

SUCHISMITA SEN

Pennsylvania State University, University Plaza, PA

The Tale of Itu: Structure of a Ritual Tale in Context

Abstract

This paper examines the Bengali tale of Itu from a structural and contextual perspective. The tale of Itu, an orally transmitted tale of the *vratākatha* genre, is told by senior female members of Bengali Hindu households to junior members during the Bengali months of *Kartick* and *Agrahayan*. Eight versions of the tale are presented in this analysis. The tale's basic structure is similar to that of AT 480, but with further modification and development. The similarities do not lie at the motif level, but at a deeper structural level. Although the story includes the pattern of unsuccessful repetition familiar in European fairy tales, there are certain differences, such as the absence of any punishment for the villain. These features depart from the European pattern of unsuccessful repetition and suggest a typically Hindu view of the world.

Key words: ritual folktale — märchen — unsuccessful repetition — Itu worship

THIS paper elucidates some of the concerns and beliefs of contemporary Hindu women in the Indian state of West Bengal through an examination of a ritual tale (*vratakatha*) known as the tale of Itu. The structural features of this story show interesting parallels with European *märchen*, and demonstrate how a basic plot structure may be manipulated in different storytelling situations and cultural contexts.

The ritual of Itu is one of many rituals, or *vratas*, still commonly practiced by Hindu women in contemporary India. In its current form the ritual is performed every Sunday of the Hindu months of *Kartick* (October) and *Agrahayan* (November). The ritual itself involves narration of the story of Itu and abstention from the Bengali staple foods of meat and fish. The nature of the ritual has been shifting, however, as Indian society attempts to adapt its deeply held beliefs and traditions to the contemporary world. The manner in which this ritual has changed provides clues for deciphering the current worldview of the Hindu female community.

A *vrata* involves certain rules of conduct in which the senses are controlled and choices made between good and bad. The Sanskrit word *vrata* derives from the root *vr*, meaning “to choose” or “to will”; Sudhir DAS suggests that in the Vedic texts the word refers to “the milk used by one who is living on that beverage alone as a vow or penance” (1952, 207). The primary emphasis of *vrata* practice is on carrying out some form of self-denial for the purpose of gaining a desired end. In a sociological study of the *vrata* of *Sakat* in the state of Bihar, Susan WADLEY defines these rituals as acts of influencing a “deity to come to one’s aid as one struggles across the ocean of existence. The austerities associated with the *vrata* are signals to the deity of one’s faith and devotion” (1983, 147). A *vrata* can, therefore, be viewed as a process of give-and-take between the performer and the appropriate god, with the process being initiated by the former. The performer gains material and spiritual benefits, while the god gains loyalty; the austerities undertaken by the prac-

itioner function as the medium of transaction in this negotiating process.

Although Hindu religious texts refer to many types of *vrata*, including those that enjoin the performer to sleep on the bare floor and refrain from sex, the most commonly followed *vrata* nowadays involves abstinence from food. Fasting is especially significant in the Indian context because of the sacredness attached to food, perhaps because of its relative scarcity in an overpopulated country.

Earlier anthropological studies suggest that the worship of Itu in Bengal was a formal religious ceremony that required the participation and guidance of a male Brahmin priest, who offered prayers to a grain-filled pot.¹ During the 1970s, however, I took part in this *vrata* as one of the adolescent daughters of an Indian household, and did not witness any formal ritual connected with it — at present the ritual requires only those practices mentioned above: abstinence from meat and fish and participation in the storytelling session. The *vrata* thus appears to have changed markedly in the recent past. The retention of the story, however, suggests that it addresses deeper concerns still relevant to the lives of Bengali women — otherwise it would have disappeared altogether. Let us thus begin by briefly describing the world in which the Bengali woman lives.

PARTICIPANTS

Until recently the women of middle-class households rarely worked outside the home; women took jobs only if it was an absolute economic necessity. The primary responsibility of women lay in bringing up educated, well-behaved, and healthy children. Working mothers were often accused of neglecting their duties, especially if their husbands were capable of supporting them.

The household context has undergone little change in the past two decades despite the increased participation of women in the work force. Women still consider themselves the primary anchors and nurturers of their households. ROHNER and CHAKI-SARKAR (1988), for example, maintain that most Bengali women, irrespective of their identity in the outside world, aspire to the traditional role of *gharer Lakshmī*, “household Lakshmī,” embodying the prosperity and well-being of the home (Lakshmī is the Hindu goddess of good fortune). The older women of a family constantly advise the adolescent girls on the modes of behavior appropriate for a model wife and mother. The responsibility for maintaining the household — including cooking, cleaning, and feeding — falls mainly, of course, on the women. Such social expectations reinforce the extreme polarity of life-styles between the genders. Men rarely, if ever, help their wives with the household chores — to do so would be consid-

ered effeminate. And any woman who neglected such duties would earn the contempt of friends and neighbors.

The general pattern described above is found throughout India, with some degree of regional variation. Generally speaking, the gender-based variation in life-style is more subtle in cities than in villages, and often harder to detect. However, Promilla KAPUR, in a study of urban Indian marriages, suggests that "even in urban areas, only those marriages are well-adjusted where women play traditional roles; in those families in which women question the legitimacy of such a relationship, the marriage tends to be on shaky ground" (1970, 40). The superiority of men is accepted (at least outwardly) and seldom questioned. The greater value that Indian society places on male life is reflected, in the use of modern medical procedures to prevent the birth of females (e.g., BUMILLER 1990).² And indeed, the latest Indian census (1990) shows that India is one of the few countries where the birthrate for females is substantially lower than that for males.

In such a context, tales circulated by and for women can serve as important indicators of the values that the narrative community holds and transmits to future generations. Stories like that of *Itu* teach survival skills that help women cope with an inherently unfair situation. Current participants say that in most cases there are no explicit interdictions against male participation in the ritual, but any man who did participate would be regarded as unnaturally concerned with matters that are part of the women's domain, and would become the laughingstock of the community. In fact, it is often the women themselves who are the most critical of men who show interest in these rituals.

THE TALE OF ITU

I have collected four contemporary narrative versions of the tale of *Itu* and four older published versions. In order to provide a suitable context for my subsequent analysis, I would like here to present one narrative variant and one written variant. The former is the version I heard as an adolescent girl from my mother, and the latter is a summary of McCULLOCH's published version (1912). An additional three oral versions and three published versions are presented in the Appendix.

Oral Version

There lived a lazy and poor Brahmin who had two daughters, one named Umno and the other Jhumno. One day in the month of *Agrahayan* he told his wife that he had a craving for pancakes. Since they did not have the necessary ingredients at home he went begging and soon collected

enough flour and ghee. He gave these to his wife and ordered her to prepare the cakes. Being a mean old man, he strictly forbade her to give any of them to his daughters. After the daughters had gone to bed the Brahmin's wife started to make the pancakes. This wicked man did not even trust his wife! While she cooked, he hid himself behind the kitchen to make sure that his daughters did not get anything. The Brahmin was uneducated and did not even know how to count! So he devised a way in which he could keep track of the cakes — every time he heard the splash of batter falling into the hot ghee, he tied a knot on a piece of string.

As the Brahmani was frying the pancakes, Umno and Jhumno came in and asked her to give them some. The Brahmani told them that their father had strictly forbidden this, but as they kept insisting she could not refuse. She gave a cake to each, hoping that their father would not miss a couple. As the Brahmin sat down for his meal, however, he matched the number of pieces with the number of knots. When he found out that his daughters had gotten two of the cakes he was furious, and decided to punish them by abandoning them in the forest.

The next morning he woke his daughters early and went with them into the forest, as if he was taking them for a walk. They walked for a long time, until the two girls got tired and asked to rest a while. The girls were so exhausted that they fell fast asleep the moment they lay down. The Brahmin was waiting for just this opportunity. As his daughters slept he poured some red *alta* [the red paint with which Bengali married women adorn their feet], scattered some sticks nearby, and quickly left.

When the girls woke up their father was long gone. Umno, noticing the *alta* and sticks, started to cry, assuming that their father had been eaten by a tiger. But Jhumno was not fooled so easily. Realizing exactly what had gone on while they were asleep, she said, "Now don't be silly, and stop crying. Don't you see that those are not real blood and bones! It's only some *alta* and sticks that father scattered to fool us. He was cross yesterday because we ate his pancakes, so he abandoned us in this forest. Let's see if we can find our way home on our own." So the two sisters set off, though they did not know which way to go.

After walking through the woods for a while they came to a clearing near a spring. There they noticed that several pretty women were busy washing themselves and getting ready for some type of ritual worship. The girls were curious and, after greeting them, asked what they were doing. The women answered that they were going to worship Itu. The two sisters had never heard of such a thing before and asked them why they were doing so. The women answered that it brings good fortune to the worshipper, and invited the girls to join them. Umno and Jhumno

readily agreed, and they all worshipped together. After the ritual was over the women disappeared.

While the girls were still sitting by the spring, the king of the land and his minister passed that way on a hunt. Attracted by the beauty of the two girls, the king decided to marry Umno and the minister agreed to marry Jhumno. On the journey back to the palace Jhumno remembered that the date for another Itu ritual had arrived; she reminded her older sister about the morning fast necessary for the ritual, but Umno replied, "I don't need to perform any more rituals! I'm going to be the queen soon enough. Go ahead and do it on your own if you wish. Don't call me!" Jhumno went away disappointed, but kept the fast by herself.

Soon they arrived at the palace and word got around that the king and his minister had brought their new brides with them. Everyone was very happy and set out to welcome them. The king's mother brought out her best gold platter and filled it up with spices and food in order to perform the *baran* ceremony in welcome of her daughter-in-law-to-be. The minister's mother did likewise with her best silverware. But what a surprise! As soon as the elder queen touched Umno's forehead with the golden platter, the gold turned into silver! At the same time, when the minister's mother touched Jhumno with her silver platter, the silver turned into gold. The king was very upset with this turn of events and ordered his minister to kill Umno at once. The minister's family was very happy with Jhumno, however, and she became the minister's wife. When she learnt of Umno's plight she implored her husband not to kill her sister. The minister could not refuse his new bride's request and they decided to hide Umno in their house.

A few days passed this way, and another day of Itu arrived. Jhumno told her sister beforehand that she must not miss the ritual this time, as it was very clear that such bad things had happened to her because she had neglected it. On the morning of the fast Jhumno called her sister to accompany her to the bath, but Umno told her that she could not go as she had picked up some food from a child's platter and eaten it. So Jhumno kept the fast all alone. The next time, to make sure that Umno would not miss the ritual, Jhumno put her sister in a huge earthen pot the night before. When she went to get her sister in the morning, however, Umno told her that she had felt hungry during the night and had eaten a few grains of cereal that were lying in the pot. Thus Umno could not worship Itu that time either. The next time Jhumno slept in the same bed with her and tied a lock of her hair to one of her sister's, so that she would be able to stop Umno from eating anything during the night. Finally, the two sisters were able to perform the ritual successfully.

About this time the king began feeling remorseful for his hasty decision. One day he asked his minister if he could bring Umno back. The minister replied, "Where shall I find Umno now? You yourself ordered me to kill her some time ago!" The king did not listen to him and finally threatened to punish the minister if he did not restore Umno to him. So the minister went away promising to do his best about the matter. The next day, he brought Umno back to the palace and the king married her with great pomp and splendor.

In the meantime, news of his daughters had reached the Brahmin. Being lazy and illiterate, he had remained as poor as before. When he heard about his daughters' prosperity he decided to get help from them. He set out with his wife towards the royal palace. After a long journey they arrived at the capital, where they saw the huge, magnificent palace. The Brahmin went up to the guards and told them he was the father of their queen. But naturally the guards did not believe him. How could this ragged old Brahmin be the father of their beautiful queen Umno? They shooed him away. So he devised a new plan, and went with his wife to the spring from which the royal maids fetched bath water. There they waited.

Thus when the maids came to get water for their queen they found an old couple sitting next to the spring. When they asked the Brahmin who he was, he replied that he was the father of the queen and wished to meet her. The maids were quite skeptical, but agreed to convey his message to their mistress. To make sure that the maids wouldn't forget, the Brahmin wove a ring from some grass and dropped it into their receptacle. Later, as his two daughters were pouring out the water, the grass ring fell out on them. The sisters were quite alarmed, and asked the maids, "What trick are you playing on us?" The maids replied, "Oh yes, we forgot to mention. A ragged old couple is waiting for you by the spring. They claim to be your parents." As soon as the two sisters heard this they rushed to the spring and received their parents with great honor. They described how the grace of Itu had brought them such good fortune. They persuaded their father to observe the ritual fast, and as a result he became quite learned.

At about this time the king was looking for a new court pundit. Hearing that his father-in-law was perfect for the job, he appointed him to the position and they all lived happily ever after with the blessings of Itu.

Published Version (summary, McCulloch)

Once there dwelt a Brahmin who had a wife and two daughters, Umro

and Jhumro. One day the Brahmin had a strong desire to eat cakes, so he asked his Brahmani to make them. When the Brahmani said that they did not have the necessary ingredients, the Brahmin went out and begged and thus procured a quantity of husked rice, milk, and date-palm sugar, which he gave to his wife.

The Brahmin, a great glutton, was determined to keep count of the cakes, so he sat down at the back of the kitchen and counted the crackling noise the cakes made as they were dropped into the frying pan. When all was ready, he sat down to enjoy his feast. But while their mother was frying the cakes the two little girls had been sitting in the kitchen, looking on, and their mother could not help giving them one each. When the Brahmin noticed that two cakes were missing, he called his wife and asked her about them. She said that his daughters had eaten them. The Brahmin said nothing, but he felt bitter towards the two little girls.

Some time later he went off with his daughters, pretending that he was taking them to his uncle. After they had gone a very long way they found themselves in a dense forest. The girls asked the father if they could rest there for a while. He agreed, and once he saw that they were sleeping soundly he hurried away. When he got home, he told his wife that a tiger had devoured them.

Meanwhile, as evening drew on, the two girls awoke and found themselves alone. They searched for their father with no success, and finally the younger girl said, "Since we ate father's cakes, he must have punished us by leaving us in the forest. However, come along, we may find shelter for the night somewhere." As they walked, they saw a very big tree in front of them. Going up close, they implored, "Oh Tree, if we are the virtuous daughters of a virtuous mother, then please divide in two and shelter us." Forthwith the tree trunk divided itself and the girls stepped inside. Soon the tree closed up around them.

At dawn they stepped out of the tree, thanked it for its help, and walked on. Suddenly they heard the sound of women's voices, and came upon a crowd of women, old, middle-aged, and young. The two girls asked them what they were doing. A very old woman came forward, smiled at them, and said, "This is called *Itu puja*." She also told them that by worshipping *Itu* one's heart is made good and happy, and one obtains good luck, wealth, and marriage into a Raja's family. She then asked the girls to join them. When the girls agreed she asked them to take a dip in the nearby pond before joining the group. The two girls performed the *Itu puja* following the old woman's directions, then went with her to her house. There they lived with her and continued doing the *puja*.

One day the girls went to the pond to bathe. As soon as they stepped into the water the elder one cried out, "Oh, sister, my foot has struck against something!" It turned out to be a big lump of gold. They took the gold home, and out of it they fashioned a pot for the goddess Itu.

One night at about this time their father was asleep, when Itu appeared to him in a dream and said, "If you don't bring your daughters back home, I will kill you by making you vomit blood. You will find your daughters in such-and-such a place." The Brahmin related his dream to his wife, who was very happy to learn that her daughters were alive. She ordered him to set off immediately. When he found them his daughters bade good-bye to their rescuers and came home with him, not forgetting to bring the golden pot with them.

From the day Umro and Jhumro returned home, the Brahmin grew very prosperous. One day the Raja of the country, accompanied by his minister, came hunting in the nearby forest. It was a hot day, and he grew very thirsty. Searching for some water, they reached the Brahmin's house. After quenching their thirst, they noticed the beauty of the two girls and decided to marry them. The Raja married the elder girl, while the minister married the younger.

Umro was so elated at becoming a Rani that she forgot to bring her ritual pot when they started out for the royal palace. Jhumro, though, was careful to take all her Itu pots with her. The cavalcade moved along, the Raja and Umro on one side and the minister and Jhumro on the other. On the Raja's side of the highway fiery rains fell, meteors darted about, jackals howled, mourners wailed, and kites and vultures screeched, while on the minister's side showers of flowers fell, sweet bird songs were heard, and people held festivals. The moment the Raja reached his front gate it fell down in ruins. The Raja, seeing these bad omens, was terribly frightened. Gradually his fortunes waned, even as the minister grew ever more prosperous. One night the Raja dreamt that his wife was an ogress, and the next day he ordered his minister to banish her to the forest. When the minister's wife heard about her elder sister, she coaxed her husband to hide her in their house. When Umro arrived Jhumro said, "See sister, all that has befallen you is your own fault. Come now, begin doing Itu *puja* again." The elder sister said she would, but actually did nothing.

The month of *Agrahayan* came around, and again the younger sister said, "This time you must do the *puja*." But right before the ritual Umro confessed that she had eaten some sweetmeat instead of fasting, so she could not worship Itu. The following Sunday, as soon as they woke in the morning, her younger sister tied her sari to Umro's so that she could

not get away. Thus the two sisters were finally able to do *puja*, and they begged the goddess to be gracious to them.

Soon the Raja became very prosperous. One day he said to his minister, "Bring back my wife to me." The minister feigned surprise at first, but finally, realizing that there was no danger, he confessed that the Rani was with her sister.

On the day of the Rani's return to the palace, magnificent preparations were made and the road was carefully decorated. However, as Umro walked back to the palace her foot struck against something on the road and was badly bruised. The Raja was furious with the sweeper who had cleaned the road, and ordered his head cut off. That day, amidst the great rejoicing, the Rani forgot about the *puja* till after she had eaten. When she suddenly remembered, she asked her servants to search for someone who had not yet eaten that day. The only such person the servants could find was the sweeper's mother, who had been grieving for her son the entire day. The old woman refused at first to go to the palace, but after much coaxing she finally agreed. The Rani received her very kindly, and induced the woman to perform the *Itu puja* on her behalf.

Afterwards, the goddess revealed to her that if she sprinkled water from *Itu's* pot on the head and trunk of the dead sweeper he would revive. The Rani did so, and the sweeper came back to life. As a result, everyone sang the praise of *Itu*. The Rani advised everyone to perform the *puja* and then returned home, where she lived in peace and comfort, performing all her duties.

THE STORYTELLING OCCASION

Storytelling, as I recollect, always took place on chilly autumn Sundays. My sister and I looked forward to these days with special keenness. Unlike other Sundays, when the whole family gathered together for lunch in the dining room, the women would eat separately in the pantry, partaking in a meal of boiled vegetables, lentils and rice, and lots of ghee. Before the meal, however, we had to sit cross-legged on the pantry floor and listen to the story of *Itu*. It was the same tale every time, relating how the two sisters Umno and Jhumno managed to take a desperate situation and turn things to their own advantage. We knew the tale almost by heart, yet when our mother called us to sit with her quietly in the morning and listen to the story again we gladly complied, if for no other reason than for the much-needed respite it gave us from the morning study hour. The narrator started with the recitation of a short Bengali chant:

aṣṭa cāt, aṣṭa drabya, kāmsya pātra laye

*çono re itur katha ekman haye
 ye bā çone, ye bā kay itur mandire
 dhane putre lakshmī lābh,
 bāp, mā ghar, çvaçur çvacuḍī ghar
 rathe caḍe svarge yān*

Take eight kinds of cereal, eight things and a plate of bell metal
 Then listen to the story of Itu.

Whoever hears or recites the katha of Itu
 Is blessed by the god Itu with money and children.
 The family of [her] parents and in-laws ascends to the
 heavens in a chariot.

The recitation was solemn — it was extremely important that it be done properly, and one could distinctly sense my mother's relief when she finished. She was now ready to tell the story. Aware of our attitude towards the rustic tale, she told it in a way that made us feel that she too was amused by what happened. Overall, though, these storytelling sessions were serious in tone. Outside the ritual context we would often discuss the irrationality of the women's rituals, and my mother would comment on the foolishness of taking them too seriously, but during the narrative sessions we were clearly expected to pay attention and not be irreverent. Such ambivalence towards these tales always intrigued me.

This attitude appears to be typical of educated Hindus, who generally realize that these traditional rituals do not really mean much as far as their physical well-being is concerned, but who nevertheless maintain that disrespect towards them results in a dangerous rootlessness and lack of traditional identity. One wonders if such reactions are common in societies long dominated by an alien culture: the practices and beliefs of the native culture are quietly nurtured within the safe confines of the family, while the foreign culture dominates outside. By revealing their ambivalence towards the old tales, Indian narrators attempt to make the younger generation aware of the significance of these stories in maintaining the characteristic social fabric of their country. Such demonstrations of empathy by adults toward the younger generation may also be of help in transmitting traditional values without making the process seem confrontational.

My mother's ambivalence toward the tale was also apparent from the comments that she made during the storytelling sessions. For example, every time she came to the point where the Brahmin hides himself behind the kitchen and counts the pancakes with knots on a piece of

string, she paused, looked at us with mock seriousness, and said, “Look what trouble you have to go through if you don’t know your sums!” Another place where she always added a comment was where the sisters, surprised when Brahmin’s grass ring falls onto them, ask their maids, “What trick are you playing on us?” The Bengali expression my mother employed was a quaint one no longer used in regular conversation. At this point she would look at us, sometimes a bit embarrassed, and comment, “This is how my grandmother always told it to us.” Everyone maintained that my mother’s grandmother was an excellent storyteller,³ and this remark became a part of the storytelling process.

COLLECTION AND VARIANTS

I went back to Calcutta in the winter of 1989–90 and attempted to collect the tale from my mother. It was an artificial situation, however — the ritual period had passed and the setting was not proper. At first she made excuses, saying that I knew the tale already, and that there are more important things to publicize in Indian folklore than a holdover from the old agricultural society like the tale of Itu. I wondered, though, if her reluctance did not come more from a reluctance to expose the private, secure channels of feminine communication that enable women to maintain their status within society. I understood her misgivings — to her, the story is something to be told in private and is not for outside attention.

Sensing her hesitation, I asked her to write the story if that made her feel more comfortable. The result is variant 1 in the Appendix, which thus forms a more recent, written account by the same narrator of the oral version above (the translation is mine). The second variant was provided by my maternal grandmother, who said she learned the tale from her mother-in-law; more elaborate and somewhat different from my mother’s version, it was also collected during my last trip to Calcutta. The third oral variant was collected from my sister, who grew up listening to the same story that I did, but who remembers it with interesting differences.

When I asked my grandmother to narrate the tale, she, like my mother, wanted to know why I was so interested in this particular story and not one of the many others in Indian folklore; I replied that it was an important tale to collect since it was not well known. We sat on her huge bed after lunch and talked, with my mother there too; no men were present in the room. I asked if Itu is a god or a goddess. I could sense that neither of them was very comfortable with the question — they either did not know or did not want to tell me. Not having much success with that question, I asked if they knew what Itu was. They said that they had read

it was the Sun God, with the name Itu deriving from Mitra, the Vedic name for that deity. Sun worship was outlawed by a Bengali king in the Middle Ages, they said, whereupon the cult had gone underground. Later Itu became associated with the goddess Lakshmī, who is extremely popular among the women of Bengal. Bengali housewives are expected to embody the qualities associated with this deity, and almost all Hindu households have a shrine in honor of her. The timing of the Itu ritual in the harvest season also indicates an explicit association with Lakshmī. When I asked whether men are allowed to perform the ritual, my grandmother answered, "There is no reason why they cannot — you saw in the story how it affected the Brahmin." I asked why this particular ritual has been retained out of the many prescribed by folk tradition, but they responded simply that it was their own personal preference.

Both my grandmother and mother are from upper-middle-class backgrounds. They are devout Hindus, but do not consider themselves overly religious. My grandmother, apart from being a homemaker, is an active social worker and publishes children's stories; my mother is active in various women's issues. They are considered by the family and neighbors to have successfully balanced the traditional and the modern roles of Indian womanhood. For them, these rituals are private affairs to be performed for the welfare of the household.⁴

William McCulloch, whose published version of the Itu tale is summarized above, was a Scottish missionary who collected his account from a Hindu Brahmin informant. Variant 4 in the Appendix is one of several modern chapbook renditions readily available on the streets of Calcutta; these books also include the correct procedures for performing the accompanying rituals. Variants 5 (GUPTÉ 1919) and 6 (NEOGI 1912), as well as McCulloch's, are from the colonial period. Gupte and Neogi show a curious mixture of nationalistic regard for past glories and contempt for current folk practices, which they regard as a distortion of the ancient Sanskrit cultural heritage. They published these tales, they claim, in order to emphasize the importance of the ancient Indian civilization to the rest of the world. GUPTÉ describes the *vrata* tales as special stories compiled for the edification of the weaker sex (1919, xiv). Since women are less perceptive to the importance of their tales, he says, he felt it to be his responsibility to preserve these priceless relics for posterity. A similar sentiment is reflected in Neogi, who collected the tale of Isani and Rama, a version of the Itu tale.

PRINCIPAL MOTIFS AND THEMES

Let us now examine the various versions more closely in order to show

some of the basic values embodied in the tale; contrasting the oral and written versions, in particular, reveals interesting shifts in the outlook of the narrative community over the past century. Further insights are provided by comparison with similar European *märchen* (e.g., AT 480), which contain many related elements.

The first motif common to every version is that of abandoning children in a forest. Motif-indexes indicate that this motif is very common in Indo-European folktales, where the abandoners are often parents or other parent-like figures.⁵ This motif describes the exposure of young protagonists to an outside and often hostile world, and provides an apt illustration of the contrast between the comfortable security of home and the dangers that lie without. Such stories usually then describe the protagonist's successful overcoming of those dangers and return home. Hansel and Gretel, for example, manage to kill the witch and return with her treasures, while Snow White marries a prince and finds a new home. The two girls in the tale of *Itu* manage to escape the dangers of the forest and find prosperous husbands.

The inclusion of this motif, which stresses the helplessness of the two girls in the face of the outside world, may be an attempt by older women to prepare their young female listeners for the unknown and unpredictable future, a future that in the context of Bengali society will in all probability unfold in the household of their in-laws. It is not surprising that this motif would capture the imaginations of young Bengali girls — in India, where marriages are still arranged, abandonment is in many ways a fitting metaphor for the Hindu wedding experience.⁶ The responsibility of giving the bride away rests with the father or a senior male member of her family. This event is one of the most essential parts of the ceremony: in addition to its symbolic significance, it reflects the reality of the father's role in the marriage negotiations.⁷ If the purpose of the tale of *Itu* is to prepare little girls for their future, then this motif is an appropriate device for alerting them to the shape of things to come.

If the abandonment motif is understood in this way, it provides one possible explanation for another curious detail of the tale: the reward of the cruel father. At first glance, this appears to contradict the familiar ethics of fairy tales, in which good is rewarded and evil punished. However, in the *Itu* story the dangerous forest in which the cruel father abandons the two girls is also the place where they meet their future husbands. The cruel Brahmin can thus be compared to a father who arranges a marriage for his daughter: the new bride must leave her familiar home and move into that of her husband's parents, but once she overcomes her initial shock she is thankful for the arrangement since it is

the socially accepted way of gaining a mate. Viewed in this way, the Brahmin's cruelty does not contradict fairy-tale ethics. This detail is also important from a structural perspective, as I will explain below.

Another motif with similar implications — one present in most but not all of the versions — is that in which a large tree shelters the two girls within its trunk, either voluntarily or in response to the girls' prayers. The patrilocal kinship system in Bengal requires that after marriage women assume a new identity, a process that older Bengali women often compare with that of rebirth. The girls' enclosure in the tree and later reemergence can thus be seen as symbolic of the rebirth they must undergo in preparation for their roles as wives. Similar symbolic rebirths are reflected in other details of the story, such as when the older sister is placed in a huge earthen pot prior to the Itu ritual.

Another common folklore technique encountered in this tale is the use of outer beauty to express a person's inner goodness: the worth of the younger sister is revealed when her touch turns silver into gold, while that of the older sister is exposed when *her* touch turns gold into silver. One is reminded of the tale of the kind and the unkind girls (AT 480), in which the kind girl is rewarded by having pearls and other precious stones drop from her mouth whenever she smiles, while the unkind girl is condemned to spit toads and other animals when she speaks.⁸ The respective worth of the two sisters may also be semantically expressed in their names, Umno and Jhumno. Jhumno can be broken down into "Jh + Umno"; it is possible that the more complex name, which incorporates the simpler one, reflects the familiar Indo-European motif of the superiority of the youngest sibling.

An extremely significant difference between the two sisters is revealed through a comparison of their respective abilities to fast. Fasting in the *vrata* context is a form of self-control, suggesting that one of the purposes of the storytelling sessions is to teach the importance of self-discipline in acquiring social power. At the beginning of the tale both girls yield to the temptation of food. Jhumno, however, soon learns to control her appetites and emerges successful, while Umno does not and repeatedly fails. Jhumno, in other words, is rewarded by Itu for her more rapid maturation, while Umno is punished for her continuing immaturity. If self-control is viewed as the medium of transaction in negotiations with a superior power, then the ability to check one's appetites is a skill vital for maintaining one's bargaining position in all interpersonal dealings. Such self-discipline is demanded especially of women in a society where they have limited social freedom and where their primary responsibility is the nurturing of others. The acquisition of self-control is thus a

necessary step towards becoming a successful member of the female community.

The difference in the way the process of upward mobility is depicted in the older written versions and the newer oral versions indicates that an evolution has taken place in the worldview of the narrators. The written versions, for example, tend to stress the importance of Itu worship, while the oral versions center more on experience and proper conduct. Thus, while the published variants place more emphasis on Itu's power to affect the fate of the protagonists, the oral versions stress the value of sensible and practical behavior in a world full of unpredictable happenings — the underlying message in the latter versions seems to be that one must always be ready for opportunity, and that individual behavior is ultimately responsible for material and social success. The role of Itu is accordingly less direct in the oral versions, not a single one of which mentions an appearance by the deity. Nor is Itu's aid as forthcoming or immediate (the girls do not find instant riches, for example), and whatever help is available comes from figures who work as Itu's agents. The contemporary versions of the tale, though ritualistic in flavor, have thus clearly moved from a mythical to a secular realm in line with the decreasing dependence of the younger generation on ritual solutions.

Interestingly, the oral versions never reveal the sexual identity of Itu (an ambiguity reflected in the inconsistency of the written versions on this point). Although the majority of variants indicate that the figure in question is female, there are explicit descriptions of a strong male deity in Neogi's version. I believe that this ambiguity is tolerated because it does not interfere with the transmission of the underlying message.

Another significant change in the oral versions is the fact that the girls' rescue involves not a return to their family but a chance encounter with their future husbands. Moreover, the men decide to marry Umno and Jhumno not because of any machinations on the part of Itu but because they are attracted by the girls' beauty and charm. In this respect Umno's and Jhumno's experience differs little from that of many present-day Indian women. In Bengali arranged marriages, where the groom often chooses his bride during formal face-to-face meetings between the two families, the encouragement of romantic sentiments between the two young people often forms part of a larger plan by the family elders to bring the couple together. The oral versions are thus closer to the reality of the modern audience than the written versions. The listener is expected to be aware of Itu's power, and at the same time to recognize that happy outcomes are more likely if one knows the proper way to conduct oneself: such behavior not only befits a woman's social

position but also makes her attractive to the opposite sex. In this way the story allows the contemporary listener to decide for herself how much she will rely upon Itu and how much upon her own conduct and qualities when seeking the desired social status. This freedom to choose and yet to retain the security of group membership may be one reason for the narrative's continuing popularity.

One can also see a greater emphasis on family cohesion in the oral versions, all of which describe the happy reunion of the girls and their parents following the girls' marriages and attainment of social and material success. In the written versions the girls return to their family home following their first performance of the ritual; they bring prosperity to their parents, but after they meet their future husbands and leave home little more is heard of the Brahmin couple.

The written versions end with a description of the spread of the ritual throughout the land, the major point of which is to convince the readers of the deity's powers. Itu can intervene on behalf of worshippers, as in McCulloch when the deity appears in a dream⁹ to the girls' father and tells him to take them back; punish transgressors, as in Neogi when a powerful and vengeful male Itu physically harms those who disregard him or get in his way; and reward those who perform the ritual, as in McCulloch when Umno stumbles upon a lump of gold. In the oral versions the relationship between Itu and the girls is more of a direct give-and-take, with less emphasis on intra-family dealings. RAMANUJAN's contention that in India the same tale can serve as either a myth or a folktale depending on the context finds support in this case (1986). In order to adapt to contemporary sensibilities, the Itu story seems to have shifted from a broader social and religious milieu to one more intimate, familial, and secular. The narrators may have recognized that such changes are necessary to ensure the survival of such traditional tales.

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

A structural examination of the tale illustrates the manipulation of these factors more clearly. The study of story-grammar has been approached from two different perspectives: the syntagmatic methodology of PROPP (1968) and the paradigmatic methodology of LÉVI-STRAUSS (1967). Despite their broad applicability, however, the two modes of analysis have remained underutilized since they have rarely been used together.¹⁰

Structurally speaking, the Itu tale compares the respective social worth of the two sisters by setting them up against each other through use of the pattern of unsuccessful repetition. This pattern, according to DUNDES (1962), is bipartite — the second portion is quite similar to the

first, with one ending in success, the other in failure. These two basic “moves” or “kernels,” which can be expanded almost infinitely, are present in all eight versions of the *Itu* tale: *Jhumno* successfully performs the tasks expected of her and is rewarded, while *Umno* neglects her duties and is punished. The variations in the tales occur because of the different modes chosen by the individual narrators to expand the tale. The unsuccessful repetitions are *Umno*’s in every version except my grandmother’s (number 2 in the Appendix), where only the first failure is hers and the subsequent ones are by the Brahmin’s wife and then the Brahmin.

The structure of the primary pair of kernels is represented in figure 1. The two sisters, A and B, gain material prosperity after the first performance of the ritual. *Jhumno*, B, is accepted into the higher social strata after she successfully performs the ritual a second time; A’s failure to do so results in her banishment from society, or, at least, in the loss of her recently acquired status.¹¹ The story then describes how the elder sister is finally accepted in the higher social circle when her younger sister helps her perform the ritual successfully.

The above figure also illustrates how the successful performance restores the original familial hierarchy, with the older sister once again occupying a higher social position than her younger sibling. The tale of *Itu* thus conforms to the Hindu familial and social structure while operating within the characteristic plot patterns of European fairy tales.

Application of the Proppian model to the eight versions of the tale illustrates that move 1 (see table 1) is essentially similar in all of them. The difference lies in the nature of the rewards: in the written versions the protagonists get a material reward, while in the oral versions they are betrothed to a king and minister. The written versions thus stress material status, while the oral versions stress social status.

The second move can be subdivided into two parts. Move 2A describes the actions of the older sister, while move 2B describes the actions of the younger (tables 2 and 3). The move starts with the sisters’ double wedding, then develops along two strands in accordance with the two protagonists’ subsequent actions. *Umno*’s failure in move 2A to perform the ritual a second time leads to the “lack,” i.e., to her banishment. This move conforms to the broad pattern of disintegration and restitution of a family or relationship (in this case, the family that *Umno* has married into). *Umno*, not yet worthy of her newly acquired fortune, neglects her duty to perform the ritual and thus breaches her contract with *Itu*, the donor, bringing about the breakup of her new family and her own downfall. Only when she reestablishes her contract with *Itu* by performing the

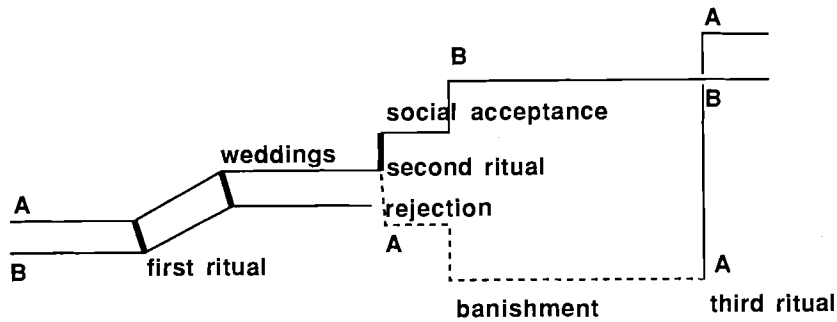


FIGURE 1. The Pattern of Unsuccessful Repetition in Itu

ritual is she accepted back into her husband's family, where move 2A ends.

Move 2B describes the actions of Jhumno. This move seems truncated, and at first sight functions 8 and 19 appear to be absent. However, a closer examination reveals that the move is structurally identical to 2A: function 8 is filled by a negative action, and function 19 does not describe the dissolution of the lack, but a further glorification of the protagonist.

The third move in the oral versions describes how the parents reunite with their daughters following the girls' marriages and attainment of prosperity with the help of Itu. This move is absent in the written versions, which have the girls return to their parents after their first performance of the ritual and prior to their encounter with their future husbands.¹² While this arrangement of events may not fit the fixed sequential order of Proppian functions, it does not interfere with the Proppian model. The reunion with the family in the written versions occupies the same motific slot as that of the wedding in the oral versions, making the events functionally equivalent. The written versions also describe the weddings of the two sisters as a further reward for them, which acts as the initial situation of move 2.

Another feature commonly associated with stories built upon the pattern of unsuccessful repetition is the presence of a definite donor figure. In the Itu tale the identity of this figure changes as the story progresses, a change that provides another key to the attitude of the storytelling community. The agents of the donor (Itu) in the first move are the women or fairies who initiate the girls to Itu worship. McCulloch mentions an old woman among the devotees, who acts as the primary helper and shelters the sisters in her house after they perform the ritual; the text does not make it clear whether this old woman is Itu herself, although the ritual-tale tradition leads one to suspect so. In the second move the tale-role of donor is taken by Jhumno, who as the agent of Itu

TABLE 1. Move 1

Functions	VERSIONS			
	1	2	3	4
Interdiction (2)	Brahmin prohibits wife to give pancakes to daughters	Brahmin prohibits wife to give pancakes to daughters	Brahmin prohibits wife to give pancakes to daughters	Brahmin prohibits wife to give pancakes to daughters
Violation (3)	Daughters violate the prohibition	Daughters violate the prohibition	Daughters violate the prohibition	Daughters violate the prohibition
Villainy (8)	Brahmin banishes them to the forest with an intention to get rid of them	Brahmin banishes them to the forest with an intention to get rid of them	Brahmin banishes them to the forest with an intention to get rid of them	Brahmin banishes them to the forest with an intention to get rid of them
Lack (8a)	The family disintegrates	The family disintegrates	The family disintegrates	The family disintegrates
Hero/Heroine is tested (12)	Jhumno sees through her father's plan.	Jhumno sees through her father's plan.	Jhumno sees through her father's plan.	Jhumno sees through her father's plan.
	Both perform Itu	Both perform Itu	Both perform Itu	Both perform Itu
Provision of Magical Agent (14)	Heroines acquire the blessings of Itu	Heroines acquire the blessings of Itu	Heroines acquire the blessings of Itu	Heroines acquire the blessings of Itu
Victory (19)	The two sisters marry and acquire a new family	The two sisters marry and acquire a new family	The two sisters marry and acquire a new family	The two sisters marry and acquire a new family

rescues her older sister from the misery Umno has brought upon herself because of her neglect of her ritual duties. In the third move of the oral versions the donor role is jointly filled by the two daughters, who help their parents out of their misery.

Propp's original model did not account for such changes in the identity of the donor, but later researchers, including BREMOND (1977) and HOLBEK (1987), have commented on similar cases. Bremond's model, based on the structure of the French fairy tale, is especially helpful in understanding the rationale behind the shifts. According to Bremond, French fairy-tale episodes are built upon the interplay of three primary pairs of functions: deterioration and improvement, merit and its reward, and unworthiness leading to punishment. Bremond suggests that the first pair, namely deterioration and improvement, is the only obligatory function; the way in which the latter two optional functions are employed in

TABLE 1. continued

Functions	VERSIONS			
	5	6	7	8
Interdiction (2)	Prohibition is implicit	Prohibition is implicit	Prohibition is implicit	Brahmin prohibits wife to give pancakes to daughters
Violation (3)	They eat them anyway	They eat them anyway	They eat them anyway	They eat them anyway
Villainy (8)	Brahmin banishes them to the forest with an intention to get rid of them	Brahmin banishes them to the forest with an intention to get rid of them	Brahmin banishes them to the forest with an intention to get rid of them	Brahmin banishes them to the forest with an intention to get rid of them
Lack (8a)	The family disintegrates	The family disintegrates	The family disintegrates	The family disintegrates
Hero/Heroine is tested (12)	Jhumno sees through her father's plan.		Rama learns about her father's plan from her mother	Jhumno sees through her father's plan.
	Both perform Itu	Both perform Itu	Both perform Itu	Both perform Itu
Provision of Magical Agent (14)	Sisters acquire a magic water pot	Sisters acquire blessings of Itu Possibly a magic water pot	Sisters acquire blessings of Itu	Sisters acquire blessings of Itu
Victory (19)	Gain material prosperity Marry a king and a minister	Gain material prosperity Marry a king and a minister	Gain material prosperity Marry a king and a minister	Gain material prosperity Marry a king and a minister

the tale provides a clue to the narrator's perspective.

In the Itu tale, the first donor — Itu — is rewarded through the acquisition of two followers. Jhumno, who fulfills her donor role in move

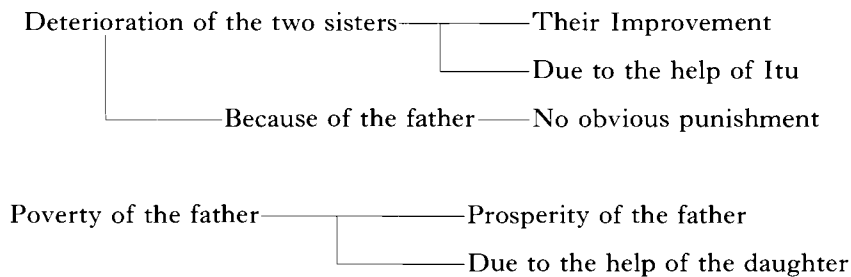


FIGURE 2. Structure of Itu According to Bremond's Model

TABLE 2. Move 2A

Functions	VERSIONS			
	1	2	3	4
Initial Situation	The sisters marry a king and a minister	The sisters marry a king and a minister	The sisters marry a king and a minister	The sisters marry a king and a minister
Interdiction (2)	Not to neglect the ritual worship	Not to neglect the ritual worship	Not to neglect the ritual worship	Not to neglect the ritual worship
Violation (3)	Elder sister neglects her duty	Elder sister neglects her duty	Elder sister neglects her duty	Elder sister neglects her duty
Lack (8a)	She is banished to the forest	She is banished to the forest	She is banished to the forest	She is banished to the forest
Mediation (9)	She is rescued by her younger sister	She is rescued by her younger sister	She is rescued by her younger sister	She is rescued by her younger sister
Hero/Heroine is tested (12)	Elder sister asked by her younger sister not to neglect the ritual worship	Elder sister asked by her younger sister not to neglect the ritual worship	Elder sister asked by her younger sister not to neglect the ritual worship	Elder sister asked by her younger sister not to neglect the ritual worship
Reaction of the hero/heroine (13)	Fails twice Succeeds the third time	Fails twice Succeeds the third time	Successfully performs the ritual	Fails twice Succeeds the third time

2A by aiding Umno's rise in status, is in turn rewarded by having her own status elevated, as shown by the ease with which she enters her husband's household and — in several of the versions — the way in which her counsel is sought by her husband in times of difficulty.¹³ The third-move donors in the oral versions, Umno and Jhumno, receive both material rewards and the reward of increased happiness in their new households. The Brahmin couple also acquires material and social rewards. The helper's tale-role is thus filled by the person or persons who most quickly perceive the underlying rules that hasten the flow of events.

The specific action that is consistently rewarded in the tale is the performance of the Itu ritual. The rewards have a pragmatic as well as a material side, however. As we have seen, Jhumno assumes the role of helper in the second move and aids her less-capable older sister; both Umno and Jhumno fulfill the tale-role of helper in the final move of the

TABLE 2. continued

Functions	VERSIONS			
	5	6	7	8
Initial Situation	The sisters marry a king and a minister	The sisters marry a king and a minister	The sisters marry a king and a minister	The sisters marry a king and a minister
Interdiction (2)	Not to neglect the ritual worship	Not to neglect the ritual worship	Not to neglect the ritual worship	Not to neglect the ritual worship
Violation (3)	Elder sister neglects her duty	Elder sister neglects her duty	Elder sister neglects her duty	Elder sister neglects her duty
Lack (8a)	She is ordered to be killed	She is ordered to be killed	She is banished to the forest	She is banished to the forest
Mediation (9)	She is rescued by her younger sister	She is rescued by her younger sister	She is rescued by her younger sister	She is rescued by her younger sister
Hero/Heroine is tested (12)	Elder sister asked by her younger sister not to neglect the ritual worship	Elder sister asked by her younger sister not to neglect the ritual worship	Elder sister asked by her younger sister not to neglect the ritual worship	Elder sister asked by her younger sister not to neglect the ritual worship
Reaction of the hero/heroine (13)	Successfully performs the ritual	Successfully performs the ritual	Succeeds after failing a number of times	Successfully performs the ritual

oral versions by persuading their parents to observe the rite, thus rescuing them from their poverty; and Umno becomes the helper in the final move of the written versions when she convinces the old woman to perform the ritual and thereby assists in bringing the old woman's dead son(s) back to life. In each move the helper role is assumed by the person(s) who successfully performed the ritual in the preceding move, suggesting that the improvement in one's social condition is coincident with the improvement in one's understanding of the norms of social behavior.

This brings us back to the curious failure of the tale to punish the cruel Brahmin. As mentioned above, the Brahmin can be seen to symbolize the ordinary Bengali father, who "cruelly" sends his daughter forth into marriage in order that she might gain a mate in the socially accepted manner. This feature can be seen to convey another important message,

TABLE 3. Move 2B

Functions	VERSIONS			
	1	2	3	4
Initial Situation	Sisters marry a king and a minister	Sisters marry a king and a minister	Sisters marry a king and a minister	Sisters marry a king and a minister
Interdiction (2)	Not to neglect the ritual worship	Not to neglect the ritual worship	Not to neglect the ritual worship	Not to neglect the ritual worship
Violation (3)	Younger sister performs it faithfully Negative violation	Younger sister performs it faithfully Negative violation	Younger sister performs it faithfully Negative violation	Younger sister performs it faithfully Negative violation
Lack (8a)	-	-	-	-
Restoration (19)	Further reward of the younger sister by gaining a stronger position in the family	Further reward of the younger sister by gaining a stronger position in the family	Further reward of the younger sister by gaining a stronger position in the family	Further reward of the younger sister by gaining a stronger position in the family

however, one that provides an interesting insight into the contemporary feminine perception of males: the narrators may be using the behavior of the Brahmin as an example of “typical” male immaturity. In the traditional Hindu household the women tend to be rather forgiving of the faults of the male members, as males are traditionally viewed as child-like when it comes to human relationships.¹⁴ Males often get away with behavioral flaws that would be unforgivable in women. This gender-based difference in standards of behavior may have arisen as a survival technique by the less powerful female members of society, but women have turned it around and given it an aura of virtue. Women, as nurturers, see themselves as the upholders of virtues from which men may choose to benefit or learn. In this sense the tale of *Itu* may be seen as an exaggerated example of the proper mode of feminine behavior. The story is saying, in effect, that women must be especially careful of their behavior not only because of their inferior social position but also because they are responsible for maintaining a virtuous household and keeping the men satisfied. The cruel father, and the entire third move in the more family-oriented oral versions, have been added by the narrators to more carefully define the limits of social freedom accorded to women within the existing norms.

TABLE 3. continued

Functions	VERSIONS			
	5	6	7	8
Initial Situation	Sisters marry a king and a minister	Sisters marry a king and a minister	Sisters marry a king and a minister	Sisters marry a king and a minister
Interdiction (2)	Not to neglect the ritual worship	Not to neglect the ritual worship	Not to neglect the ritual worship	Not to neglect the ritual worship
Violation (3)	Younger sister performs it faithfully Negative violation	Younger sister performs it faithfully Negative violation	Younger sister performs it faithfully Negative violation	Younger sister performs it faithfully Negative violation
Lack (8a)	-	-	-	-
Restoration (19)	Further reward of the younger sister by gaining a stronger position in the family	Further reward of the younger sister by gaining a stronger position in the family	Further reward of the younger sister by gaining a stronger position in the family	Further reward of the younger sister by gaining a stronger position in the family

The tale clearly illustrates the dangers of breaking the behavioral norms of society while emphasizing the rewards that result when one chooses to follow them. Many researchers have commented upon the relationship between folktale patterns and societal norms, but few have explored the actual mechanism behind this relationship. The analytical model devised by KÖNGÄS and MARANDA (1971) and HOLBEK (1987) can be of help in this context.¹⁵ The three primary oppositions operating in this tale are those of age, gender, and status. As in European fairy tales, the ultimate objective is the improvement of social and material status; the other two factors are constant.

The first contest of power occurs between the older male Brahmin and his two young daughters. The older man drives the daughters away, manifesting the accepted balance of power in the social and familial hierarchy of Indian society. The second power play takes place between Itu and the two young females; again, the socially sanctioned norms are maintained as the two girls readily yield to the wishes of a higher power and, in turn, acquire some of the helper's power. No contest occurs between the helper and the helped, unlike many European fairy tales in which the protagonist has to prove his or her worthiness before earning the helper's aid. Rather, a relationship based on loyalty between the

TABLE 4. Move 3

Functions	VERSIONS			
	1	2	3	4
Provision of magical agent	Elder sister acquires the blessings of the goddess	Elder sister acquires the blessings of the goddess	Elder sister acquires the blessings of the goddess	Elder sister acquires the blessings of the goddess
Restoration (19)	She is restored to the king's household	She is restored to the king's household	She is restored to the king's household	She is restored to the king's household
Difficult task(25)	-	-	-	-
Solution (26)	-	-	-	-
Recognition (27)	She becomes the rightful queen	She becomes the rightful queen	She becomes the rightful queen	She becomes the rightful queen

helper and the protagonists is initiated through performance of the ritual, enabling the girls to employ the magical powers of Itu. In the oral versions this power is translated into the concrete form of higher social status for the girls through their marriages to the king and the minister.

The third contest of power occurs between the king and his wife, ending in the latter's fall from power. The pattern of unsuccessful repetition comes into play at this point, as the queen's misfortune is directly attributable to her failure to perform the ritual and her consequent neglect of her responsibility towards *her* helper. This power play also emphasizes the success of Jhumno in pleasing her helper, as shown by her acceptance into her husband's household. Here again the reward comes in the form of higher social and familial standing.

The final show of social power is between the successful Jhumno, who acts as a helper and as an agent of Itu, and her unsuccessful sibling. Umno, forced by Jhumno to repeat the ritual, is instantly rewarded by reacceptance into her husband's family, another display of the story's emphasis on the acceptance of social norms and the consequent ability to manipulate the play of power to one's own advantage. Success is directly linked to the recognition of the nature of social power and to one's willingness to impart that knowledge to others.

TABLE 4. continued

Functions	VERSIONS			
	5	6	7	8
Provision of magical agent	Elder sister acquires the blessings of the goddess	Elder sister acquires the blessings of the goddess	Elder sister acquires the blessings of the goddess	Elder sister acquires the blessings of the goddess
Restoration (19)	She is restored to the king's household	She is restored to the king's household	She is restored to the king's household	She is restored to the king's household
Difficult task(25)	She is required to perform the ritual with an uninitiate	-	She is required to perform the ritual with an uninitiate	She is required to perform the ritual with an uninitiate
Solution (26)	She performs the ritual with the blind old woman	-	She performs the ritual with the blind old woman	She performs the ritual with the blind old woman
Recognition (27)	She becomes the rightful queen Worship of Itu spreads	She becomes the rightful queen	She becomes the rightful queen Worship of Itu spreads	She becomes the rightful queen Worship of Itu spreads

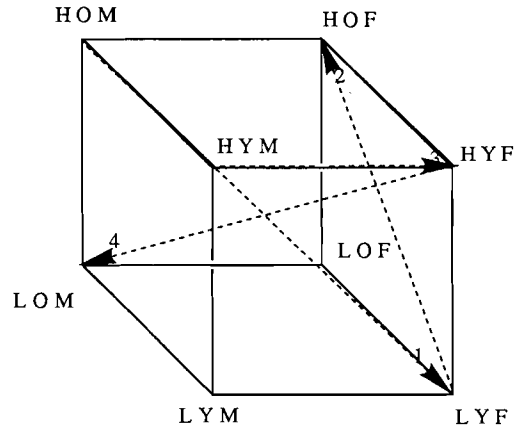
CONCLUSIONS

The above analysis highlights three aspects of the Itu tale and of the storytelling process.

First, this Bengali ritual tale uses the familiar pattern of European *märchen* to transmit the traditional values and worldview of middle-class Hindu Bengali society. This is done within the framework of a plot that develops along the theme of dissolution and reestablishment: the protagonists are driven out unprotected into the world and subsequently win social, material, and spiritual rewards through Itu's help.

Western fairy tales or *märchen* usually end with the wedding of the protagonist. In the context of the Western social tradition this final wedding serves as a plot device to indicate the beginning of a new familial order. In India, however, a wedding does not automatically initiate a new order. Studies of Indian — and especially Bengali — kinship terms and social structures indicate that the bride must acquire kinship status in her new home before the process of establishing a new familial order can begin. The position of mistress of the family becomes available to the younger woman only after the death of the older mistress (most commonly her mother-in-law) or, in some cases, with the older woman's voluntary retirement. In any event, the formal position of household

FIGURE 3. The Paradigmatic Structure of Itu



DIMENSIONS

SEX	AGE	STATUS
M=male	Y=young	H=high
F=female	O=old	L=low

M o v e s

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. HOM vs. LYF | 2. LYF vs. HOF |
| 3. HYM vs. LYF | 4. HYF vs. LOM |

mistress lies with the older woman as long as she is alive. The new mistress is under intense social pressure, at least in her first few years, not to change the old order in any way. In this way the strict traditional hierarchy of Hindu society is continued and maintained.

In the Bengali context, the Proppian motifemic slot occupied by the wedding can be seen as symbolically equivalent to the restoration of the old social order under new leadership. A story that begins with the dissolution of a family and progresses to its restoration is in conformity with the basic principles of the Proppian model; with regard to plot development there is thus no qualitative difference between the tale of Itu and European *märchen*.

Utilizing the pattern of unsuccessful repetition as its basic structural unit, the tale describes the successful social transformation of a girl who chooses to remain faithful to Itu, and the problems encountered by an-

other girl who neglects her ritual duties. The conduct of the younger protagonist, who succeeds through mastery of the accepted social norms, is a plot device to teach the listeners the ideal code of conduct with regard to themselves, their siblings, their society, and their universe. The same concern with accepted norms is reflected in the fact that all eight versions of the tale follow traditional concepts of social hierarchy by reinstating the elder sister in a social position above that of her sibling. The elevation of the father to a better social position through the help of the very daughters he had treated so cruelly may be seen in a similar light. The triumph of the younger heroine is accommodated in the story by making her responsible for improving the condition of her sister and her parents. Thus the traditional social order is restored even as the audience is made aware of the young protagonist's key role in this process.

Second, the tales reflect a gradual shift in the sensibilities of the narrative community. A comparison of the written and the oral variants reveals this quite clearly. The older written versions conclude with the restoration of the new queen to her position through the intercession of Itu; the queen spreads the glory of the deity and earns her subjects' respect and love by helping them acquire Itu's blessings. These variants, with their broad social significance, are thus close to myths in MELETINSKIJ's definition (1969, 1970). The contemporary oral versions, however, are increasingly secular in nature, closing in a more intimate, family setting. They thus appear to be moving away from their traditional identity as *vratakathas*, a reflection of the diminishing relevance of myth in contemporary urban life. This greater secularity has also broadened the story's appeal, as it now addresses the concerns not only of religious believers but of more worldly people as well.

In the Bengali community the responsibility for maintaining tradition falls upon women. The ideal modern Bengali woman is one who is qualified for a career, but who willingly puts herself behind her husband to maintain the traditional social order. The qualities that middle-class Bengali households consider desirable in a woman are clearly visible in the innumerable matrimonial notices that appear daily in the Bengali newspapers.¹⁶ Most of those placing notices seek brides whose primary responsibility would be as traditional homemakers in their husband's household, but who would also be able to support their husbands in case of economic necessity. Women who conform to such a model are regarded as having achieved an ideal balance between the different social roles they are required to play. This is why young middle-class women often train themselves for a career, fully aware that they may have to give it up once they are married. Moreover, women who do pursue indepen-

dent careers after marriage often take their homemaking duties especially seriously in order to compensate for their deviation from the ideal.¹⁷ These social norms put immense pressure on women, and often women themselves act as the strictest enforcers. The older generation imparts these messages in various ways to young girls in order to prepare them for the responsibilities they will have to face; the storytelling session described earlier is just one of these ways.

Hindu tradition asserts that a woman has no separate, independent existence apart from her male caretaker as long as she remains within society. How does such an outlook affect the perspective of contemporary women? Our examination of the storytelling community suggests that although women no longer take this view literally, it affects them in subtle ways. For example, the absence of any punishment for the villain in this tale presents no serious problem for the narrators since the emphasis in the narrative community is on accepting traditional norms and finding ways of manipulating the rules from within — more importance is attached to maintaining the social order than to fair play, a reflection of the Hindu stress on societal salvation at the cost of individual salvation. Nevertheless, the tale provides the audience with the hope of upward mobility by revealing the way in which power operates within society.

Finally, the tales — in their contemporary oral versions, at least — emphasize the role of the younger generation in bringing the family together. Once Umno and Jhumno acquire a higher social status, their parents willingly give up the superior status they enjoyed in the original household and seek their daughters' help. The underlying message is that the members of the younger generation are to shoulder responsibility for the family once they have acquired the proper social standing, and at the same time respect the older generation's outward appearance of authority. In the Bengali middle-class community this particular social skill is expected particularly of women, and they are exposed to role models expressive of this skill from early childhood.

Thus in telling the tale of *Itu*, the narrative community — expected to balance traditional and contemporary expectations — operates on two levels. On one level they employ the classical Hindu cyclical construct to maintain the general status of Hindu society, while on the other they explore the mechanisms behind social power. The story offers clues towards manipulating the social rules by revealing the importance of intelligence, and suggests that though social power lies in the hands of men it is not beyond the reach of women if they know how to manipulate situations to their advantage.

These messages are conveyed not only by the tale itself but by the context in which the tale is told. The narrators never assume that their audience will take the stories literally; indeed, they make it obvious through their comments that the miraculous elements in the story are there only to make a point. The narrative style also suggests to the listeners that they should be perceptive enough to sense the implicit messages.

The tale of Itu illustrates how a broad fairy-tale structure has been employed to further the current values of the middle-class Bengali society. The tale structure has shown great flexibility in adapting itself to different social and cultural contexts, and therein lies the reason for its continued circulation.

NOTES

1. Many scholars and writers have speculated about the ritual origin of Itu. For a discussion see BHATTACHARYA 1978, 26–28, and BHATTACHARYA and MITRA 1924–27.

2. For a discussion of the topic see *THE NEW YORK TIMES* 1991. BUMILLER describes how doctors in Bombay use amniocentesis and chorionic villus sampling — the so-called “sex tests” — to determine the sex of the fetus so that female fetuses can be aborted (1990, 101–24).

3. The comments of the narrators suggest that this woman might have been an example of a “stellar narrator.” This concept was first suggested by von Sydow.

4. I have used the word *welfare* here as the closest substitute for the Bengali word *kalyan*. Women insist that they perform these rituals for the *kalyan* of the household and family. Since *kalyan* includes emotional as well as material well-being, these rituals symbolize both economic prosperity and emotional stability for the traditional Indian family. Maintaining family *kalyan* has required adjustments in the face of social change, as discussed in this paper.

5. The extensive use of this motif in folklore is evidenced by the allocation of ninety-nine different categories (S300–399) to it in THOMPSON 1955–58. The category most applicable to the Itu tale is S338.

6. The suffering of new brides in their in-laws’ homes is one of the most common topics in both folklore and everyday conversation. In traditional marriages there is often a substantial age difference — averaging about five to seven years — between the husband and wife, which makes the bride’s experience even more difficult. Also significant is the fact that the terms used in Bengali folklore to describe the in-laws often refer to ferocious animals: the husband’s elder sister, for example, is referred to as “Roy Baghini,” “regal tigress.” See Roy 1975, 44.

7. The contemporary practice of choosing a bride often involves a formal event where the prospective bride and groom are given a chance to meet face-to-face under the supervision of the bride’s family. This is usually also the first time the bride’s family and the groom’s family meet. The gathering takes place in the bride’s home, though sometimes a neutral location is chosen.

8. Discussion of the variants of this motif can be found in ROBERTS 1958.

9. The appearance of deities in dreams to convey their wishes to mortals is a very common technique in Indian folklore. According to folk belief, dreams are divinely inspired.

10. A significant exception is HOLBEK, who successfully combined Propp’s and Lévi-Strauss’s models in an analysis of the structure of the Danish fairy tale *King Wivern* (1987,

457–98).

11. A married woman's loss of her wifely status is considered a greater misfortune than a girl's failure to find a suitable mate.

12. The chapbook and Neogi variants also describe how *Itu* rewards the daughters' piety by providing a male heir to their parents; the absence of this detail in the contemporary oral versions suggests that the narrators no longer accept its implication of female inferiority.

13. Such details are especially relevant in a traditionally male-dominated society, where men rarely heed women's views in worldly matters. Thus the tale provides subtle indications of the type of behavior that women think would help them in improving their status within the family.

14. The idea that Indian men are perceived as naive and childlike finds support in many sociological studies. In a study of Meitei women from the Manipur valley in north-eastern India, CHAKI-SARKAR focuses on women's perceptions of male dominance. She cites a case where women openly make fun of the childish, self-indulgent behavior of their husbands, who expect total subservience from their wives (1984, 98). Roy comments on the social environment in which Bengali men grow up. Owing to the strong taboo against male-female sexual relations in Hindu society, males are expected to look upon women in general as mothers. Women naturally try to conform to this expectation, so that the idea of men as children has become rooted in the traditional outlook (ROY 1975).

15. Holbek modified KÖNGÄS and Maranda's model for his analysis of *King Wivern*. For the original model, see KÖNGÄS and MARANDA 1971, 23.

16. The following notices, both from the "Matrimonial" section of the *Prabashi Anandabazar*, are typical: 1) "Correspondence invited with returnable photograph from well-educated, home-loving, beautiful, never-married Bengali Hindu girl for well-placed computer professional, 38, 5' 9", MS Comp. Sc/Statistics, US immigrant"; 2) "Wanted: prospective bridegroom for the daughter of an East Bengali Vaidya retired bank official. Girl B.A. (Hons.), trained in *Montessori teaching*, fair, pretty, slim, home-loving, 25, 4' 10"

(translation and emphasis mine).
17. Menon reports that one of the most highly stressed groups in India is working wives. "No one is perhaps quite as stressed as working wives. In their search for a new identity which meshes dual responsibilities, they are juggling the demands of convention. Even as they earn their spurs at work, they are expected to be super-moms and super-wives at home" (MENON 1992, 71).

REFERENCES CITED

BHATTACHARYA, Ashutosh

1978 *Folklore of Bengal*. New Delhi: National Book Trust.

BHATTACHARYA, Rajendra Kumar and Sarat Chandra MITRA

1924–27 On the worship of the sun-deity in Bihar, western and eastern Bengal. *The Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay*: 313–20.

BREMOND, Claude

1977 The morphology of French fairy tales. In *Patterns in oral literature*, eds. Heda Jason and Dimitri Segal, 49–76. The Hague: Mouton.

BUMILLER, Elisabeth

1990 No more little girls: Female infanticide among the poor of Tamilnadu and sex-selective abortion among the rich in Bombay. In *May you be the mother of a hundred sons*, 101–24. New York: Ballantine Books.

CHAKI-SARKAR, Manjusri

1984 *Feminism in a traditional society: Women of the Manipur Valley*. New Delhi: Shakti Books.

- DAS, Sudhir R.
1952 A study of Vrata rites of Bengal. *Man in India* 32: 207-45.
- DUNDES, Alan
1962 The binary structure of "unsuccessful repetition" in Lithuanian folktales. *Western Folklore* 21: 165-74.
- GUPTE, B. A.
1919 *Hindu holidays and ceremonials with dissertations on origin, folklore and symbols*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co.
- HOLBEK, Bengt
1987 *Interpretation of fairy tales*. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- JASON, Heda and Dimitri SEGAL, eds.
1977 *Patterns in oral literature*. The Hague: Mouton.
- KAPUR, Promilla
1970 *Marriage and working women in India*. Delhi: Vikas Publications.
- KÖNGÄS, Elli and Pierre MARANDA
1971 *Structural models in folklore and transformational essays*. Approaches to Semiotics 10. The Hague: Mouton.
- LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude
1967 The myth of Asdiwal. In *The structural study of myth and totemism*, ed. Edmund Leach, 1-47. London: Tavistock Publications.
- MCCULLOCH, William
1912 *Bengali household tales*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- MELETINSKIJ, E. M.
1969 Zur strukturell-typologischen Erforschung des Volksmärchens. *Deutsches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 15: 1-30.
1970 Die Ehe im Zaubermärchen. Ihre Funktion und ihr Platz in der Struktur des Märchens. *Acta Ethnographica* 19: 281-92.
- MENON, Ramesh
1992 The silent scourge. *India Today* (30 April): 71.
- NEOGI, Dwijendranath
1912 *Tales sacred and secular*. Calcutta: P. Mukhopadhyay and Sons.
- NEW YORK TIMES
1991 Census in India counts 844 million people. *New York Times* (26 March): A10.
- PRABASHI ANANDABAZAR
1990a Matrimonial. *Prabashi Anandabazar* (14 February) 5.
1990b Matrimonial. *Prabashi Anandabazar* (25 February) 5.
- PROPP, Vladimir
1968 *The morphology of folktales*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- RAMANUJAN, A. K.
1986 Two realms of Kannada folklore. In *Another harmony*, eds. Stuart Blackburn and A. K. Ramanujan, 41-75. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- ROBERTS, Warren
1958 *The tale of the kind and the unkind girls*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- ROHNER, Ronald P., & Manjusri CHAKI-SARKAR
1988 *Women and children in a Bengali village*. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- ROY, Manisha
1975 *Bengali women*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- THOMPSON, Stith
1955-58 *Motif index of folk literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- WADLEY, Susan
1983 Vrats: Transformers of destiny. In *Karma*, eds. Charles F. Keyes and E. V. Daniel, 147-62. Berkeley: University of California Press.

APPENDIX

ORAL VERSIONS OF THE TALE OF ITU

1. [*Author's mother; written version*] Once there was a poor Brahmin who used to live by begging from house to house. Once, during the winter months, the time when people make *gur* from date syrup, the Brahmin had a craving for pancakes. He called his wife and said, "Fry a few pancakes for me." The Brahmani replied, "That's fine for you to say! To make pancakes one needs many things, like rice, milk, and *gur*. We are poor, where would we find such ingredients?" So the Brahmin went begging from house to house and gathered the necessary materials. He gave them to his wife and said, "Now, fry them for me, and remember, do not give them to anyone else. I want to eat everything myself."

The Brahmin had two daughters. The elder one was called Umno and the younger one was called Jhumno. When the two girls had gone to bed, their mother got ready to fry the pancakes. As she dropped a dollop of batter into the hot oil, it made a loud sizzling noise and Umno woke up. She came to her mother and asked, "Ma, what's that you are frying?" Her mother replied, "I am frying some pancakes." Umno said, "Give me one, please." The mother answered, "Don't eat any! Your father will be very angry." Umno said, "Give me just one, father won't know!" So the Brahmani gave her a pancake.

When the Brahmani dropped a second dollop of batter into the oil, Jhumno woke up. She came to her mother and asked, "Ma, what are you frying?" Her mother said, "I am frying some pancakes." Jhumno also asked for a pancake, as had her sister, and after her mother gave her one she went back to bed. In the meantime, the Brahmin sat behind the kitchen and tied a knot in a piece of string every time he heard the sizzle of the hot oil. The Brahmin did not know how to read or write and so this is the way he kept count of his pancakes.

When the Brahmin sat down for his meal, he matched the pancakes with the knots on the string and found that he was missing two. So he said to his wife, "You did not listen to me and fed those cakes to your daughters. So, I am going to abandon them in the forest today." When the two girls woke up he said, "Come, let me take you to your uncle's house," and set out with them towards the forest.

After walking through the forest for a long time the two little girls got very tired. So the Brahmin said, "You had better rest a while under this tree; we shall resume our journey after you have recovered a bit." The little girls were very tired and soon dozed off. As soon as they were asleep the Brahmin scattered some sticks and some *alta* nearby and left quietly. Umno and Jhumno woke up just as it was getting dark and realized that their father was not around. Of the two girls, Umno was a bit foolish. When she noticed the *alta* and the sticks she exclaimed, "Look there, father must have fallen prey to a tiger." Jhumno, on the other hand, was quite clever. She said, "Don't be silly; father has abandoned us in the forest because we ate those pancakes." As they talked it got darker; frightened, the two

girls started to cry. The trees in the forest felt pity for them and said, "Don't be afraid, spend the night inside us." A tree split into half and sheltered Umno and Jhumno.

The next morning, as soon as the sun was up, the two girls came out of the tree and noticed that some fairies were busy performing a ritual by a nearby pond. When Umno and Jhumno asked them what they were doing, the fairies replied, "We are praying to Itu." The girls asked, "Does it do you any good?" The fairies said, "Yes, one becomes prosperous and is blessed with sons if one worships Itu." Hearing this the girls said, "We would like to join you." So the fairies taught them how to worship Itu and the girls joined them after bathing in the nearby pond. After it was over, the fairies went back to heaven while the two sisters sat by the water.

At that time, the king and his minister were returning home from a hunting trip and noticed the two girls sitting all alone by a pond. The king asked his companion to inquire about the girls. After learning their story, the king married Umno and the minister married Jhumno. On their way back to the palace there came a Sunday. Jhumno went to her sister and said, "Sister, remember we have to worship Itu today." Umno said, "I don't need to do such things any more. I am now the queen," and did not keep the ritual fast. Jhumno kept it all by herself.

A few days later the royal party reached the palace. The elder queen rushed to greet her daughter-in-law with her golden platter. But as soon as the plate touched Umno's forehead, it turned into silver. Meanwhile, when the minister's mother touched her silver platter to Jhumno's forehead the platter turned into gold. So the minister's mother welcomed Jhumno into the house while the king ordered Umno to be banished into the forest. The minister could not stand by and see Umno banished and so he decided to hide his new sister-in-law in his house.

Some time later, as another Sunday approached, Jhumno again reminded her elder sister that she needed to perform the Itu ritual. Early that morning, as Jhumno prepared for the ritual, her sister came to her and said, "Sister, I cannot go through with the ritual today. I picked a grain of rice from your child's plate and broke my fast." So again Jhumno kept the ritual fast all by herself. Next time Jhumno reminded her elder sister, "Remember, tomorrow is the day for the ritual. Remember to eat nothing until you have said your prayer." Again, on the morning of the ritual Umno said, "Oh no! I have picked a grain of mustard and eaten it." Next time, to make sure that Umno did not eat anything by mistake, Jhumno went to bed the night before the ritual and tied her hair with Umno's so that she could not eat anything in the morning. This time the two sisters worshipped Itu together. Very soon after that, the king remembered his bride and asked his minister to bring her back to him. Finally, Umno went back to her husband's house and both the sisters lived happily.

Meanwhile, the Brahmin and his wife had learned of the fate of their daughters. One day their mother went to the capital and waited by the side of a pond. As she sat there, a group of maids came to fetch water. Seeing them, she asked,

“For whom are you fetching water?” They answered, “We are getting bath water for our queen and her sister.” So the old woman said, “Tell them that their mother is waiting for them.” The maids whispered, “Such daughters have this woman as a mother!” Then the maids told her, “Well, we don’t know if we would remember, but if we do, we will mention it.” So the Brahmani made a ring from grass and quietly dropped it into their vessel.

As Umno and Jhumno poured water during their shower, the grass ring fell on them. The two sisters were quite alarmed and said to their maids, “Did you just drop something on our heads? What tricks are you trying to play on us?” The maids replied, “Oh yes, we forgot to mention — a wretched old woman who claims to be your mother is waiting for you by the pond.” Hearing this, the two sisters immediately brought their mother to the palace. They were very happy to see her. When the time came for the next ritual, Umno and Jhumno persuaded their mother to join them in the worship. As a result, the Brahmin became quite prosperous.

One day Umno and Jhumno decided to accompany their mother home and spend some time with their parents. At that time the daughters heard of the news of the death of the king’s mother. They learnt that the king was looking for a court pundit to carry out the funeral with great solemnity and had called for a debate among all the pundits in his kingdom. The daughters asked their father to go. The Brahmin was quite hesitant. He said, “I am a worthless unlettered Brahmin. How do you expect me to participate in this great debate?” The daughters reassured him, saying, “Don’t worry, you will be able to by the grace of Itu.” So the Brahmin went and was able to defeat the rest of the pundits by his brilliant arguments. The king was very impressed with him and presented him with lots of gifts. Umno and Jhumno spent a few more days with their parents and then returned home.

2. [*Author’s grandmother*]. Once upon a time there lived a poor Brahmin who had two daughters. The elder was named Umno, and the younger was called Jhumno. The Brahmin used to beg from house to house and whatever rice or *dal* he received he brought home to feed his wife and family.

Now one day — it was the month of *Agrahayan*, just as the weather started to get cooler and the bazaars were full of newly prepared *gur* from the dates — the Brahmin had a craving for some pancakes and *gur*. So he ordered his Brahmani, “Make some pancakes for me today.” His wife answered, “Aren’t you even a bit ashamed to ask me to make pancakes for you when we don’t even have enough rice at home to cook a proper meal?” The Brahmin replied, “You wait, today I will get everything necessary to make those pancakes.” Saying this, he went out to collect the ingredients. When he returned and gave them to his wife, he said, “Don’t do anything just right now; wait till the girls fall asleep. Only then should you fry the cakes. And remember, don’t give any of the pancakes to anyone else!” His wife said, “All right.” Later, after the Brahmani had fed Umno and Jhumno and put them to bed, she started to fry the pancakes.

When the Brahmani poured a dollop of batter into the hot oil it made a loud sizzling noise. As she did this her husband sat quietly behind the kitchen window and tied a knot in a piece of rope every time he heard the sizzle. Suddenly Umno woke up and heard the noises coming from the kitchen. She came to her mother and asked, "What are you frying, ma?" The Brahmani answered, "Your father had a fancy for pancakes, and so I am frying these for him." Umno said, "Ma, give me one please." The Brahmani could not refuse her daughter's request and gave her one. She then said, "Now don't stand here any longer, go back to sleep. If your father finds out about this he will be terribly upset." So Umno went back to bed. A little while later, Jhumno came up to her mother and asked the same question as Umno. The Brahmani gave her a pancake too and told her to go back to bed.

In the meantime, the old Brahmin had tied twenty-one knots as he heard the sizzle of twenty-one cakes. When the Brahmani finished frying she called her husband, set a place for him, and started serving. The old man untied a knot for every cake he gobbled. When he had finished eating the entire pile there were still two knots left on the rope, so he asked, "What happened to the last two cakes? You must have hidden them somewhere." His wife replied, "Eat whatever I have made. Why should I hide any?" He knew very well that she had given the other two to his daughters, but he did not say anything further to his wife. He was very angry.

At the break of dawn he called his daughters and said, "Let us go visit your uncle." The girls gladly agreed, so they all set out. The day went by as they walked and the little girls got very tired. As they were passing a pond they said, "Father, we would like to sit here for a while and have a drink of water. We can't walk any further." The old man agreed readily. The girls were so exhausted from their long walk that they dozed off to sleep very soon. Quickly, the Brahmin scattered a few pieces of broken shells and rags, which he had dipped in red *alta*. Then he left.

When he returned home his wife asked him about their daughters, and he explained that he left them at their uncle's place.

The girls woke up just as it was getting dark and realized that their father was nowhere around. Umno, noticing the broken shells and the red rags, exclaimed, "Look here, he must have been eaten by a tiger." Jhumno looked at them and quickly realized what they really were. She was quite smart, and said, "What nonsense! He has been eaten by nothing. Oh! Don't you see that these are nothing but a few broken shells and colored rags? Don't you realize what happened? We ate those pancakes against his wishes last night, and that is why he has left us here so far away from home." The two little girls could not figure out a way to return home and so they sat by the pond and started to cry.

There was a big tree nearby that was moved by the plight of these two little girls. It called to them and said, "Come and take shelter in this hole in my trunk. I will keep you covered with leaves and nobody will be able to see you." Umno and Jhumno did as they were told, but were so frightened that they could not sleep.

At dawn they noticed that a group of maidens nearby was preparing to perform a ritual. Curious, Jhumno asked them, "What *puja* are you performing so early in the morning?" They replied, "We worship Itu every Sunday in *Agrahayan* before eating anything in the morning." Jhumno said, "Would you share your sacred offerings with us when you have finished your worship? We are very hungry, as we have not eaten anything since yesterday." The worshippers replied, "Why do you not join us in the worship? It will be good for you." They helped Umno and Jhumno perform the ritual. Before the sun rose too high in the sky the maidens left. Having nothing else to do, the two little girls sat by the water.

As the girls waited by the pond, the king of the land passed by on his way home from a hunting trip. His minister was with him. Noticing the girls, he asked, "Why are you two little girls sitting all alone in the middle of this forest?" Jhumno, being very smart, answered, "Our father wanted us to wait here while he went somewhere. We are waiting for him to come back." After she said this, both girls started to cry. The king was a nice man; he thought, "Since the father seems to have deserted them, why don't we marry them and take them to our kingdom?" The king asked his minister about his plan and the minister agreed. So the king married Umno and the minister married Jhumno.

The next Sunday, on their way back to the capital, Jhumno asked her sister to join her in the worship of Itu. Umno refused, saying, "Look, I have become the queen, so I do not wish to perform such rituals anymore." Jhumno was a bit saddened by her sister's reaction but went away and kept the fast on her own.

As the hunting party reached the royal palace, everyone got ready to welcome the two new brides. The elder queen filled a gold platter with all kinds of fruits and spices and proceeded to perform a *baran*. But as she touched the platter to Umno's forehead the golden platter turned into silver. The queen put beautiful gold jewelry on Umno, but as soon as it touched her it turned into silver. The queen did not like her new daughter-in-law, but she did not say anything. Gradually, the kingdom started losing its old glory and there were words of rebellion everywhere. The king became very angry and ordered Umno to be banished immediately. He figured that all his troubles started after he had brought her home.

In contrast, when the minister's mother touched her silver platter to Jhumno's forehead when performing the *baran*, it turned into gold. There was no end of prosperity in the minister's house. Jhumno's husband became quite fond of his wife. So when Jhumno heard of the royal order banishing Umno and asked her husband if Umno could be brought to their house, he readily agreed. Thus Jhumno hid her sister, saying, "Listen sister, do not make the same mistake again. Worship Itu on this coming Sunday." Umno had realized her mistake and pledged not to repeat it again. So the next Sunday she prayed with all her heart. From then on she regularly kept the fast of Itu.

The king gradually recovered his lost glory; he succeeded in suppressing the rebellion and the royal treasury was again filled with money. One day he remem-

bered his wife and regretted having sent her away. He said, "I had poor Umno banished, though I now realize she was blameless." The minister said, "Maharaja, you have become so prosperous only because of her piety." The king mourned, "Oh! Would that I could get her back. It was me who banished her from this land forever." The minister said, "Maharaja, when you ordered me to send her away, I did not follow your orders. I secretly sheltered her in my house instead. She is still living in our household." The king thanked his minister for his wisdom and asked him to restore his wife to him. So Umno returned to the palace. Peace and prosperity reigned in the house. The elder queen was very pleased with her daughter-in-law. Days were spent in great happiness.

In the meantime the Brahmin couple had been spending their days in dire poverty. One day the Brahmini told her husband, "I heard that our Umno has become a queen and Jhumno has married a minister. Why don't you go to them and get some money?" The Brahmin willingly agreed to his wife's idea and set out towards the capital. When he came near the palace, he decided to rest by the side of a pond. It so happened that this was the same pond from which the royal maids fetched bath water for Umno and Jhumno. When the maids came to fetch water for their mistresses, the Brahmin asked, "Who are you, dears?" They said, "We are the queen's maids and have come to fetch water for her." He said, "Go and tell your queen that her father is waiting for her by the pond." The maids were very amused by such a preposterous claim. One of them said, "How can such a destitute Brahmin like you be the father of our queen?" But the old man kept insisting that they tell their queen about his arrival. Finally one of the maids said, "We doubt if we would remember to mention this to her. Why don't you drop a blade of grass into the water, so that when we pour the water we will be reminded." So the old man dropped a blade of grass into the water pot. The maids returned to the palace.

The time came for Umno to take her shower. As the maids poured water on her the grass fell on her head. Umno was quite alarmed, and asked, "What was that you girls dropped on me? Are you trying to cast a spell?" The maids looked at each other and smiled. They said, "We forgot to tell you, but an old man who claims to be your father is waiting by the water." As soon as Umno heard this she ordered her maids to get the old man some fresh clothes and toiletries. She also told them to bring him to her after he had taken his bath and felt refreshed. She also sent a message to her sister regarding their father's visit. Jhumno quickly came to the palace.

Seeing their father after such a long time, the daughters started to cry. After they recovered a little, they said, "Why don't you eat something first and then we will hear all about you." The two daughters fed their father with great care and listened to his news of home with great eagerness. Learning of their parents' poverty, the two girls were very concerned and said, "We shall give you a lot of money and you will not have to suffer any longer." They gave him plenty of money when the Brahmin was ready to return home.

On his way back it got dark as he came near the forest. He was very tired as

he had walked for a long time, and decided to rest awhile. He put the bag of money under his head and soon fell asleep. But as he slept some robbers came by and stole all of the money. When he woke up, he found out that the money was gone. The disappointed Brahmin slowly went home.

On his return, his wife asked him, "Well, what have you brought?" The old man was very upset and related the whole story to his wife. The Brahmani heard her husband and said, "It is clear that you are a good-for-nothing. Let me go and try my luck with our daughters."

The next morning, the Brahmani set out on her way to the royal palace. It took her a long time to reach her daughters' land. She asked many people and finally was able to reach the same pond. She waited there till the maids came to fetch water for their queen. When she saw them coming, she asked, "Who are you, my dears?" The maids answered, "Why do you want to know?" She said, "Go and tell your mistress that her mother is waiting for her by the pond." The maids did not believe her. They whispered among themselves, "How can such a beggar woman be our queen's mother?" They told her, "We shall not be able to remember all that. If you want, you can drop a blade of grass into the water pot; when we see that we might remember." As the maids were pouring water on Umno during her shower, she felt something on her head. She was very alarmed and said, "What was that you just dropped on my head? Are you casting a spell on me?" The maids replied, "Oh yes, we forgot to mention, your mother is waiting for you by the water." Umno immediately ordered her maids to bring her mother to the house through the back door. She asked her maids to help her mother take a shower and provided her with fresh clothes. In the meantime, she sent for her sister Jhumno.

When the two sisters met their mother, they were very sorry to see her condition. "Why did you not come to us earlier?" they asked, adding "What happened to the money we gave to our father? Why did that money not improve your situation?" In reply their mother said, "Do you think your poor father was able to take that money home? That money was stolen from him on his way back from here." The two daughters said, "Why don't you spend a few days here with us? It is almost the month of *Agrahayan*, and the time for *Itu* is near. Worship *Itu* with us and you shall be rewarded." Their mother agreed with them.

On the eve of the next Sunday, the daughters reminded their mother, "Do not eat anything before you worship *Itu* tomorrow. You can have your meal after the ritual is over." At the break of dawn, the girls got things ready for the ritual and asked their mother to join them. But the Brahmani said, "Oh dear, I forgot all about the ritual, and while cleaning the rice I picked up a grain and ate it." So the daughters said, "In that case, you cannot join us today, but remember not to eat anything before the *puja* next Sunday." The daughters kept the fast on their own. The next Sunday when the daughters went to fetch their mother to join them in the ritual, the Brahmani said, "Oh dear, I forgot about it and while cleaning the mustard seeds I picked up one and ate it." The girls were very upset with their mother's behavior and told her, "We won't let you alone when the time comes to

keep the ritual fast again. Next Sunday you will sleep with us." The night before the next ritual, Jhumno tied her hair with that of her mother before she went to bed. At the break of dawn Jhumno woke her mother, and the three women worshipped Itu before their morning meal. The Brahmani kept the ritual fast throughout the month of *Agrahayan* even after she returned home. Gradually she and her husband became prosperous, and happiness returned to their lives.

One day when the Brahmin returned home, he found his wife sitting with a pitcher of water in front of her and murmuring something to herself. He was very upset and screamed, "What the hell is going on here? You have not even made breakfast for me yet." When his wife replied that she was worshipping Itu, the god responsible for their current prosperity, the Brahmin said, "We do not need that nonsense anymore. Do you not see that we have everything we want? People come to us and provide us with the things we need." Then in a fit of rage he kicked the water pitcher and broke it into pieces. The old woman was very upset and started to cry. But by then it was too late. They started to get poorer as time went by.

Finally, the Brahmin realized that he was to blame for their misfortune. He asked his wife to resume the worship of Itu. The Brahmani said, "Where am I supposed to get the ingredients necessary for the ritual? You have to go to your daughters and ask them for some money." When the Brahmin went and spoke with his daughters, they were very angry with him for disrupting their mother's worship, but said, "Anyhow, take this money and go home. There is still time to make amends." The Brahmin went home repentant and asked his wife to perform the ritual once more. As the old woman resumed her worship, prosperity gradually returned to the household.

In the meantime, the king's mother had passed away. So that his mother's funeral might be properly performed, the king sent messengers all over the land to bring the most learned pundit to his court. He ordered his messengers to carry a golden pumpkin with them. Whoever considered himself to be the most learned would have to claim the pumpkin. The two girls sent a message to their father that when the royal envoy arrived at their village he must claim the fruit for himself. The Brahmin was very frightened. He thought, "I am an illiterate Brahmin. How can I dare to claim the pumpkin for myself?" But then he remembered his daughters' words that Itu would take care of everything. When the envoy came the old man claimed the fruit, although he was half-dead with fright. The king summoned him to the court. The poor Brahmin had no choice but to go. The king asked him, "Well Brahmin, will you be able to perform the ritual properly?" The old man did not even have the nerve to say no. The king said, "Remember, you must be able to perform the funeral without a hitch." The Brahmin mustered all his courage and somehow said, "Yes."

On the day of the funeral he was scared stiff, and all he could do was pray. But at the time of the ceremony, he realized that he could easily chant all the necessary mantras. The whole ceremony was carried out perfectly. Everyone praised the wise priest. The king gave him a lot of money and everybody lived

happily ever after.

3. [*Author's sister*]. A Brahmin had two daughters called Umno and Jhumno. They were very poor and lived a hand-to-mouth existence. One day the Brahmin felt like having some pancakes. But that would require a lot of money. Somehow he managed to get enough ingredients to make a few. He gave them to his wife and said, "When everyone has gone to bed, fry some pancakes for me, and do make sure that our daughters do not hear of them." What could the poor wife do but obey him? As the Brahmani fried the cakes, the Brahmin sat in the next room and tied a knot in a piece of rope every time he heard the sizzling noise of the batter. What else could he do! He did not know how to count.

In the meantime, how could the girls sleep in the middle of all this? The smell of the fried cakes woke them up. First, the elder daughter Umno came to her mother and asked "Ma, what are these that you are frying?" Her mother replied "Pancakes." Umno said, "Give me one, please." The mother answered, "No, dear, your father would be very cross." The daughter insisted, "It's only one, he won't even know." The Brahmani thought, "That's true," and gave one to her daughter. How could she know that her husband was keeping count from the other room? A little while later the younger daughter woke up and asked, "Ma, what are you doing?" The mother replied, "I'm frying pancakes." The daughter said, "Would you give me one?" The mother answered "No, dear, your father would get very angry." The girl insisted, "It's only one, he wouldn't even know." The Brahmani could not refuse her and gave a pancake to her younger daughter.

When the Brahmin sat down to eat, he was very angry to find that two of the cakes were missing. He decided to banish the daughters to the forest immediately. The next morning he took them into the forest on the ruse of going with them to their uncle's place. He waited till they fell asleep and then he left them there. He also broke a few sticks and poured some red paint on the ground so that the girls would think that he had been killed by a tiger.

When the girls woke up, they realized that they were all alone in the jungle. Their father was not around. The elder daughter Umno was rather simple; she immediately assumed that their father had fallen prey to a tiger. Jhumno, on the other hand, was quite bright, and quickly realized what had actually happened. She told her elder sister, "Look, father is all right. He hasn't been killed. He has left us in the forest as a punishment for eating those pancakes." The poor little girls did not know what to do, and set out through the forest as soon as the day dawned.

After walking for a while they noticed that some pretty maidens were bathing in the river and getting ready for some ritual worship. The two sisters asked, "What are you doing?" The maidens answered, "We worship Itu every year at this time. It brings good to you. Why don't you join us in the worship?" The two sisters performed the worship along with the others.

At just that time the king of the land and his minister wandered into the area on their way home from a war. They were attracted by the two pretty girls, so the

king married Umno and the minister married Jhumno. A whole year passed on their journey back to the kingdom. One day Jhumno went to her sister and said, "Today is the day for the worship of Itu, won't you keep the ritual fast?" But Umno replied, "Oh no, I totally forgot about it and have already eaten some of the rice that was left over from last night's dinner." So Jhumno kept the fast on her own.

When they arrived at the royal household, the elder queen was very happy and eagerly greeted the royal couple with her golden *baran dala*. Similarly, the minister's mother welcomed her son and his new bride with her silver *baran dala*. But as soon as the queen-mother touched the golden platter to Umno's forehead it turned into silver. At the same time, as soon as the silver platter touched Jhumno's forehead it turned into gold. This incident upset the king terribly, and he told his minister, "I do not wish to have such a wife, get rid of her and banish her into the forest immediately." What could the minister do in such a situation? Surely he could not abandon his sister-in-law, so he hid her in his house.

Jhumno faithfully kept the fast and it did her much good! The minister was very happy with her. A year went by and the date for another ritual arrived. Jhumno went to her sister and asked, "Sister, won't you worship Itu this time?" But Umno answered, "Oh no! I have eaten a bit of cereal that was lying here." So what could Jhumno do? She again kept the fast by herself. Jhumno prospered as she faithfully kept the ritual fast every year. As a result the minister became richer. Umno's condition did not improve, however, and the king remained upset with her. The next year Jhumno decided that she would not let her sister miss the ritual. Before going to bed she tied one end of her sari with that of Umno, so that Umno could not eat anything without her knowledge. But Umno still could not control herself! She picked up a few pieces of cereal that Jhumno's son had left on the bed! So what could be done! Umno had to keep on living in her sister's household.

When the date arrived for the next ritual, Jhumno, determined to help her sister keep the fast, guarded her closely through the night. They worshipped the deity Itu in the morning. Soon after this the king started to prosper again. He inquired about Umno and the minister took her back to her husband's home. This way, both sisters — the king's wife and the minister's wife — got settled in their respective households and lived in peace.

In the meantime, the Brahmin had become even poorer. He and his wife hardly subsisted from day to day. One day they heard from their neighbors that their daughters had been married to the king and the minister. So, when their poverty became unbearable, they decided to go to their daughters and ask for help. But how could they show up at the palace in their rags? Who would believe that they were the queen's parents? So they decided to wait by the side of a pond. It so happened that this was the same pond from which the maids of Umno and Jhumno fetched the bath water. When she saw the maids the Brahmani asked them to tell their mistress that her parents were waiting for her by the pond. The maids did not believe her at first, and thought that the old woman was crazy.

Perhaps to reassure her, they finally said, "All right, we will tell her." The Brahmani was quite clever. To make sure that the maids really mentioned their arrival to her daughters, she made a ring of grass and threw it into the water vessel. As the two sisters poured the water on themselves, the grass ring fell on them. They asked their maids what it was. Were the maids trying to play a magic trick on them? The maids had forgotten about it completely. Seeing the grass ring, they said, "Oh yes, we forgot to mention that an old ragged couple is waiting for you by the pond. They claim to be your parents." On hearing this, the sisters immediately brought the Brahmin and the Brahmani home and kept them there. They also made their mother worship Itu the next time. As a result, the Brahmin also prospered.

At that time the funeral of an old queen took place in the neighboring kingdom. Umno and Jhumno convinced their father to go and perform the ritual. The Brahmin was very scared because he was illiterate and did not know anything about worship. But the daughters insisted that he would be able to carry out his responsibilities since their mother had worshipped Itu. So it happened. The king was very pleased with the wise Brahmin and offered him the post of court pundit.

This way, the family was saved by the grace of the goddess and everyone lived happily.

WRITTEN VERSIONS OF THE TALE OF ITU

5. [*Chapbook version*]. There lived a poor Brahmin couple in a distant kingdom. They had two daughters named Umno and Jhumno. One day the Brahmin had a craving for pancakes. So, after acquiring the necessary groceries, he ordered his wife to prepare the cakes, while forbidding her to give any to his daughters. At night, when the wife prepared the cakes, he sat behind the kitchen and quietly counted the cakes.

A little while later he sat down to eat as his wife served him. The Brahmin asked, "Why are two of the pancakes missing?" His wife replied that she had given two of the pancakes to their daughters. Hearing this, the Brahmin got very angry and decided to banish the two girls, although he did not mention anything to his wife.

The next morning he told his wife, "Look, I would like to take Umno and Jhumno to visit their aunt." He explained, "My sister is rich and so Umno and Jhumno should be looked after well in her household. I did not keep contact with her because of my silly pride." His wife listened to her husband's plan. She did not protest, although she did not like it much either.

The Brahmin set off with his daughters. They walked for a long time, reaching a forest in the afternoon. By that time the two little girls were very tired, and it did not take them long to fall asleep on their father's lap. The Brahmin was waiting for just this moment. As soon as the girls were asleep he quietly removed their heads from his lap and placed them gently on two bricks, so that they would not awake. Then he scattered a few broken shells and some red paint nearby and quickly left.

When the girls woke up they were very concerned, as they could not find their father anywhere. Taking the broken shells and the red paint for her dead father's bones and blood, Umno started crying. She said to her sister, "Look here, perhaps he has been eaten by a tiger." Jhumno said, "No, we have been banished to the forest by our father for eating two of his pancakes."

The two little girls, overcome by fear and hunger, started to cry. When at a distance they heard the roars of tigers, they became even more afraid. Umno suggested that they implore a big tree to protect them from the danger. So they went to a tree, and it sheltered them from tigers that night by hiding them within its trunk. The next morning, as the girls wandered in the forest, they noticed a group of women busy in some ritual worship. As the two girls came close, the beautifully arranged shrine broke into pieces. The worshippers got very angry with Umno and Jhumno, but when the girls related their sorry tale the women were moved and asked them to join their worship. But as the two girls went to take a bath in the nearby pond, the pond dried out. The worshippers then threw a few pieces of holy grass into the pond and it filled up again. After that Umno and Jhumno performed the ritual along with the others. After that the women asked Umno and Jhumno to return home. When they returned, they found that their father had become very prosperous. At the year's end a baby boy was born to the Brahmin and his wife and they lived happily.

One day, a prince and his friend wandered into the Brahmin's house and asked for a drink of water. When the water in the serving pot seemed never-ending, the prince was very grateful. He married Umno and his friend decided to marry Jhumno. On the day of their departure, which coincided with a fast day for Itu, Umno, happy with her newly acquired status, had a lavish meal. Jhumno, on the other hand, had a simple ritual meal. On their way to their new households, people rejoiced and celebrated when they saw Jhumno, while accidents and misfortunes were constant companions for Umno. As a result the prince ordered Umno to be executed, while Jhumno was received into her husband's house with great honor. The executioner, taking pity on Umno, set her free and told her to flee. Umno, being helpless, went to her sister, who sheltered her without anyone's knowledge. Jhumno also convinced her sister to keep the ritual fast of Itu.

In the meantime, the prince had a dream one night in which a goddess ordered him to bring Umno back. He was very concerned about it and asked Jhumno's husband for help. When Jhumno found out about it she assured him that she would be able to help the prince and asked him to plant banana trees on both sides of the street that connected their house with the royal palace. As Umno set out on her way to the palace she cut her foot on a root of grass. The prince was very angry and ordered the execution of the eighteen menials who were supposed to have cleared the path for Umno. He also ordered the mother of these menials to be blinded, and his orders were followed instantly.

When the date for the next ritual arrived, Umno wanted to tell the tale of Itu to a woman who had kept a fast from the day before. The only person who had not eaten since the previous day was the blind mother of the dead servants. At

first she refused to come to the palace, but when Umno reassured her that the goddess Itu would help her if she listened to the tale, she agreed. After the ritual Umno asked the old woman to pray to the goddess, and the woman's dead sons were restored to her. The glory of the goddess spread throughout the land and everybody lived happily.

5. [*GUPTE*] There lived a greedy Brahmin who felt a craving for some sort of pancakes and asked his wife to prepare them, but the poor woman had no materials to make them with. Full of resource, he went begging and collected sufficient stuff for a meal. Late at night his obedient wife sat frying the cakes, but her husband was so suspicious that he secretly watched her all the time, tying knots in a string to record the actual number of cakes prepared. After the operation was over he went to sleep. His two daughters, named Umno and Jhumno, awoke early and out of motherly love they were each fed with a single cake. They were warned not to ask for more. As the sun rose, the Brahmin got up and demanded the cakes. He found that there were two missing, and, knowing that his daughters had consumed them, he took them to a forest and cruelly deserted them. The heartless greedy priest returned home, and the poor mother dared not complain! The girls wandered until they came across a place where some fairies were engaged in worshipping the goddess Itu. They learned the process, followed it, received blessings, came back to their father and made him rich. A king who passed their house sent for some water, and it was supplied by the girls in a pitcher. He was angry at the small quantity, but found that the pitcher contained an inexhaustible supply, so he took fancy to the girls, married one himself, and gave the other in marriage to his minister. His wife did not perform the *puja* and came to grief. She was ordered to be beheaded. The executioner saved her life, and handed her over to her sister Jhumno. She lived incognito. The father of the girls neglected the *puja*, kicked the sacred pitcher and suffered the consequences. He became a beggar. He then went to the prosperous Jhumno, but the gifts she gave were looted by the emissaries of the goddess Itu. His wife then went to her daughter, stayed there until the *sankranti* day in *Agrahayan*, worshipped the goddess, and became rich. The other daughter did the same. The king repented and in his foolish way asked the minister to restore his wife on pain of death. The prime minister came home dejected and told his wife what an impossible order he had received. She disclosed the queen's secret and restored her to the king on condition that he plant an avenue of plantain trees and pitched tents covered with cowries. This was done and all became happy and, after a full enjoyable life, went to heaven.

6. [*NEOGI, summary*] A Brahmin who lived a mendicant life had a wife and two daughters. Our Brahmin was a prince of gluttons. One day as he begged from house to house during the month of December his mouth watered at the sight of those delicious cakes that everyone eats at that time. Upon his return home he entreated his wife to bake him some. In reply he received a torrent of sharp feminine eloquence from the Brahmani, who elaborated on their desperate pov-

erty. The Brahmin, stung to the quick, resolved to procure the ingredients for the cakes. These he brought to his wife and enjoined her to take care that her daughters not nibble at the good things she was to prepare. If they did, he said, he would banish them from his sight. As the good wife was baking the cakes at night, the Brahmin concealed himself behind the kitchen and tied a knot in a piece of string every time he heard the peculiar sizzle that announced the frying of a cake.

However, the elder girl woke up and begged her mother for a piece. The mother could not refuse and gave her one. Then the second girl got up and also asked for one. She too was given one.

When the Brahmin sat down for his meal the next morning, he found that two pieces of cake were missing. He repeatedly questioned his wife until she finally revealed that their daughters had eaten them. A few days later the Brahmin asked his daughters to accompany him to their uncle's house. Rama, the younger girl, was suspicious of her father's motives and mentioned this to her elder sister, Isani; but they were powerless to do anything.

After they had gone some way the girls became weary and footsore, and they asked their father to stop so that they could rest. When the girls fell asleep the Brahmin broke a few pieces of conch shell on the ground, dyed some of the pieces with *alta*, scattered locks of hair nearby, and quickly left.

The girls awoke and sought for their father in vain. They were filled with terror in the dark forest, and implored a nearby fig tree to shelter them for the night. The tree parted and, when the girls entered inside, closed again. In the morning the sisters came out, thanked their night's protector, and started walking.

Soon they came upon the outskirts of a village where some beautiful women were performing religious rites. Noticing the girls, one of the women asked what they wanted. After hearing their sad tale, the women invited the girls to join them in the worship of Itu. The women supplied them with all the requisites. After the two girls finished their baths they worshipped the god with guileless hearts. Presently a voice spoke to them from above, "What do you wish for, girls?" The girls answered, "Let us be in comfortable circumstances; let our father have wealth and a son, kind god!" Their prayers were granted. They continued to live in the village, devoutly worshipping Itu.

Some years later the girls returned to their parents' house, where their mother received them with great pleasure. By that time, the Brahmin had grown very rich due to his daughters' piety.

About a year after this the king of the land announced a debate in which the winner would be awarded half the kingdom. The Brahmin, though a notorious dunce, managed to win since his daughters had implored Itu to help him. He forgot his learning as soon as he left the court, however, and when another pundit found out that he was illiterate everyone laughed at him. The Brahmin blamed his daughters for this and decided to marry them off to the first available men he came across the next morning.

It so happened that a young prince and a minister's son were returning from

a hunt that day and had lost their way. While they passed by the Brahmin's house they noticed Isani and Rama and were attracted by their beauty. The Brahmin let them marry his daughters without even inquiring who they were. Thus Itu interfered on his devotees' behalf and saved them in this way.

Unfortunately, Isani's marriage to the prince made her very proud. Imagining herself to have reached the pinnacle of human glory, she abandoned the worship of Itu. Rama, however, lived as devoutly as before. As Isani proceeded to her husband's house the way was marked by devastation and sorrow. People denounced her as a witch. In contrast, Rama's progress marked the advent of spring. When they reached their respective homes, the mothers-in-law received the two brides by performing the *baran* ceremony. When a gold *baran* platter touched Isani's forehead it turned into iron, while the things in Rama's *baran* platter all turned into glittering gold.

Soon the state was on the verge of collapse. Everyone ascribed the misfortunes to Isani, and she was banished from the kingdom after giving birth to a male child, named Dukha-kumar, "Son of sorrow." Rama, on the other hand, adorned her new home as the personification of Lakshmi. The minister rose in wealth and power as the prince declined, until, in time, he carved out a state for himself. Rama gave birth to a son called Sukha-kumar, "Son of happiness."

In the meantime the surly old Brahmin had managed a match for his son. As the wedding party set out the Brahmani busied herself in the worship of Itu, but when the Brahmin heard of this he rushed home and kicked the sacred pot. From that moment his misfortune began and his decline was very rapid. He again became a pauper.

The wedding party, meanwhile, had been overtaken by a severe storm that destroyed everything. Itu himself appeared, armed with a stout wooden staff. With blood-red eyes the god belabored all the men, sparing not even the bridegroom, whom he bore through the air and cast half dead on a dunghill at the bride's house. After the youth was rescued he preferred to live with his wife's family.

The Brahmin finally set out for the home of his younger daughter, hoping that she would help him in his time of difficulty. He met Rama's maids while they were fetching bath water for their mistress and dropped an iron pin into their pot. When Rama noticed it, the maids told her about the old Brahmin. Rama received him in her house and treated him with great kindness. When he expressed a desire to return home, she gave him a lot of money. Unfortunately the Brahmin was robbed on his way back due to his own foolishness.

Sometime later the Brahmani also went to get help from Rama. She was also received with great kindness. Isani, in the meantime, had found shelter in Rama's household. Both the mother and the elder daughter lived in complete forgetfulness of Itu. The god could not bear to see them free from distress when they were so forgetful of him, but for Rama's sake he did not punish them. Rama tried her best to induce her mother and sister to worship Itu. Sunday after Sunday came and went, but when *puja* time came the Brahmani and Isani were found to have

eaten something, so that they were unable to worship the deity. Finally one Saturday night Rama slept in the same bed with them, tying her sari to theirs so that they could not get up without waking her. Thus all three were able to worship Itu together.

The prince's prosperity soon returned, and he felt remorse for having banished Isani and her son. He ordered the minister's son to restore his wife to him. Rama told her husband that she had sheltered Isani in their house and would take her back to the prince.

The prince made the palace ready to receive his wife and son. While alighting from her palanquin, however, Isani cut her foot on a blade of grass. When the prince heard about this he was furious with the sweepers who were supposed to have cleared the way and ordered their execution.

Great festivity accompanied Isani's return to the palace. But in the midst of the rejoicing Isani forgot to worship Itu. When she remembered, she sent her maids to fetch someone who had not eaten anything that day. The only person who was left unfed on that festive day was the bereaved mother of the sweepers. Isani finally performed the ritual with the old woman as her companion. After the worship was finished Itu revealed that the sweepers would revive if holy water from Itu's pot was sprinkled on them. When the sweepers revived, complete happiness returned to the kingdom. There was great prosperity all around. The Brahmin also recovered his wealth and well-being. His son also returned home with his beautiful bride.

At the end of a blissful and long life Isani and Rama went to heaven and the worship of Itu spread all over the land.