

## Bawan Ganga

Once there was a poor low-caste man who eked out his living by hiring himself out as a field-labourer and by rearing pigs. The man had a daughter whose duty it was to drive pigs to the field. While grazing pigs one day on the full moon of an important festival, the girl saw a young Brahmin hurrying by. She was curious why he was almost running and asked him the reason. The Brahmin replied that he wanted to reach the river Ganges and bathe at the time of the full moon. The girl smiled and told him that he could not possibly reach the river Ganges in time, as the river was far away, but that she could solve his problem. The Brahmin wanted to know what she had in mind. The girl pointed to a dirty pool where her pigs were wallowing and told him that if he had real faith in his heart and if he had complete trust in her, he should dip into the pool, and she would bring about the exact auspicious moment of the full moon, and he, in turn, would earn all the merit of bathing in the Ganges. The Brahmin dived into the pool and found the bottom full of jewels and brought out a handful of them. The girl wanted him to dive again and he did so once more. This time he found mud at the bottom. The girl then told him that he had got the reward he deserved for the implicit faith in his mind and his confidence in her. The astonished Brahmin was very attracted to the girl and proposed marriage. The girl blushed, but smilingly said that she could not marry without her father's consent.

The Brahmin youth approached the father but the father did not wish to accept a high caste man. The young Brahmin was heart-broken at the refusal and threatened to commit suicide. The father was frightened of being responsible for the death of a Brahmin and reluctantly gave his consent. The marriage was duly performed. When the bride and groom were taking their leave, the father wanted to give a dowry. The girl told her husband secretly that he should only ask for a particular cow, a particular pig and a particular parrot. The poor man was taken aback at the son-in-law's request, but was obliged to grant the gifts asked for. The bridegroom and the bride left the village.

The parrot was not an ordinary bird. It had access to Lord Indra's court and visited it every day, bringing its mistress news of happenings in the court. The pig was the leader of all the pigs in the country; the cow was a «Suravi» or the auspicious cow that yields plenty.

The Brahmin boy and his wife lived very happily. One day the parrot brought the girl news that Indra had decided that in the approaching rain season there would be no rain anywhere in the districts except for on the barren hills and valleys of Rajgir. Everywhere else there would be famine. Hearing the news, the girl asked her pig to

dig up the entire barren hillside and valleys with its herd of swine, which it also did. Then she asked the Suravi Cow to manure the fields, and that was also done. Then the girl asked her husband to sow rice in the dug-up area. The Brahmin husband was very puzzled but did as his wife requested. After some time it rained and that particular area was congested with rice. The couple supplied food to the other areas where the harvest had failed. Indra was perturbed that his plan to bring about a famine had been thwarted. He ordered an army of rats to destroy the crops. The parrot smuggled the news out to its mistress, and the Brahmin husband procured an army of cats to guard the crop and the rats fled. Indra was furious and ordered a storm to be raised when paddy was being cut and stored on the threshing floor, the idea being that the grain would thus be blown away. Again the parrot brought the news and the girl advised her husband to dig a deep moat round the wall at the foot of the hill. This was done. The storm came but the paddy remained safe in the trench. This way the country was saved from famine because of the virtues, cleverness, and also resourcefulness of the girl.

The moat is still there. The pool in the southern defile of the south gate of the hill-girt Rajgir, where the pigs used to wallow, was named Bawan Ganga, or the Fifty-Two Ganges.

Bawan Ganga is a water-pool near Rajgir in Nalanda District and is associated with a folk-tale fondly recited by the people of Rajgir area. Rajgir, with its ancient relics, has been the seat of many kings and saints. The place, associated closely with Buddhism and Jainism, is picturesque and attracts many visitors