Goth: Adivasi Stories from Gujarat
Edited by Kanji Patel
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Translated into English by Sonal Baxi

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Bhasha Research and Publication Centre, Vadodara
Editorial

Adivasi oral traditions have a rich treasure of stories told on different occasions. A child is an important member in an Adivasi family. Adivasi elders and parents tell stories to children out of love and an idea to train them into ways of life. Their stories are a creation of imagination and wisdom, many a times with inputs from children. The core of story-telling is to address and nurture the child’s sensibility and imagination.

Ecological surroundings are the prime concern for the story teller. Animals, birds and humans come alive in Adivasi stories. Children live in nature’s intimacy and feel oneness in the co-existence. Like fables elsewhere, the stories are much enjoyed and treated as a part of life by the community. Story-telling is a powerful tool of informal education in their upbringing. The animals, birds, reptiles and insects enter the child’s material and psychological life. This helps the child to understand nature. The interlink between nature, humans, ancestors and gods can be immediately sensed in such stories. There is hardly any difference between utility and spirituality. Simple yet basic principles of life are revealed easily to children because Adivasi imagination captures and fictionalizes the truths experienced in life around.

Devices used for representation of characters and situations, ideas, rituals, festivals are many a time like those found in dreams. Animals speak, display certain qualities like humans and the divine entities. Oral folk stories do a great service to scriptless Adivasi children. And that too effortlessly. In the fast globalizing world such stories must be understood and disseminated as a rich, vital living heritage. The notion of inevitable relationship between nature and script must change. Children’s stories available in the oral domain must reach the wider world through translation.

Bhasha Research and Publication Centre and the Adivasi Academy have worked over two decades for the revitalisation of Adivasi culture and education. The Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh has set up ‘Vasantshala: A Training Centre in Mother-Tongue and Multi-lingual Education’ which helps to transition primary learners among the local communities from their respective mother-tongues to Gujarati, Hindi and English. During the past years, Vasantshala has enabled many children who have missed out on education, to go back to schools. By running a multi-lingual school for children pushed out of the mainstream schools, we have realised that oral, cultural heritage is an appropriate educational tool for
Adivasi children. Vasantshala has developed teaching materials from Adivasi oral literature. Bhasha Centre has a rich experience in documenting and publishing in Adivasi languages and translating them into the official language of the state. Such a vital, living literature should become accessible to the larger world through its translation into English. This publication is an endeavour precisely in this direction. *Goth: Adivasi Stories from Gujarat* is produced to create and enhance an understanding of oral stories for Adivasi children among children in other language regions. This book includes the stories from Rathwi, Kunkna, Chaudhari, Dhodia and Gamit languages, spoken by Adivasi communities living in the state of Gujarat. The book has included the Adivasi language text while presenting its translated version in English.

The original Adivasi language texts are contributed by Adivasi documentors. The translation into English is carried out sensitively and carefully by Sonal Baxi. The translation is based on the original stories alongwith their translations in Gujarati, provided by the documentors. The illustrations are by Adivasi artists. I am sure that the result of the combined efforts of the Adivasi documentors, artists, designers and the translator will be welcomed by children and the readers in general. The idea for this publication emerged during an ongoing dialogue with the Tribal Cultural Heritage in India Foundation, Netherlands. The Foundation enthusiastically supported the publication. I am grateful to the Foundation for making this endeavour possible.

Kanji Patel
Vadodara
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Map presenting language regions of Gujarat

- Rathwi
- Chaudhari
- Gamit
- Dhodia
- Kunkana
- Dehwali
Adivasi communities live in close communion with nature. Several of these communities have their own stories about the creation of the earth and life. Presented here are two such stories. The first story presents the creation of day and night and the second story narrates the competition between the sun and the wind. These stories are also found among the Adivasis living in the states of Jharkhand, Nagaland and Meghalaya and may have travelled to the Rathwa Adivasi community living in western India through the print medium.

The Rathwa Adivasis reside in the Chhota Udepur and Panchmahals districts of Gujarat and in the Alirajpur area of neighbouring Madhya Pradesh. The region which they inhabit is also known as Rath-vistar. The area has several caves bearing ancient paintings. The Koraj Hill near Tejgadh has a cave painting estimated to be about 12,000 years old, and quite similar to the ones at the Bhimbetka rock shelters in Madhya Pradesh. The Orsang is the main river flowing through Chhota Udepur.

The Rathwas speak the Rathwi language. They have beautiful artistic traditions as the Pithoro painting, sculpture, pottery, textiles, bead jewellery and canework. Their Timli dance is very well-known. Holi, Diwaso and Dev Diwali are their major festivals. The Gher Mela held at Kawant in Chhota Udepur district during Holi attracts visitors from Vadodara and other nearby places.
Creation of Night and Day

Long, long ago there was a time when the sun would shine all along in the sky and there would always be light on earth.

One day God came down to visit Earth. He met a farmer working in the field. Since God was in the guise of a man, the farmer did not recognize him.

God asked the farmer, “Your field seems to be ready for sowing, when did you prepare it?”

The farmer replied, “Now.”
God pointed to the neighbouring field and asked, “When did that field get ready?”

The farmer said, “Now.”

God pointed to the next piece of land and asked again, “And when did you prepare that field?”

The farmer replied, “I prepared them all right now.”

God was perplexed. He saw a patrara lying nearby. He enquired, “When did you have your food?”

The farmer said, “Now.”

God saw another patrara lying further away. He asked, “When did you have your meal in that?”
The farmer again said, “Now.”

God felt curious and asked further, “Friend, for how long do you work? And when do you take rest?”

The farmer said, “I work and rest in the present. There is only now.”

God realised that he needed to organise time for man. So that man could work for a certain period and rest at other hours.
Surprised, the farmer replied, “I do not know what night is. And who are you? How will you make night?”

God laughed and disappeared. Then God called the Sun and said, “Please do not shine for all hours. As you always stay in the sky, man on Earth has to work all the time. He has no time for rest. If this continues, man will die early. Therefore, from now on, you should hide yourself for the same number of hours for which you shine. When you do not show, man too will not venture out and take rest at the time.”

From that day, the Sun would set in the evening after which darkness would swathe the Earth.

A few days later God came to meet the farmer and said, “Do you now know what is night? You should work till there is light. Then you must rest and resume work only at daylight.”
The farmer realised that it was God before him. He greeted God with folded hands and said, “I will work and rest as you say. But I cannot see anything in the dark. How do I go home after dark?”

God said, “I will create the Moon for you. The Moon will rise in the sky after sunset each day and will give light. So you will be able to see even in the dark.”

And so God created the Moon to show light at night. Since then, the day begins with sunrise. And the Moon appears in the sky after sunset.

Story contributed by Nazroo Rathwa
Illustrated by Chetan and Eknath Gangawane
Once the Sun and the Wind had an argument as to who was stronger among them. So they decided to compete. They looked around for something to test their strength upon.
They saw a man walking on the road. An idea struck them both: the one who could make the man take off his clothes would definitely prove that he was stronger of the two.
The Wind began the contest. It blew in such great gusts against the man that it was a struggle for him to walk straight.

The Wind blew hard and long; and the harder it blew the colder the man felt. So he held on tightly to his clothes trying to keep himself warm. Finally, the Wind gave up.
Then it was the Sun’s turn. First, he gave a gentle shine that comforted the man.

However, the Sun continued to shine on the man who gradually began to feel hot and uncomfortable. So he unbuttoned his shirt, took it off and carried it over his arm.
Soon the heat of the Sun became unbearable. When the man saw a stream close by, he took off all his clothes and jumped in to cool off.

The Wind conceded defeat. The Sun was definitely stronger than the Wind.
The challenge between the Sun and the Wind shows that it is better to bend gradually than to break by force.

Story contributed by Nazroo Rathwa
Illustrated by Chetan and Eknath Gangawane
Chaudhari

Chaudhari Adivasis are concentrated in the Mandvi, Vyara, Valod, Bardoli and Mangrol areas of Gujarat. According to the community, the word ‘Chaudhari’ has its roots in ‘cho’, meaning ‘in all directions’. The community is well-known in the area and is thus known as chaudhari. The main profession of the Chaudharis is agriculture.

The Chaudhari language belongs to the Bhili language family. There are approximately six lakhs speakers of Chaudhari language in Gujarat. Chaudharis have a rich repertoire of songs and stories.

Their weekly market is known as haat. The haats are held in different villages during the week. The Chaudharis therefore name their weekdays based on the particular place where the haat is held. These names vary from place to place as every region has its haat in different villages. One collection of weekday names is given below.

Sunday is known by the word Kodujja, derived from Kadod, the place where the local haat is held on Sunday. Similarly, Saturday is termed Viyora. Viyaro is derived from Vyara where the Saturday haat is held. Similarly, we have the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hammar (Gangapur Harshad)</td>
<td>Monday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haatkiyo (Bedkuvadur)</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manbio (Mandvi)</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gadiyo (Devgadh)</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaknino (Vankal)</td>
<td>Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viyaro (Vyara)</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They celebrate festivals with fanfare. Around Diwali, the Chaudhari community gets together to hold the Kansari mela at Padamdungri near Unnai in celebration of their harvest. Many people visit Padamdungri to see the mela.
The Tale of a Mouse

Once there lived an old woman. One day the woman sat before the fire, preparing rotlas. A mouse passed by the hedge outside. As it rushed by, a thorn stuck in its legs. The mouse came slowly inside the house to the old woman and said, “Oh Grandmother, a thorn has stuck in my leg. It is hurting me. Please help me pull it out.”

The old woman pulled out the thorn and threw it into the fire. The mouse then said to the old woman, “Grandmother, give me back my thorn.” The old woman was taken aback. The thorn was burnt to ashes. How could she give it back? But the mouse insisted, “I want my thorn back. Or I will take away your rotlo.” Since the old woman could not return the thorn, the mouse took away her rotlo.
On the way the mouse met an old man. The old man was ploughing his field. The mouse called out, “Grandfather, grandfather, let me help you. Please hold this rotlo while I plough your land.”

After some time the mouse returned and said to the old man, “Here is your plough, now please give me back my rotlo.” The old man replied, “Oh, I was hungry and so I ate your rotlo.”

The mouse wanted his rotlo back: “Return my rotlo or I will take away your plough”. And so the mouse went away with the old man’s plough.
On the way he met a potter. The potter was digging the soil with a kuhunu. The mouse said to the potter, "Here, please take this kuhunu to dig the earth." As the potter was digging, the kuhunu broke. The mouse demanded his plough back, "Give me back my plough or I will take your handli away."

But the plough had broken. So the mouse took the handli and went his way.
Soon he came upon a Bharwad. The Bharwad was milking a buffalo, collecting the milk in a mould made of *khakhra* leaves.

The mouse said to the potter, “Please use this handli to collect the milk.” As the potter took the handli, it fell and broke. The mouse said to the potter, “Give me back my handli or I will take away your buffalo.” But the handli had broken. The Bharwad could not give it back to the mouse.

So the mouse took hold of the Bharwad’s buffalo and left.
On the way, he met a wedding procession. The bridegroom’s family and friends were dancing to the beat of the dovro. The mouse said to them, “Please hold this buffalo. I will play the music, so you may all dance”. Everyone danced to the tune of the mouse.

After the dance got over, the mouse asked for his buffalo. But the wedding guests had cooked and eaten the buffalo. How could they return it? The mouse threatened them, “Give me back my buffalo or I will take away your bride.” But there was no buffalo to give.
And thus the mouse went away with the bride, singing:

“I gave a thorn and got a rotlo.
I gave the rotlo and received a handli.
The handli broke and I got a buffalo
The buffalo got eaten and so I found my bride!”

The mouse had reason to be happy as he had got much more than he had lost.

Story contributed by Mansing Chaudhari
Illustration by Nazroo Rathwa
In Gujarat, Gamits are largely concentrated in the villages on the eastern part of Dang district. In Maharashtra, where they are known as Gavits or Gavtas, the Gamits live in the Nandurbar and Dhulia districts.

Like other Adivasi communities, the Gamits too have their own stories of origin. The community believes that the earth was created from water. When the world first came into existence, there was no land. With the passing of time, water began to solidify and there emerged land, rocks and mountains. This is why even today water springs from the hills. Later, the sky was born from the movement of the oceans and then came the sun, the moon and the stars. From water also evolved life and the first to emerge was God who created human beings.

The language spoken by the community is known as Gamit which belongs to the Bhili language family. The Gamit language is influenced by its neighbouring languages and thus its idiom varies in different geographical regions. In Gujarat, Gamit is influenced by Dehwali, Chaudhari, Mawchi and Dangi languages while in Maharashtra, it is influenced by Marathi. The Gamits live close to nature and commence each festival celebration by invoking the sun, sky, earth, moon and the stars. Their festivals follow nature’s cycle. They have a rich knowledge of the local ecology. They believe that trees indicate the weather. When saag tree bears more flowers, Gamits understand that there will be good rainfall and harvest. When the akval, humb, kakad and baheda trees bear less fruits, it is an indication of poor rainfall.

Like many other Adivasi communities, Gamits endeavour to be self-sufficient by using natural resources to make household items. Their pottery is much known. Gamit women make kothis, chulho and ghantino thal. Bamboo being in abundance where they live, they use it to make baskets, fishing nets and mats.
The Blind Woman

There lived an old woman in a village. She practised witchcraft in secret. Since she was very old, her vision had dimmed. She did not know night from day.

One evening the village children were playing near her house. The old woman asked them, "Oh, children, has it turned dark?"

The children were busy playing. One of them replied absent-mindedly, "Oh, yes, grandmother, it has long turned dark but we continue to play."
As soon as the old woman heard this, she pulled out a stick. She uttered some words and lo, it turned into a horse. Then she brought out a broom and with the snap of a finger, turned it into the horse’s tail. Believing that it was indeed night, she climbed on to the horse. The horse rose into the sky!

However, the sun was yet to set. It was still day light. The children saw the old woman flying in the sky and began to shout. Soon, the entire village gathered to see her. Thus the old woman’s secret became known. Everyone in the village learnt that she was a witch!

Story contributed by Urmila Gamit
Illustration by Chetan and Eknath Gangavane
The Old Man And The Monkeys

There once lived an old man. Once he sowed chibdas on his farm. The old man would tend to his farm daily. Soon, the chibdas began to grow.

One day a brood of monkeys from the forest landed in the old man’s farm. They tasted the chibdas and loved their taste. From then on they began to visit the old man’s farm daily to feast on the chibdas.
The old man felt worried that the monkeys would destroy his crop. He thought of a plan. He sharpened a few knives and placed them among the chibdas.

The next day the monkeys arrived again. Like on all days, they had their fill of the chibdas. Satiated, they began to rub it on their backs. As they hopped around, a monkey’s tail got cut by the knife. The monkey shrieked in pain.
The old man was ready. He rushed to the farm. He ran after the monkeys with a stick in hand. The old man had left the door of his house open. The monkeys rushed into the old man’s house to save their lives. The old man went inside and began to beat up the monkeys.

Only the tailless monkey was left behind in the farm.

What could happen then? The tailless monkey jumped up and down, howling in pain in the farm outside. There was a loud hup-a-hup as the monkeys received a thrashing inside! Never again would the monkeys dare to visit the old man’s farm!

Story contributed by Urmila Gamit
Illustration by Lalji Rathwa
Dhodia

Dhodia Adivasis are spread across Gujarat and Maharashtra. In Gujarat they live in Valsad, Navsari and Surat districts. The rivers Tapi, Purna, Kaveri, Ambika, Taan, Baan and Kolak flow in the region where they reside. The Dhodias live amidst the hills, especially in the forest areas of Vansda, Mahuva and Dharampur.

They have several beliefs regarding their origin. According to one belief, more than a thousand years ago, two brothers, Dhansinh and Rupsinh, migrated from Saurashtra and Mewad to Dhulia. They gradually married women from the Naik community and came to live in Surat district. Since they belonged to Dhulia, they came to be known as Dhodia. Their language is known by their community name, Dhodia.

Another story goes that Dhansinh and Rupsinh were two Rajput Sardars of Dhandhuka who were once compelled to move outwards in search of food and fodder during the time of a famine. Crossing the river Narmada, they reached the Tapi region and settled there. Their progeny came to be known as ‘Dhodhias’, derived from ‘Dh’ of Dhansinh.

The Dhodias often name their children on the kind of harvest they have reaped or the day on which they are born. For instance, if they have had a good produce of the moong/mag pulse, they name the child Magan or Magji. If chana or gram has grown well, the girl is called Chani. If the child is born on a Sunday, s/he is called Raviyo or Ravli; if on Monday then Somo, Somlo, Somi or Somli.

Dhodias have songs for all occasions: birth, death, marriage, harvest and festivals. Their main musical instrument is the Toor. They have a rich repertoire of stories of human, animals and birds, tales of wit and cleverness, historical stories, mythical and magical tales, stories of origin, legends and religious folklore.
Vadu on the Old Woman’s Nose

It was an extremely cold winter night. For the cold had decided, “It is my job to spread cold! Let me do it well.” It was so cold that one’s bones would num. The people in the village did not have enough warm clothes. So many villagers took shelter in the hills. They snuggled and slept inside the warm caves. All the dogs and cats in the village followed them. Those who stayed back in the village lit firewood to keep themselves warm.

There lived an old man and woman in the village. That night they too lit a fire in front of their home. They sat before the fire, basking in its warmth and chatting.
The old man said, “I would love to be rich. Once I have a lot of money, people will flock to me and treat me like a seth. There is no fun being anybody else.”

The old woman agreed and added, “Me too. I too would love to be a sethani. Oh, only if somebody grants me a wish! I would ask for everything... I would ask for so much wealth that it would last our children, grandchildren, and even their grandchildren. There would be no more need for anyone.”

The old man remarked, “But we have no children! So who would use it?” Irritated, the old man added, “Money can make anything possible.”
Meanwhile, a fairy passed by. She was shivering in the biting cold. Seeing the fire burning, she stopped by. The old couple invited her to warm herself. Soon enough, the fairy felt warm and cozy. Pleased with the couple, the fairy said, “Grandfather, I have three boons. You may ask for whatever you wish. I will grant you your wishes.”

The old couple was extremely happy to hear this. They began to wonder what they should ask for. They thought and thought but could not think of anything.

Suddenly, the old woman said, “Oh, it’s been a year since we ate a vadu. So let me ask for one!”

She said to the fairy, “Oh fairy, please give me a vadu. I would like to eat a hot one in this chilly cold.”

And lo! A vadu appeared before the old woman.
The old man thought: “Oh how could she have been so stupid to ask for a vadu?! And so selfish, she asked only for one.”

He showered his anger on his wife and then said to the fairy: “Oh fairy! Please grant the second wish to me. Let this vadu go and stick on this woman’s nose.”

And lo! The vadu flew and settled on the old woman’s nose.

The old woman tried to remove the vadu from her nose but it would not budge. It had stuck on her nose for good! She pulled and pulled but the vadu would not move.

Now the old man too felt worried. He got up and pulled at the vadu. But it would not get unstuck from the woman’s nose.
The old woman suddenly cried out, "Oh fairy, may this vadu fall from my nose!"

And lo! The vadu immediately disappeared from her nose. And so did the fairy!

The old couple realised that they had wasted their three wishes. Everything had happened the wrong way. They began to blame each other for the lost opportunity.

Then they said, "We are stupid, and so extremely stupid. We could have asked for so many things and what did we ask for...a vadu?"

They both burst out laughing at their own foolishness.

Story contributed by Arvind Patel
Illustration by Lalji Rathwa
The Kunkna Adivasis live in the Dang region of South Gujarat. Dang is a richly forested area and has a rich bird and animal life as well as medicinal plants. It is well-known for the hill station, Saputara. The Kunknas believe that their ancestors migrated to Dangs many centuries ago from the Sugana-Nashik-Khandesh belt. Before the colonial rule, Dang was an independent kingdom ruled by kings and Naiks. In 1842, the British signed a lease with them to gain access to the forest timber. The British then introduced in 1894, the Dang Darbar, to honour the local kings and give them their annual salyana or income. However, by then the kings had lost their autonomy over the regions and its resources.

The Kunknas have a rich oral tradition. Among their oral lore, the Kunkna Ramayan or Ramkatha is unique in its telling. The Kunkna version of the epic is strikingly different from the popular Ramayan stories. The characters who populate the Kunkna Ramayan are ordinary folks; there is nothing heroic about them. The narrative of the Kunkna Ramkatha is recited to the accompaniment of the music of the thali which is stuck with beeswax reed at the centre. The reciter sings and recites the katha to a drone from the reed that he plays with his fingers. All major festivals of the Kunknas as Holi, Naag Panchami and Dungardev Mavli (the Mountain Goddess), call for a katha recital. Kansari and Mavli are the two main Goddesses worshipped by the Kunknas. The harvest time is especially important when they perform a ritual and sing the narrative of Kansari—the Goddess of Grain.

Among their dance performances, the ‘Thakrya’ dance is very popular. The dance is performed after the rains and ends at Diwali. The Kunknas have several musical instruments as the dhak, dera, thali and ghanghali.
In a village lived a widow. She had a son named Juvan. The widow was extremely lazy. One day she left her son and went to live with another man.

A farmer took Juvan home. Juvan began to help the farmer. He would take the farmer's cattle out to graze and work in his fields. When Juvan grew up, the farmer gave him a plot of land. Juvan built a hut on the plot and began to live there by himself.
Once, Juvan sowed naagli in his field. He tended the naagli with great love and care as if each sapling was a living being.

One day Juvan saw a beautiful young girl in his field. The girl had no place to go. She was feeling hungry and thirsty and requested Juvan to give her shelter. Juvan took her to his hut. However, there was flour enough to make only one rotla. The girl prepared a meal which they both shared. Juvan said to the girl, “Please stay here for as long as you like. I live here by myself. You can help me in the field.”
Juwan never asked the girl who she was and where she had come from. He believed that the girl would share her past with him at an appropriate time. Juwan kept his distance from her and the girl in turn, treated him with great respect.

Together, Juwan and the girl worked very hard in their field. That year they had a very rich harvest of naagli. Juwan became very prosperous. The news of his prosperity soon reached his mother. She learnt that a young girl was living with her son. Juwan's mother had been forsaken by the man she had gone to live with. She was all by herself and alone. So she decided to return to her son's home. She felt no shame or hesitation in doing so.
When Juvan's mother reached his hut, Juvan had gone to the field. The young girl was alone at home, cooking. Juvan's mother taunted her, “You have come to live here as you found my son's home full of grains. Where have you come from? How can you live with my son when you have no relation with him?”

The girl replied, “There was no grain in the house when I arrived. I have worked hard to make your son prosperous. It is you who have been drawn here by a home full of grains. You forsook your son while he was asleep! What makes you remember him now?”

Juvan's mother felt offended. She picked a piece of burning firewood from the hearth and hurled it at the girl. The wood charred the girl’s hair and face. Weeping with pain, the girl rushed out. As she left she said to Juvan’s mother, “If your son asks for me, please tell him that I have gone to the field.”
When Juvan returned home, the young girl was nowhere to be seen. Instead, he found his mother at home. He asked his mother, "Where is she?" The old woman said that the girl had gone to the field. Juvan rushed out.

From afar, he saw that the naagli field was burning. When he reached the farm he saw the girl in the centre of the field, sitting with her head between her legs. Juvan saw that her hair was burnt.
Juvan went to the girl. He gently held her hand and requested, “Please come back home.” The earth shook. The girl sank in the earth up till her waist. Frightened, Juvan pulled her hand. The earth shook once again and the girl sank even deeper. Only her head remained visible.

The girl raised her burnt face and head and said: “Juvan, I am Kansari, the Goddess of food grain. I appreciated your hard work and came to make you prosperous. But your mother ill-treated me. Look at my condition! You are a good man. You treated me as a friend. Work hard and I will continue to make you prosperous. I will live in every seed and sapling of your crop. But I must go now.”
Juvan tried to pull her up again. And Goddess Kansari sank into the Earth. Juvan had to return home alone.

Story contributed by Dahyabhai Vadhu
Illustration by Lalji Rathwa
The Leapord and the Barber

There once lived a poor barber by the name Bhaglo. Since he was a barber by profession, he was known as Bhaglo Hajam. Bhaglo lived in a small village and could earn very little. So Bhaglo began to visit nearby villages on the days of the weekly haat. He would carry with him a small piece of cloth, a mirror, scissors and a razor in his bag.

Bhaglo had to walk through dense forests to reach the other villages. On occasions Bhaglo would meet a fellow traveller; on other occasions he would walk alone. In the forests lived leopards, foxes and hyenas. Bhaglo would feel scared while passing through the forests, particularly of the leopard.
One day, Bhaglo set out alone on his journey. Chanting God's name, he trudged fearfully along the lonely path. The chirping of the birds as kabar, sparrow, crow and chatu pokar would break now and then the deadly silence of the forest.

Suddenly, a ferocious leapord sprang from among the bushes. Bhaglo froze, his voice stuck in his throat. Frightened, he began to perspire. Certain that the leapord would eat him alive, Bhaglo began to chant God's name. He suddenly had the desire to have a last look at himself and remembered the mirror in his bag. As Bhaglo took out the mirror, a brilliant idea struck him.
He showed the mirror to the leapord and said, “This is a machine which captures leapords. Look inside, I have caught a leapord. Now, it is your turn!”

The leapord saw his reflection in the mirror. He thought that there was another leapord inside the machine. Frightened, the leapord fled to save its life! Feeling scared that the leapord would return, Bhaglo scrambled up a tree.
The leapord went and shared all that had happened with the chief of leopards: “A man has come with a dangerous device. He has captured and imprisoned a leapord inside the machine. I have seen him with my own eyes. A great calamity is upon us!”

The chief of leopards began to tremble. The safety of his clan was his responsibility. He wondered what to do.

The chief leapord roared loudly. All the leapords in the forest were alerted of a looming danger. They rushed to meet their chief. The chief leapord shared his anxiety, “There is a human being who has come to our forest to capture leapords. If we do not take action then he will soon take in all of us.”

All the leapords went to the spot where the leapord had met Bhaglo Hajam. The chief leapord called a meeting below a tree. This was the same tree which Bhaglo Hajam had climbed.
The leapords decided to kill Bhaglo. Bhaglo knew his end was near. Once again, he took out the mirror to have a last look at himself. Trembling with fear, Bhaglo lost balance and fell upon the chief of leapords! At the very moment, he was struck by an idea.

Bhaglo stood up and declared, “Your chief will be the first whom I will capture in this machine”. He held the mirror before the chief leapord. The chief leapord saw his image in the mirror. Struck by fear, he was the first to flee. What could the other leapords do without their king? They dashed behind him.

Bhaglo Hajam too saw his chance and fled in the direction of the next village.

Story Contributed by Dahyabhai Vadhu
Illustration by Mahendra Gamit
Kartuki was the first king on earth. Rajmata was his queen. They had a daughter named Kansari.

When Kansari was born, the earth had rains for the first time. New saplings sprouted, making the land green.

Kansari was fond of dust and pebbles. She loved to be in the fields. Rajamata made for her a wooden pestle of seesam and a winnowing fan to play with. Kansari would take these to the fields. There she would ground the small stones and pebbles with the pestle and turn them into dust. Then Kansari would ask the pebbles to turn into grains and the dust to become dough. Kansari would use these to prepare a meal of rotlo and rice. The aroma of her cooking would fill the air.
One day Kansari stayed back at home to play. She turned the pebbles into grains of rice and put these on the fire to cook. The queen mother mother was close by. She was amazed to see her daughter’s antics. She bowed to her, “Kansari, how can I be your mother? I hold you to be my mother.” From then on, the queen mother began to take special care of her miraculous daughter. But just as the clouds cannot hide the sun, Kansari’s feats could not be kept a secret. Word about her miracles spread far and wide.

Very soon the Gods in Dwarka heard about Kansari. The Gods said: “Miraculous persons have a place only in the abode of Gods.” So they decided to bring Kansari to Dwarka.
The Gods, Mahadev and Narandev kidnapped Kansari. They brought her to Dwarka and imprisoned her. But they had forgotten that Kansari could perform miracles. She said to the locked door, “Open”. The door opened and Kansari made good her escape from Dwarka. She returned home.

In a few years Kansari grew up. She loved to tend the fields. Her father, King Kartuki did not like this. He said to Kansari, “If you wish to live in this royal palace, forsake the fields. And if you want to be in the fields, leave the palace.”

Kansari left the palace. She fetched bamboo from the forest and built a small hut for herself. Soon a cat, a parrot and a spider came to live with her. When Kansari would walk to her farm, the cat would go along with her, playing hide and seek on the way. The spider would stay in the hut and keep watch. The parrot would fly to the royal court of the Gods at Dwarka. There, he would listen to the discussions of the Gods. At night, the four friends would return home and share the day’s happenings.
Kansari had left her palace as she loved to do farming. The Gods felt that as a princess, she should do as her father wished. They decided to bring Kansari’s downfall.

That year, the Gods decided to shower torrential rains on earth. They thought that when Kansari’s crop would be destroyed, she would realise that she had failed and return to her parents. However, the parrot returned home and told all this to Kansari. Kansari said, “We need not worry.” That year, Kansari selected a sloping surface of land for cultivation. The people around her said, “She is a royal child! How will she carry out farming?” But Kansari was not deterred.
It indeed rained very heavily that year. Everyone’s harvest got washed away. Kansari alone had a good crop.

The next year, the Gods decided to send less rain on earth. Once again, Kansari learnt about their plan. That year, Kansari chose a patch of very moist land for her crop. Thus, despite scanty rains, she had a rich harvest.

The Gods felt envious of Kansari. They decided to let loose an army of rats and locusts in her field. Again, the parrot informed Kansari of the plan the Gods had made. Kansari and her friends began to make preparations.
The cat said, “My flock will kill the rats.”

The spider said, “I will immediately take my community to the field. We will weave our webs over the crop. Then the locusts will not be able to touch the harvest.”

Kansari’s army got ready. The rats came in huge numbers. The cats were waiting to launch their attack. The rats began to run helter-skelter. They soon got tired and fled. The cats took care of those who could not make good their escape.

Next, a cloud of locusts descended on Kansari’s field. But they too could do no harm. The naagli was protected by the nets knitted by the spiders. The plan of the Gods had failed as once again, Kansari had saved her harvest.
The next two years saw a severe drought. There was neither food to eat nor water to drink. Kansari helped the people during this difficult time. She opened her storehouse of grains to everyone. Her grains gave life to the Kunknas who began to believe that Kansari resided in every grain. They began to worship her as the Goddess of grain.

Even today we can see in every Kunkna house, an idol of Kansari with naagli in her hands.

Story contributed by Dahyabhai Vadhu
Illustration by Lalji Rathwa
Dehwali

The Dehwali community is spread across Vadodara, Bharuch and Surat districts of Gujarat. At the foot of the Satpuda ranges, the plain stretching on both sides of the river Tapi is known as ‘Dehpaati’ or ‘Dehpradesh’. Dehpaati means flat as the body or a plain region. The sub-communities of the Dehwali people are known by different names as Kathaliya Vasava, Dehwaliya Vasava, Ambuda Vasava, Mathavadi Vasava and Mevasi Vasava. They all speak the Dehwali language. Dehwali is a distinct language belonging to the Bhili group of languages. It is spoken in the border areas of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

The word, ‘Dehwali’, is coined from natural elements as the Sun and the Earth. In Bhili, the Sun is known as ‘Dih’. As the sun rises in the morning and shines over the Tapi region till the afternoon, the Adivasis on the eastern side of Tapi river were known as ‘Dih Veliya’. Gradually, the word was transformed to Dehwaliya.

The Dehwali community has a rich repertoire of songs, stories, legends, puzzles, sayings and drama. There are a lot of emerging writers from within the community.
River Narmada

There once lived a carpenter by the name Kaliya. Kaliya went to the forests in the Amarkantak hills to fetch wood. One day as he was felling wood, Kaliya felt thirsty. As he went looking for water, Kaliya wandered deep into the forest. But he could not find water anywhere. Tired, Kaliya lay down beneath a tree and soon fell asleep. In his sleep Kaliya had a dream where he saw a bamboo tree in the forest. Seven saplings had sprouted from its trunk and there was water at their base.
Kaliya woke up and set out in search of the bamboo tree. He soon came upon the bamboo grove. He felt the earth, the soil was moist. There seemed to be water beneath the tree. Kaliya struck off a sprout and immediately, water gushed out. Kaliya had his fill of water. Feeling contented, he pushed a piece of wood in the gap to stop the flow of water. From then on Kaliya would visit the tree everyday to have water.
Kaliya had seven young daughters. One day, they carried food and some water in a tumbhda for their father in the forest. Kaliya had his meal. After some time the sisters felt thirsty. The water in the tumbhda had got over.

They asked Kaliya, “Father, where can we find water in the forest? We will go and fill the tumbhda.”

Kaliya replied, “Daughters, you are all very young. Please do not wander alone in this forest.”
But the sisters insisted. Finally, Kaliya allowed them to go. Before they left, he asked them to be careful: “Look daughters, the tree is the abode of the Goddess. Do not step close to the tree. If you go too near, the water will become impure. So keep your distance while you drink water. And do not forget to plug the wood back to block the flow of water.”
The sisters went to the tree and pulled the piece of wood. A torrent of water poured out. As they watched in amazement a small rivulet formed in no time. It was summer and the day was very hot. The sisters took off their clothes and dipped into the water to bathe. The water had begun to flow from all the seven sprouts and soon there formed two rivulets, the first was a river of oil, the other turned into milk. The streams came together to form two rivers, Tapi and Narmada.

The sisters began to drown in the current. Tapi and Narmada began to flow in the direction of the Arabian sea. Narmada washed her hair in the river of oil. Esconed atop a crocodile, Narmada surged ahead amidst the mountains and hills and reached the kingdom of Nimbad, passing village after village.
Tapi washed her hair in the river of milk. She perched herself on a fish and uprooting hills, trees and stones which came in her way, she rushed ahead to meet the Arabian sea.

Meanwhile, river Narmada made a halt at the village of Jalahedo. There, she received a messenger from her sister, River Tapi. At that moment, a large fish with a large chandlo on her forehead arrived there. The fish said to Narmada, “The marriage ceremony is over. Tapi is now the chief queen of the Arabian sea. If you feel that I am lying, see this chandlo on my head, the mark of marriage.”
Narmada was angry. She rushed ahead, destroying hills and trees which came her way. She decided: “I will show the strength of my power to all my sisters. I will uproot one and all.” Thus thinking, Narmada went deep inside the earth and stayed there. And so it is believed that while Tapi bubbles into the sea, Narmada meets the sea water slowly.

Story contributed by Vanita Valvi
Illustration by Chetan and Eknath Gangavane
Why is the sky so high?

In the olden days the sky was very close to the earth. With the sky hovering above their heads, people on earth found it difficult to walk upright. They had to bend themselves every time they moved.
One old woman was taller than the others. Every morning when she swept her courtyard, she had to bend down. She got tired of doing so.

One day, in a fit of anger, the woman swept her broom across the sky. The sky felt frightened by her attack. It immediately rose higher and higher. Finally, it was out of reach of the angry woman.
Since then the sky has remained there. It does not dare to lower itself. And so the people on earth no longer have to bend themselves!

Story contributed by Jeetendra Vasava
Illustration by Chetan and Eknath Gangavane
When the birds were first created, they were new to the earth and its life. They did not know what to eat, what not to eat, where to live and how to live. They felt free to do as they wished. As they were settling to life on earth, Berotaryo, the Rain God sent a message that monsoon would soon arrive on earth. It was the first time when the earth would receive rain. All insects, animals and birds began to wonder how they would protect themselves from the rain water. They began to build their homes in the trees and amidst the rocks.
The birds too began preparation for the onset of the monsoon. However, nobody knew from which direction the rains would come. Everyone was in a quandary. So the chief of birds called a meeting of all birds in the forest. The birds gathered for the meeting. Rajaghvad, pechro punjaro and liyo hovaryo took their place in the front. The main issue was: When would the black clouds descend? And in which direction would the rains fall? The birds decided to find this from the Rain God. Everybody agreed to send sugdi with a message.

However, darjido did not trust sugdi. He announced to the gathering, “I do not have faith in sugdi. Therefore, I feel that one or two other birds should accompany him.”
Nobody paid heed to darjido. So sugdi went alone to meet the Rain God and said, “You will be visiting earth for the first time. Please tell us when you will come. Which direction will you come from? This will help us to make homes to provide us shelter from the rain water.”

Berotaryo replied, “I will come when the royal drum is sounded. Stones will hurl on the clouds and Queen Kajal will charge them. Lightening will strike the sky and I will fall through the clouds. Go and give my message to all the birds.”

Unknown to sugdi, the darjido had followed him. Darjido secretly heard all that the Rain God said.
Sugdi returned to earth with the darjido following him quietly. All the birds gathered eagerly to listen to the message sugdi had brought. But sugdi decided to cheat his fellow birds. He lied to them: “Since the Rain God is coming to earth for the first time, he will come by way of the land. So everyone should make their nests accordingly.”

Darjido was present at the gathering. He felt very angry on hearing sugdi lie. He immediately got up and shared the original message of the Sun God. But everyone drowned his voice: “It was sugdi who had gone to meet the Rain God, so why should you interfere?”
Thus nobody paid heed to darjido. The meeting got over and the birds dispersed. They set about to make their nests. Believing that the rains would come bottom-up from the earth, they sewed their nests from the base and kept the top of their nests open. Sugdi alone covered his nest from top and kept an opening at the bottom of the nest so that the water could flow out.

The darjido too made a nest which would save him from the rains. When the Rain God descended, the rains fell from the clouds. But since all the nests were closed at the bottom, the rain water collected in the nests. The birds were drenched. Only sugdi and darjido remained safe and dry. The birds realised that sugdi had cheated them. They felt very angry. But they could not do anything.
And therefore we see that the nests of darjido and sugdi are different from those of the other birds. It is believed that ever since, the nests of the birds have remained as they were built at the beginning.

Story contributed by Jeetendra Vasava
Illustration by Desing Rathwa
Contributors

Kanji Patel is an eminent Gujarati writer. He is Editor of the Gujarat Peoples’ Linguistic Survey of India volume. His creative writings include Kotarni Dhar, Dahelu, Dero and Dhartina Vachan. For more than a decade, he has been organizing the Kaleshwari Mela at Kaleshwari in Panchmahals, Gujarat, bringing together Denotified and Adivasi Communities for spectacular performances on the occasion of Mahashivratri.

Sonal Baxi works in the voluntary sector and holds experience in the areas of education, publishing and translation. She has carried out research on the social and literary movement of the Denotified and Nomadic Communities.

Arvind Patel is a high school teacher and writer with several publications in Dhodia and Gujarati languages.

Dahyabhai Vadhu worked with the State Bank of India. He has made a significant contribution by documenting the oral traditions of the Kunkna community to which he belongs. His most important work is the Ramayana of the Kunknas and Tales of Kansari, published as Kunkna Kathao (2000) and The Ramayan and other Oral Narratives of the Kunknas (2012).

Jeetendra Vasava is a poet and writes in Dehwali and Gujarati. He is presently pursuing his doctorate in Tribal Literature.

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Nazroo Rathwa is a Pithora painter belonging to the Rathwa Adivasi community. He has been teaching out-of-school children, helping them to re-enroll in local schools and has recently completed a course on naturopathy.

Urmila Gamit is a Faculty at the M. B. Patel College of Education, Sardar Patel University at Vallabhb Vidyanagar, Gujarat.

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Chetan Parshuram Gangavane and Eknath Parshuram Gangavane belong to the Pinguli community of Maharashtra. They have set up the Adivasi Kala Aangan (Museum and Art Gallery) at Kudal taluka in Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra to promote their community’s art forms. They practise Chitrakathi, a tradition of narrating historical and mythical stories through puppetry and paintings. Their illustrations in this publication reflect the Chitrakathi style of painting.

Lalji Rathwa has completed his Diploma in Visual Arts (Painting) from the Faculty of Fine Arts of The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. Belonging to the Rathwa Adivasi community, Lalji Rathwa’s illustrations combine the traditional rural ethos with modern impressions. He strongly believes that every child is a painter and we need to give wings to their imagination and talent before adulthood erases the artist within.

Desing Rathwa is a Pithoro painter from the Chhotaudepur district of Gujarat. He has earlier made illustrations for Bol, a children’s magazine carrying stories, songs, riddles and puzzles from the tribal belt of Gujarat. Desing Rathwa has drawn the Pithoro at many public places across India.

Mahendra Gamit belongs to the Gamit community of south Gujarat. He has adopted the Warli style of painting and illustrated several children’s publications.

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Glossary

*bharwad*: cowherd
*chandlo*: an auspicious mark made on the forehead
*chibda*: a kind of gourd
*darjido*: tailorbird
*dovro*: a wind instrument made of wood
*hajam*: barber
*handli*: a small earthen vessel used for cooking
*goth*: story
*juvan*: a young man
*khakhra*: a kind of tree
*kuhunu*: spade
*naagli*: a kind of millet
*patrara*: a plate made of leaves
*rotlo*: thick chappatis prepared of corn or millet
*seesam*: a kind of wood
*seth*: a prosperous business man
*sethani*: wife of a business man
*sugdi*: weaverbird
*tumbhda*: water container
*vadu*: an Indian dish made from ground pulses, round in shape and deep-fried
*vistar*: region