

KUPTI AND IMANI PUNJÂBI STORY

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KUPTI AND IMANI^[0]

Once there was a king who had two daughters; and their names were Kupti and Imani. He loved them both very much, and spent hours in talking to them, and one day he said to Kupti, the elder:

‘Are you satisfied to leave your life and fortune in my hands?’

‘Verily yes,’ answered the princess, surprised at the question. ‘In whose hands should I leave them, if not in yours?’

But when he asked his younger daughter Imani the same question, she replied:

‘No, indeed! If I had the chance I would make my own fortune.’

At this answer the king was very displeased, and said:

‘You are too young to know the meaning of your words. But, be it so; I will give you the chance of gratifying your wish.’

Then he sent for an old lame fakir who lived in a tumbledown hut on the outskirts of the city, and when he had presented himself, the king said:

‘No doubt, as you are very old and nearly crippled, you would be glad of some young person to live with you and serve you; so I will send you my younger daughter. She wants to earn her living, and she can do so with you.’

Of course the old fakir had not a word to say, or, if he had, he was really too astonished and troubled to say it; but the young princess went off with him smiling, and tripped along quite gaily, whilst he hobbled home with her in perplexed silence.

Directly they got to the hut the fakir began to think what he could arrange for the princess’s comfort; but after all he was a fakir, and his house was bare except for one bedstead, two old cooking pots and an earthen jar for water, and one cannot get much comfort out of those things. However, the princess soon ended his perplexity by asking:

‘Have you any money?’

‘I have a penny somewhere,’ replied the fakir.

‘Very well,’ rejoined the princess, ‘give me the penny and go out and borrow me a spinning-wheel and a loom.’

After much seeking the fakir found the penny and started on his errand, whilst the princess went off shopping. First she bought a farthing’s worth of oil, and then she bought three farthings’ worth of flax. When she got back with her purchases she set the old man on the bedstead and rubbed his crippled leg with the oil for an hour. Then she sat down to the spinning-wheel and spun and spun all night long whilst the old man slept, until, in the morning, she had spun the finest thread that ever was seen. Next she went to the loom and wove and wove until by the evening she had woven a beautiful silver cloth.

‘Now,’ said she to the fakir, ‘go into the market-place and sell my cloth whilst I rest.’

‘And what am I to ask for it?’ said the old man.

‘Two gold pieces,’ replied the princess.

So the fakir hobbled away, and stood in the market-place to sell the cloth. Presently the elder princess drove by, and when she saw the cloth she stopped and asked the price.

‘Two gold pieces,’ said the fakir. And the princess gladly paid them, after which the old fakir hobbled home with the money. As she had done before so Imani did again day after day. Always she spent a penny upon oil and flax, always she tended the old man’s lame limb, and spun and wove the most beautiful cloths and sold them at high prices. Gradually the city became famous for her beautiful stuffs, the old fakir’s lame leg became straighter and stronger, and the hole under the floor of the hut where they kept their money became fuller and fuller of gold pieces. At last, one day, the princess said:

‘I really think we have got enough to live in greater comfort.’ And she sent for builders, and they built a beautiful house for her and the old fakir, and in all the city there was none finer except the king’s palace. Presently this reached the ears of the king, and when he inquired whose it was they told him that it belonged to his daughter.

‘Well,’ exclaimed the king, ‘she said that she would make her own fortune, and somehow or other she seems to have done it!’

A little while after this, business took the king to another country, and before he went he asked his elder daughter what she would like him to

bring her back as a gift.

‘A necklace of rubies,’ answered she. And then the king thought he would like to ask Imani too; so he sent a messenger to find out what sort of a present she wanted. The man happened to arrive just as she was trying to disentangle a knot in her loom, and bowing low before her, he said:

‘The king sends me to inquire what you wish him to bring you as a present from the country of Dûr?’ But Imani, who was only considering how she could best untie the knot without breaking the thread, replied:

‘Patience!’ meaning that the messenger should wait till she was able to attend to him. But the messenger went off with this as an answer, and told the king that the only thing the princess Imani wanted was ‘patience.’

‘Oh!’ said the king, ‘I don’t know whether that’s a thing to be bought at Dûr; I never had it myself, but if it is to be got I will buy it for her.’

Next day the king departed on his journey, and when his business at Dûr was completed he bought for Kupti a beautiful ruby necklace. Then he said to a servant:

‘The princess Imani wants some patience. I did not know there was such a thing, but you must go to the market and inquire, and if any is to be sold, get it and bring it to me.’

The servant saluted and left the king’s presence. He walked about the market for some time crying: ‘Has anyone patience to sell? patience to sell?’ And some of the people mocked, and some (who had no patience) told him to go away and not be a fool; and some said: ‘The fellow’s mad! As though one could buy or sell patience!’

At length it came to the ears of the king of Dûr that there was a madman in the market trying to buy patience. And the king laughed and said:

‘I should like to see that fellow, bring him here!’

And immediately his attendants went to seek the man, and brought him to the king, who asked:

‘What is this you want?’

And the man replied: ‘Sire! I am bidden to ask for patience.’

‘Oh,’ said the king, ‘you must have a strange master! What does he want with it?’

‘My master wants it as a present for his daughter Imani,’ replied the servant.

‘Well,’ said the king, ‘I know of some patience which the young lady might have if she cares for it; but it is not to be bought.’

Now the king’s name was Subbar Khan, and Subbar *means* ‘patience’; but the messenger did not know that, or understand that he was making a joke. However, he declared that the princess Imani was not only young and beautiful, but also the cleverest, most industrious, and kindest-hearted of princesses; and he would have gone on explaining her virtues had not the king laughingly put up his hand and stopped him saying:

‘Well, well, wait a minute, and I will see what can be done.’

With that he got up and went to his own apartments and took out a little casket. Into the casket he put a fan, and shutting it up carefully he brought it to the messenger and said:

‘Here is a casket. It has no lock nor key, and yet will open only to the touch of the person who needs its contents—and whoever opens it will obtain patience; but I can’t tell whether it will be quite the kind of patience that is wanted.’ And the servant bowed low, and took the casket; but when he asked what was to be paid, the king would take nothing. So he went away and gave the casket and an account of his adventures to his master.

As soon as their father got back to his country Kupti and Imani each got the presents he had brought for them. Imani was very surprised when the casket was brought to her by the hand of a messenger.

‘But,’ she said, ‘what is this? I never asked for anything! Indeed I had no time, for the messenger ran away before I had unravelled my tangle.’

But the servant declared that the casket was for her, so she took it with some curiosity, and brought it to the old fakir. The old man tried to open it, but in vain—so closely did the lid fit that it seemed to be quite immovable, and yet there was no lock, nor bolt, nor spring, nor anything apparently by which the casket was kept shut. When he was tired of trying he handed the casket to the princess, who hardly touched it before it opened quite easily, and there lay within a beautiful fan. With a cry of surprise and pleasure Imani took out the fan, and began to fan herself.

Hardly had she finished three strokes of the fan before there suddenly appeared from nowhere in particular, king Subbar Khan of Dûr! The princess gasped and rubbed her eyes, and the old fakir sat and gazed in such astonishment that for some minutes he could not speak. At length he said:

‘Who may you be, fair sir, if you please?’

‘My name,’ said the king, ‘is Subbar Khan of Dûr. This lady,’ bowing to the princess, ‘has summoned me, and here I am!’

‘I?’—stammered the princess—‘I have summoned you? I never saw or heard of you in my life before, so how could that be?’

Then the king told them how he had heard of a man in his own city of Dûr trying to buy patience, and how he had given him the fan in the casket.

‘Both are magical,’ he added; ‘when anyone uses the fan, in three strokes of it I am with them; if they fold it and tap it on the table, in three taps I am at home again. The casket will not open to all, but you see it was this fair lady who asked for patience, and, as that is my name, here I am, very much at her service.’

Now the princess Imani, being of a high spirit, was anxious to fold up the fan, and give the three taps which would send the king home again; but the old fakir was very pleased with his guest, and so in one way and another they spent quite a pleasant evening together before Subbar Khan took his leave.

After that he was often summoned; and as both the fakir and he were very fond of chess and were good players, they used to sit up half the night playing, and at last a little room in the house began to be called the king’s room, and whenever he stayed late he used to sleep there and go home again in the morning.

By-and-by it came to the ears of the princess Kupti that there was a rich and handsome young man visiting at her sister’s house, and she was very jealous. So she went one day to pay Imani a visit, and pretended to be very affectionate, and interested in the house, and in the way in which Imani and the old fakir lived, and of their mysterious and royal visitor. As the sisters went from place to place, Kupti was shown Subbar Khan’s room; and presently, making some excuse, she slipped in there by herself and swiftly spread under the sheet which lay upon the bed a quantity of very finely powdered and splintered glass which was poisoned, and which she had brought with her concealed in her clothes. Shortly afterwards she took leave of her sister, declaring that she could never forgive herself for not having come near her all this time, and that she would now begin to make amends for her neglect.

That very evening Subbar Khan came and sat up late with the old fakir playing chess as usual. Very tired, he at length bade him and the princess good-night and, as soon as he lay down on the bed, thousands of

tiny, tiny splinters of poisoned glass ran into him. He could not think what was the matter, and started this way and that until he was pricked all over, and he felt as though he were burning from head to foot. But he never said a word, only he sat up all night in agony of body and in worse agony of mind to think that he should have been poisoned, as he guessed he was, in Imani's own house. In the morning, although he was nearly fainting, he still said nothing, and by means of the magic fan was duly transported home again. Then he sent for all the physicians and doctors in his kingdom, but none could make out what his illness was; and so he lingered on for weeks and weeks trying every remedy that anyone could devise, and passing sleepless nights and days of pain and fever and misery, until at last he was at the point of death.

Meanwhile the princess Imani and the old fakir were much troubled because, although they waved the magic fan again and again, no Subbar Khan appeared, and they feared that he had tired of them, or that some evil fate had overtaken him. At last the princess was in such a miserable state of doubt and uncertainty that she determined to go herself to the kingdom of Dûr and see what was the matter. Disguising herself in man's clothes as a young fakir, she set out upon her journey alone and on foot, as a fakir should travel. One evening she found herself in a forest, and lay down under a great tree to pass the night. But she could not sleep for thinking of Subbar Khan, and wondering what had happened to him. Presently she heard two great monkeys talking to one another in the tree above her head.

'Good evening, brother,' said one, 'whence come you—and what is the news?'

'I come from Dûr,' said the other, 'and the news is that the king is dying.'

'Oh,' said the first, 'I'm sorry to hear that, for he is a master hand at slaying leopards and creatures that ought not to be allowed to live. What is the matter with him?'

'No man knows,' replied the second monkey, 'but the birds, who see all and carry all messages, say that he is dying of poisoned glass that Kupti the king's daughter spread upon his bed.'

'Ah!' said the first monkey, 'that is sad news; but if they only knew it, the berries of the very tree we sit in, steeped in hot water, will cure such a disease as that in three days at most.'

‘True!’ said the other, ‘it’s a pity that we can’t tell some man of a medicine so simple, and so save a good man’s life. But men are so silly; they go and shut themselves up in stuffy houses in stuffy cities instead of living in nice airy trees, and so they miss knowing all the best things.’

Now when Imani heard that Subbar Khan was dying she began to weep silently; but as she listened she dried her tears and sat up; and as soon as daylight dawned over the forest she began to gather the berries from the tree until she had filled her cloth with a load of them. Then she walked on as fast as she could, and in two days reached the city of Dûr. The first thing she did was to pass through the market crying:

‘Medicine for sale! Are any ill that need my medicine?’ And presently one man said to his neighbour:

‘See, there is a young fakir with medicine for sale, perhaps he could do something for the king.’

‘Pooh!’ replied the other, ‘where so many grey-beards have failed, how should a lad like that be of any use?’

‘Still,’ said the first, ‘he might try.’ And he went up and spoke to Imani, and together they set out for the palace and announced that another doctor was come to try and cure the king.

After some delay Imani was admitted to the sick room, and, whilst *she* was so well disguised that the king did not recognize her, *he* was so wasted by illness that she hardly knew *him*. But she began at once, full of hope, by asking for some apartments all to herself and a pot in which to boil water. As soon as the water was heated she steeped some of her berries in it and gave the mixture to the king’s attendants and told them to wash his body with it. The first washing did so much good that the king slept quietly all the night. Again the second day she did the same, and this time the king declared he was hungry, and called for food. After the third day he was quite well, only very weak from his long illness. On the fourth day he got up and sat upon his throne, and then sent messengers to fetch the physician who had cured him. When Imani appeared everyone marvelled that so young a man should be so clever a doctor; and the king wanted to give him immense presents of money and of all kinds of precious things. At first Imani would take nothing, but at last she said that, if she must be rewarded, she would ask for the king’s signet ring and his handkerchief. So, as she would take nothing more, the king gave her his signet ring and his

handkerchief, and she departed and travelled back to her own country as fast as she could.

A little while after her return, when she had related to the fakir all her adventures, they sent for Subbar Khan by means of the magic fan; and when he appeared they asked him why he had stayed away for so long. Then he told them all about his illness, and how he had been cured, and when he had finished the princess rose up and, opening a cabinet, brought out the ring and handkerchief, and said, laughing:

‘Are these the rewards you gave to your doctor?’

At that the king looked, and he recognised her, and understood in a moment all that had happened; and he jumped up and put the magic fan in his pocket, and declared that no one should send him away to his own country any more unless Imani would come with him and be his wife. And so it was settled, and the old fakir and Imani went to the city of Dûr, where Imani was married to the king and lived happily ever after.

[0] Punjâbi story. ↑

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