

STORY OF THE BLESSED CHILD KANYAL

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In the good old days in a village called Allur Guthu, in a royal household lived a lady called Achamma Pergadthi. She died within 40 days of delivering twins. The bereaved father, though inconsolable, brought up the little children with all the love and care that he was capable of. The elder one of the two, a girl was named Kanyal and the younger one, a boy Kanyasi. The two lovely kids were inseparable and made a lovely pair. After about sixteen springs, they grew up to be sweet sixteen and made a perfect picture of youth.

One day they decided to make a trip to their grandmother's house. As they were unused to taking long walks as the one they were making, they soon grew tired. They decided to take rest under a peepal tree. In a little time, unaware to them, a haughty man named Malleri had come to the spot that they were resting on a horseback from Palevuru. This man had earned the wrath of his entire neighbourhood for his wickedness.

He was under the impression that his wealth had given him the authority to get away with anything that he did. Infact, he was always on the lookout for doing horrible things and then getting way from blame. He seemed to be enjoying what he did. That explained why even in the recesses of darkness, his sly eyes had not failed to see the twins resting under the peepal tree. The royal female twin had already cast his wicked glance on the curvaceous beauty resting charmingly in her palanquin.

Dazed by her seductive beauty, he was at once seized of a desire to marry her at the earliest opportunity. He immediately summoned his attendant and sent an emissary through to the youthful girl with a proposal of marriage. He assumes without an iota of doubt that there would be no question of the girl rejecting his proposal of marriage. On reading his letter, the young girl was infuriated with rage and started sweating profusely.

She replied to him saying that if he was interested in marrying him, then he would have to be successful in performing a hundred tasks assigned to him by her. The clever girl used all her ingenuity to assign him such tasks which would be almost next to impossible to perform. She knew that neither his political clout nor his power of money would be helpful to him to perform the tasks set for him. She knew with certainty that even if he would use all his wealth, he would never be able to fulfil all the tasks that she had assigned to him as per the norms and stipulations that he had to follow while performing them.

The list of the things to be done was pretty long. She stated that he should built a bungalow of dreams for her, a one hitherto unheard or unseen by anyone in those days. She had stated that the

bungalow should be built of lime stones and not of mud and stones as was the normal practice. The materials used should be of betel nut leaves, bananas and jaggery. The pillars of the bungalow were to be made of sugarcane and the pandal leading from the corridor and the ceiling were to be made of a bed of jasmines, fringed with betel leaves. She had reiterated that the streets were to be festooned with babana and mango leaves from Palavuru, Mulleri's place to Nandavar, her place. Besides, dancing girls were to perform a pooja at the starting point of the procession and all the way from the groom's place to the bride's place. The dancing girls were to perform to catchy music when the invitees too joined the procession. Gold coins were to be showered on all and sundry throughout the procession. Fresh vegetable caskets were also to be carried throughout the procession. The bride was to wear a gold chain made of sixty sovereigns and her sacred tali made of thirty sovereigns. Her wedding sari was to be spun out of the finest and softest silk. Infact the sari was to be so thin that it was capable of being hidden under finger nail and be able to be drenched in a droplet of a tear.

The idiotic Malleri who was so smitten by his craze for Kanyal that he failed to realize that in his eagerness to fulfil her desires, he had already lost half his property. He had finally started building Kanyal's dream house. He had the earth dug for the foundation of the bungalow and the clay mixed with oil for the process of building it. He had made the layers of the bungalow with lime. Along with that he had made an oven of jaggery for cooking. The pillars of the bungalow were intertwined with the roots of a sweet smelling plant and lined with the finest paste of sandalwood.

On the marriage day, the roads were decorated lavishly as per Kanyal's specifications. With a gay abandon rose water was sprayed on all the invitees attending the marriage procession. Benzoin of sandalwood was lit in every conceivable open space to entice the invitees. Precious pearls were carelessly tossed over the leisurely walking crowds. Midst all this, the foolish groom, Malleri was seated on a silver horse atop a golden mat.

He took meticulous care to see that the beautiful wedding sari, the hefty gold chain, the sacred tali and the priceless pearls were all placed delicately on the platter to be taken to the bride's place. On hearing the loud thunderous noises of the blowing trumpets and drums, Kanyal slowly stepped down from her palanquin and stood before the bright light of the burning lamp. She then challenged Malleri to face her and told him that he should be prepared for an eventuality of the least imagined propensity. She told that just before she would be seated on the ceremonial stool meant for the bride, she would like him to perform one more demand. The demand was that he should be ready with a silver cradle and a golden infant.

As a last appeal she tells him to desist from the crazy idea of marrying and to follow the path of morality. Hearing these words, he got angry and asked her what right she had to expect the entire procession of people to retreat when they had come fully prepared to attend the marriage. He retorted that this was arrogance on her part and that she would have to pay a heavy price for her arrogance.

She contented that a marriage half done was akin to a an unfulfilled vow to God. She mocks y saying that yes, marriage was a must but instead of getting married to her ,he might as well get married to the post of a palanquin!

However, Malleri was not prepared to give up the idea of marrying Kanyal. He seemed to have gone crazy. He tried to fulfil her last desire by getting a silver cradle and an golden infant installed in it. She told him that by the time he would get her last wish fulfilled, she would be seated in her palanquin and would be in the midst of the procession. She had written a letter reminding him that she had not yet become his wife and that he would have to take the palanquin post as his wife!

On reading her letter, he finally cried when realized that what he had aspired for had melted down like a glacier and that there was nothing tangible left in his hands. In his lust for the comely girl on whom he has no claims, whatsoever, he lost everything that he had ; acres of property and even his hordes of domesticated animals, including his famous mighty oxen. Now he was so ashamed of his plight, that he himself blackened his face in misery. In sheer helplessness, he questioned himself on the use of his living all alone. He felt as if someone had squeezed the core of his heart. That very instance, in extreme pain, he falls down dead on the ground.

In the milieu, Kanyal got ready to attend fair of the temple deity going on in the village of her uncle, a respected chieftain, which was situated a little far away from her village. She took the necessary things like flowers and fruits to offer the temple deity. The whole village was excited and there was a look of festivity everywhere. Horde of men, women and children made plans to get ready to welcome the village festivity that was coming close.

As she neared the shrine, she encountered her uncle's wayward son who wanted to block her way to the shrine. With not a responsibility to shoulder and always in the company of bad friends, he approached her menacingly. He thought that he could get away with whatever he did since he was the son of the village chieftain. Kanyal got angry with his behaviour and hissed like a snake at him. She told him blatantly that Malleri paid the price of his life by trying to play with her youthful looks and asked him whether he too wanted the same thing. He did no heed to her words. In response, he just took the platter from her hands on which she had placed all the ceremonial things needed for the pooja and flung it into the well nearby. Then with eyes, full of lust, he tried to get close to her by pulling her by the loose ends of the sari.

At this, without hesitation, she pulled out the ritualistic small silver sickle, carefully placed under the pleat of her sari on the waistline and thrust it with full force upon his chest. Blood oozed profusely from his chest and he fell to the ground with a thud and died instantly. His close friends came rushing to the spot of the incident. Seeing them and wishing to see them dead too, she cleverly told them that out of them both, whoever would successfully get into the well and back all her ceremonial things, she would listen to him and do whatever he would ask her to do.

Without thinking of any implications, both jump into the well and fight with each other to retrieve whatever could be retrieved. In the fight that ensues between them, they not only hurt each other but end up killing each other as well. After this particular incident Kanyal was seized with a terrifying sense of frenzy. Then without wasting any time, she went to the temple pond, drenched in its water and without wiping herself dry and still in wet clothes he ran to the temple shrine panting and puffing.

By that time the procession seemed to have been glued to the ground and the temple bells too remained static as if they had never sounded before and would never sound further in the future too. There was pin drop silence everywhere and all the musical instruments too had gone dead. The ever truthful utterances coming forth from the oracle lay bare a dreadful fact that the procession would go no further and that the girl Kanyal would not return home! Suddenly in a frantic bust of emotion, she held her mouth tight and clenched her teeth. Then she questioned the people assembled in the temple premises whether there was any harm in killing someone who had tried to play with the modesty of the girl. The crowd replied in unison, that indeed it was not!

Relieved with this answer, she made a secret appeal to the deity and asked her to get her a permanent abode by its side. Then as soon as she stood beside the deity lining of fierce lightning conspicuously noticed by everyone, which was then accompanied by a loud echoing of thunder. Within a few seconds, a heavy shower of rain lashed everyone everywhere just for a few moments and then ceased just as suddenly as it has made its appearance. To the surprise of every one, Kanyal was just beside her deity but not in human form. She was now a doll of stone and was in a standing position with a hand fan clenched in her palm.

The place because of the miracle witnessed on account of Kanyal came to be regarded s a place of pilgrimage. Now it offered courage to countless girls who visited it asking Kanyal to grant them the same strength that she had to fight those who came forward brazenly to outrage their modesty.

This story is taken from 'Kathe' Aiyer Ponnulu Aiyver', a collection of Tulu Ballads. The original work in Tulu is beautiful. It is difficult to do the translation word by word as some of the concepts do not exist in other parts of the world and there is no equivalent word for it in English. I have tried to stick to the original as best as possible.

Yours sincerely
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