

Story of KARAM





A Resource Centre for Women and Children

Thanks to the tribal women of Chatra, Jharkhand
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Once upon a time, there lived a king with seven sons and a beloved daughter. Their lives seemed joyful and full of promise until calamity struck - the kingdom was besieged by a terrible famine. Food, water, and other essential resources became scarce, making it increasingly difficult for the people to survive.



After much contemplation, the king made a difficult decision. He summoned his sons and ordered them to journey overseas in search of work to earn money for their struggling kingdom. One by one, they all set off to seek their fortunes, except for the youngest son, Dharma.

Dharma chose to remain at home, driven by a deep love for his father and his homeland. He cherished nature and felt a profound spiritual connection to it, yearning to dedicate his life to honouring the gods and goddesses of nature.



As the years passed, the king's sons thrived in their ventures, each amassing a fortune.

But Karma, the elder son, began to yearn for the warmth of home and the company of his family.

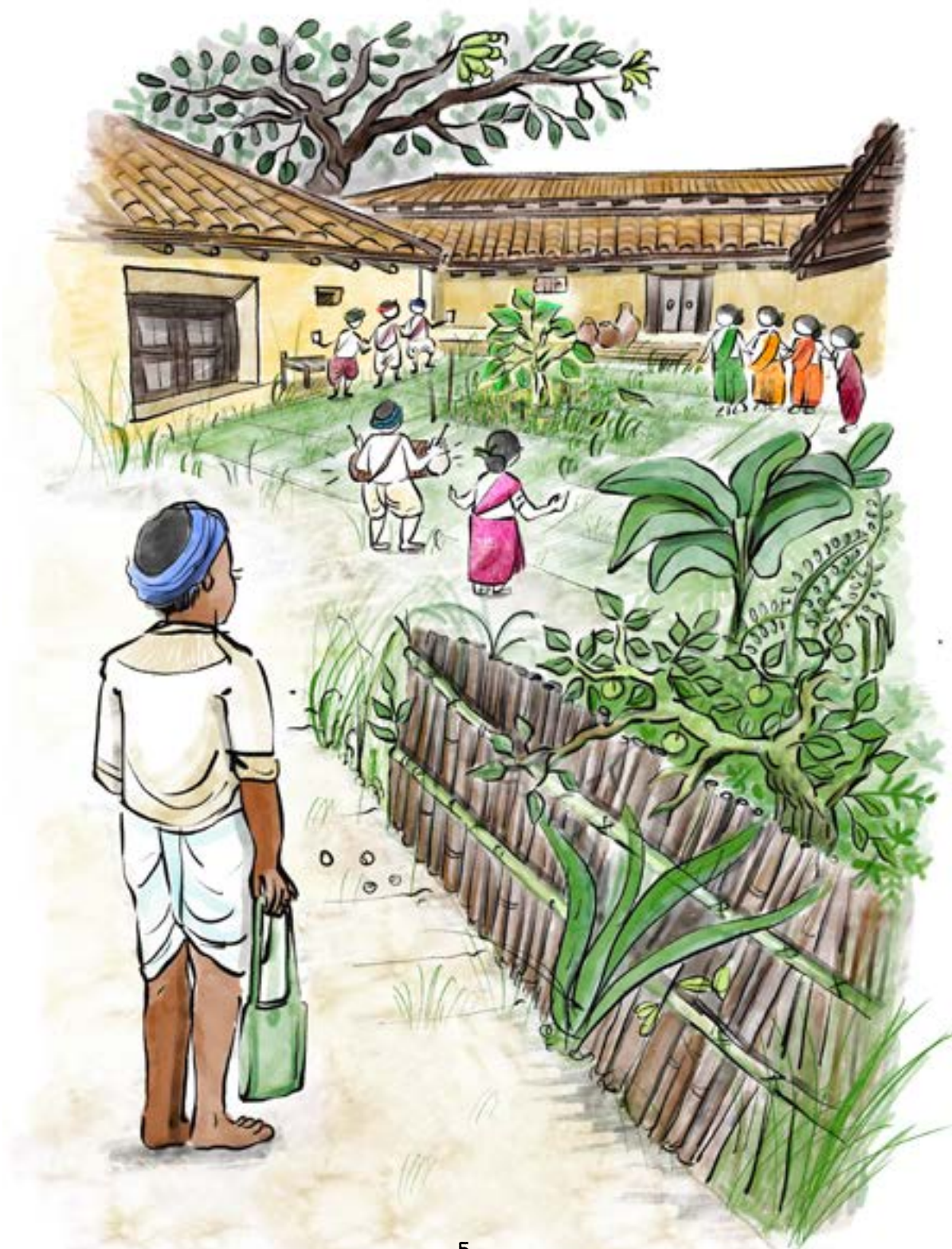
Eager to reunite with them, he followed the age-old village custom: anyone returning from distant lands must inform their parents or the villagers about their visit beforehand.



After a long and exhausting journey, Karma arrived at the entrance of his village. He took a moment to rest, as he waited for his family to come and take him home.

He asked the nearby villagers to spread the word of his return to his parents. However, as days went by, hunger and thirst gnawed at him, and still, no one came to bring him home.

Frustrated, he decided he could wait no longer, and made his way to his family's house.



As he reached his home, an unexpected sight greeted him. Everyone was gathered joyously in the courtyard, singing and dancing around a tree - the centre of their celebration.

This tree was revered as an embodiment of the *Devata*, a living link to their ancestors and gods of nature.

As Karma stood at the edge of the courtyard, he could see everyone lost in merriment, celebrating and revelling without him. It seemed as though they had all forgotten about his return, making him seethe with anger.

In a fit of rage, Karma rushed toward the sacred tree, uprooted it, and hurled it far away.



But his actions had dire consequences. The gods of Nature (Devata, and the spirits of his ancestors) watched in dismay and anger at his disrespect. In that moment, they cast a powerful curse upon him.

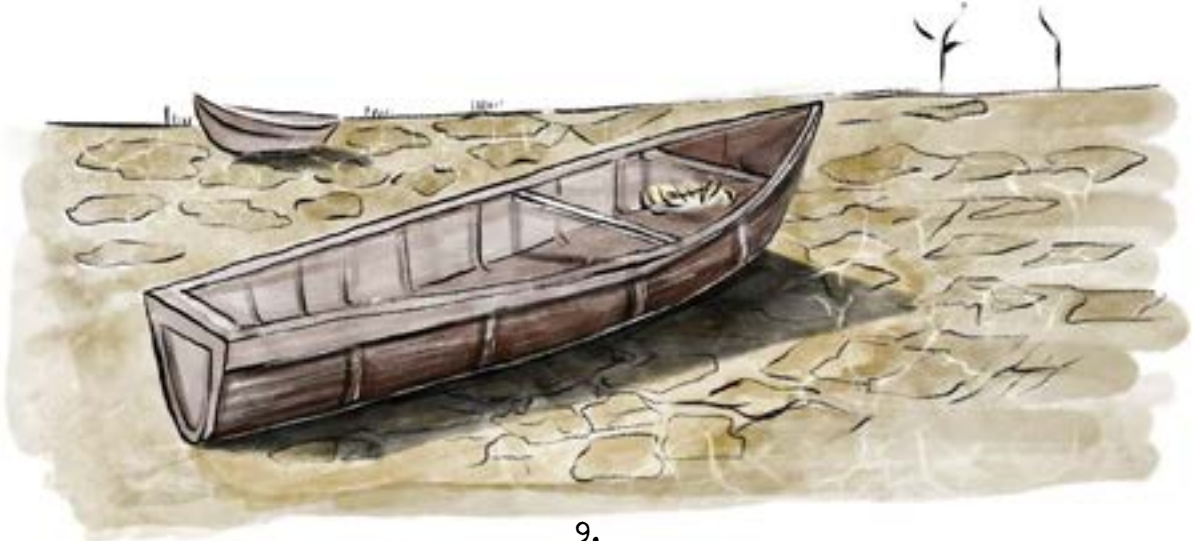
“ The village shall know no rain for seven long years, and it will endure a terrible drought. Suffering will prevail until you return the branch to its rightful place...”

the voice of the gods echoed, filling the air with a sense of foreboding.





Within a few days, the entire region began to dry up - rivers ran low, canals cracked under the sun, and streams that once flowed with life now lay stagnant. Trees withered, plants drooped, and the lush forest became a mere shadow of its former self.



As days turned into months and months into years, the region remained parched, with not a single drop of rain falling from the skies. The village faced a devastating drought, its people struggling to survive as famine took hold. The delicate balance of nature was disturbed, and the vibrant life that once flourished was replaced by an air of despair.





Starving, Karma
wandered from
forest to forest,
searching for water
and food....



Each time he stumbled upon a glimmering pool and leaned down to drink, the water would transform before his very eyes, turning into thick, dark blood. The same ghastly fate befell any food he found.

As the days wore on, Karma began to realise the weight of his actions and the grievous sin he had committed. He had angered the gods of Nature and dishonoured his ancestors.

The consequences of his immorality became painfully clear to him - this suffering, both his own and that of the village, was the result of his recklessness.



Determined to seek forgiveness and restore harmony, Karma decided to undertake a vow of penance (tapasya) to please the gods. However, it eventually became clear that his efforts were in vain – the gods remained unyielding, and the land continued to suffer.





Finally, the villagers, weary of the ongoing famine, urged Karma to make a sincere apology to the gods and fulfil their demands. They reminded him of the curse and the vital task that lay ahead. He needed to find the branch of the sacred tree he had uprooted, bring it back from across seven seas, and painstakingly care for it until it regrew.

Driven by a newfound sense of purpose, Karma sought the help of his younger brother, Dharma. Together, they resolved to embark on a perilous journey to find the branch and restore the balance that had been disrupted.



With hope shining
in their eyes, the
villagers and their
sister
gathered to bid
farewell to Karma
and Dharma as they
set off on their
important quest.





Their journey
took them
through
dense woods
and across
vast seas.

After several days of searching, they finally spot the branch in a sea glistening under the sun. To their astonishment, floating amidst the waves was the very branch that Karma had uprooted.



Without hesitation, the brothers waded into the water, and joyfully retrieved the branch. With great care, they brought it back to their village.



Upon their return,
the villagers erupted
in joy, greeting the
brothers with warm hugs
and tears of relief.
They conducted pujas
in gratitude.

In a beautiful gesture of love, their sister tied a sacred thread around the wrists of the brothers, praying earnestly for their safety and good fortune as they prepared to nurture the branch and restore the tree to its rightful place.





United with a shared purpose, the entire village gathered to help the brothers plant the precious branch back in the courtyard. Together, they conducted a pooja, pouring their souls into prayers for forgiveness from the gods and goddesses of nature and their ancestors. They beseeched the divine for good rains, bountiful crops, and the return of lush greenery to their lands.





Moved by the sincerity of their prayers, the gods were eventually pleased, and looked down upon the village with compassion.

In response, nature flourished once more; dark clouds rolled in, and life-giving rain began to fall from the heavens.

The earth drank deeply, awakening dormant seeds and coaxing forth vibrant greenery, while fresh fruits and vegetables sprang up from the fertile soil.

Laughter and joy returned, as the village was restored to its former glory and dignity.

Since then, the day is celebrated as the *Karma Festival*.

It became a day of gratitude, remembrance, and celebration of nature's abundance, reminding everyone of the importance of respect, harmony, and love for the world around them.



The Karma Festival typically falls during the Bhado season in September. On the first Ekadashi, people worship the Karma tree, regarded as the most sacred among all trees and cherished as a beloved brother within the Munda community.

Women tie beautiful threads, around the wrists of their brothers as well as the branches of the Karma tree, offering prayers for protection, blessings, and good fortune.

They implore the divine for good health, lush forests, plentiful rainfall, and abundant crops for their families and the entire community.

The women in the village observe fasting for days, while others engage in Upasna and conduct pujas with great devotion.



The entire community comes together in celebration, dressed in vibrant traditional attire. Music resonates throughout, accompanied by lively drumbeats, spirited dancing, and a grand communal feast that fosters a spirit of togetherness and gratitude.





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