanskritic words; Vijayachandra, Ramanīmohan and Vimalā may be cited as examples. The king’s priest is Dhouma of the Paurānic tradition. Harinath is not only a pupil of Sanskrit poems and the Purāṇas, but shows his knowledge of Kalidāsa’s poetry by referring to udyanlatā and agramalatā, the creeper of the king’s garden and that of a hermitage, in a passage of his work (p.99). He belonged to the society of educated Bengal in the early part of the 19th century and the age spoke through him. So how could he help giving all that was fashionable in the cultured society of his times in a work which, though based on an ancient rural story, was recast and re-written with a view to entertain the young men of his generation. The style has the stamp of that of Vidyā-sāgara, refined, rigidly accurate and heavy with pompous classical words. We need only quote the first sentence which is typical of the style of the entire work.

“एकं पराक्षितं राजेन्द्र सदैवो युगयाय गमन करिया। अरण्य अवरोध करिले बिषिन बिहारी-गण भयाकुल हैिया इत्यतः निविड़ारण्ये प्रवेश करिते लागिल।”

Specimen of language.
This reminds us at once of the characteristic style of Vidyā-sāgara’s Sakuntalā and Sītār Vanavāsa. The rural element in which, however, lay the unassuming poetry and simplicity of the people was out of favour in the early part of the 18th century, and Harinath as an exponent of the taste of his times changed the manner and style of narration of the folk-tale by giving it a preponderance of Sanskritic words. But as stated by me in the foregoing portion of this lecture, the work of Harinath possesses remarkable pathos in the earlier chapters, such as only Vidyā-sāgara alone could show in some of his finest works.

Next if we take up the version of the story given by the Rev. Lalbehari De, we find that his account is not always an accurate one. True, he reproduced it as he heard it, but being a Christian, he could not always get the materials of the folk-tales at first-hand. In his version we find a portion of the story of Malati Kusumā dove-tailed into that of Čītā-Vasanta. The account of a baby who was kidnapped by a nobleman from the arms of its mother, lying senseless after delivery, and the subsequent union of the mother with her son grown up to manhood, forms a part of many old folk-tales in Bengal. This account we also find in the story of Čankhamālā in Dakshinaranjan’s second collection called the
Thākurdār Jhuli or the grand-father's bag. We think that this episode was originally a part of the story of Cankhamālā from which it was taken and joined to other stories. But whatever it be, the Rev. Mr. De has described in this story how the kidnapped child, when he grew up to proper age, conceived a passion for his own mother without knowing her to be so. This seems very repelling. And as we have condemned a similar thing in the Muhammadan version of this story we do it also here, though it must be said to the credit of the Rev. Mr. De that he has dealt with this part of the story very cautiously so that its impropriety has not become too prominent. Mr. De tells us that his old friend Sambhu's mother from whom he had heard many folk-tales had died before he collected the stories for his work, "The Folk-tales of Bengal," and that therefore he had to depend for them upon a christian woman who evidently had lost some of her old memories. At least she could not have given him a strictly faithful version of the Hindu folk-tales. The episode of one of the brother's eating the flesh of a bird or fish by which he got the power of producing rubies and pearls by smiles and tears is analogous to the European story of the Salad in the Grimm Brothers' Collections.

Last of all is the version of Daksināranjan Mitra Majumdar. It is not affected by any
pedantry or scholarship in classic literature or any modern propagandism; for Mitra Majumdar is too humble a scholar to aim at higher things. He is in love with the tales as they are related by the rural people of the lower Gangetic valley, and gives a faithful version of what he has heard. Nor do his stories bear any exotic influence—Persian, Arabic, or even Sanskritic. The language is that in which our grandmothers used to tell tales,—simple, even archaic, full of naïve rural charms, and always to the point. There is nowhere a display of vain learning or straying out of the main subject in order to hold disquisitions on the burning questions of the day. But as we shall have to deal with his folk-tales more elaborately in course of our lectures, we cut short our comments here.

There are many folk-tales which we have got in common from the Hindu and Muhammadan sources, and this we have already noticed. Another very interesting story repeated by many writers is that of Sakhi-sonā. The compiler of the Muhammadan version is one Muhammad Korban Ali—an inhabitant of Butuni in the subdivision of Manikgani, Pergannah Sindurijan in the district of Dacca. The story of Sakhi-sonā that he gives, is briefly summarised as follows.
In a place called Taef, there lived a poor man named Syed. He had a wife, and none else in the family. As they were in extremely indigent circumstances, Syed had frequently to bear insulting treatment from his wife who was a shrew. One day when Syed could by no means secure food, his tart-tempered wife rebuked and insulted him grossly, taking him to task for indulging in the luxury of a wife before he could provide for her comforts. Syed bore the insult quietly but resolved to put an end to his wife's life and thus be saved from the state of things that occurred every day. He accordingly secured a poisonous cobra and put it inside an earthen pot and carried it home. He planned to open the cover of the pot at the dead of the night, and to place it near his sleeping wife. But when at midnight he actually opened the cover, instead of the venomous animal that was inside the pot, he found it filled with gold coins. He was of course very glad at the discovery, and his wife's anger against him was all gone when he produced the pot before her, and said that he had earned the wealth by great labour. By Syed's order, his wife took the pot to the palace of the Badsha of that country and sold the gold coins to his Begum for a thousand rupees.
The Begum thought that she had made a bargain, and kept the wealth in her iron safe, and when in the morning she brought it out to show to the Badsha, he, instead of finding the gold coins that she had seen there the day before, found in it a smiling baby—a girl of exquisite beauty. The King who was childless was right glad to have this baby,—far more glad than if the pot had actually contained gold as had been reported to him by his wife. The news was announced throughout the capital that a girl was born to the Begum and there were great rejoicings in the palace over this event. The girl was named Sakhi-sonā. Just at the moment when the king's palace resounded with the music of the nahabat orchestra announcing the glad news, the mansion of the Uzir of the king's court witnessed similar festivities, though on a much smaller scale, on the occasion of a son being born to him. This son was called Mānik. The Badsha's astrologers prophesied that Sakhi-sonā, who was born under the influence of the Scorpion, would elope with a youth when she had reached womanhood.

The Uzir's son Mānik and the princess Sakhi-sonā read in the same Mokhtab. When they grew up to youth, they fell in love with each other; but one could not speak of "the passion that burnt within" to the other for shame.
One day, however, an opportunity presented itself. Sakhi-sonā's paper in the school dropped from her hands below, and she asked Mānik to get it from the ground and hand it to her. Mānik eyed her with a look in which a longing desire was hardly suppressed, and said that if she promised to pledge something to him, he would do so. Sakhi-sonā agreed knowing full well the significance of his suggestive words, and from thence they met in a compartment of the palace every day. A maid-servant of the princess one day discovered their intrigue and advised them to go away from the palace as they were sure to be detected some day or other.

Sakhi-sonā dressed herself as a young valorous youth with a sword hanging by her side and Mānik was also similarly dressed. Both mounted swift horses and left the palace at the dead of the night. From a deep jungle they came out after a day's fatiguing ride and coming near a cottage stopped there. The old lady of the house seemed very hospitable, but she was the mother of seven dacoits who just at that moment were not in the house. She gave her guests wet fuel and rice mixed with grains of stones, so that it took them considerable time to kindle a fire and cook the rice. But a woman of that house had whispered
in their ears that the house belonged to dacoits who would soon return and rob them of every thing they had. Mānik and Sakhi-sonā instantly mounted their horses and fled away; but the old woman had, before their departure, tied a small bundle of mustard-seed to the tail of each of the horses. So, as they proceeded, the seeds fell on the ground marking their path, without their knowledge of the device of the cunning old woman. The dacoits, seven brothers, returned home, and their mother regretted their lateness in coming back, saying that the guests who had escaped, were enormously rich, their crowns, and necklaces sparkled with pearls and diamonds. The seven brothers lost no time but mounting the swiftest horses in their stalls marched with the speed of lightening and overtook the princess and Mānik. A fierce skirmish ensued, and Mānik who was a superior swordsman killed six of the robbers: but the seventh who was a lame man, implored for mercy and Mānik granted him life. Sakhi-sonā was not for showing him any mercy, but Mānik was kind to him and appointed him to be in charge of the horses to give them food and drink. But the dacoit felt a flame of passion for Sakhi-sonā, and secretly planned to kill Mānik and seize her. So when one day Mānik had fallen asleep and Sakhi-sonā was busy
in the kitchen, the dacoit took a sword and cut off the head of Mānik. Sakhi-sonā lamented the loss of her husband and killed the lame dacoit and then prayed to god to restore her husband’s life. A pir (saint) came there at this stage of affairs and taking pity on Sakhi-sonā restored Mānik to life. The couple were now happy beyond measure on being restored to each other, and they rode their horses again till they came to the cottage of a flower-woman named Champā. She at once conceived a passion for Mānik, and by witchcraft turned him into a monkey; Sakhi-sonā, who was not just at that moment with her lord, knew nothing about his strange transformation, and seeking him everywhere in vain bitterly lamented for him. The monkey in the night assumed the form of man, by the spell of Champā, and she spent the night with him. If he attempted to escape he was again turned into a monkey.

Sakhi-sonā now led the two horses, the one that of herself and the other that of Mānik, by their reins and walked from place to place enquiring about her husband. She was dressed as a man and was arrested by the officers of the king of that country on a charge of theft of the two horses from the royal stall. She was thrown into prison. At this time a very large serpent appeared in the city of the king; it ate goats, cows
and men; even tigers and bears were devoured by this dreadful reptile. The king’s officers with guns shot with fruitless aim at it; the shots failed to pierce through its tough skin. The king proclaimed a large reward to one who would kill the animal and save his subjects from destruction. Sakhi-sonā dreamt in the prison that a pir (saint) appeared to her and told her the secret of killing the serpent. In the morning she sent word to the king, that if she were released, she could kill the serpent. She was of course all along taken for a young man and the king forthwith ordered her release. She approached the serpent from behind and struck her sword in the manner in which she was advised to do so by the pir in her dream. She had therefore no difficulty in killing the animal. When she succeeded in this enterprise, the king gave her his promised reward. And when she told her story of the sufferings caused to her by the king’s Police officers on mere suspicion, declaring her own innocence in respect of the charge of theft of the horses, the king was very much ashamed; for, he could not disbelieve anything that she said. The king, as a token of his appreciation of her heroism, and also to make up for the injustice done to her, resolved to give his only daughter in marriage to her, taking her to be a valorous and an
accomplished youth. She readily consented to the proposal and married the princess. But the latter, after a short time, felt that there was something strange and mysterious in the conduct of her husband; for, Sakhi-sonā kept aloof from her for fear of detection. Meantime, the monkey who assumed his human form every night, wrote a letter to Sakhi-sonā describing his condition. As soon as she read it, she asked the king to get for her the particular monkey belonging to the flower-woman. Inspite of the latter's protestations, the monkey was brought to the palace, and when in the night he got back his own form he related the story of his sad transformation into the shape of a monkey by the witch-craft of the flower-woman. The woman was obliged to undo her spell on him. So he was himself once more. The flower-woman after this was beheaded by the order of the king for her wickedness. The king, knowing now that Shakhi-sonā was a woman, married his daughter to Mānik with the consent of Sakhi-sonā. And he lived long in prosperity and happiness with both his wives.

The story of Sakhi-sonā was rendered into Bengali verse by the illustrious poet Fakir Rama Kavi Bhūṣaṇa, who was a native of the Burdwan district and flourished in the middle of the 16th
century. The story as told by this writer who was a poet of the Hindu Renaissance is briefly summed up as follows.

The princess Sakhi-sonā and Kumāra, the son of the kotwal, or the prefect of the Police, used to read in the same school. The seat of the princess was an elevated platform over the gallery in which the classes were held. Sakhi-sonā's pen one day dropped below, let us say, by a mere accident, from her seat. And she asked Kumāra to pick it up for her. Not once, but thrice did the pen drop that day, and on the third time Kumāra extorted a promise before he would pick up the pen for her, to the effect that he would do so on condition that she would comply with his wishes whatever they might be. Heedlessly did Sakhi-sonā run into the agreement, but what were her wonder and indignation, when Kumāra demanded to marry her and run away with her from her father's palace? For after such an inequal marriage, the king would not brook the pair to live with him, though she was the only legal heir to the throne.

Sakhi-sonā said in rage, "You villain, dare you say so? Do you know that your body will not bear the burden of your head if this be brought to the notice of the king? For a trifle of help that you did me, you venture to insult me in this way."
Kumāra said, "If you say so, no more. I do not press my request. But the moral binding nevertheless remains the same in either case. You can kill me, princess, but if you break your promise you cannot avoid the eyes of God who sees everything.

"Rāma, for a simple word that he had given to his father, left his kingdom and turned an ascetic. Dasaratha, his father, died of grief, but yet did not break his promise. Rāma, the pure-hearted killed Vāli in a questionable manner, simply for a promise that he had given to Sugrīva. If you break promise, well and good, you will be lowered in my estimation and that of your Maker, what more?"

Sakhi-sonā felt humbled, before this appeal to God. For she had given a promise and there was no doubt about it. After many conflicting emotions which caused her sleepless nights, she decided to leave the palace and join Kumāra. She excused herself of a little delay that had occurred, in the following manner:—"my maids are constantly with me; how for shame can I come out? The queens will not leave my side for a moment. Some cover me with the hem of their garments; some fan me, and some wave the soft cẖāmara. One offers me betel, and another kisses me with great love, and a third calls my attention by such words as 'Hear me,
my dearest child, I will tell you a story.’ And yet another weaves floral wreath for me and wants to know if I like it.”

Before leaving the palace, she had taken a parting view of the sleeping queens and soliloquised in this way: “Henceforth we shall meet no more. Like a boat trusting itself to the current, I trust my youth to fate. Do not weep, dear queens, when you miss me—your hapless child. Burn my throne and royal couch, for they will torment your eyes. Offer all my books lying in heaps in my chamber as a present to the Brähmins. Forbear to enter into my apartment, it will grieve you ever so much. My golden plates and cups and vessels adorned with precious stones, distribute among the poor. My jewels and ornaments send to the royal treasury, and adieu queens, adieu for life.”

She had met her preceptor in the way who advised her not to take the rash step, but to return to the palace. But she said that as she had given the pledge, it was sacred and inviolable.

In the way the princess did not say any word to signify her love for Kumāra. She was far too much moved by her grief in cutting off her home-ties for ever. Like Gareth following Lynette, Kumāra followed his love—wooing her at every step. But she heeded not, now looking at the cow that had
lost its young one, and then sighing over some other thing she saw in her way that reminded her of the home that she had deserted. But when the spring came and the trees that had looked like skeletons in winter became covered with luxurious foliage, "the Princess and Kumāra delighted in each other's company and the former forgot her old sorrows for a time."

"Nature had given her a form of surpassing beauty; now the dawn of youth made her a marvel. She never had passed the threshold of a kitchen; and if her hair was untied, never did she adjust it with her own hands,—but her maids for her. Never had she learnt to blow the fire with her breath; and as she did it now, the smoke of the wet fuel made her face pale and sad. The smoke stifled her breath and the fire of the hearth wel-nigh burnt her skin. Alas, once even the heat of a lamp-light was too much for her; but with the smoke and fire of the hearth she continued her struggle to cook a humble meal."

Both of them were journeying on horseback when a great cyclone overtook them. "The trees of Cuttack were carried down to Hinglat. Goats and cows were forced to fly on the high air like winged things. Seldom from the palace had the princess walked abroad on foot, and when she passed from one room to the other, the maids spread a rich carpet
on the court-yard; and when walking in the sun a guard used to hold a golden umbrella over her head. But now the hailstones beat incessantly against her head, and it seemed at each stroke her very skull would break. "O my love" she asked, "what will become of us? From the storm, the rain and the hailstones no escape I see. What path should we follow. The thick hailstones will ere long kill us both. The lightning's flash frightens my steed, and the striking of his hoofs on the hard ground produces fire. The storm suffocates me and I feel as if the breath of life itself would cease."

Suffering in this way from the furious weather and her own mental anguish, she with her husband came to a cottage which belonged to seven robbers. Kumāra killed six of them, but the seventh implored pardon which out of magnanimity he granted. But when Kumāra fell asleep, the miscreant killed him. Sakhi-sonā prayed goddess Chandi for mercy, and she restored Kumāra to life. Kumāra was next turned into a goat by the witchcraft of a flower-woman named Hīrā and the king of that country Naradhaja carried Sakhi-sonā by force into his compartment for females. Sakhi-sonā said that, before she would agree to marry the king for which he
pressed, she must perform some religious rite, which was to be completed after a year, with due solemnity. The king agreed to wait till that time. And at the end of the year, when her period of religious observances was over, she asked the king to provide her with a particular goat that was in the possession of Hirā, the flower-woman. For Chandi had appeared to the princess in a dream, and told her that her husband had been transformed into a goat by Hirā. Hirā was obliged to produce the goat by the king’s order, and the princess by the power of the spell that Chandi had taught her, forthwith restored her husband to his own form. Naradhaja saw in the transformation of the goat into a man the mercy of the goddess Chandi, and ungrudgingly shared in the joy of the couple who had met after a long year of bitter separation. Meantime the old king Vikramajit, the father of Sakhi-sonā, had heard all about his daughter and Kumāra, who had been so long missing, and now pardoned their marriage, and took them to his own city and made them heirs to his throne at death.

The most authentic version of this story, however, is the one compiled by Babu D. R. Mitra Mazumder. The story is called Puṣpamālā and not Sakhi-sonā. Mitra Majumder has
given the oldest form of the story, which is also the most accurate form. Whether the name Sakhi-sonā or Puṣpamālā is the older name of the heroine is open to question, but that is an immaterial point. In briefly summarising this version of the tale, I beg leave to state that the peculiar excellences of the original form of some of our folk-tales will be the subject of a somewhat elaborate analytical review in one of my future lectures. Here for the purpose of comparison, I subjoin a very brief summary of the story under review.

A Rājā happened to enter into a contract with his kotawal that if a daughter be born to him and a son to the kotawal, they would be united in marriage. But if instead, a daughter were born to the kotawal and a son to the king, the kotawal would be beheaded. These were the whimsical ways of the autocrats of those days. So no question was raised as to the propriety of the oath insisted on by the sovereign, and the kotawal had only to submit. It so happened that just at the same moment the queen and the kotawal's wife ran into a similar agreement, while they were bathing in a tank called the Putra-sarovara. The world knew nothing about these pledges. The king with the point of his arrow wrote his pledge on a fig-leaf and handed it to the kotawal.
A daughter was born to the king and a son to the *kotawal*; the princess was called Puṣpa-māḷā and the *kotawal’s* son Chandana. They used to read in the same school and each day from the high seat on which the princess sat, she dropped her pen below, and Chandana used to pick it up for her at her request. One day when he picked up the pen, and she bent herself a little to receive it from his hands, their eyes met, and Chandana the next day said, “Princess, if you exchange garlands with me, then shall I pick up the pen from the ground for you; else I will not.” An angry look came from the princess as she said, “Don’t you remember, lad, that you dwell in my father’s kingdom? Have you no fear of life that you dare say so?”

Chandana said, “Why should I fear, princess? I know that my ancestors have for several generations shed their blood to build up this kingdom for your father.”

The princess said nothing more that day. The next day her pen did not drop. But as Chandana was cleaning his own pen, it escaped his hand and fell on the the princess’ apparel spotting it with ink. Chandana was abashed at this, and the princess also felt a shame which she could hardly conceal, but she pushed the pen with
her finger so that it dropped below. Chandana took it up and said, "Many a day did I pick up your pen from the ground, to-day your gentle hand has pushed mine down to reach me. This earth is sacred because the flower blooms here. I charge you by the sacred earth and by the sun and the moon that illuminate her, that there has been an exchange of some sort." Saying so Chandana went away silently with the pen touched by the princess leaving his books and other things in the school. The princess was lost in her thoughts, and it was at a very late hour that she returned home that afternoon. The maid-servants had been long waiting with soaps and perfumes for her toilet.

But Chandana one day brought her a leaf on which the king had written the pledge, and on another occasion she came to know of the promise made by the queen to Chandana's mother. The king had absolutely ignored his promise and the queen would not even bear to be reminded of hers. If the kotawal or his wife ever alluded to it, they were threatened with death.

The princess, however, felt that the pledge was solemn in the eyes of God, however lightly her parents might now regard it in the pride of their power. She said to herself, "Alas, now I feel why my pen dropped from my hands every day. A destiny binds me to the young
Chandana, my parents' pledge must be fulfilled. I must be his wife."

She wept and could not sleep, the floral fan dropped from her hand on her breast; and the next morning a change in her was observed by all. On other days when she came to school, the jingle of her ornaments sounded like the merry hum of bees, but that day she stole into the room like a guilty soul quietly and silently.

The teacher marked it and said, "Princess, on other days the sweetness of your voice, while reciting lessons, pleases every one; how is it that your voice to-day seems so dull?" Chandana looked at Puṣpa and Puṣpa looked at Chandana; their eyes met again and she blushed drawing the veil over her face. Then the princess with hands that trembled produced the fig-leaf containing the king's pledge. Both of them said to their guru, "Should we, or should we not, keep our parents' pledge?" The teacher felt alarmed when he saw the leaf and read its contents, but collecting himself after a while said in a clear, firm voice, "If you keep the pledge, your seat will be in heaven, if not, your place will be in hell." Then the princess made Chandana sit on the high throne reserved for her in the school, and she sat below where Chandana used to sit. They bowed to their teacher, and the princess laid her ornaments,
her bracelets and necklaces, studded with precious stones, at his feet and asked him to accept them as her humble present at the close of her school career. And both of them said, "To help the king to keep his words is to maintain the honour of his kingdom. We leave the city to-day."

Before she had left her father's palace, the princess cooked a good meal herself. It was a great strain on her nerves to leave her father's house for good, and frequently did she wipe away her tears with her sadī. She offered the food to her parents, relations and servants and even to the domestic animals. It was the last time that she was permitted to serve them. Just at the time Chandana signalled to her; as she heard it she did not wait to take her own meal. She ran to Chandana and bowing low at his feet, fainted away. For the whole night Chandana fanned her with the cloth that he tore off from his turban and said to himself, "How can I preserve this jewel stolen from the serpent's hood?"

But she was all right the next morning, and both of them rode on and on, till they reached a cottage standing in the middle of a clearing. It belonged to an old woman, the mother of seven robbers, who had just a moment before gone abroad on their wicked trade. She showed great hospitality to the couple and
marked with delight the precious ornaments on the person of the princess. She gave them rice mixed with gravels, pulse which was old and dry, and a wet hearth and damp fuel. All these caused delay in cooking. The princess and Chandana went to bathe, but the landing steps were made slippery for them by water; and when they tried to come up to the bank by some other way, the old woman cried, "Not that way, dear, it is unclean." And when they tried a different way, the old woman came again and said, "Not thither, my children, there are thorns." By such petty devices she caused delay, expecting her sons to come in the meantime and plunder the guests.

The pair came to the kitchen and the torn turban now stood them in good stead. Fire was kindled by means of it. And they, rightly suspecting danger, came out by the back-door, and got on their horses and fled. The fire on the hearth gave a wrong impression, for, the old woman thought that her guests were busy cooking their meal. But what was her surprise when peeping into their room she found them gone. And from the stall their horses were gone too. She was, however, a very clever woman; or as soon as the couple had entered her house leaving their horses in the stall, she had collected some white seeds. These she had put in small pieces of cloth and tied to the horses'
fetlocks. The small bundles had been pierced through with a needle, so that when their riders fled, the seeds fell on the ground by twos and threes all over the track, and as they fell they turned into white flowers. The robbers on return easily overtook the guests by these beautiful signs. There ensued a fight and the six brothers fell as Chandana was a superior swordsman. The seventh implored mercy. The princess said, "No, dear, it is not safe to keep a part of debt, however small; all should be cleared; do the same with an enemy, howsoever lightly you may think of him."

But Chandana said, "Foolish, what can he do? he will be our attendant." So the life of the robber was spared and he became their servant. He burnt, however, with vengeance, and when one day Chandana had fallen asleep, killed him with his sword. The princess did not weep but smiled, and said, "What am I to do now?" The robber was very glad at this and said, "All right, now come to my house, dear." The princess assented. So both of them rode back and Puṣpa said, "It is surely a happy day for us both, will you not accept this betel from me?" He, in eagerness, stretched himself forward to receive the betel from the princess, as a sign of her love, and she in the twinkling
of an eye cut off his head with a stroke of her sword.

Now she alighted from her horse and threw herself on the ground where her husband’s head lay severed from the body; she had so long controlled herself by superhuman efforts but now her tears were unceasing. She held the head close to her breast and cried, “How long, dear, will you remain silent and not talk with me?” “From morn to noon” she wept and “from noon to dewy eve.” It was a dark night. The god Çiva and his consort Pârvatî were passing by the sky at this time. The goddess said, “Stop, husband, who is it that is weeping below?” Çiva replied, “No matter, who, let us pass on.” Pârvatî said, “That can never be. A woman’s lament I hear. O who art thou, unfortunate woman, grieving over a dead child or a dead husband? I must see thee.” Then as she looked down below, her eyes met a sad spectacle. A woman was bathing a head, severed from the body, in her tears and crying, “O my husband, O my darling.” The goddess was moved by the sight and restored Chandana to life.

After thanksgivings and great elation, the couple again rode on, till they reached the house of a flower-woman. She was a witch. As soon as she met them, she eyed them malignantly, and Chandana turned into a goat,
but her charm did not affect Puṣpa as she was true and chaste. Puṣpa was dressed like a young soldier. She approached the king of that country and said, "Here am I seeking service in your majesty's personal staff." "What can you do for me, lad, and what should be your pay?" asked the king. "My pay is one shield full of gold coins per day, and I can do what others cannot." The king assented to her demand and employed her. Just then a huge reptile appeared in the city of the king, and swallowed men and beasts every night, for in the night only it made its appearance and none could kill it. It was generally seen by the side of a large tank near the palace and passed by a deep forest abounding with Śal trees. The young soldier was ordered to kill it. She was busy in the afternoon cutting the tall śal trees with the fine end of the sword with such wonderful dexterity that the trees stood as before and none could know that they had been cut in the middle. At night a deep uproar mixed with a hissing sound was heard as the serpent moved about in the jungle, and no sooner had it come to the bank of the tank, than the trees touched by it, fell in hundreds upon its body, and the monster lay crushed under their weight. The young soldier next engaged herself in cutting the body to pieces. But
when the animal gave up its ghost, there sprang from its body a middle aged woman. She told Puṣpa that she was her mother transformed into that shape because she had failed to fulfil her pledge to the wife of the kotwal and Puṣpa recognised in her the queen—her own mother, who also stated that the old king, her father, had become a sweeper in that palace for the sin of his breaking his pledge. And as she said this she died at the spot and where she died a flower plant grew as a memorial.

Not long after Chandana was restored to human form by the grace of Pārvatī who was pleased with Puṣpa’s devotion. Puṣpa told Chandana, “What is the good of my life when my father is a sweeper and my mother died as a serpent because of me?” She was resolved on committing suicide, but Pārvatī’s grace again helped them, and the queen got her life back and the king was restored to his kingdom which he had lost by divine curse for breaking the pledge. Chandana and Puṣpa were united in wedlock by the sanction of the king and the queen. The kotwal was raised to the status of a feudal chief so that the king was no longer ashamed of calling him a friend and relation. The kotwal’s wife, now a lady of high rank, became a fast friend of the queen. They now lived in happiness and prosperity for long years.
In the version of Fakir Ram Kavibhusan, the father of the princess Sakhisonā, is King Vikramjit. There is a village called Mogalmāri two miles to the north of Datan which some of our scholars have identified with the ancient historic town of Dantapur in Orissa. At Mogalmāri there are ruins of a palace which people of the locality ascribe to Rāja Vikramjit and they say Sakhisonā of the folk story was the only daughter of that king. A mound of earth is still pointed out there as relics of the schoolroom of the princess where she pledged her hand to the kotwal’s son. Many places of our country are associated in this way with our legendary heroes and Purānic characters. But unless we have clear evidence we cannot accept such accounts as historically true. What happens is this. A man gives out a story in respect of some ruins in his locality consulting his fancy, and his statement is taken as a historical fact by the simple village-folk and it passes current throughout the neighbouring locality and goes unassailed from generation to generation. I do not believe that these attempts to connect places with the heroes of legends and popular romances should be treated as having any historical value.

All these stories, I beg to repeat, have been greatly abridged by me, and if the reader wants
to compare them and have fuller knowledge of their details he must go back to the originals themselves. If we take up the Muhammadan version for a critical review, we see, as we have already observed, that with the loss of the Hindu ideal of womanly virtue amongst the rank and file of converts to Islam, imm modesty in sexual matters was no longer thought of as a matter of serious social condemnation. The lower class of Muhammadans revel in unrestrained language while dealing with the topics of the passion of the flesh. The self-immolation of a Sati, though its propriety is justly called in question on humane grounds, the self-denial and austerities of widowhood enjoined by the Hindu scriptures, the loyalty that does not break after husband’s death but continues to inspire a woman’s soul through the rest of her life—these ideals of women were withdrawn from the community of converts, and the result was that the folk-lore amongst them degenerated from the standpoint of the high Hindu conception of devotion and purity. The story of Sakhisonā shows this decadence of the lofty Hindu spirit in a striking manner. Sakhisonā with her hair all loose and dishevelled stands on the roof of her palace enjoying the warmth of the sun on a wintry day; her charms are exposed to the gaze of Kumāra who feels the “dart of Cupid
pierce his breast outright," and then when they meet in the school he seduces her in the language of a low class debauch. She listens to him with her heart throbbing with passion; and they meet shamelessly in a room of the palace every night. What a contrast does such a scene of lust, introduced by a Muhammadan writer, offer to that quiet self-control which we find in the original Hindu story! Pre-nuptial love is unknown in our community but sometimes it finds a place in our folk-tales, as it does in the present case. It is, however, couched in guarded language showing a high sense of sexual purity even amongst our rustic folk. In the Hindu version of this tale, stress is justly laid upon the word of honour and upon the pledge of parents, justifying the abandonment of home in the company of a lover, which divested from any such moral obligation, is in itself a horrible thing to our men and women. Peruse the Hindu tale and nothing will jar against your ears in respect of the elopement of a princess with a youth of humbler rank. The woman stands elevated in your eyes inspite of what she did. And yet what she did was deliberate and well-planned, not conceived at the spur of the moment. A grossly sensuous element, on the other hand, permeates the Muhammadan version. The immodesty of the princess meeting a lover before she is married to him will strike every
Hindu reader and in our Zenana the women will not bear to hear a story like that. The robber, whose life is spared, feels a passion for the princess, and says or thinks nothing of his murdered brothers. The flower-woman also conceives a passion for Kumāra, whom she transforms into a goat but restores to human shape every night. The writer says "they spend the night in jolly spirits." We need not comment on the conduct of the flower-woman. She may be equal to this action or things even more hineous, but the hero of the tale becomes contemptuous by his tacit submission to the will of the debauched witch. The king seizes the princess when she is forlorn and there is again a love-proposal. The whole story in the Muhammadan version has thus been worked up to pander to a vulgar taste which repels us. We would not have cared to notice the story, were it not for showing how the original Hindu tale has been vitiated in its Muhammadan version; but let us very clearly state here that we do not believe that the Muhammadan women tell this story in their homes in the shape in which it has come down to us in its printed form. The version current in Muhammadan homes may be truer to the original, and let us believe that it gives a decent and becoming account of Sakhisona's love and trials. What seems to have happened is this, The
Muhammadan writer, whose readers are no doubt a few rustic men who have just learnt to read the Bengali alphabets, in his zeal for showing himself a dilettante and well skilled in the art of expressing the softer emotions of the human heart, has introduced these incongruous elements into the original Hindu story which is so rigidly pure.

So far with the Muhammadan version. Let us next say a few words about this story as related by Fakir Rama Kavibhushana in the middle of the 16th century. That Fakir Rama was a true poet admits of no doubt. His taste is rigid and he gives very fine touches showing a real mastery over the poetic art in many of his elegant passages. For instance, he begins his tale with a dialogue between the princess and Chandana. The latter proposes elopement. The princess should leave the palace and both of them go to a different country and live as husband and wife. The indignant princess expresses her vehement rage at this unbecoming proposal and threatens to bring the matter to the notice of the king. This would lead to his immediate execution. But Chandana cites Pauranic examples; how R̄ma left the palace and became a beggar for a simple pledge; how Daçaratha died of grief yet dared not break his pledge; how R̄ma himself did an act which
was blamed as one of questionable integrity, simply because he had pledged his word. These references to Pauranic examples of faithfulness completely conquered her spirit. For being a scholar herself, she dared not violate the ordinances laid down in the holy books. The Puranas guided the social lives of the Hindus of the 16th century. Even the literary characters were bound down by the commandment of these scriptures. The preceptor of Sakhisonā dissuaded her from flying away with Kumāra, but she cited an example from the Rāmāyana referring to the case of the washer-woman who was afraid of scandal in the Uttarākānda; and this completely outwitted the preceptor. The descriptions of Nature given by Fakir Rama are all on classical lines. The animated account of a hurricane is interesting, and so is also that of Sakhisonā’s full grown charms on the attainment of womanhood. Her feet are like lotus buds, her eyes soft as those of a gazelle and her face lovely as the moon. These are of course stereotyped objects of comparison which abound in Pauranic literature. But inspite of his classical taste, which is a marked feature of the story related by Fakir Rama, we admire his keen appreciation of the rural element in the original folk-tale which he retains in his version in a considerable measure. His writings show a combination of the classical elements with the
rural, and his style is light occasionally verging on the humorous and far from the monotonous and heavy sweep which often repels us in most of the vernacular poems of the Hindu Renaissance.

But when we come to the version of Dakshinaranjan what a sense of relief do we feel! This scholar has taken down the story as told by old women of the country-side. He has added nothing himself. He has even tried, as far as possible, to retain the very language in which these tales were delivered. This takes us back to a state of things which existed in the country before the Muhammadan invasion. Those that are acquainted with Hindu life in the zenana, especially in the remote Mofussil villages of Bengal, will bear testimony to the fact that time has changed but little of the ideas and thoughts of our womenfolk and even of the dialect they have been speaking for all these long centuries. We find in these country-tales some of the simple charms of old life, before the Brahmin priests had made it a complicated and artificial one. These beauties grow up everywhere in the tale and are abundant as field-flowers. The princess and Chandana take the vow of adherence to a life of devoted love, but they do not swear by gods and goddesses nor by the holy writs nor by the words of the Brahmins. Chandana says “We shall be true
as the earth is true where flowers blossom.'” The flower is the emblem of innocence and truth; and the earth is sacred because the flowers blossom here! When the queen breaks her promise, Chandana’s mother—the poor wife of the kotwal—comes to the bank of the Putra-sarobar and before the lotuses which were the witnesses of the queen’s pledge, sings her lament, the quiet pathos of which appeals to the heart, offering a contrast to the Pauranic allusions made in Fakir Rama’s version to prove that breach of promise is not good. Here the kotwal’s wife says in rhymed verse:—“Oh lotus, why do you blossom still and do not blush and fade for shame? For did she not make a pledge here and has not she broken it here and in your presence? The bank of this lovely tank is no longer sacred. How strange that in spite of the breach of faith that took place here the sun still throws its reflection on this tank by day and the moon and stars by night!”

The princess has a dim knowledge of the pledge given by her royal parents. She comes near the tank and sees the birds Çuka and Sāri perched on the bough of a near tree. The shade of the evening spreads around her and she says: “O birds, Çuka and Sāri, O waters of the tank, can you not tell me what this pledge is? For its fulfilment I am ready to take out a rib of my heart and offer it, if
necessary.” The ideal of loyalty and devotion is here even more strikingly shown than in Pauranic tales; but they are simple virtues of the innocent human heart, and for following these no Pauranic rules need be quoted. The plant with its floral wealth, the tank with its transparent water and the lotus in its full-blown beauty appeal to the rural people more than the Brahmins and all their holy writ would perhaps do. The thought of the pledge weighs upon Pusmapalā, the princess, and makes her sad. The next day, the preceptor marks it. On other days the jingle of the gold cymbals on her feet pleased the ear of everyone that heard it, to-day she steals into the room quietly, and the preceptor says, “How is it that your voice on other days sounded so sweet when you recited your lessons, and to-day it is dull like that of a dry piece of wood?” When the preceptor learns the whole thing about the pledge from Puspa and Chandana, and when both of them seek his opinion as to what they should do, he does not play the part of the vociferous Brahmin of the Renaissance giving a catalogue of the Pauranic allusions to bear upon the question, but briefly says, “If one keeps the pledge he goes to heaven, he that violates it, goes to hell.” But before this Daniel delivered his judgment, he had sat quiet for a minute with brows that were darkened and pursed up, for he realised the fact
well, that his judgment would make the princess, the heiress to the throne of that country, leave the palace and seek a life of poverty and distress. But in his regard for truthfulness, he did not yield to the Brahmanic enthusiasm of the Pauranic revival, though he was not at all prolific in his speech like the latter. The princess after hearing this judgment from his Guru, made Chandana sit on the throne, while she sat below; this simple act showed that she elected him as her bridegroom.

Without the sound of conch-shells and the recitations of Vedic hymns, and a hundred rites which are held indispensable, they became bound in wedlock in response to the call of a higher duty which gave a solid grounding to love and sentiments. Before they departed they said, "To keep the honour of the pledge of a king is to keep unimpeached the honour of the country; so do we follow this course." The princess took her diamond necklace and bracelets off and offered them as fees to the preceptor. We all feel that he richly deserved them; for even at the risk of everything enviable in this earth, he could not advise the pair to swerve from truth. He knew that if this were known to the king, he would punish him with death.

One thing that strikes us as very remarkable in these stories is the control exercised on feelings and speech of the great characters. This affords a contrast to the literature of the
Pauranic renaissance where descriptions of simple things often weary us by their monotony and unnecessary repetitions. Here the women-folk are generally the listeners of these tales and they are also the story tellers. This accounts for the excellent brevity—the characteristic of the stories—which as a great poet has said “is the soul of wit.” For though we read in modern romances long speeches on love delivered by women, these people of the tender sex are, as a matter of course, averse to such speeches, when their feelings are deep. This is true especially of the Hindu women. One of our great poets has put this in the mouth of his heroine: “We are called Abolás (speechless), for though we have mouth, we cannot speak out our sentiments.” In fact, deep love is not consistent with long professions. It is silent and full of sacrifices. Words are generally frothy and they often disclose shallowness of the heart. Did ever a mother deliver a long speech to her child to prove how dearly she loved him? Even so it is with nuptial love; when it is deep it scarcely speaks. In the modern Bengali romances, the heroines are given to long speeches and long love-confessions. But here we find the highest and deepest love shewn in action and in sacrifice at every step, but the characters seldom make speeches.
The look of the flower-woman's malignant eyes turned Chandana into a goat. She wove a garland of flowers without the help of thread and blew into the air by her breath. These had no effect upon Puṣpa. For, says the folk-tale, she was chaste and pure. It is interesting to notice that in spite of the many superhuman actions, charms and spells, with which these stories abound, the rural people realised the power of simple truth and faith in a wonderful manner. A woman who was loyal and true and who sacrificed everything for love, and suffered without complaint, was a proof against all kinds of spell. Truth and devotion were the armour against which no witchcraft or charm could stand. Human virtues are appreciated in these simple accounts of rural life in a remarkably convincing manner. Gods and even devils bow to a true heart. This gives the stories a great ethical status. We shall, however, show a striking example of these great human virtues in the typical story of Mālanchamālā of which a full translation will be appended to our concluding lectures.

The country life, with its charms and simplicity and with its deep poetry, finds a most unassumingly fascinating expression in these stories. Not a word more, not a word less than what is required; the words are all to the point, and the descriptions are not made
ingenious or heavy by scholarly effusions; the little songs interspersed in the stories are full of poetry, wit or pathos. In this very story of 
Puṣpamāḷā, there are many small songs which shine like gems; they were not composed to illustrate classical canons of rhetoric, but coming direct from hearts that were charged with emotions and true pathos, they appeal irresistibly and remind us that there is nothing so beautiful as simplicity. Puspa had disguised herself as a warrior but the king’s guard while trying to take off the soldier’s coat from her body, makes a strange discovery. The folk-tale here introduces a song:

“How does her rich braided hair become open to the gaze! The green outer skin of the mango had hid its wealth of ripeness but the beak of a crow strikes it, and lo! the golden colour is out. The water weeds had covered the lotus, its soft stalk lay hid under thorns, the bee touches it and lo! a hundred petals spread out and show the full bloom.”

This passage reminds us of a few charming lines in Goldsmith’s “Hermit.” The beauty of words like “বরণ চোরা আম” is untranslatable, and belongs to the rural dialect of this province. Their rich suggestiveness can hardly be conveyed to foreigners.

The descriptions sometimes consist merely of a number of onomatopoetic words. They are,
however, more expressive than those which are verbose and written in a grandiloquent classical style. The great reptile, the Čankhini, that swallowed men and beasts, approaches through the forest lands.

"কঠিএ জুনেন, গাছ মত মত, হাত বড় বড়, নিমিতে লেজের দাপটে নন প্রল কাপাইয়া শরীরে সরে লাখিল, তিন শোধ সবোরে কৎম শোখ করিয়া ডাক দুঃখিয়া চিরায় গেল।"

These few words call up the hideous imagery of the Čankhini, which many of our modern writers would fail to produce by writing a number of pages.

CHAPTER V

Four kinds of Folk-tales

There were four kinds of folk-tales prevalent in Bengal. First of all, to begin with, the ṛūpa-kathās,—they are simple tales in which the superhuman element predominates. The ṛūpa-kathā.

The Rākṣasas, the beasts and celestial nymphs often play the most important parts in these stories. The tales of heroism related in them are sometimes fantastical. The sages of these kinds of tales in Gaul could tell you the age of the moon; they could call the fish from the depths of the seas and cause them to come near the shore; they could even change the shapes of the hills and headlands; they
could utter incantations over a body cut to pieces, saying, "Sinew to sinew and nerve to nerve be joined" and the body became whole again; the Druid priest could hurl tempests over the seas; the heroes with one stroke of their favourite swords beheaded hills for sport; when they sat down to their food, they devoured whole oxen and drank their mead from vats. In the legend of Mainamati, we find the Hadi Shiddha displaying similar feats; with golden shoes on his feet he could walk over big rivers; he kindled fire with the water of the Ganges instead of oil; the river was bridged at the mere words of his mouth; at his command the tree laden with fruits drooped low to the earth to yield its treasures to him; the gods came down to offer their services to him; he was so powerful that with his rod he even chastised Yama, the god of death. The attribution of superhuman powers to mortals, held in higher rank than even the immortals, was a special feature of the rūpakathās and legends from the 8th to the 10th centuries all over the world. In a tale called the "Field of Bones" in the collection of Bengal folk-tales by Lal Bchary Dey, we find a sage, like the Gaelic physician Miach, son of Diancecht, joining the different parts of a dead body by incantations; and the legend of the beautiful nymph Caer, who became a swan every summer and smote Angus with her charms, will ever
remind us of many stories current in Bengal like those of Daudi, Jamini Bhan and Chandrāvali, to which reference has already been made. This episode, differing in some of its details in various versions, recurs in many Bengali stories as well as in those of the other parts of the world. The genuine rūpakathās and legends all over the world have many strikingly common points in them. Those that are indigenous to Bengali life have the special feature of having some great ethical aim while imparting instruction with amusement to the young. It is now admitted by European scholars that many episodes of the Arabian Night's Tales owe their origin to Indian stories, such as are to be found in the Kathāsarit-sāgara. The story of Saharia and Sahajeman is an Arabic adaptation of the story of the two Brahmin youths and their religious sacrifice described in that Indian work. The story of Sindabad the sailor, that of the King, the prince, and seven ministers, of Geliad, his son and minister Senmash, in the Arabian Night's Tales, are derived from Sanskritic sources. We have already mentioned how the Panchatantra which professed to teach the princes of Pataliputra rules of conduct and politics, presented in the garb of animal stories, got a world-wide circulation. This represents one of the forms of rūpakathās. (But the true rūpakathās are those
where fair ones are won by the heroic feats of dauntless princes and young merchants after a conquest over the Rakṣasas or achievements of other feats equally hazardous and glorious. These at one time carried the young children breathless through every stage of narration; the spirits of the air, the beasts of the forest and the monsters of the deep took part in human affairs in these stories creating a romance which produced and excited interest around the hearth of each family.

Often in particular classes of rūpakathās, the human powers were exaggerated, till imagination feasted itself to a satiety, and in Eastern tales the romance of these was not bound by time and space, but transcended limits of all sorts. In the Edda the giant Skrymmer notices the dreadful blows of Thor's hammer as the falling of a leaf. In the English story of Jack the giant-killer, Jack under similar circumstances, says that a rat had given him three or four slaps with its tail. But these feats are nothing as compared to those described in the Bengali tale called "The wrestler 22-men-strong, and the wrestler 23-men-strong." The tale is a typical one showing the wild excesses of Eastern imagination. The wrestler 22-men-strong heard that there lived in another part of the world a wrestler 23-men-strong. His
pride was wounded, so in great rage he started for the country of his rival who claimed the strength of one man more than himself, in order to challenge him to a fight. In his hurry he forgot to take his meal. But on his way he found that his bag contained 24 maunds of flour. Where was the plate to be found from which he could eat so much food? Finding a tank on his way he threw the flour into it and then quaffed off the whole mixture. This appeased his hunger for a time. He now took a mid-day nap, but a wild elephant that had come to drink water from that tank was enraged to see it emptied of its liquid, and trampled the wrestler under its feet; the sleeping man was disturbed, and half-opening his eyes from which sleep had not yet vanished, gave a slap which killed the animal as though it were a gnat, and then he turned on his back and slept again.

Arising from his sleep the wrestler came to the house of his rival 23-men-strong, and knocked at his gate. But as no one responded to his call, he kicked at the earth as a sign of his rage, and this caused a great sound. A girl nine years old came out and wonderingly said, "You, a man? I thought the cat of the house was scratching the earth as it does every day?" The wrestler felt himself humbled by this remark, for his feats were belittled
by a girl and declared to be worthy of a cat. Then reclining upon a tall palm-tree he asked the girl where the wrestler 23-men-strong was. "You mean my father, wait a bit, he will come presently. He has gone to the river side," said the girl and added "Don't push the palm tree in that way, it may fall down." "Why, what if it does?" The girl replied "My father will make a tooth-brush with it, when it grows stronger." The wrestler did not relish this remark also and wondered what the man would be like, who thought of making a tooth-brush with such a tall palm-tree. He did not wait, but ran to the river side to meet his rival. They met and forthwith began to fight.

An old woman with a herd of goats was passing that side, and seeing the two wrestlers fighting, said "Children, forbear your play for a moment, and let me pass." The wrestlers stopped fighting and wondered that such giants as they were could be addressed as children and their fight described as play! But the woman did not wait long; she took the fighting heroes upon her shoulders and forgot all about them, and tying her cows and buffaloes to her apron, passed by. The king of birds Gadura was passing by the sky above them at this moment and he saw the prospect of a good feast, and carried in his beak the woman with all that she carried.
There lived a king in a certain country who had a daughter. She was taking rest on a couch on the roof of her palace, and one of her attendant maids was narrating a rūpakathā to her. The breeze was pleasant and the princess enjoyed it no less than the tale, when suddenly she rose up from her bed and said, “Maid, see what has fallen into my right eye, it may be a dust-grain.” The maid took a straw in her hand and put a bit of cotton around it, and then with its help drew out the dust-grain. The princess felt a little pain in the eye from which fell a drop of tear. The dust-grain when brought out proved to be nothing less than the woman with two fighting men on her shoulders and with a whole herd of beasts tied to her apron! The gentle breeze that the princess enjoyed was a cyclone which had caused the king of birds to throw the woman from his beak! The dwellers of Brobdingnag who are “as tall as an ordinary spire-steeple” sink into insignificance before this mighty host of the Bengali tale.

These rūpakathās introducing nymphs and fairies, where the hero and the heroine suffer for their love and pass through risks and sacrifices in an adventurous spirit, have interest for the young as well as the old, rousing the imagination of the former and old memories of the latter. And what people of the world have
not heard these in their infancy, and not admired them with all the warmth and eagerness of their souls? Sometimes the grim and terrible element in these tales fills the young minds with awe, and sometimes the picturesque natural sceneries drawn in a few lines—the flowers of the valley, the evening stars and moon light—diffuse a charm which make a lasting impression on the young. And many a time and oft the story carries them through the dangers passed by the hero,—in the land of Rakṣasas or of giants or in cities depopulated by tigers or cobras. And the young listeners sigh and pray for the end of the hero’s troubles and when he is restored to his love’s arms, feel extreme gratification and sense of relief. Sometimes as in the story of the Field of Bones, the stillness of a dark night, in the depth of an impenetrable forest, mixed with awful incantations and the grimness of Tantrik worship, recalling the dead to life, awaken the soul to mystic emotions and thoughts that transcend the limits of time and space. In stories like that of “The Origin of Opium,” through the various stages of ambition presented in the form of a legend, the ethical lesson that contentment and not self-aggrandisement should be the true object to be aimed at, prepares the temperament of the young aspirant to high moral life.
The next species of folk-tale in Bengal consists of those in which there is an attempt at humour. These may not be often too pointed and subtle, but they show the power of appreciating humorous situations by the rural-folk in their own simple way. They call up associations of merry laughter of children and smiles on the bashful lips of youthful women. One of them begins in this way:

"There was once a king whose name was Habuchandra and his minister was called Gabuchandra.

"The king was the very jar of wisdom and the minister a palm-tree of sagacity.

"Both kept company day and night, and did not leave each other for a moment.

"How could injustice prevail in a kingdom ruled by such a pair of prodigies? They were determined to protect the country from harm in every way.

"The king used to laugh loudly, ho—ho—ho at every thing, and the rejoinder was sure to come from the minister who in his deep-mouthed voice coughed kho—kho—kho.

"Each admired the other's wisdom and was full of praises of the other.

"The king had a wall raised round his Audience Hall, his minister kept his nostrils and ears shut by putting a quantity of cotton in
them. This was a precaution lest the royal and ministerial wisdom should disappear from the court.

"It happened one day that a boar passed near the palace making a sound with its nose, ghouth, ghouth, ghouth. The king saw the animal and said, 'What is it, minister?' The minister looked at it with scrutinizing eyes, and said, 'Your Majesty's servants in charge of the stall are thieves. This is an elephant famished and reduced to this size; the servants have not evidently provided it with food.'

"At once an order was passed to imprison the servants belonging to the royal stall!

"Another day the same boar passed by the palace again. The king looked at it and said, 'How is it, minister, that the elephant has not improved in size though the servants have been punished.'

"The minister said, 'Your Majesty, this is a mouse, for were it an elephant, its trunk would have come out by this time. The kingdom is in a great peril. The mice have become fat, feeding on the royal store.'

"'Does the matter even stand so?' cried the indignant king. Orders were at once passed to behead the sentinels of the royal store.

"The royal store was now saved by the sagacity of the king and his minister; they drew a breath of relief and sat in a chamber
after this great labour and the servants fanned them in order to remove the weariness caused by the toil of administration."

The story goes on to narrate a number of episodes illustrative of the sagacity of the king and his minister, and the humour throughout, though not pointed as a needle, is neither blunt as a wooden sword. They best show the joys and merriments of simple village-folks, and are purely indigenous in character. The sequel is worthy of the beginning, comic and tragic at the same time. The king, counselled by the minister, orders the execution of a man, as innocent as you or I, on a charge of theft. A stake is raised for the impalement of this criminal. And the king and the minister are present to see to the carrying out of their command. Now the Guru of this unfortunate man came to the spot at that moment and cried out, "Do not put him to the stake for god's sake; let not a criminal be rewarded in the way deserved by saints." "What is the matter?" "What is the matter?" asked the king and his minister with gaping mouths. Now the Guru who was dressed as a hermit said, "I have found it in the holy writs that the man who is impaled at this most auspicious moment will go to heaven straight, no matter what heinous crime he may have

* Dakhina Ranjan's Thakurmar Jhuli.
committed in this earth; so keep his punishment in abeyance for a while, and put me on the stake instead, so that I may at once pass from earth to the heaven.” The minister said, “This cannot be, if this death is so glorious, why should an outsider be rewarded with it? Put me there.” But His Majesty whose imagination was inflamed by the description of the nymphs of heaven that he had heard, cried aloud, “The king must go to heaven first.” So by his royal order he was impaled by the executioner and by his wish loud music was kept up all the while drowning his screams, and when the crowd at last saw him, they found him stone-dead, with a horrible grimace on his face.

There are many stories that we heard in our childhood containing rural sketches full of humour and jovial spirits, and not in an inconsiderable portion of them are the animals, the chief actors. The fox is often the hero of these stories. In one of the tales we find him in the capacity of a village pedagogue. The tortoise has seven young ones; he is anxious for their education and leads them to the school of the veteran teacher. The wily fox is well pleased to see the young ones and casts on them hungry looks, but says he, “You need not at all care for them now. Their interest is my look-out from this day.” The tortoise now goes back
fully convinced of the sound education its young ones will get at the hands of such a well known scholar as the fox. On the third day, his fatherly care made him feel some anxiety about them and he paid a visit to the school-master. One of the seven had meantime served for the light refreshment of the latter, but the cunning fellow brought the little things one by one and showed them to their father, the sixth one was brought twice so that he could not perceive any diminution in their number. In this way when all but one remained, the cunning fox brought it out and then took him back to his school chamber and in this way produced it seven times, on which the tortoise felt that all the seven were alive and doing well. But when the wily animal had finished that one also, the tortoise on his visit again was told that his seven young ones had completed their school-education and gone to college for higher academic distinction. How long could such a pre-text hold water? The tortoise now realised the truth that his young ones had gone up indeed to a higher world but through the jaws of the wicked Reynard. And he took a solemn vow of retaliation. One day the old fox was crossing a canal and the tortoise caught one of his legs tightly within his jaws. "Ha'-Bah!" cried the prince of cunning, whose presence of mind never failed him. "What a narrow escape!
The foolish tortoise has but caught a log by his teeth, my legs are quite free." Whereupon the latter let it go, thinking that it was a mistake on his part. Another day the fox was thinking to how to cross the small canal. He had urgent business on the other side, but dared not cross the canal lest the tortoise who was on the alert, might catch him again. The tortoise was weary of waiting, and at last showed himself on the surface of the water. He abused the fox to his heart's content and said that there was no escape from him, sooner or later. The fox also gave replies which enraged the tortoise. In his indignation he floated in mid-water in a careless manner; and lo! clever Reynard sprang up in all haste and resting his feet for a moment on the back of his enemy went to the other side of the canal by a heroic leap. "Ha'-Bah!" cried Reynard safely landing on the other bank, and the tortoise felt greatly disappointed. The tortoise thought "The wily fox outwits me in this way each time but I will prove too clever for him this time." He came up to the bank of the canal and landing ashore closed his eyes and lay like one dead. "The old fool Reynard must take me for a corpse and come to partake of my flesh. Let me wait." The fox came up there as usual for an evening walk and noticed the father of the deceased young
ones lying there inert and motionless. In a moment he understood the device of the tortoise and said: "The tortoise, poor fellow, is dead. But stop, I am not sure if he is completely dead; for he does not shake his ears as tortoises do when they die." The tortoise thought that it must be a sign of death of the species to which he belonged, to shake the ears after death. So he gently shook his ears as a convincing proof of death. But the fox said: "The tortoises open their eyes after death and shut them again." Whereupon the foolish animal did as he was told, shutting his eyes after opening them once. Reynard approached him and gave him a kick and fled in all haste into the depths of the forest. This part of the story has a parallel in the story of a hare and a fox current among the Negroes.

The third class of these stories comprises the brata kathās or tales interspersed with hymns and attended with religious observances. Some of these seem to have come down to us from hoary antiquity. The deities addressed are those for the most part to whom the Aryan pantheon has not opened its doors. Their names are unknown and non-Sanskritic, and the mode of their worship is strange. The deities called the Thuā, five in number, are to be made with clay. Their conically shaped figures are like miniature pyramids and the
hymns addressed to them are couched in the oldest form of the Bengali dialect akin to Prākrit. The meaning of this mystic hymn is not very clear.

"পৃথু পৃথুক্ষ মাসেব জ্ঞাতীপ আধুন বনে বনে আগ্রহি। অকালে ভাতিষ্ঠ ধনে জনে সৃষ্টি। জনে জনে সৃষ্টি। পৃথু পৃথু মোরা চম্যারিণ॥"

The origin of the worship of the Bengali woman’s god Lāul is also lost in obscurity. Like Thuā he is represented by a conically shaped piece of clay. This is covered with floral decorations, and two sticks of flowers representing two arms are attached to the figure; but this seems to be a later innovation. The religious observances in regard to Thuā and Lāul seem to be a sort of pyramid-worship; and it is difficult at this stage to say if these forms of worship belonged to the indigenous non-Aryan population, or were introduced by the Dravidians or some other people. One point to be noticed in regard to such worship is that the elderly women of the Aryan homes seem to have been originally opposed to them. It is the young
wife that introduces them at the teeth of great opposition. This we find in the sacred tales by which every such worship is consecrated. The Aryans did not at first tolerate these practices but the brides were initiated into the rites probably by the non-Aryan people with whom they came in contact and amongst whom the Aryan homes were built. In the stories attached to the worship of these local deities, we find the mothers-in-law resenting the practices, nay sometimes setting their feet on the sacred things with which the wives worshipped these deities privately. We all know that the worship of Chandi and Manasa Devi was not at first favoured in the Aryan homes. The young wives introduced it at great sacrifice on their part and bore all manner of oppression for doing so.

To some of the deities of this nature, such as Chandi and Manasa Devi, the Brahmin priest opened his temple-door latterly. They were connected in some form or other with the legends of Hindu mythology. But Thuana and Laul are worshipped by womenfolk alone, without being recognised by the Brahmins, and are now in their last struggle for existence in Bengal. The archaic forms of words in the hymns addressed to these deities carry us to the 8th or 9th century A.D. and even earlier times; and there
is no lack of other internal evidences to prove that some of these forms of worship originated when the Bengalis were at the height of maritime activities. The chart of worship of the goddess Bhāduli is full of symbolical things denoting sea-voyage. There are seven seas, thirteen rivers, the sandy sea beach, rafts, sea fowls, palm tree, etc., in the chart. The prayers all refer to the safe landing on the home-shore of those dear ones and relations gone by sea to distant countries:—

"Oh river, Oh river, whither do you run? Before you pass by, say something of my father and his son. Where do you go so fast, Oh river, Oh river, Tell me how my husband and father-in-law fare. Oh sea, Oh sea, peace be with thee, grant what I pray. My brother has gone for trade, may he return to-day. Oh sea, Oh sea, peace be with thee, hear what I say. My father has gone for trade, may he return to-day. Oh raft, Oh raft, dweller of the high seas thou art. Keep my father and brother safe from all harm and hurt. Oh sea-beach, Oh sea-beach, smile when they pass by thee. Watch them, keep them safe, this boon grant me. Oh sea-fowls, Oh sea-fowls, tell me I beseech thee. Where did you see the ship, that carries them in the sea?"

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The little girls worship the image of the sea, of the rivers, sea-fowls, and rafts, preparing the figures by a solution of powdered rice, and address these short prayers and hymns, wishing the safe return of those dear and near to them, engaged in sea-voyage. Who the goddess Bhāduli is, no one can tell. In one of the hymns, she is called the mother-in-law of Indra, as Lāul is called in another passage the elder brother of Čiva. These are no doubt mere attempts to connect them in some way or other with the deities of the Hindu pantheon. Bhāduli is worshipped in the month of August, when the rivers are full and the monsoons are high, and the anxiety of tender hearts becomes greatest in respect of their husbands, fathers and brothers whose ships, not so secure by scientific methods and appliances, as now, were often a plaything of the deep. The little girls observed fasts and prayed to the raft, the seabeach, the ship and the sea-fowls to keep their kith and kin in safety. There is a simplicity and tender pathos in these unassumingly beautiful prayers of the child’s heart which cannot but appeal. The images of men and women are drawn in utipana paintings and this is an essential rite and part of the ceremony of worship. These figures are often like crosses; a line is drawn in addition, to each cross towards the end; for otherwise the figure would have
but one leg. These are also made of clay and sold in the country-side. A distinguished European scholar once expressed great surprise at seeing one such clay figure, and told me that it was the exact likeness of some of those clay-figures which Mr. Evans discovered along with other things in Crete, all belonging to about 3000 B.C.

The agricultural element, an indispensable factor of country life in Bengal, is in evidence in most of these songs and tales. We find that in the Čunyapurāṇa, written in the 10th century, Čiva appears to us as an agricultural god engaged in reaping the harvest and doing other field work, with the help of his chief assistant Bhima. The peasantry of the country-side attributed their own calling to the deity, in order to bring him nearer to their comprehension. There is a humour which almost reaches a pathetic interest in the description of Čiva applying lime water to the roots of rice-plants in order to destroy insects. Well is it said, that if a bull were to make an image of its god, the horns would be considered indispensable for such a divinity. Some of these brāhakathās attribute an agricultural life to Indra as the Čunyapurāṇa does to Čiva. One of these runs thus:—

"Where is the god Indra"
Indra is husking rice."
One of the most popular of these Bratas, or religious rites performed by our girls, is the Sejuti. In the prayers and songs relating to this brata, we have a vivid sketch of the Hindu girls of the old school with their ideas and feelings. The typical girl of our society expresses in simple language all that she feels to the deity she worships. Her ambition, her sweetness of temper and even bitterness of feeling and jealousy are all expressed in her prayers. There is much crudeness but the simplicity is most attractive. There are prayers for a pretty son being born to the mother; "Let me be borne in a stately palanquin from my father's house to my father-in-law's" is suggestive of a desire of being married to a rich husband; "May the refuse in the plate of my brother be the meal for others." "May my brother be lovely as the moon-beams." "May he be a favourite in the king's court; "May I eat off a plate of gold and may I wear golden bracelets; "Oh god Civa, Oh god sun, may I not be married to an illiterate man; "May my husband be a prince;—elephants at his door and steeds in his stall, heaps of grain husked in his courtyard and cows breeding evermore in the cow-shed, and may we have a son of a swarthy colour." The liking for a child of a swarthy colour is inherent in the Hindu mother with
her love for the child Kṛṣṇa of the religious legend of her country. “May I have a son in my lap, and one in my arms, and may I have a sāḍī of Benares-silk to wear in the night”; “May I be a sister of seven brothers.”

With a solution of powdered rice she makes a bracelet and with joined hands she prays, “I worship thee, Oh bracelet of powdered rice, may I have a pair of golden bracelets, grant me this boon.” Then she makes a kitchen, a cow-shed and a dwelling house with the same material and prays to them each, in the aforesaid manner that she may have these made of bricks. She prays also for diamonds and jewels to wear in her person. Her concluding prayer is, however, the purest gem amongst her sincere expressions of the heart: “I take a vow of sejuti worship so that I may be as virtuous as Savitri.”

But if the above show her crude simplicity and anxiety to lead a virtuous life, she is not free from that fear which was once a Hindu girl’s nightmare. In those days Hindu girls were plagued by a number of co-wives; and the favours and likings of the husband fluctuated whimsically, but invariably with the approach of age in his consort the favourite of to-day became the cast away of to-morrow. The fear in respect of a co-wife was, as I have
said, the very nightmare of her existence, and this will be illustrated from the following:—

"Oh mirror, Oh mirror, may I not have a co-wife.

"Oh squirrel, Oh squirrel, keep my husband in peace but eat my co-wife's head.

"Oh broom, Oh broom, may my co-wife never have a child.

"Oh bird, Oh bird, may my co-wife die below and I behold her death from above.

"May her sleeping-room be the hut for husking rice and there may she die.

"Oh knife, Oh knife, here do I dress vegetables with thy help for a feast to be given on my co-wife's death.

"What is the red dye that adorns my feet? you ask, it is the blood of my co-wife whom I have killed."

We have some very old specimens of the songs of the sun-god, which at one time were recited by girls and young women. The sun was probably called Viṣṇu in the earlier Riks. In fact, in Vedic literature there are enough hints suggesting that the word Viṣṇu implied the sun-god amongst the Hindus in ancient times. Even in the days of Rāmāyana the Viṣṇu of the line "বিষ্ণুনা সদুপুরীহীর্যো সোমবৎ প্রিয়দর্শনঃ" seems to signify the solar god. The sun according to the Ptolemaic theory, as also that of the early Hindus, made his round through the solar system. The theory of Copernicus gives this motion to the earth. According to the Hindus the sun met
the constellations राधा, अमृराधा, बिशाखा and passed through कालिय ष�ुद मण्डल, कंसमण्डल and other signs of
the Zodiac of the Vedic times in its course. The worshippers of the sun-god, created legends
out of this astronomical theory, describing the marriage of the sun-god, and his play with his
planetary companions. In a song of the sun-god we find him in a boat with 1,600 Gopis or
milk-maids. It is quite probable that these 1,600 maids were meant to symbolize the in-
numerable planets of the solar system. Whatever it be, there are good grounds for believing that
Viṣṇu or the sun-god of the Vedic hymns became in later times identified with Kṛṣṇa and as the
worship of the sun-god lost popular favour in preference to the worship of Kṛṣṇa, the legends
that had gathered round the bright luminary of the day in a previous epoch of history all
passed to Kṛṣṇa, who ousted the former from the temples of this country—the popular
Vaiṣṇava religion of to-day thus seems to have evolved out of the worship of the
sun-god.

The song, to which reference has been made seem to have been composed in the 10th
century or so, judging not only from its crude language, but also from the fact that the forms of
worship and the legends which they treat of, were those of that early epoch of our religious history.
Like a thing carried by the waves from the Atlantic or the Pacific ocean to the shores of Bengal, these literary and historical relics, the subjects of the songs, have come floating to us from the Vedic or Upanishadaic times.

The young sun-god, in this song has attained a fit age; yet his parents do not think of marrying him. "The beautiful sadis of two Brahmin girls have been spread to the sun,—the young sun-god casts a longing look at them,—O mother of the sun-god, he is now grown up, why not get him married? A girl on the other side of the river is sitting with her hair spread before the sun,—look there, how the young sun-god roves about in order to see that hair.

Oh mother of the sun-god, why not yet get him married, he is quite grown up.

Another Brahmin girl walks with the cymbals jingling on her feet. The young sun-god goes so far as to propose to marry her. Why not get him married; he is quite grown up."

My audience should excuse any indecent suggestion in this rustic song. This was the way how the old village people felt that the time was ripe when they should look for brides, for their young lads.
But the real pathos of the song is centred in the touches with which young Gauri's marriage and separation from parents are described. She is below twelve, she must sever all connection with her parents at this tender age. The relatives bless her saying,

"Go O Gauri, weeping to-day, but come to-morrow smiling and rejoicing."

As the boat carrying her passes through the stream that flows fast by the village, Gauri says to the boat-man, "Brother boat-man, ply your oars slowly, my mother is crying, let me hear her voice a little more; Oh my brother boat-man, ply the boat slowly, my sisters are crying, let me catch their sound; Oh brother boat-man do not ply your boat so fast, yet my brothers are crying, let me hear their voice a little more."

At the time she left home the relations were weeping, for she was a little girl and never stayed even a day away from her home. Her father hid his face in his scarf and wept. With a basket, full of toys, with which they used to play together, Gauri's brothers and sisters wept, but her mother threw herself on the bare earth and cried beating her head against a stone. The little girls after their marriage, went to their husbands' home and were subjected to the maltreatment of their sisters-in-law and mothers-in-law. This accounts for the tender pathos of such situations.