

# NANDHAN AND THE OCTOPUS PRINCE

G. MANOHARAN



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Published in India by Prowess Publishing,  
YRK Towers, Thadikara Swamy Koil St, Alandur,  
Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600016

ISBN: 978-93-89097-47-4

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication

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# 1. The Arrival of the Octopus

The fish in the river Varuni were very happy, swimming and playing with their friends in the water, like frogs, baby snakes and turtles. The monkeys and squirrels on trees were also busy eating fruits of many kinds and their young ones were playing hide and seek with the squirrels and birds that lived in the nests on tree tops. Unlike the monkeys elsewhere, the monkeys in Varuni never disturbed the birds who had their eggs and young ones in the nests. Many of the birds were getting ready to leave their nests to far off places in search of food for their young ones. They were only happy to leave their young ones in the custody of the monkeys.

As Varuni was a perennial river, and as it was joined by some tributaries just before it entered that village, it had plenty of water. The recent rains also had added to that and the river was in full spate with its water touching both the banks. The fish jumping above the water and splashing about it, could be seen even from the bank. The sound of the water running making ripples could be heard above the mixed chirping noises of the birds and the different sounds made by animals. Even at that time of dawn, a few fishermen were there in small boats trying their luck with the fishing nets. On top of a tall tree a kuil bird was sitting making melodies, while hundreds of birds were flying here and there making innumerable noises. The kuil was singing soulful melodies as if it was making some fervent appeal to Mother Nature. A young owl was telling her friend, a parrot, that it was the fervent appeal of the kuil bird that brought the sun rise to their village every morning.

The village Varuni, with the river running through it was very fertile. With the range of high mountains covered with thick green forests providing a beautiful background Varuni looked stunning. In fact, the village had its name from the river only. It had a vast area of paddy and sugarcane fields. It presented a panoramic view in all its splendour. The golden rays of the rising sun highlighted the beauty of the village in that early morning also.

The time was six in the morning and the sun was raising up in the sky with its light becoming bright. The sunrays were entering the village through the gaps in

thick forest. The birds, animals and fish were waiting on the river bank for their friends. Two of them had to come from the village nearby and the third from a hamlet in the forest. The birds were restless as they had to leave soon and it was already late.

A parrot asked a fish impatiently, 'Hey fishy! What happened to these three? Still in bed? Lazy boys!'

Many young parrots echoed his voice shouting, "Lazy boys! Lazy boys!" and many others laughed. They were all flying here and there testing their newly grown wings.

The fish replied, "Don't know; but they will come! Wait for some more time birdie!"

Even before the fish finished it, there was a loud fluttering noise of the wings and splashing of water in the river and screeching of monkeys. One of the monkeys shouted from a tree top, "Oh! they are coming! they are coming! I can see them!"

Everyone looked in that direction. Nandhan and Bairavan were coming, walking along the bank of Varuni. As usual they were joking and playing while talking to their friends in the water. Nandhan looked taller as he had grown a few inches since his Mayalok adventure last year and he was in a light blue jean and a deep blue shirt, and of course had his favourite hat. He had his cane at the back of his shirt. Bairavan also looked taller and the white spots on his body looked brighter. But his playful nature has not changed and he was laughing and wagging his tail as he walked. It was

one of his habits to tease his friend when they were in a happy mood.

Bairavan told Nandhan, "It is a long time since you tested your skill with the stones. Why don't you try your luck today? Come on; do it now!"

With a smile in his lips Nandhan looked for some flat stones on the riverbank and picked up a few. Then he took a look at the surface of the water and stooping his body, he threw the first stone. That stone flew parallel to the surface, touching the water at four points and finally losing its power, dived into the water.

Bairavan laughed at this and said, "m.. hum! you have forgotten the game boy; try the other stones!"

Nandhan then threw the other stones one after another and the next three stones showed some improvement. And the fifth one touched the water surface at six points. Nandhan proudly flashed a thumbs up sign to his friend with a smile.

Bairavan also accepted Nandhan's claim and said, "OK, Nandhan! you are still a master in this game!"

By this time many animals and birds had gathered there to watch Nandhan play with the stones. As Nandhan's last stone hit the water at six points, they all cheered him clapping their hands and with their long whistles.

An elderly monkey, hanging from a tree shouted, "Hey boys! don't you have anything else to do? Always throwing stones at something!"

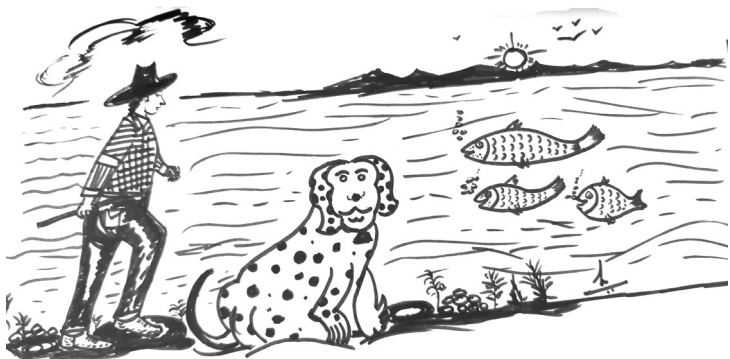
An elderly fish also came in support of the Monkey. “Whenever he throws a stone I have to dive deep; I am afraid, someday I would get hit by a stone, as warned by my astrologer!” The astrologer is none other than the elderly monkey.

Everyone there burst into laughter at this and the monkey astrologer felt insulted and moved away cursing them.

One of the young monkeys plucked some mangoes and gave them to Nandhan and Bairavan.

Enjoying the fruit, Nandhan asked “Where is Mangani? hasn’t she come yet? I thought she would have come by this time!”

The monkey replied, “We are also waiting for her; I don’t know what keeps her so late in the village! It is not even their festival time!”



Then suddenly, the monkey screamed in fear and shouted pointing to a place near a thick bush, some hundred feet from where they stood. "Nandhan! look there!"

He jumped down from the tree and stood close to him. His body was trembling in fear and shock.

Everybody looked in that direction in fear. A big twin headed snake was trying to kill a strange creature, and that creature was struggling to escape from the deadly clutch of the snake. As the monkey was on the tree it had easily seen that. Seeing this, Nandhan and Bairavan ran towards that place, which was behind a big tree. They could not see clearly who the snake was holding in its grip. Though the snake was ten feet long, it was only a baby snake. The figure in it's grip looked like a strange animal, with eight tails or legs and a big head with two big eyes. It had web like wet skin with many holes. Nandhan was surprised to see that near a river and that too in his village. All the others were also surprised and scared to see that strange creature.

The creature was struggling hard to get rid of the snake and some of its legs were holding the tree trunk firmly. The creature spit some black liquid on the snake and the snake found it very difficult to keep the creature in its grip. Seeing the boy and the dog, the strange creature shouted in pain and called for help.

"Please save me from this wicked snake! Please!" It's voice was like that of a small boy, though it looked big and strange!

Bairavan spoke in a hushed voice, “Nandhan! do something! that creature is in grave danger! kill that snake! um, quick!”

Nandhan drew out his cane from the back of his shirt and pressed it's button on the handle to make it a long one. The moment he decided to attack the snake, the three points in the stick exerted the three knives to make a trishul. The next moment he pounced on the snake and attacked it's head with the cane. The trishul's sharp tips pierced the snake's head and unable to bear the pain, the snake let go of the strange creature and fell to the ground. Then it cursed Nandhan and slowly moved away letting a loud and angry hiss and finally disappeared into the bushes.

The strange creature slowly moved and came near Nandhan and thanked him for saving it's life. The next moment it moved fast on all it's eight legs and jumped into the river and vanished. The incident they witnessed had made the birds and animals dumbfounded and they stood speechless for quite some time.

The birds and animals were restless as their third friend still had not come. Many birds became impatient and got ready to take off fluttering their wings.

A pair of woodpeckers told, “Ok, friends! we will see her in the evening! It's already late!”

The monkey chided them, “Wait for some more time. Every day you are going to the deep forest; you don't lose anything if you are late for one day.” It further

said, “Why do you go there risking your lives? We have everything here in our place!”

A small family of peacocks was also there and the male one said, “You are right Monkey! We have everything in our village and we are safe here; we never go to the deep forest! Only the fools and the greedy go there!”

But other birds laughed at the peacock. The male woodcutter ridiculed him saying, “You can’t fly fast and so you stay here; It is quite an experience to go deep there and eat a variety of fruits! We don’t have any of them here!”

Though they spoke like that, they heeded to the Monkey’s words and stayed there for some more time. It seemed that the Monkey, as the astrologer enjoyed some respect among them. They spent their time talking about the strange creature and the big snake.

A parrot said, “I thought the snakes would not come here as Nandhan had punished them last year!”

Bairavan said, “Yes; last year we had a fierce fight with their master, Vichithra Koturan. Nandhan killed him and his friend the Big Serpent also. I killed many twin headed wolves which were Koturan’s soldiers. It all took place in the Mayalok.”

The parrot asked, “Mayalok? where is it?” It was curious to know about that.

“Mayalok is a very strange world; There we saw animals with human heads, twin headed birds, trees that change their colours, the blue river; Then we

met Big Eagle, Taurus, the tiny man from the yellow planet and many other things. All were very strange with incredible powers." The excitement was clear in Bairavan's eyes and words.

The parrot asked, "Where is Mayalok? Can we go there?"

Bairavan replied to him with a sigh. "Mayalok is only very close to our world; in fact, it exists in our Earth; but the problem is nobody except the wise Tortoise knows the door to that strange world within our world."

All the birds were disappointed and sang in a chorus, "O my God! What a pity! what a pity!"

"So you say that these snakes come to our world from that Mayalok!" asked the parrot.

Bairavan waved his head and said, "yes!"

The Monkey told the parrot, "This is only a baby snake and he does not know anything about what happened last year; had he known anything about that he would not have come here!"

The birds of Varuni used to venture into the deep forest in search of some different kinds of seasonal fruits which were available only there. They considered that habit as an adventure also, though sometimes they were hunted by the fierce vultures. Mostly the younger ones resorted to that and the risks and danger never deterred them.

Nandhan was still holding the cane in his hand and when he pressed the button it became short again. He

was about to keep it in a sheath in his shirt. Every one was in a happy mood talking and laughing.

A few minutes went on like this, and after that there were some big movements in the bush. Then they all heard some big hissing sounds. They stopped their talks and watched out. They saw a huge snake with two heads coming out of the bushes along with a few more snakes. All of them looked very angry. Their black and brown skin shone bright as it reflected the rays of the sun. The big twin headed snake must be the mother of the snake which had been attacked and driven away by Nandhan. The wounded young snake also had accompanied them. It could be seen moving behind the mother snake as it was afraid of the boy.

The angry mother shouted, "How dare you touch my son? I am going to kill all of you fools for that misdeed! you do not know who we are!"

She slowly raised her hoods making a very big hiss. She was so huge that her hoods were at a height of four feet from the ground.

All animals and birds were quite scared and they climbed on the trees and hid behind the branches and leaves. A few birds fainted at the mere sight of the twin headed snake. Only Bairavan stood by Nandhan during the big snake and he was ready to pounce upon the snake at any moment. The huge snake did not mind the high pitched bark of Bairavan who looked tiny before it.

But Nandhan was not afraid.

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