



This is an example of a chain tale, where the various trades the boy makes are connected to one another like the links of a chain. Chain tales are very popular in parts of India, where the characters are often animals rather than people.

A Drum




here once was a poor widow who had only one child, a son. He was a kindhearted boy, always willing to help out in any way he could. Theirs was not an easy life, but the boy rarely complained. As long as he and his mother had each other, the boy didn't mind that his clothing was ragged or that he had only a few toys.

The boy had been secretly wishing for something, however. He had always wanted a drum. One day when his mother was going to the village to sell some of their grain, she asked, "Is there anything you would like from the market?"

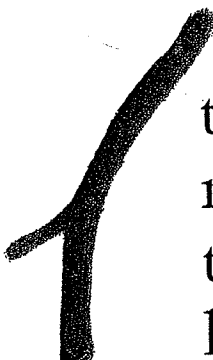
The boy hesitated, then said, "All I would really like, Mother, is a drum. I know you won't be able to get me one, but that is what I would really like."

The boy was right. His mother knew she would never be able to buy a drum. The grain they grew and harvested to sell usually only gave her enough rupees, or Indian coins, to buy the few things she and her son could not grow or make themselves.

The poor woman thought of her son all the way home from the market, saddened that she was not able to get him the one thing he



really wanted. She bent down to pick up a piece of wood she saw lying by the side of the road. "Perhaps my good son can find a use for this," she thought. "It's not much, but at least it's something."



The boy didn't know what to do with the wood when his mother gave it to him, but he thanked her and carried it with him when he went out to play.

Down the road, the boy could see an old woman kneeling beside a cookstove. The woman was trying to light the dried cow dung she used for fuel, but the fire wasn't catching and great billows of smoke hung all around her. Her eyes were watering, and the boy asked her why she was crying. "I can't get my fire to burn," she replied.

"Here," said the boy, handing her his piece of wood. "Perhaps this will help." In no time at all, the old woman was able to get the fire going. She thanked the boy, giving him a chapati (chah-PAH-tee), a round, flat bread, that she cooked in a pan on the stove.

The boy took the bread and walked on until he met another woman, this one the wife of the village potter. She held a small child in her arms, but the child was crying and could not be quieted. The boy spoke loudly so that he could be heard. "Why is your child crying?" he asked.

The potter's wife answered, "Because he is hungry. We have nothing for him to eat." The boy looked at the chapati he was holding in his hand, then offered it to the unhappy child. The child nibbled at the bread and stopped crying at once. By way of thanks, the grateful mother



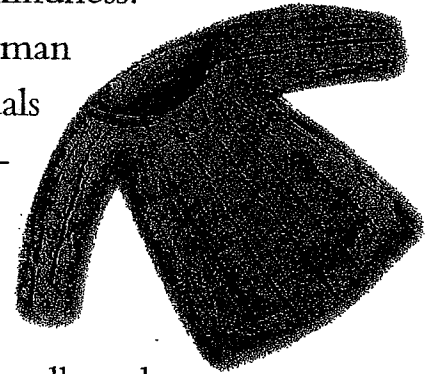
gave the boy a large pot.

The boy hadn't gone far when he came to the river, where he found a man and woman arguing. "What is the trouble?" asked the boy.

"I am a washerman," the man replied, "and my wife has just broken the only pot I had to boil clothes in. I'll never get the clothing clean now."

The boy realized that he had a solution to this man's problem, too, and gave the couple the pot he was carrying. "Thank you very much," the washerman said, and gave the boy a coat for his kindness.

The boy walked on further until he came to a man leading a horse along the road. The man wore sandals on his feet but was dressed in little more than his underclothes. His hair was wet, and he was shivering. The boy approached the man and asked, "What happened to your clothes, and why are you all wet?"

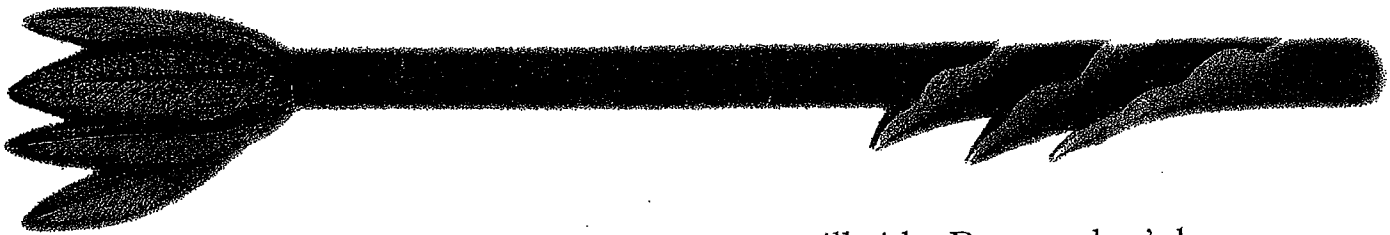


"I was on my way to visit relatives when a robber galloped up on this horse," the man replied. "He demanded I give him my clothes. Then he pushed me into the river."

The boy handed the man the coat he'd been given by the washerman. "Here," he said, "put this on." The man slipped on the garment. "Please take the horse," he told the boy. "The robber left it, and I have no need for it."

So the boy took the horse, and before long he came upon a wedding party—the bridegroom and his family, plus several musicians with their instruments. They were all seated beneath the shade of a small tree, looking not the least bit happy. "Why do you all look so glum?" the boy asked.

The father of the bridegroom spoke up. "We are waiting for the



man who is bringing the horse my son will ride. But we don't know what has happened to this man, and if he doesn't arrive soon we shall be late for the wedding." (It was the custom for the groom to be on horseback during the wedding procession.)

The boy listened to this story, then offered the bridegroom his horse. "You have saved the day!" the groom exclaimed. Turning to speak with his father and one of the musicians, the groom handed the boy a drum. "Please accept one of our drums, with all of our thanks."

The boy's face lit up with joy. "Oh, thank you," he cried. "I have always wanted a drum. Thank you very much! And much happiness to you on your wedding day!"

The boy ran all the way home, as fast as his feet would take him. His astonished mother stared at the drum in disbelief as her son told her the entire story of how he had come to own it, starting with the piece of wood she had picked up along the side of the road.

They are there; we are here.

