

THE
NANG TANTAY
OR THE
LAO " ARABIAN NIGHTS "



by
VO THU TINH



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NANG TAN-TAY

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NANG TAN TAY

(The Lao Arabian Nights)

Tome I: Nanthapakone

Abridged translation

by

VO THU TINH

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PREFACE

Over the centuries, the writing entitled "Nang Tan-Tay" acquired great fame throughout the kingdom of Laos. This is a Lao version of the Indian "Pancha Tantra", which is said to be written by a Brahma named Visusarman to render dull and abstract political principles into attractive stories and legends, so that he could teach politics to his pupils, who were three absent-minded young princes, sons of king Mihilaropya in ancient India.

The peculiarity of this work is that the key story constitutes a large frame in which are inserted other tales. Each of them is usually ended by some gnomic verses condensing ethics or political concepts.

The Lao version of the "Pancha Tantra", the "Nang Tan-Tay", is alleged to be composed of five volumes. At present, only four of them have been found. There are :

- (1) The "Nantha-Pakone", or "Story of the Bull Nantha".
- (2) The "Sakouna-Pakone", or "Story of How the Birds selected Their King".
- (3) The "Pisacha-Pakone", or "Story of How the Demons chose Their Leader".
- (4) The "Manthou-Pakone", or "Story of Frog and Snake".

Maha Sila Viravong recently transcribed these old manuscripts into modern Lao writing which were published in Editions of the "Comité Littéraire, Vientiane", 1957, 1961, 1965, and 1966. The following work is translated and condensed from the publications of this well-known scholar.



The

NANG TAN TAY

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PROLOGUE

Once upon a time, there was a kingdom named "Outhay-gnama-maha", governed by a powerful and authoritative king called Vimala Chakhphat Thirat.

King Vimala appointed his younger brother, prince Virasen, as gouvernor of a district quite far away from the capital.

After a long separation, the king wanted to see his beloved brother. He sent a delegation to Virasen's district to ask him to come and meet him in his palace.

When this news reached Virasen, he was very glad and had magnificent tents set up at the entrance of his city, where he greeted the royal delegates.

At midnight, as soon as the feasts and conversations ended, Virasen hurried to his palace to bid his wife farewell. But on entering his room, he found the princess lying in the arms of a strong handsome guard. They were exchanging ardent kisses on his conjugal bed.

Growling in rage, Virasen pulled his sword and killed his unfaithful wife and his treasonous subject on the spot, then left the city and made his way to his brother's palace.

Vimala gave a hearty welcome to Virasen, but the prince was sunk in grief for what had just happened. It lay heavy upon his heart. Amazed at his brother's sadness, the king asked him :

"What is the matter with you? What is the reason that you are so weary of life?"

He had not the courage to reveal the shameful and abominable adultery committed by his wife to his royal brother. At any rate, he thought he had better keep it quiet. And the more Vimala did his best to give him a good time, the sadder the poor prince

became.

One day, the king went to hunt in the forest. He wanted Virasen to come with him, but Virasen said that he was not well and stayed home.

At midnight, as he had been lost in thought, leaning on his elbows at the window of his bedroom, a strange spectacle caught his eyes. The Queen, his sister-in-law, and twenty ladies-in-waiting, entered the park situated below his window.

Perhaps they thought that Virasen had gone hunting with the king and that they were alone in the palace, the ladies undressed impertinently.

At the great amazement of Virasen, he noticed, by moonlight, that there were among them, ten good-looking young men, who started to embrace and caress the ten ladies-in-waiting passionately. The Queen clapping her hands, called in a loud voice :
"Theva!"

A very strong and handsome young

man appeared on a branch of a big tree at the end of the park. He got down, drew near the Queen and embraced her. Then, the eleven couples exchanged endless frantic caresses. At length, they hid behind thickets to enjoy the ecstatic delights of love.

When all were completely satiated, Theva and the other ten young men left by scaling the wall of the royal park.

The unexpected spectacle cut Virasen to the quick. He whispered to himself:

"How odd and disgusting life is! One can hardly believe it! It's true that treachery is the inherent nature of women? My brother, the powerful king to whom hundreds of princes far and wide have to pay tribute, is not able to prevent his wife from committing adultery! How can a little prince like me, shelter myself from man's shame of being an eternal, piteous cuckold? But this is the way things go and I must not have a sad life. I will face reality with wisdom and do my best to pass my time merrily".

Thereupon, Virasen, like someone who had just had a narrow escape, began to

look on the bright side of the picture. He had music played, dances performed, food brought to his heart's content, and became as happy as the day is long.

Coming back from the hunting party, King Vimala was amazed to find that Virasen did not grieve any longer but was again in luck's way. He didn't know what to think about this sudden change in his younger brother. And it was difficult for Virasen to hold his tongue while Vimala fired questions at him.

Finally, he got the secret off his chest. At some length, he told his royal brother about the adultery committed by his own wife and the strange spectacle he had just happened to see in the park, and how he had opened his eyes and changed his conceptions of life.

As Vimala could not seem to get through his head that his beloved wife was really unfaithful, Virasen suggested :

— "You had better state the Queen's

promise me that one day if we were to meet some husband unhappier than we are, we should cancel our pessimistic decision and come back to our palace, for we should not be the most unfortunate cuckolds any longer".

"I shall make my word good", Vimala replied, "but I don't believe that we can find a husband unhappier than us in this world".

The two brothers left Vimala's palace, not to join the hunting party, but to go towards unknown areas. After two days' walk, they arrived at a forest bordering a seacoast. They halted under a big tree, talking about the perfidy of their wives and complaining ceaselessly about their unfortunate destiny.

Suddenly, roaring noises were heard from the bottom of the sea and waves surged mountains high. On top of the waves, a gigantic pillar sprung up and assumed colossal proportions, then changed into a demon carrying on his head a huge pot with a strongly padlocked lid.

Filled with amazement and terror, the two brothers climbed up the tree to hide in its branches.

The demon made his way towards the tree and put the pot down on the ground. He opened it, and a beautiful lady got out of the vessel. The demon, looking passionately at her, began speaking :

"My beauty!" he said, "Because of my violent affection for you, I carried you off on your wedding day. Do you know that the longer I stay with you, the greater my love for you becomes?"

Without any transition, he then continued :

"Now, I am rather tired and feel quite drowsy".

He lay down under the tree in which Vimala and Virasen had taken shelter. His head rested upon the thighs of the beautiful lady. He fell into a deep sleep like a log and snored with noises as loud as the roar of storm.

The beautiful lady raised her eyes and saw the two handsome brothers. Great sex desires awaking in her, she beckoned to them to get down. In awe of the demon, Vimala and Virasen, by a nod, besought her to spare them. The lady lifted the demon's head off her thighs, put it down on the ground, and drew near the big tree, whispered :

"Get down quickly! Don't be afraid! The demon doesn't awake easily!"

As the two frightened men remained confounded and irresolute, the lady lost patience and threatened :

"If you don't get down, I will awake the demon and he will devour you two".

Then she approached the demon and pretended to awake him. Vimala and Virasen quickly complied with her summons. As soon as they came down on the ground, the lady rushed on them and drew them along to hide behind a cluster of trees rather far from the demon. She then forced them to make love to her.

Once satiated, the beautiful lady stood up, and casting a glance at the rings on the two brothers' fingers, she asked them to give her these jewels as souvenirs. Then, she brought out a small box and said :

"Here are ninety eight rings, souvenirs of ninety eight men to whom I have made love, exactly as I made love to you! Your two rings, added to these ninety eight ones, will increase the number of my souvenirs to one hundred. This is a rather nice whole number, isn't it."

Not without bitterness, she added :

"Actually, this demon is my husband. He is so jealous that he has locked me up in a huge pot hidden at the bottom of the sea. And yet I have succeeded in betraying him one hundred times! O you credulous men! You must know that once a woman is obstinate in doing something, nobody in this world, even her husband or lovers, can thwart her. Give up your foolish pretention to have your wives watched over, and use your power to compel them to remain your servile and faithful slaves."

Therefore, the lady took her way towards the big tree under which the demon was still in a sound sleep, lifted his head and put it on her thighs as previously, then she motioned for Vimala and Virasen to flee.

The two royal brothers ran away as fast as their legs could carry. When they were quite far from the demon, they stopped, out of breath. King Vimala said to Virasen : "What do you think about all what has just happened? In spite of his supernatural powers, this demon has not succeeded in preventing his wife from committing adultery! How strange a woman's heart is! Upon further consideration, I am convinced that, in this world, no one can boast that he has really mastered it."

Virasen ventured to reply : "You are quite right, my dear brother! I have no hesitation in saying that this demon is much more unhappier than you and I, and that we are not the most unfortunate husband in this world any longer. So we must alter our minds and go back to our palace! Let bygones be bygones! Let us get women's treachery or faithfulness out of our head! It is

not use flying into a passion or being sick at heart."

Vimala consented to return to his palace, and on coming home, ordered the Queen and her accomplices to be put to death.

In addition, he ordered that henceforth every night a virgin girl of a noble family would be brought to him and be killed the next morning. A mandarin was designated to execute this strict command. If he could not find a virgin girl for the king every night, or if he did not put her to death by his own hands the next morning, his family and himself would be killed.

The mandarin had two daughters, Nang Tan-Tay and Nang Vilayvanh. Both were very beautiful and charming, but the first was wiser, more intelligent and more courageous than the second.

One day, Nang Tan-Tay said to her father :

"I understand that you are sick at heart because of the king's orders which you must execute. But I think I have found a way

to bring our sovereign to reason."

The mandarin asked : "What would be your plan? It is not easy to have an authoritative monarch's decision changed!"

Nang Tan-Tay returned with a smile :
"Have you the mission to bring a virgin girl of a noble family to the palace every night? Well, this time introduce me to the king, I know how to make him more virtuous!"

"Nonsense! Don't you forget that any girl who is with the king must be put to death the next morning?" The mandarin retorted.

Nang Tan-Tay said : "No, I am not ignorant of it, but come what may, if I failed I should die game; on the contrary, if I succeeded in having the king come to his senses, I should get the country out of a great calamity. Would it be worth the trouble?"

The mandarin stated firmly :

"No, I never let my daughter venture on such a terrible danger! If you failed, it

would be me who should have to put you to death by my own hands. You are not afraid to die indeed, but for me, a father can not kill his own daughter by himself! How horrible it would be!"

Nang Tan-Tay cried ceaselessly, day and night, to make the mandarin to accept her proposal. The mandarin told her the story entitled "The farmer's wife" or "The man who understood the language of the beasts" as follows, in order to warn his daughter that if she disobeyed him, she would be thrashed like the farmer's wife in this tale :

Once upon a time, there was a farmer who had a lot of animals on his farm. He made friend with a devil who revealed to him supernatural powers which enable him to understand the language of the beasts. The farmer had to swear not to reveal the secret of the power to anyone on penalty of instantaneous death.

One evening, going around the farm, he happened to overhear a conversation between a donkey and a bull.

"My dear friend", the bull said to the donkey, "I always envy your happy fate : you have only to carry the boss who doesn't move so often, - there is always somebody who brings you fresh water and green grass every day, and for resting, you have a rather clean and quiet room."

"As for me, what a wretched life! Though I have taken great pains with the ploughing of our boss'fields from dawn to twilight, I am constantly at the mercy of his cruel whip all day. Look at my neck, full of scratches. No hair can grow there because of the rubbing of the heavy yoke. Besides, I have nothing but dried weeds as food, and my skin is so full of mud and midges that I cannot close an eye all night. What injustice!"

The donkey replied with irony in his voice : "Whose fault is it? Frankly, your cleverness and will are not proportional with your huge body and your sharp horns! You want to have happy and quiet life, don't you? Well, it is not difficult! Here is a plan for you. Tomorrow, when they come to yoke you, pretend to bolt, show your horns as if

you were ready to charge; feign to rear as if you were about to hoof; and when they bring you food, simulate to be ill and don't eat. They won't take you to the field to plow and you will be allowed to rest to your heart's content".

After hearing the ass and the bull, the farmer said to his men : "Tomorrow, if the bull is ill, yoke the ass in his place".

The next morning, when they came to the cows barn, the bull did as he had been advised by the donkey, so farm servants took the ass and compelled him to drag the plow instead of the bull, following the farmer's orders.

The poor donkey, having no experiences about drawing a plow, could not work well, so the farmer, wreaking his malice on the long-eared animal, struck him to the ground many times. As for the bull, he had a happy holiday, enjoying fresh water and green grass in the quiet and clean donkey stable where he had been moved.

The day after that, the bull preten-

ded to be ill again, and once more, the donkey was yoked and obliged to drag the plow in the place of his friend.

The poor ass thought "Woè is me! I have brought mischief upon myself! This is the consequence of my meddling in people's business. If I cannot find a way to get out of this wretched situation, I shall be giving my last gasp!"

The farmer wanted to know the reactions of these animals about what had happened. At the end of the day, he had a walk with his wife in the farmyard in order to listen to the eventual conversation between the bull and the ass.

He overheard the donkey saying to the bull : "This morning, while plowing in the fields, I happened to hear the farmer give a very important order to his men, a terrific order which quite frightened me. O my dear, poor friend! A great misfortune shall happen to you!"

The bull asked : "What do you mean by that? I am impatient to know! What is this

misfortune?"

Pretending to take pity on the bull, the donkey went on :

"I heard the boss tell his men to verify whether you are ill or not. If you are very much pulled down by your illness, they will kill you and cut up your body to send to the butcher. This order will be executed at sunset tomorrow. As you are a very good friend of mine, I must try to do my best in order to imagine a plan to save your life!"

The bull asked with much solicitude :
"What's to be done?"

The donkey suggested : "Tomorrow, when they bring you water and grass, consume them readily, and the farmer will realize that you have recovered, so he will cancel his tragic decision".

The bull hastened to express his thankfulness to his saviour, the donkey, and promised that he would carry through the plan without fail.

Having listened to the conversation

between the donkey and the bull, the farmer could not help bursting into a roar of laughter.

Amazed, his wife asked : "Why do you laugh like that? What is it about?"

"It is not your business", the farmer said, "Don't ask me the reason why!"

Such an answer could not satisfy his wife who asked him to reveal to her the true motive of his sudden rapture.

"Well", he said, "I laugh at the donkey and the bull. That's all. Besides, it is impossible, even dangerous for me to disclose the cause of my laughter".

His wife said : "I can't understand how a bull or a donkey could be the basis of your rapture. Haven't they been quite tranquil and speechless all the evening? If you don't speak the truth, I shall leave you, for I don't want to stay with a husband who is not frank and sincere".

Then she ran to their bedroom, loc-

ked the door and cried ceaselessly all night. The farmer was compelled to sleep alone on the verandah.

The next morning, the farmer tried to calm her down : "Take it easy, my dear!" he said, "I am very sorry that I cannot tell you the reason why I laughed last night, for the disclosure of which involves my instantaneous death".

His wife returned furiously : "What is that to me if you were alive or dead! Don't beat about the bush! Speak the truth or there is no love lost between us!"

The more the farmer tried to have it out with his wife, the more she held her own against him and worried him to death.

At length, the farmer left his house and went to his garden in order to ponder over. There he happened to overhear another conversation between his dog and the rooster of his poultry-yard.

"A pretty doing, this!" the dog said to the rooster, "While our boss is being in

Amazed, Vimala asked : "Why? Will you sacrifice your own daughter?" The mandarin replied : "My daughter herself has required so. She is not ignorant of what will happen, but her supreme wish is that she will have the honour to meet His Majesty, even only once, and she will die happily".

Having his pride flattered, the king said :

"Take your time to think this over! At length, if your daughter does not alter her mind, I will not refuse her offer. But I must remind you that I shall never change my decision, that is to say the next morning you must kill her by your own hands on penalty of death for your family and for yourself".

Nang Tan-Tay was very pleased to know that the king had agreed to her proposal and before leaving home, she asked Nang Vilayvanh, her younger sister, to come with her in the royal palace :

"My dear sister!" she said, "I want you to lend me a hand tonight. I shall beg the king the permission to let you stay in the palace. At first cockcrow, you will wake me up and ask me to tell you stories. If

you do that, I shall be able to carry out my plan and get the country out of this great calamity".

The two sisters were brought to King Vimala, who was very impressed by Nang Tan-Tay's exquisite charm and outstanding beauty.

"Sire!" Nang Tan-Tay besought, "may I beg you a favour. I would like to keep my younger sister, Nang Vilayvanh, with me in the palace tonight, for this is the last night of my life".

Vimala agreed, and following to Nang Tan-Tay's recommandation, Nang Vilayvanh woke her sister at the first crow of the cock, and said :

"My poor dear sister! Before you leave me forever, please tell me some stories".

Nang Tan-Tay kneeled in front of the king and sighed : "I beg, Sire, that you will grant me leave to tell my younger sister some stories for a last time".

"Why of course, yes," replied Vimala, "I would like to listen to stories too, and above all, to interesting ones".

Thereupon, Nang Tan-Tay recited :



Tome I : Nanthapakone

Once upon a time, in Muong Putti of the kingdom of Thaksinanhok, there was a millionaire named Thammapala, who had earned great fortune in trading with neighbouring countries. Usually he had his merchandises carried by a convoy of carts drawn by oxen. Among these oxen, there was an old bull called Nanthaka who had served him for years.

One day, on the way to Katsamira, the convoy loaded with Thammapala's goods crossed a country which was wooded everywhere except at the bottom of a large valley to the North, where there was a large natural meadow, through which flowed a stream. Its green was more vivid than that of the enclosing forest. As he had been forced to drag a heavy cart all the previous day and night, Nanthaka felt exhausted and wanted to rest in this meadow. He said to himself :

"This old millionaire has the name "Thammapala", which means "Great Virtue", but frankly, he is not virtuous at all! I am the oldest of his servants, and it was due to my services that he is now wealthy. I take great pains with drawing a cart for him, so that my neck and shoulders are scratched, and yet he is not grateful to me. He does not give me enough food to satisfy my hunger, nor enough time to rest. I am getting older and older, and it is no use serving such an unjust and cruel owner any longer!"

Then the bull Nanthaka pretended to be exhausted and fell down on the road.

The millionaire, thinking that the old bull was at his last gasp, ordered his men to unyoke and leave him in the forest, guarded by a group of servants.

"If the bull dies," Thammapala said, "cut up and bake its body". Then he speeded the convoy to get out of the forest.

One of the guard said to others :
"This place is not a safe one. We are in a thick forest where we may have trouble with

demons or tigers. I think we had better get firewood to roast this awkward beast and leave this dangerous place as soon as we can, before sunset".

When the guards went away to fetch firewood, Nanthaka took advantage of their absence to escape and to hide in the forest.

There he lived for months, grazing on the green grass, drinking fresh water to his heart's content, having no more heavy yoke to carry, no more huge cart to draw, getting fat, and enjoying his complete freedom, bellowing so loudly that the whole forest shook.

Not far from the meadow was the den of Pingkhala, King of the lions. One day, the royal animal left his lair to make his way towards the stream flowing through this meadow, in order to quench his thirst. He happened to hear Nanthaka's bellows which were as loud as the roars of thunder. He was so afraid that he forgot his thirst and ran back to his den as fast as his legs could carry him.

Two jackals, counselors of King Pingkhala, named Vasuphakhagna and Thamana, noticed that the lion was half dead with fright, and said to themselves :

"What is happening to our King? What is the reason that he had left the brook so hastily without quenching his thirst?"

Thamana added : "If there was some real danger, it would be better for us to leave the place as soon as possible. It is no use sacrificing ourselves for such a king like Pingkhala. Though we do our very best to serve him, we are never rewarded. I am inclined to the belief that in this world, faithful servants receive nothing but pains and bitterness, while the sly ones, who know how to refrain from meddling in their boss' affairs, are always lucky! They who rely but on their master's subsidy, are inevitably eliminated! The words : "Stand up!", "Come here!", "Get away!", "Shut up your mouth!" are the common ones used by powerful men to speak to the weaker and poorer fellows who come to solicit their favours."

"We must bear in mind that there are

only crazy servants who prove themselves capable and ready to serve, in order to be exploited by their boss, as prostitutes who embellish their face and body in order to be abused by those who come to seek sexual pleasures. In my own opinion, the subjects who stoop to honour their lord, who sacrifice their life to save their master's, who take great pains with making their boss happy, are the most foolish men in this world!

"If you had half an eye, you would awaken to the fact that slaves can never satisfy their masters. If they are resigned, the lord will find them idiots; if they venture to express their minds, they will be considered as braggarts by the boss. In the eyes of the lord, to be prompt to execute his orders, proves that you are not polite; to wait constantly, denotes that you are an intriguer. But on the contrary, to refrain from putting yourself on his way, means that you want to steal away your duty. A servant's career itself is lunacy!"

Indignant by such reasoning, the other minister of King Pingkhala, Vasuphakhagna retorted :

"I cannot share your opinion. As for me, I think that however good or bad the master is, a worthy servant must serve him without selfishness and mental reservation!"

Thamana said : "What is happening to our king has no connection with our own duty. The servants who don't know when and how to refrain from thrusting their noses into their master's business will be punished as piteously as the ass in the tale entitled "The Ass and the Dog".

Vasuphakhagna asked : "What is this story?"

Thamana then recited :

"THE ASS AND THE DOG"

There was formerly, in Muong Phalanasi, a laundry man named Kappurapat. One evening, after making love to his wife in his hut, he fell into a deep sleep. At midnight, a thief came and roamed around his habitation. An ass, attached to a post in the yard, saw the robber, so he hailed the dog lying in the kennel not far from away :

"It is you who have to bark and wake

up our master. Why don't you fulfil your duty?"

The dog replied : "Don't meddle on other peoples' affairs! I am not such a fool as to do that! I have guarded the house vigilantly and it is owing to me that they can enjoy life happily and sleep peacefully all the night long. But they are not grateful to me at all. Worse than that, they often forgot to feed me. If they had not a run of misfortune, they would never take into account of having a devote and zealous servant like me!"

The ass said : "Whatever may occur, do what we conceive to be our duty! The servant who expects rewards to accomplish his duty is not a good worthy one!"

The dog retorted : "Well, tell me whether a master who profits by the hard works of his servants without rewarding them, is a good worthy one? All the world and his wife must not forget the old saying that there are four duties which we have to fulfil by ourselves : feeding servants, expressing gratitude to superiors, offering sacrifice to the Gods and making love to our

wives in order to ask them to bear us children. In other words, we must not have these four duties fulfilled by others."

The indignant ass interrupted :

"Shut up, coward! You don't fulfil your duty, do you? So much the worse! As for me, I think at any rate, I must wake up our master. This is one of the ways to express my gratefulness to him. We are told that only with pious faith we make offerings to Buddha, only with good will we serve our lord."

Thereupon, the ass fell to braying as loudly as he could. The laundry man started out of his sleep, flew into a temper, took a club, got out of his hut and gave a good drubbing to the devoted ass!"

Having narrated the story "The Ass and the Dog", Thamana concluded : "It is why I have recommanded you not to busy yourself with our king's affairs unnecessarily. Our job is only to accompany him during hunting parties and fetch him game. That's all! Let's not waste our time talking to one another! Let's go and devour the re-

mainders of the prey which we brought yesterday."

Vasuphakhagna exclaimed : "You think of nothing but your own stomach while our king has been overwhelmed with worry!"

Thamana asked : "How do you know that he is sad?"

Vasuphakhagna replied : "I know a thing or two about it. A wild animal, once having been tamed, can understand the orders of his master; it stands to reason that humans, being much more intelligent than beasts like we are, must be able to guess their neighbour's sentiments, ideas and intentions, through their attitudes, looks, gestures or bearings."

"Besides, it never entered my mind that a top mandarin in the Court such as you, would let the sovereign down, when he is in great trouble! Don't you forget these sayings "A servant in need is a servant indeed", and "Helping at right time, speaking to the point, is behaving wisely".

Thamana objected : "Really! You know nothing about the art of a servant to serve his master! He, who comes and sees the boss without having been summoned, who speaks without having been questioned, is not a clever servant at all. Now, you come and offer your help to Pingkhala, but what would you tell me if he refused your aid, or did not deign to accept it?"

Vasuphakhagna said : "I'll trust you for that. So, first I have to make sure whether our king is disposed to receive us or not".

Thamana asked : "You will be able to do that really, won't you. Go ahead and good luck to you".

Thereupon, Vasuphakhagna came to see King Pingkhala who asked : "Wherefore did you come? I haven't seen you for a long time?"

Vasuphakhagna answered apologetically : "Sire, I am the most useless one of your servants. Nevertheless, as a loyal

subject, I have to come and beg your benevolent protection."

"My absence may be misunderstood, but can be justified without difficulty. I hope that His Majesty doesn't treat a pebble as a diamond, nor a diamond as a pebble. They bury "keo mani" (a kind of diamond of great value) in mud, and incrust "keo ven" (a sort of glass trinket) in headgear, but when selling them, "keo mani" always costs a great sum and "keo ven" is dirt cheap. Men as well as jewels have not the same values. Their masters or owners must know how to put or to use them in right places".

"We should not use suspenders to tie our hair, nor diadems to fasten to shoes. Accordingly, as to whether horses, swords, books, words, sentences, boys or girls can be useful or not doesn't depend on themselves; they who manage or use them must be responsible".

"Truth is always truth, as flame, at any position, always points upwards. So, a monarch, while sentencing at the court, regularly discriminates the guilty from the in-

nocent. On all occasions, he puts the right men in the right places. Besides, a docile and faithful servant is often a crazy one, on the contrary, a clever subject, ready to communicate intelligence, is brought to displease his master".

"Sire, may your humble servant beg you the leave to claim himself as a docile, a faithful and an intelligent subject, and therefore may he pretend to merit your august and benevolent esteem?"

Quite amazed at such a bombastic speech, King Pingkhala asked : "What is happening to you? Aren't you my right-hand man, whom I have always trusted in? What do you mean by this long hint?"

Noticing that King Pingkhala was disposed to listen, Vasuphakhagna then recited :

"Sire, may your humble servant beg you the permission to inquire as to the cause which made you leave the brook hastily this morning without quenching your thirst. I think it incumbent on me to do my very best, even to sacrifice my own life, to eli-

minate your august problem!"

Pingkhala said : "Well, I heard terrific cries of some mysterious animal while I was going to the brook. If the body of this beast is proportional with his cries, it must be a gigantic one and we will be dealing with a powerful, frightful monster. So, had we better leave this dangerous area to settle in a safe place!"

Vasuphakhagna replied : "Of course, it is alarming news! But losing all presence of mind because of hearsay, and proposing that His Sovereign flee without any resistance or fighting, is not the proper behaviour of a worthy counselor to His Majesty!"

Pingkhala confessed : "I am quite low-spirited! What's to be done?"

Vasuphakhagna said : "Sire, as long as I am still alive, I go through fire and water for my Sovereign's sake."

Thereupon, Vasuphakhagna took leave of Pingkhala and went to the forest where

Thamana joined him and asked : "Do you have a will of your own? Facing such a terrible danger, how dare you undertake responsibility for keeping the King safe from this monster's attack?"

Vasuphakhagna guffawed : "My naive friend! I know well who is the so-called monster. It is nobody else but a bull named Nanthaka whose flesh may constitute a good dish for the King as well as for ourselves!"

Thamana said : "Really? If it is so, why didn't you tell our King the truth in order to eliminate his fear?"

Vasuphakhagna replied : "Do you think that I am such a fool as to do that? If we don't make our boss feel that he needs good servants like us, we shall be as miserable as Thahikanh in the story "The Cat and the Lion".

Thamana asked : "What is this story?"

Vasuphakhagna then recited :

"THE CAT AND THE LION"

"There was, formerly, a lion named Maha Vikom living on the mountain called Anphuthasingkhon, in Outrabet district. Every night, when he fell asleep in his den, a mouse would come and gnaw his mane, which made him start out of his sleep. The lion couldn't close an eye. He lost his temper and fell to chase the gnawing animal in order to kill him. But, much nimbler than the lion, the little mouse was always gone in time.

So, the lion said to himself: "How must I manage to rid myself of this disturbing creature? He, who lavishes great force to fight a tiny beast, will doubtlessly fail! Silver is good, but not for ploughshares! To cut down a tree, one must use a big axe, but to sew cloth, one must use a small needle! To each enemy, an appropriate weapon!"

With this, the lion went to a neighbouring village to ask a cat named Thahikanh to come and live with him in the den.

"I will share my prey with you every

day", the lion promised.

The cat's presence frightened the mouse so much that he dared not come to the den to gnaw the lion's mane any longer. Maha Vikom could henceforth sleep on both ears.

From time to time, when the starved mouse ventured to roam near the den, the lion would increase the ration of prey to encourage the cat to keep watch more vigilantly. So, the happy feline animal could satisfy his hunger to his heart's content.

But, -(what should be a story without "but"?)- the cat's wrong was that, in an excess of zeal, he caught and devoured the mouse. Having no enemy to be afraid of, the lion did not need his friend Thahikanh any longer. Accordingly, he thought it was no use making his word good, and stopped sharing his prey with the cat."

Having narrated the story "The Cat and the Lion", Vasuphakhagna concluded: "By all means, we must not eliminate our boss' need for zealous servants!"

Then, both Vasuphakhagna and Thamana made their way to the forest to find Nanthaka. Vasuphakhagna approached him and said :

"Brother Bull! Where are you coming from? Do you know that we have received King Pingkhala's mission to control this forest? You are required to come and see the Minister Thamana immediately for inquiry, or to leave our kingdom on penalty of trial".

Intimidated, Nanthaka bowed reverently to Thamana and formulated :

"Sir, would you be so kind as to help me to obtain permission from the King to stay in this forest?"

Thamana replied : "If you want to stay in our kingdom, you must yield yourself to the lion Pingkhala, our august Sovereign".

The bull Nanthaka besought :

"How may I have the honour of becoming a subject of His Majesty Pingkhala?"

Vasuphakhagna said : "Leave it to me! Storm never roots up supple-stalked

grass; a king magnanimous and chivalrous like ours, never deigns to harm a subject much humbler than Him!"

The two ministers ordered Nanthaka to stay in a place rather far from Pingkhala's den, and came to see the lion who asked :

"Have you seen the monster?"

Vasuphakhagna replied : "Yes, Sire. His huge body is quite proportional with his terrific cries. He is really a frightful creature, but at length I came to persuade him to surrender and he agreed to become a subject of His Majesty. So, we must beware of hearsay. Usually, because of a word wrongly quoted by those who like to put spokes in the wheel, we may lose our dearest friends. If we are afraid of somebody by hearing only his cries but without meeting him, we shall be as miserable as the inhabitants of Phomburi in the story "The Prostitute and the Monkeys".

THE PROSTITUTE AND THE MONKEYS

"There once lived in Phomburi a robber who stole a big bell from a wat. On his

way home, while crossing an extensive wood, he was devoured by a tiger. The monkeys living in this forest got hold of the bell and enjoyed themselves in striking it.

The inhabitants in the neighbourhood were amazed at hearing the sounds of it and thought that the forest was haunted by demons. So they left the country and went to settle in another area.

A prostitute named Karalay, began to inquire and discovered the truth. She came to see the king of Phomburi and vowed she would go and expel the demons. The king promised her an important reward of gold and silver.

Karalay simulated an offering of sacrifices to the spirits of the forest, whilst discretely she had savoury fruit spread around the altar. When the monkeys came down to pick up them, they released the big bell. This was the chance Karalay had been waiting for. She seized the bell and carried it off. Afterwards, no mysterious bell sounds were heard any longer in this area, and all demons were believed to have been expelled

by Karalay.

The king and the inhabitants of Phomburi were quite grateful to Karalay for her having got the country out of a great calamity, and the prostitute became a national hero".

Vasuphakhagna concluded : "As I have said to you, we must not be in a flurry because of hearsay!"

Thereupon, Vasuphakhagna went to get Nanthaka and introduced him to Pingkhala.

The king of the lions and the bull became good friends one with another in no time. If it were not for Vasuphakhagna, there would have been no friendship between them.

It was dawning when ended the first episode of the story of the Bull Nanthaka told by Nang Tan-Tay. She said to Nang Vi-layvanh :

"My dear sister! The next episode of this story telling how Vasuphakhagna would succeed in having Pingkhala and Nanthaka

interfered one with another, is more interesting. But, alas! the dice are cast for me! I must leave you forever, so I shall not be able to tell you the sequel of this wonderful story!"

Willing to listen to the rest of the tale which he found quite meaningful and conformable to his taste, king Pingkhala said to himself : "I'll postpone her death until tomorrow in order to let her finish the tale, and I'll have her killed the next morning".



The second night, at the first cock-crow, Nang Vilayvanh woke up and asked Nang Tan-Tay to tell her stories again. With the permission of king Vimala, Nang Tan-Tay told the sequel of the story of the Bull Nanthaka as follows :

"One day, Satapthakan, the elder brother of Pingkhala, had come to see him. Pingkhala was about to go hunting to get game to feed Satapthakan, when Nanthaka asked him :

"Didn't you bring in a lot of game this morning? Where is it? Why must you go hunting again?"

"Vasuphakhagna and Thamana had taken it away!" Pingkhala replied.

Nanthaka said : "They are only two. I wonder how can they eat all that game?"

Pingkhala explained : "After satisfying their hunger, they distribute the remainder to their friends."

Nanthaka said : "Did they beg you leave to do that? They had their own way, hadn't they? Really, this is a breach of trust!"

"Alas!" Pingkhala said, "this is the way that they behave!"

The indignant bull then recited :

"This is not the deed of good worthy servants! Without their lord's permission, they must not do what they choose, except in emergency cases where they must interfere promptly in order to rescue his master from a sudden danger. Every subject who is anxious to preserve his master's interests, may be compared to the magic kettle of Chao Lusi (hermit-wizard) which can contain as much water as one wants to pour into it, - but which throws off its contain as little as a dropping-tube does."

"He who declares that he doesn't deign to take into account small pennies, will bring about his lord's downfall. On the contrary, he who knows how to protect his master's everyday interests is a good and worthy servant. Wealth is as the heart and blood of kings. The subject who lessens it, even for plausible reasons, will never be esteemed".

"A treasurer who is prodigal or spends money thoughtlessly, causes his sovereign's misfortune unavoidably as much as one who steals or abuses."

The lion Satapthakan added :

"Well, my dear younger brother! As you have nominated Vasuphakhagna and Thamana as top mandarins in the Court with the supreme powers to make alliances or to declare war on other countries, I think it is not convenient to trust them with the function of Treasurer. Don't forget the old saying : "Never appoint a Brahmin, a Knight or a member of the Royal Family as the Head of the Treasury. Avaricious, a Brahmin dares not provide sufficient money to build up the kingdom : -agressive, the knight pulls his sword out to pick a bone with those who dare criticize his management; - and sure of his impunity, a member of the Royal Family commits abuses without hesitating" "Besides, the subject who has rendered important services to the country, who has served the king for a long time, believes himself unpunishable and grants himself the right of managing the Treasury as he chooses."

"Never let servants becoming extremely rich, for wealth usually changes a man's heart. Punishing the officers who commit abuses, not allowing a single top

mandarin to retain charge of an important function for a long time, must be the policy of good kings".

"He who steals from the Treasury is comparable to a tumour. If we don't press the swelling vigourously in order to pull out the stink, how can we heal it? So, my dear brother, you must react in time and strongly, in order to extract the evils completely. A king must not let his princes be unruled, nor trust in the servants who have been ungrateful. If I were you, I would appoint the bull Nanthaka as Treasurer of the kingdom. Herbivorous, he will never steal your game!"

Pingkhala did as he had been advised by his brother, and Nanthaka became the Treasurer of the kingdom instead of Vasuphakhagna and Thamana who, henceforth, unable to satisfy their hunger to their heart's content, were in a very sad way.

Vasuphakhagna said : "It is no use complaining about this misfortune. We have brought mischief upon ourselves. This is the consequence of our introducing Nanthaka

to Pingkhala. It was we who built the friendship between the king of the lions and the old bull, - it must be we who will have to destroy it. Such as laugh today may weep tomorrow. Let's stand our ground and bear up under adversity. If we have the presence of mind as the lady has in the tale "The Breeder's Wife and Her Two Lovers", we will gain victory".

Thamana asked : "What is this story?"

Vasuphakhagna then recited :

THE BREEDER'S WIFE AND HER TWO LOVERS

"There once lived in the kingdom of Tharavadi, a breeder whose wife was very fond of love adventures. She used to make her husband cockold and once she got two lovers at the same time : the Tasseng (Chief of the village) and his son.

The lady confirmed the old saying : "There is not enough fire-wood to supply a big fire, nor enough water to fill an ocean, nor enough lovers to satisfy a beautiful sen-

sual lady".

One day, taking advantage of her husband's absence, she had the Tasseng's son come into her bedroom. While they exchanged lascivious caresses, the Tasseng made his appearance in the house. Promptly, the lady had the young man hidden in the loft, and came back to her room to receive the Tasseng as lewdly as she had done with his son. In no time, her husband came from the rice fields. Keeping her countenance, the lady suggested that the Tasseng leave her house by the front door, with a cudgel in his hands, while uttering insults.

The breeder inquired about the Tasseng's strange attitude: "What is happening? Wherefore did the Tasseng come?"

His wife replied phlegmly: "I don't know for what reason the Tasseng beaten his son who came to take shelter in our house. I took pity on him, and allowed him to hide in the loft. The Tasseng couldn't find his son, he left in the bad temper you noticed!"

She then opened the door of the loft and introduced the Tasseng's son, her young lover, to her husband."

Vasuphakhagna concluded : "If we have the same presence of mind as this lady, we will succeed in getting the best of it".

Thamana said : "This is just my view of the matter. But the problem becomes one of how to manage to destroy the friendship between the king of the lions and the dirty old bull?"

Vasuphakhagna stated : "Where there is a will, there is a way. Do you forget the old saying : 'Where you can't use force, have recourse to cunning'? The story "The Crow and the Cobra" is an eloquent illustration of that."

Thamana asked : "What is this story?"

Vasuphakhagna then recited :

THE CROW AND THE COBRA

"There were once a couple of crows

which built their nest in the branches of a big banyan tree, at the foot of which a cobra took shelter in a ditch.

The wicked reptile took advantage of the crows' absence to devour their eggs, which afflicted the crows so much that the female suggested to her husband that they leave the spot and settle in another area.

"For according to the saying : 'A naughty wife, a bad camarade, a disobedient servant, a snake in the house will bring us unavoidable death'", she said.

The male replied : "Don't worry about it. I know well how to get rid of this troublesome reptile. Do you remember the saying : 'A clever creature is the more powerful one'. Strength can never vanquish intelligence. I'll tell you a tale to prove that".

The female asked : "What is this story?"

The male then recited :

THE LION AND THE HARE

"In days of old, a lion, the king of the animals, required that, for his everyday meal, one of his subjects must be offered to him. When an old hare was designated, he said to himself: "It is no use beseeching and humiliating myself when I know that death is unavoidable."

So, he delayed his coming to meet the lion. Having waited for the hare for a long time, the king of the animals began to lose his temper. When the hare made his appearance, he cried out: "Where were you? Why didn't you come in time as all others? Do you know that I am as hungry as a hawk?"

The hare replied: "Sire, on my way coming here, I was stopped by a lion who prevented me from sacrificing myself for your august appetite. I had to do my very best to beseech him to let me go. At length, he deigned to agree and here I am."

Flowing into a passion, the lion roared: "How can I put up with these insults? Where is he now? I must go to meet him and I'll take care of him."

The hare led the lion to the brink of a precipice, at the bottom of which was a puddle. He pointed at the image of the lion reflected by the water of the pool and said : "Sire, there is the bold lad".

Believing that he was dealing with a real enemy, the lion rushed on his own image and crushed himself against the rocky bottom of the precipice."

The male crow concluded his story saying : "Don't forget that intelligence always wins over strength. I will show you how to have the troublesome reptile killed. There is a well near our banyan tree where the Prince of the kingdom comes and has a bath everyday. He usually removes his golden chain and puts it on a rock near the well. Steal this royal jewel and set it in front of the cobra's lodge, and you will see what will happen to our dirty snake."

The female did as she had been advised, and the cobra was killed by the soldiers who came to find the chain."

After narrating these stories to re-

assure Thamana, Vasuphakhagna added :

"As I have told you, one who laughs today may weep tomorrow. We will use our intelligence to destroy the friendship between king Pingkhala and the bull Nanthaka!"

Thereupon, Vasuphakhagna and Thamana went to see the king of the lions. Bowing reverently to Pingkhala, they formulated : "Sire, your humble servants beg you leave to speak their minds. They have a strong feeling that a great danger threatens your august person. As they think it incumbent on them to do their very best to keep His Majesty safe from any peril, they hasten to come and see you..."

Pingkhala interrupted : "I can make nothing of this! I am impatient to know what this misfortune is!"

Noticing that king Pingkhala was disposed to listen to them, Vasuphakhagna and Thamana ventured to say :

"Sire, we are devoted servants and our duty is to tell you that the bull Nanthaka is a double-faced subject. He is puffed up with pride, talks nonsense, and worse than

that, he dares speak ill of His Majesty. There can be no doubt about his treasonous project to seize your throne in order to reign in this forest. Alas, Sire! If a monarch uses his authority to remove an important function from his old and devoted servants and gives it to the first comer who follows, he will become as miserable as king Ketsathummarat in the old story".

Pingkhala asked : "What is this story?"

Vasuphakhagna then recited :

THE STORY OF KING KETSATHUM-
MARAT :

"There was, formerly, a king named Vithummarat who had eight ministers helping him to govern the kingdom in a good way. His son, Prince Royal Ketsathummarat, also had eight counselors who were fawning and cringing courtiers rather than helpful servants.

One day, enemies invaded the bordering areas of the kingdom. King Vithummarat ordered the eight ministers to open a

counter-attack. They succeeded in routing and driving back the enemies. To reward their glorious exploit, the king appointed them as 'Defenders of the Kingdom'.

The successful performance made the noses of Prince Royal's counselors swell. They made shift to overthrow the eight ministers. They came to see Ketsathummarat and said :

"Mylord, the king's ministers are now so wealthy and powerful that they have become as arrogant and proud as Lucifer. Many a time they have thrown innuendoes against you. Really, they don't see an inch beyond their noses, for they forget that sooner or later Mylord will be their sovereign. It is not difficult to check their faithlessness. If you ask them to present you some precious presents, you will have the opportunity to see how they execute your august orders".

The Prince Royal did as he had been advised. He sent his counselors with the message to the eight ministers, who received the Prince Royal's delegation in state.

They did their best to satisfy the princely demand. But instead of transmitting all the ministers' presents to their master, they engrossed them, and told the Prince Royal the dignitaries had refused to execute his order.

Ketsathummarat boiled with indignation, but he kept his temper, waiting for the proper time to wreak his vengeance.

After a while, Vithummarat died. Prince Royal Ketsathummarat was crowned king. His first act was to put the eight ministers to death and he appointed his counselors as top mandarins in his court.

Incapable and covetous, these dignitaries brought about the kingdom's downfall.

Thereupon, a king of a neighbouring country named Tungkhapon, invaded and seized the kingdom without difficulty. Ketsathummarat had to leave the country and took shelter in the forest."

After narrating the story, Vasupha-

khagna concluded :

"Sire, this is why we would like to beg permission to prevent His Majesty from abandoning his old and devoted servants and trusting in incapable, cringing greenhorns.

"In a kingdom, the supreme authority must belong only to the king, who has to discriminate good servants from the bad ones, according to the experiences and wisdom of our forefathers. Favouring new comers of whom we ignore the origin, trusting them with important functions and giving up his old devoted servants, are not the policy of good kings. May your humble servants remind His Majesty of the old saying : "Don't keep in your house the person whose origin is doubtful", otherwise we will have the same misfortune as the flea who accommodated the bug."

King Pingkhala asked : "What is this story?"

Vasuphakhagna then recited :

THE FLEA AND THE BUG

"There was once a flea named Amakhothip who lived in the bed of Kosalarat, the king of Kosalavilay. He earned his livelihood by sucking Kosalarat's blood, but the king didn't notice that because the sting was quite soft.

One day, a big bug named Chanthala came and asked the flea to let him stay in the same bed, in order to taste the royal blood. The flea said : "I regret that I can't keep you with me in the royal bed for your stings hurt too much. I'm afraid that you will kill the monarch and the same time, cause my misfortune. Therefore we will live exactly the same adventures of the Crab and the Heron in the old legend".

The bug asked : "What is this story?"

The flea then recited :

THE CRAB AND THE HERON

"There was formerly a pond named Ramatsimavisay, which abounded in fish. An old heron, as sly as a fox, came there to fetch food. The presence of the bird frightened the inhabitants of the pool so much that

all the fish took shelter behind aquatic plants or under the rocks at the bottom. In the twinkling of an eye, the pond was seemingly empty of fish.

The heron was sick at heart of this, but keeping up his spirit, he devised a stratagem to lure fish. He stood on one leg and fell to weeping his eye out. Amazed at this strange attitude, many fish ventured from their refuges to observe him better. The heron paid no attention to them and went on weeping.

"Really, this wading-bird doesn't want fish any longer", the fish said to themselves.

An old fish approached the heron and hailed him : "Mr. Heron, what is happening to you? Why are you sad? In all likelihood it seems to us that you don't want fish any longer. Is this right?"

The heron replied : "This is true. I don't want fish any longer, because I met the Hermit Himanaphone, who taught me that killing is a mortal sin. I have changed my

philosophy; I haven't killed any animals and I have become vegetarian. Now I am studying the 'tham' (Buddhist doctrine) and recite prayers everyday to beg Buddha to forgive me for all the evils I committed towards you all. I am conscious of the necessity of doing labours of love.

"This morning, crossing the capital of Outrana, I happened to hear the king ordering his men to cast a drag-net in your pond. You all will be caught in this raid. Prompted by a feeling of pity, I came here to forewarn you. But I didn't see anyone. As I have to leave the pond without preventing your calamity, I can't help weeping for your fate."

This news frightened all the fish. They besought the wading-bird : "What's to be done? Have you any suggestions to rescue us?"

The heron replied : "There is in the district of Thacsinabot a large and deep pond where you all can take shelter."

The oldest fish asked : "How can we

go there?"

The heron said : "If you don't mind, I will carry you by lodging in my beak."

Safe bind, safe find. The fish stood guard, but the thought of an imminent general slaughter put them out of countenance. At length, they decided to entrust one with the heron to be carried to the pond of Thacsinabot for the first reconnaissance trip.

The old wading-bird took readily the 'fish delegate' in his beak, flew to Thacsinabot, put him down in the pond, and let him swim and frolic to his heart's content, then carried him back home.

Having seen that the 'fish delegate' returned hale and hearty, the fish of the pond of Ramatsimavisay put their entire trust in the heron. Each wanted to be the first to be carried away by the heron to get away from the impending carnage as soon as possible.

To evacuate all the fish, the heron had to undertake numerous trips, and each

time he managed to devoure his passenger, so that at length, the pond Ramatsimavisay was without inhabitants.

In the mean time, a big crab named Chanthalakacta watched the movements of the heron with great suspicion. In order to verify the intentions of the heron, he requested the latter to carry him to the pond of Thacsinabot. The heron was very glad to accept this proposal. He said to himself :

"So far, I have had nothing but fish. I have not had the opportunity to taste crab flesh yet. It's the very moment to try this".

He opened his long beak to catch hold of the crab, but the wise crustacean said :

"I have just finished moulting and my carapace isn't strong enough to support the pressure of your beak. But if you didn't hold me well enough, I might be dropped down and be killed. If you don't mind, I should like to hang myself at your neck with my pinches while you carry me".

The heron agreed and carried the crab by this way to the pond of Thacsinabot. On arriving to the place, the crab noticed

that the pond was full with fishbones, and he understood that all his friends had been devoured by the bird. So he pressed strongly his pinches and hailed :

"Take me back to the pond Ramatsimavisay and I'll free you. If not, you and I shall die together".

The heron was obliged to do as he had been summoned by the crab, but on the way back to Ramatsimavisay, the crab pressed his pinches so strongly that as soon as they arrived at the place, the heron fell down dead".

This ended the story "The Heron and the Crab" told by the flea, who concluded : "My dear bug, your mandibles are as powerful as the crab's pinches. You'll cause the death of the king by sucking his blood. So I'm very sorry, but I can't let you stay with me in the royal bed."

The bug besought : "I agree with you that my stings are ache, but I will try to do my best to suck the royal blood as softly as I can". At length, the flea consented to let the bug stay with him. At midnight, the bug came to sting the King's body in order to

taste the royal blood. His stings hurt so much that the sovereign started out of his sleep, lit a candle, to seek the beast which had dared to attack his august body. Amazed at such a rumour the flea left his lodging place to see what was happening, and was killed by the king".

Having narrated these stories, Vasuphakhagna said to Pingkhala :

"Sire, having in our house a newcomer whose origin is doubtful will put us in the same danger as in the story "The Flea and the Bug". At present, we know nothing about the origin of the bull Nanthaka, so it is best for us to get rid ourselves of him."

Pingkhala replied : "I'll warn Nanthaka to change his behaviour".

Vasuphakhagna replied : "Don't do that. We must keep him in the dark, for better investigation."

Pingkhala objected : "But it isn't convenient to challenge an animal as huge as Nanthaka."

"Sire", Vasuphakhagna replied, "We must not be afraid of someone because of his huge body. The ocean is immense, but a little bird could defeat it easily as told in an ancient tale."

The king of the lions, Pingkhala, asked : "What is this story?"

Vasuphakhagna then recited :

THE SEA-GULL AND THE OCEAN

"There once lived a happy couple of sea-gulls near the seashore. The female was about to lay. She said anxiously to her husband : "Where shall I lay my eggs?"

The male replied : "It is quite simple. Lay them on the beach." "But at high tide, my eggs will be flooded", objected the female.

The male said : "Don't worry about it. I am powerful enough to contain the ocean. So long I live, you have nothing to be afraid of. Lay your eggs on the beach and I'll look after them."

The female did so. But the ocean,

having heard the conversation, rose into a temper and carried them off.

The sad female begged her husband to retrieve the eggs from the ocean. The male said :

"Let's face it bravely. Don't be sad. I will certainly bring the eggs back or else I will go to the Hell as did the hunter who devoured the she-monkey in the old tale."

The female asked : "What is this story?" The male then recited :

THE HUNTER AND THE SHE-MONKEY

"Long long ago, a hunter came to face to face with a tiger while chasing game in the forest. He climbed up a big tree so hastily that he didn't at first succeed in catching its branches to hoist himself up. A she-monkey took pity on him and gave him a hand.

The annoyed tiger hailed her : "She-monkey, what you have just done is not in conformity to the Law of the Jungle. All the beasts must unite to protect themselves a-

gainst men. Don't forget that they are our eternal enemies."

The she-monkey replied : "This man came to seek my protection. By keeping him safe from harm, I have not acted against the teaching of our ancestors : "One must help fellow-creatures in mortal danger, though they are one's enemies."

The tiger said : "This man is a hunter and hunters are thirsty for animals' blood. Besides, men are never grateful to beasts, but always ready to kill them. If you don't trust me, you will be as miserable as the Brahmin in the old tale."

The she-monkey asked : "What is this story?", and the tiger then recited :

THE GOLDSMITH AND THE BRAHMIN

"There once lived in the city Nhima-pham of the kingdom of Phinnaka, a Brahmin named Nanhapham. One day, on the way from his home town to Pharanasi, in a forest, he felt thirsty. He left the main road in search of water and came to across a

deep well. He fixed a pail at the end of a rope and dropped it in the shaft to draw up water.

At the bottom of the well, there were four creatures : a tiger, a naga, a monkey and a goldsmith, who had fallen in the well and didn't succeed in getting out.

After the first dropping of the rope, the monkey, (much more nimbler than the others), caught the cord and came out of the well. He said to the Brahmin :

"I owe my life to you and I am very grateful. My home is in the garden of Mathura. If you have the occasion to go over there, please call on me so that I'll have the opportunity to offer you some presents as evidence of my gratitude. Now, at the bottom of the well, there are yet a tiger, a naga and a goldsmith. I should like to suggest you not to rescue the man but only the animals." Then the monkey went away.

The Brahmin again dropped his rope in the well and had the tiger come out of the shaft. The large feline said to him : "It is very kind of you to lend me a hand. I live in

the forest of Kalikavan, near Mathura. If you happen to cross the wood, don't forget to come and see me, so that I'll have the occasion to extend you my hospitality". Then the tiger went away.

The Brahmin dropped the rope in the well for the third time, and the naga got out of the hole. The marvellous reptile said to him : "My name is Nhapapham. I live in a small pagoda in Mathura. If you have an opportunity to go there, don't forget to call on me. Now, I must tell you not to deliver the goldsmith who is yet at the bottom of the well, for he is not a good one." Then the naga went away.

The Brahmin was surprised to hear the same advice from all of the animals. He said to himself : "However good or bad the goldsmith is, I must rescue him for he is a man as I am myself! "Charity is its own reward", and "Do as you would be done by, then come what may".

Again with his rope dropped in the well, he helped the goldsmith get out of the shaft. The man said to him : "It is owing to

your chivalrous aid that I have made this narrow escape. I am a goldsmith living in the city of Mathura. Please deign to pay me a visit at my home one day, so that I will have the opportunity to honour the savior of my life."

Then the man went away.

When the Brahmin quenching his thirst and bathed in the water of the well, he made his way towards Mathura.

He first met the monkey who received him with open arms and presented him lots of delicious fruits.

Then he went to the forest of Kalikavan to see the tiger, who presented his benefactor golden jewels which he had got from the Royal Prince of the kingdom after ambushing him.

The Brahmin brought the precious presents to the goldsmith in the city of Mathura in the hope that the latter would help him to melt them. The goldsmith recognized immediately that they were those of the

Prince Royal, for it was he who had made them. Though he knew that the Brahmin had not stolen them from the Prince nor killed him, he wanted to take revenge for the Brahmin had preferred to rescue animals before him.

He asked the Brahmin to wait for him in his shop and went to see the king of Mathura, and said : "Your Majesty, His Highness the Prince Royal was not killed by a tiger but by a brigand, who is now in my shop, asking me to melt the prince's jewels in order to eliminate the proof of his crime."

The Brahmin was accordingly arrested and condemned to death. The naga, seeing his benefactor being escorted by the royal soldiers, said to himself : "The brave man will be killed. I must do my best to save his life in order to express my gratitude to him". Thereupon, he crept into the royal palace and bit the most charming princess.

The king ordered all the well-known physicians of the kingdom to come and heal his daughter, but it was in vain. Under the naga's supernatural power, the princess de-

clared that only the Brahmin whom they were about to kill might restore her to health.

The king postponed the execution of the Brahmin and had him come to the palace to heal the Princess. The Brahmin succeeded in saving the Princess' life because of the supernatural power of the marvellous snake, then told the king all what had happened to him. The king generously rewarded the Brahmin and the ungrateful goldsmith was put to death."

Having thus narrated the story, the tiger said to the she-monkey : "Well, my dear, this is the way that men behave. So leave the hunter for me to deal with or else you will be deceived the way the Brahmin was in the tale I have just told you."

The she-monkey replied : "Fie, you feline! You are much more cruel than human beings. I will tell you another tale to prove this."

The tiger asked : "What is this story?", and the she-monkey then recited :

THE BRAHMIN AND THE TIGER

"There was once a Brahmin who came to the Kingdom of Tacksila to learn how to use supernatural powers to revive dead creatures to life. After his study, on the way home, in a forest he found the corpse of a tiger lying across the road, having been bitten by a venomous snake. He couldn't help practicing what he had learnt. In doing this, the Brahmin confirmed the old saying : "He, who has a new trade, he who has a new high social rank, he who has new wealth and a boy who has just reached the age of adolescence can hardly have self control".

Chanting a magic formula, blowing on the corpse of the tiger, he soon revived the wild beast. But no sooner did the animal come to life again that he pounced upon the Brahmin and devoured him".

The she-monkey concluded : "It is beyond dispute that the feline race is much more ungrateful than human beings".

At that very moment, as the she-

monkey and the tiger were quarelling, a jackal made his appearance and asked the tiger :

"My dear friend, what are you doing here?"

The tiger replied : "I am narrating stories to the she-monkey on the branches of this tree, to advise her not to take pity on human beings who do nothing but harm to animals".

The jackal said : "Advices are always good, but the problem becomes one of whether they whom we advise are disposed to listen to them or not. If they aren't, we will be as miserable as the sparrow was when he tried to counsel a monkey, in the old tale".

The tiger asked : "What is this story?"

The jackal then recited :

THE SPARROW AND THE MONKEY

"There once lived a sparrow and a monkey, on a big tree in the forest of Manimatha. One day, a violent storm broke out.

The sparrow entered his nest and had a good rest, while outside the monkey, having no shelter, was exposed to the pelting rain all night long.

Taking pity on the monkey, the sparrow said : "My dear friend, I regret that my nest is so small that I can't extend my hospitality to you. What a pity! Any way, I suggest that you build a comfortable home on the branches of the tree in order to guard yourself against inclemencies, as you have strong arms and skilful hands".

This wise and frank piece of advice put the monkey in a passion so that when the storm had blown over, he hurried on the nest of the sparrow and destroyed it. The poor bird flew away and complained to a firefly his close friend :

"Really, I can't understand the behaviour of the monkey. Instead of expressing gratitude for my advice, he pulled down my home as if I had abused him".

The firefly replied : "It served you right, my naive friend. Don't you forget the old saying : "Wise people must not try to

strengthen up dried, twisted stalks nor attempt to give advice to stubborn crazy fellows".

After narrating the story, the jackal concluded :

"To split a rock, one must not use a sword. Monkeys are queer animals. Don't waste your time trying to talk reason to them, or else you will be put to death as King Thammasin and his Queen were in the old tale".

The tiger asked : "What is this story?"

The jackal then recited :

KING THAMMASIN AND THE MONKEY

"In days of old, there was a king of Mahenthara named Thammasin, who tamed a monkey and taught him how to handle a sword in order to make him his own guard.

One day, Thammasin and his Queen had a walk in the royal garden. The monkey followed them, the sword in his hands. The king picked up flowers with which he made

two collars. He put one of them around his neck and the other around the Queen's. Then the royal couple had a rest at the foot of a big tree, ordering the monkey to keep watch.

A wasp, attracted by the scent of the flowers came and rested on the collars. For fear that the powerful stinged insect would do harm to his masters, the monkey pulled out the sword and charged the wasp. But the tiny animal was gone in time, and the sword cut off the heads of the royal couple".

The jackal concluded : "This is why we must not try to bring monkeys to reason. The race of apes can never distinguish between good and bad." After narrating the story, the jackal left.

The tiger went on, keeping watch at the foot of the tree on which the hunter was taking shelter. But at midnight, having become aware that it would be quite impossible for him to have the she-monkey's mind changed and get hold of the hunter, the tiger left the place to go somewhere else.

At dawn, the she-monkey entrusted

her babies to the hunter and went to fetch fruit in order to supply her guest.

During her absence, the hunter felt hungry, seized the she-monkey's babies, roasted them and ate them with a ravenous appetite. Then he said to himself : "If I go home empty handed, my wife and children will laugh at me. At any rate, I have to bring them some game. So, I had better kill the she-monkey which may be a good dish for my family."

Accordingly, as soon as the she-monkey came back, bringing fruit to feed the hunter, the ungrateful guest gave her a good drubbing to put her to death.

But on his way home, Nang Thorani, the Goddess of the Earth, rose an earthquake, which gulped down the hunter and sent him to Hell."

Having narrated these stories, the male sea-gull stated to his female : "I will bring you the eggs back or else I will go to

Hell as did the hunter in the tale I have just told you."

Then he asked Phagna Khout, the king of the birds, to hold a general meeting of the feathered people to deal with the theft of the eggs by the ocean. A request was sent to Phra Naray, the Creator of the World, who decreed that the ocean must give back the eggs to the sea-gulls."

After spinning successive yarns, Vasuphakhagna said to Pingkhala, the king of the lions :

"Sire, generally, powerful men try to suppress weaker people. But mildness often does better than hardness, as the sea-gulls did in the tale I have just told you. Your Majesty be not afraid of the huge bull Nanthaka".

Pingkhala asked : "You said that the bovine animal means to harm me, didn't you? How do you know that?"

Vasuphakhagna replied : "The intention of the treacherous bull can be checked easily : from now on, if he inclines his head

when approaching you, that means he is about to attack your august person. So, Your Majesty deign to keep out of his clutches".

Then Vasuphakhagna left the king of the lions and went to meet Nanthaka, who asked : "How are you, my dear friend?"

Vasuphakhagna replied : "I'm well physically, but in fact I have a thing at heart. I don't know how to sit on a fence and I'm hanging between my lord and my friend".

The amazed bull asked : "What is the matter with you? What makes you so uneasy? May I ask you to tell me the truth?"

Vasuphakhagna approached Nanthaka and whispered : "My dear friend, I have to confide a top secret : The king of the lions doesn't trust you any longer. I don't know for what reason he takes ill of you, but I am told that he is making shift to kill you and to devour you. As you are a very good friend of mine, I must warn you to stand upon your guard. This news grieves me to my heart because it was me who introduced you to Pingkhala. I would like to have my say about

the problem, but if you give no heed to my honest piece of advice, you will be as miserable as the tortoise in the old tale".

Nanthaka asked : "What is this story?"

Vasuphakhagna then recited :

THE TORTOISE AND THE SWANS

"Once upon a time, there lived in a pond named Phunlotabon, in the kingdom Makhot, a tortoise and two swans who took a liking to each other. After a long and hard drought, the swans said to the tortoise :

"In no time, the pond will be dried up. How shall we be able to live there? We had better leave the place, to move to the pond named Nanthana in the kingdom of Uta-
ra, which is full of fresh water and abounded in fish and shrimps."

The tortoise replied : "This is a good idea. You two, feathered people, you can go there at any time you want. But for me, I can't, because I have no wings".

The swans said : "We can manage to

help you to solve the problem, but you have to promise us to follow strictly our recommendations".

The tortoise asked : "What's to be done?"

The swans said : "Well, with our beaks, we carry either end of a stick and you hang yourself at the middle of it by pressing your jaws. By this way, we'll take you to the pond Nanthana without difficulty. But the point is that you must absolutely not open your mouth during the journey. If you do, you will fall down and be killed".

The tortoise said : "I'll make my word good and hope that everything will be in a fair way".

It was no sooner said than done, and while the three animals were flying by this way over a forest, a wolf caught sight of the spectacle, and said to himself :

"I know how to have the tortoise open his mouth. This will be a good dish for me today".

He called loudly : "Hallo! my dear swans. Where are you transporting that tortoise? A turtle can't live but in water and carrying this one out of the pond, you will put him to an unavoidable death. This is your way to kill him in order to taste tortoise flesh. Well done, feathered people."

The indignant tortoise said to himself : "I must explain to the wolf that he has not to poke his nose into other's affairs and that the swans and I, we are very good friends."

He opened his mouth to speak, fell and was killed."

After narrating the story, Vasuphakhagna concluded : "If you don't follow a good friend's honest advice, you will be as miserable as the tortoise in the tale I have just told you".

Nanthaka said : "But what's wrong with me? What did I do to incur Pingkhala's hatred, so that he wants to kill me?"

Vasuphakhagna replied : "Don't for-

get the old saying : 'One must not rely upon a stream, men who have weapons, clutched animals, women, and kings'. Besides, it's always mackerel which gulps down sprat. Might is always right, as in the tale of the elephant and the woodpecker."

The bull Nanthaka asked : "What is this story?"

Vasuphakhagna then recited :

THE ELEPHANT AND THE WOOD- PECKER

"There once were a couple of woodpeckers who built their nest in some bamboo in the forest of Veruvan. One day, an elephant was fetching fodder and uprooting all plants and thickets in his way, he came across the woodpeckers' nest. In fear that the huge pachyderm would uproot the bamboo, the woodpeckers approached him and humbly pleaded :

"Sir Elephant, our children are too young to fly away. Please be so kind as not to root up the bamboo in which they take shelter".

Tossing his head, the elephant replied : "How does it matter to me if your children can fly away or not? I am Lord in this forest. You tiny creatures, how dare you build your nest in my kingdom without my permission?"

Thereupon, with his big trunk, the elephant rooted up the bamboo and crushed the whole brood of the woodpeckers.

The afflicted female woodpecker said to her husband :

"At any cost, we must wreak our vengeance in blood".

The male went to complain with an old woodpecker named Ahittha, who advised :

"Don't be sad. That is the way things go. You had better go and meet the king of the frogs who can tell you how to take revenge on the elephant".

The male woodpecker did so, and the king of the frogs advised him :

"My poor friend, the dirty elephant is puffed up with pride, because he thinks that his power is invincible. But strength can never vanquish cleverness. Where you

can't use force, have recourse to intellect as in the old tale".

The woodpecker asked : "What is this story? The king of the frogs then recited :

THE TORTOISE AND THE KING OF THE BIRDS

"There once was a khout, king of the birds, while flying along the sea shore to fetch food, succeeded in catching a tortoise. The terrified turtle said to himself :

"We must not dare danger, but once it occurs, we must keep up our spirit to find a way to overcome peril."

He said to the khout : "It is not fair play. You caught me while I was being absent-minded. If I was aware, you would never be able to vanquish me, because you are not more powerful than I am, as you think. I dare you to loosen me and have a competition of force with me. If I can't defeat you, you can devour me as you choose".

The king of the birds asked : "What is this competition?"

The tortoise said : "Let's cross the sea together, you, by flying in the air, and I, by swimming in the water. The first who reaches the other side of the sea will be the winner".

"Nonsense", the khout said to himself, "How pretentious this clumsy reptile is. Sooner or later, he will become a good dish for me."

Therefore, the khout agreed, freed the tortoise, and fixed a date for the competition.

Meanwhile, the tortoise called a meeting of all his friends who adopted the following stratagem to help him : across the sea, several tortoise would station, plunged in the water, at regular intervals. When the kite in the air called, the one who was in front of the bird, would emerge and answer him ...

On the day of the competition, the tortoise said to the khout : "You fly in the air, as for me, I plunge in the water, so that you can't see me. To make easy the

control, I would like to suggest you, from time to time, during the competition, to call me and I will emerge from the water to answer you. By this way, you will be able to check my exact position".

Naturally, the king of the birds was very pleased and accepted such an honest proposal. And during the competition, on his way to cross the sea, each time the kite called, a tortoise emerged from the water immediately in front of him. At length, it was the tortoise who was the winner, and the khout couldn't devour him".

After narrating the story, the king of the frogs concluded : "Well, what I mean is that an intelligent but weak creature can vanquish a powerful but crazy one. Don't forget the old saying "Unity is strength" "Brittle grasses, once plaited into a rope, can bind powerful animals". Now, I'll take you to the king of the flies, who can tell you what to do in order to avenge yourself upon the proud pachyderm".

They went to see the old fly, who said : "When we unite, it is possible for us to defeat the elephant, but if we don't foresee

the eventual risks in order to elaborate a plan to overcome them, we will be as miserable as the egrets in the old tale."

The woodpecker and the king of the frogs asked : "What is this story?"

The king of the flies then recited :

THE EGRET AND THE MONGOOSE

"There were, formerly, a troop of egrets and a big snake who took shelter together in a wood on the bank of the river of Reva. The reptile used to devour the little ones of the egrets, so that the afflicted wading birds held a meeting and set up a stratagem : They put fish along the track leading from the den of a mongoose located at the edge of the wood, to the snake's lodge. Attracted by the fish, the mongoose come across the snake's lodge, killed the reptile and afterwards rushed on the egrets in the neighbourhood and devoured them".

The old fly concluded the story :

"This is why I told you that we must foresee the eventual risks in order to carry out the stratagem properly and safely. Now,

I'll take you to Vasuva, one of the most clever feathered people in the forest, who can suggest you how to avenge the elephant."

Thereupon, the woodpecker, the frog, and the fly came to see Vasuva and said to him : "We'll be much obliged, if you could help us to avenge ourselves on the elephant".

Vasuva replied : "I am ready to lend you a helping hand, but I don't want you to speak about gratitude. A fellow in great danger promises no ends of wonders, but once he feels safe, nothing can prevent him from being ungrateful. I'll tell you a story to prove this".

The woodpecker, the frog, and the fly asked : "What is this story?"

Vasuva then recited :

THE TIGER AND THE CROW

"Once upon a time, there was a tiger who succeeded in catching a deer. While devouring it, a bone of the deer drove in his teeth and made him very painful. He came

to beg a crow named Marakhutti to remove it for him.

"If you succeed in removing the bone, I'll share my prey with you every day", the tiger promised.

Marakhutti removed the deer bone from the tiger's teeth. But when the large feline wasn't painful any longer, he didn't make his word good and didn't share his prey with the crow.

The latter asked him : "Tiger, this is really too bad. Have you forgotten your promise?"

The tiger replied : "Dirty bird. It is you who must be grateful to me because I spared your life when you were in my mouth".

Then Vasuva concluded the story :

"I never mind whether you are grateful to me or not. But I like to help you. That's all. Here is the stratagem : When the elephant is buried in sleep, the egret and the crow, with their strong beaks, come to destroy his eyes, where the fly then lays his

excrement to spoil them. Once the blind elephant feels thirsty, the frog and his friends come to the edge of a precipice to croak loudly. Thinking there is a pond where he can quench his thirst, the pachyderm will make his way towards it and will fall and crush himself against rocky bottom of the chasm".

It was no sooner said than done, and by this way the elephant was killed."

After narrating successive stories to Nanthaka, Vasuphakhagna concluded :

"Thought powerful men try to suppress the weaker people, but if we can foresee the eventual risks, we will be able to overcome them. Now as you know that Pingkhala wants to harm you, the situation calls the utmost care, and you must always be on guard".

Nanthaka said : "You are right. But alas, when the dice are cast, in spite of his intelligence, no one can avoid death, as the poor young man named Patutara in the old tale".

Vasuphakhagna asked : "What is this story?" The bull Nanthaka then recited :

THE POOR YOUNG MAN AND THE
BRAHMIN

"Once upon a time, in the kingdom of Kunsava there lived a brahmin named Sawami who, with the supernatural power bestowed on him by the God of Fire, could predict future.

A pirate, Patutara, came and asked him to foretell future events and reveal the place where he would die.

"Well", said the Brahmin, "Do what I'll suggest and you will be able to know this : On the 8th of a waning moon, go to the cemetery and dig up a corpse which has been newly buried. Then lie down in the coffin instead of the dead body. A ghost will soon appear and tell you what you want to know".

The pirate did as he had been advised by the Brahmin and accordingly, a ghost appeared and asked him :

"Why do you lie down on my place? It isn't yours".

Patutara retorted : "You say it isn't my place, don't you? Well, tell me where is mine?"

The ghost replied : "Yours is at the foot of a Nikhot tree in the kingdom of Patalibut. Pack off and get out of my way".

As the pirate succeeded in knowing that he would die in the kingdom of Patalibut, he did his very best not to draw near this fatal country.

One day, he happened to meet a very charming and beautiful girl who went astray in a thick forest and with whom he fell in love passionately at first sight.

"I am the daughter of a wellknown merchant named Supati. While crossing the forest with my family, we were attacked by a lion and after the rout, I have lost my way and I can't find my parents. Would you be so kind as to take me with you, Sir".

Naturally, the pirate enjoyed to hear

this. He hastened to take the girl home and married her.

The next year, after having bore him a son, the young lady became very sad; she started crying day and night ceaselessly. When questioned, she said :

"I have vowed that I would offer a sacrifice to God if I bore a son. Now my wish is fulfilled and I can't keep my word. So I fell guilty about it. It would be better for me to die rather than fail to fulfill my promise towards God".

The pirate asked : "What did you precisely vow?"

The wife replied : "I vowed that I would make a pilgrim with my husband in the mount of Sithantha in the city of Patalibut, in order to offer a sacrifice to the God of this place".

The word "Patalibut" made the pirate's hair stand on end and put him in an agony of terror.

"No, by no means", he said to his

wife, "I must not go over there. This is my death place, my cemetery".

The young lady started crying loudly : "I'll commit suicide. As I have told you I had better die rather than fail to fulfil my vow towards God".

The more the pirate tried to persuade his wife, the more rigid she became about her vow.

At length, the poor young man had to yield to the wishes of his charming wife.

"Let things take their own way", he thought. "One can never thwart his wife, but I'll manage to carry out a compromise : I'll stop at the border of Patalibut and let my wife enter the city alone to perform the sacrifice".

Therefore the couple made their way towards Patalibut. It was dark when they arrived at the border of the city. The young man and his wife stayed in an empty hut at the foot of the mount Sithantha.

At night, one of the sheep of the king

of Patalibut was stolen and when seeking it, the soldiers heard the bleats of the royal animal in the cottage where the pirate and his wife were resting. They came to the cabin, and by a strange coincidence, the sheep was found lying closed to Patutara. The poor young man was arrested on robbery charges and brought up for trial. Having been believed to be caught in the very act, Patutara was sentenced to death, then executed at the foot of a Nikhot tree in the royal garden of the kingdom of Patalibut, as the Brahmin had prophesied for two years".

Nanthaka concluded the story :

"That is why I told you that no one can avoid death, when the dice are cast".

Vasuphakhagna said : "Indeed Man proposes and God disposes, but we had better take the life in good part. Finally every body must die, but we have to do our utmost to face the reality with courage and to get things better. Be not as crazy as the fish Nhatha Khavisay in the old tale".

Nanthaka asked : "What is this story?" Vasuphakhagna then recited :

THE STORY OF THE THREE FISH

"Once upon a time, lived in the same pond three fish named Anakhatavithala, Batchubannamati and Nhathakhavisay, who were very close friends.

One year, after a long drought, the pond became shallow. The inhabitants in the neighbourhood were planning to go there to cast a drag-net. Anakhatavithala came to know of this frightening news, he hastened to report it to his friends.

"If we didn't leave the pond in time", he concluded, "we would perish for certain."

Batchubannamati replied: "I need not to move away, because I know well how to face dangers. He who is able to keep his presence of mind as the merchant's wife in the old tale, is really a clever one".

Nhathakhavisay and Anakhatavithala asked: "What is this story?"

Batchubannamati then recited:

THE STORY OF THE MERCHANT'S
WIFE

"There once lived in the kingdom of Vikomburi a merchant whose wife, named Rattanapapha, was very fond of love adventures. She used to take advantage of her husband's absence to make love with their handsome servants. One day, while exchanging frantic kisses with one of them, the merchant made his appearance in the house. Promptly, she drew herself towards her husband and said :

"Darling, this servant is a strange one. He ate the camphor that your friends had given to you. Come and check the camphotic odour at his mouth".

Having understood on the spot, the game played by the merchant's wife, the servant pretended to be offended and said :

"It is rather you who are a strange one, Madame. In my life, I never meet such an employer as you, who spends his time to overcheck the odours in the mouth of his servants in order to investigate what they have eaten. I can't stand this way to treat and I think that it is better for me to quit".

The naive husband found that his wife was wrong, so he did his best to convince the servant not to leave them".

Batchubannamati then concluded the story :

"I know to keep my presence of mind to face dangers, so I stay in the pond until they come".

Nhathakhavisay said : "I think that it will be vain try to avoid death when the dice are cast."

The next day, when fishermen came to the pond, Anakhatavithala had already left. Batchubannamati pretended to be dead; a fisherman picked him up, and drew him at a place near another pond where the sly fish dived promptly and took shelter safely in the muddy bottom. As for Nhathakhavisay, trusting in his fate, he stayed in the pond. Finally, he was caught by fishermen who had him fried in their pan."

After narrating the mishap of the fish Nhathakhavisay, Vasuphakhagna concluded :

"So, he who does nothing but waiting death, is really a foolish one. In this world, there are only two things to which we have to surrender ourselves : the thunderbolt and the king's authority. But the former strikes a small spot, and the latter spreads over only one country. As for death, the common calamity of the mankind, the more we make shift to struggle against it, the better it will be. Resigning to die according to another's order, is not a wise behaviour. At any time, those who don't resist, will bring doom to themselves and those who are resolute to struggle against death, may have a chance to survive. In the other hand, when a fighter forgets his own interest or his own life to serve a noble ideal, he is never afraid of death and dares dangers courageously. If he didn't win, he will be a martyr!"

Nanthaka asked : "How can I know when Pingkhala is about to kill me?"

Vasuphakhagna said : "When the king of the lions pricks up his ears, raises his tail, opens widely his mouth jaws, shows his clutches, and looks daggers at you, you can be sure that he is on the point to carry out

his criminal project. But at any rate, you must keep Pingkhala in the dark, and when meeting him, you have to stand upon your guard. Safe bind, safe find, my dear friend".

Vasuphakhagna then left the naive bull, went to see King Pingkhala and said : "Sire, a helping piece of advice, though given by a three-year-old child, must be welcome by older people. In an old tale, King Kēkayrat succeeded in getting a narrow escape since he had paid attention to the humble opinion of one of his rams".

Pingkhala asked : "What is this story?" Vasuphakhagna then recited :

THE STORY OF KING KEKAYRAT

"Once upon a time, there lived in the kingdom of Mathula, a king named Kekayrat, who used to travel in incognito over the country in order to observe his people's life better.

One day, on his way to a small temple not far from his palace, he met a nagi, the daughter of the king of the nagas, making

love to a snake. Finding this was not convenient for a princess to commit such a shameless debauchery and, for a filthy reptile, such fool-hardy high-treason, King Kekayrat pulled his sword and killed the snake, then beat the nagi.

The angry nagi went home and said to her father : "Today, while visiting the kingdom of Mathula, I was arrested by King Kekayrat who wanted me to become his concubine. As I refused, he had me struck deadly hard". Then the nagi burst into tears.

To avenge his daughter, the king of the nagas, changed himself into a small snake, crept into Kekayrat's palace and rolled himself up under the royal bed, awaiting a propitious opportunity to bite and kill his daughter's injurer.

Meanwhile, he overheard a conversation between Kekayrat and his wife :

"Did you notice something interesting during your trip today?", the Queen asked.

King Kekayrat said : "I happened to meet a snake making love to the princess

of the king of the nagas. I killed the dirty reptile and beat the nagi to remind her not to forget her princely dignity".

The king of the nagas then understood that his daughter had lied and Kekayrat was his benefactor. He went home and expelled the nagi from his kingdom.

The next day, he transformed himself into an old man and came to meet Kekayrat, then said : "I am the king of the nagas, the father of the nagi whom you beat to remind her not to forget her royal rank. I do appreciate your august intervention. May I have the permission to offer you something in order to express my gratitude".

Kekayrat replied : "As king, I have lots of precious things. I should like only to ask you to bestow upon me supernatural powers which will enable me to understand the language of the beasts".

The king of the nagas agreed, but asked Kekayrat to swear not to reveal the secret of the power to anyone on penalty of instantaneous death.

One day, after having all the holes of an ant-hill under his royal bed corked with bull excrement, Kekayrat happened to overhear a conversation between the ants which were inside the hill and those which stayed outside it.

The latter said : "Try to perforate some holes to get out".

The former retorted : "You are more numerous than us, why don't you move the king's bed away in order to get in?"

Finding that those tiny creatures were too pretentious, Kekayrat could not help bursting into a roar of laughter.

Amazed, the Queen, who was on the bed with the King, asked :

"Why do you laugh like that? What is it about?"

Kekayrat replied : "Nothing."

The Queen said : "If nothing happened, you wouldn't laugh. I am afraid that you laughed at me".

Kekayrat said : "Please, don't ask

me the reason why. It is impossible even dangerous for me to disclose the cause of my laughter".

"If you don't speak me the truth, I'll commit suicide", stated the Queen.

Then she cried ceaselessly, so that the king was brought to make up that he would sacrifice himself for the sake of his charming wife.

The next morning, he went out to visit his kingdom for the last time, and he happened to overhear another conversation between a ram and a sheep which were grazing grass near a deep well.

The sheep said to the ram, her husband : "I am about to bore you lambkins, so I feel badly the need to have the grass growing at the bottom of the well. Go there and fetch some for me. If you don't, I'll commit suicide".

The ram replied : "How selfish and cruel you are. Will I crush myself against the rocky bottom of the chasm to get grass

for you? I am not as foolish as King Kekayrat who will sacrifice himself for a woman's caprice. A man must not let his wife lead him by the nose".

Convinced by the reasoning of the ram, King Kekayrat went back home and expelled the Queen.

Then Vasuphakhagna concluded the story : "Sire. As I have just told you, a helping piece of advice, though given by an humble one, can enable us to avoid great dangers. I am one of your humble and useless servants, but what I have seen and heard may be useful for my lord's safety. Besides, I think it is incumbent on me to tell you that the bull Nanthaka is planning to overthrow Your Majesty in order to reign over the forest".

Pingkhala said : "Really? So, when the bovine is about to do it, please forewarn me in time".

After a while, it rained and the bull Nanthaka, being able to drink fresh water, was so delighted that he charged his horns

against a termite-hill and gamboled around it.

Vasuphakhagna went to take Pingkhala along to the forest where Nanthaka was frisking about and said :

"Sire, look at the queer bovine, Isn't he on the point to harm you? There can be no doubt about it. I would like to beg you the permission to prevent him from carrying out his treacherous project".

Pingkhala said : "No, you can't do that! He is much bigger and stronger than you are. Let me take care of him".

Then, the king of the lions pricked up his ears, rose his tail, opened widely his mouth jaws, showed his clutches and look daggers at the bull.

At the sight of Pingkhala's dreadful attitude, Nanthaka believed that the lion was about to kill him as he had been told by Vasuphakhagna. He pointed his horns to Pingkhala and waited. The king of the lions rushed on the bull, his teeth sank in the fat of

the bovine's neck. Nanthaka brought down his head and his horns tore the lion's bowels. Both were dead on the spot."

After narrating the long story of the bull Nanthaka, Nang Tan-Tay said to her sister, Nang Vilayvanh :

"Those who are kings must not lend an ear to the courtiers' flatteries. They must act according to their forefathers' teachings, to discriminate with lucidity and impartiality, to prevent themselves from getting angry easily. If not, they will perish as miserably as King Pingkhala in the 'Nantha-Pakone' (The story of the Bull Nanthaka) which I have just told you".

EPILOGUE

King Vimala, finding that Nang Tan-Tay was the most charming and intelligent girl he had never met, made her his Great Queen and cancelled the order to bring him every night a virgin who would have to be killed the next morning.

Existing

title

The

PHRA LAK - PHRA LAM

THE LAO VERSION OF THE RAMAYANA)

Abridged translation

of the manuscript of Vat Kang Tha

by

VO THU TINH

Dépôt légal 2è semestre 1972

LAO " ARABIAN NIGHTS "

Over the centuries, the writing entitled "Nang Tan-Tay" acquired great fame throughout the kingdom of Laos. This is a Lao version of the Indian "Pancha Tantra", which is said to be written by a Brahma named Visusarman to render dull and abstract political principles into attractive stories and legends, so that he could teach politics to his pupils, who were three absent-minded young princes, sons of king Mihilaropya in ancient India.

The peculiarity of this work is that the key story constitutes a large frame in which are inserted other tales. Each of them is usually ended by some gnomic verses condensing ethics or political concepts.

CULTURAL SURVEY OF LAOS

1972