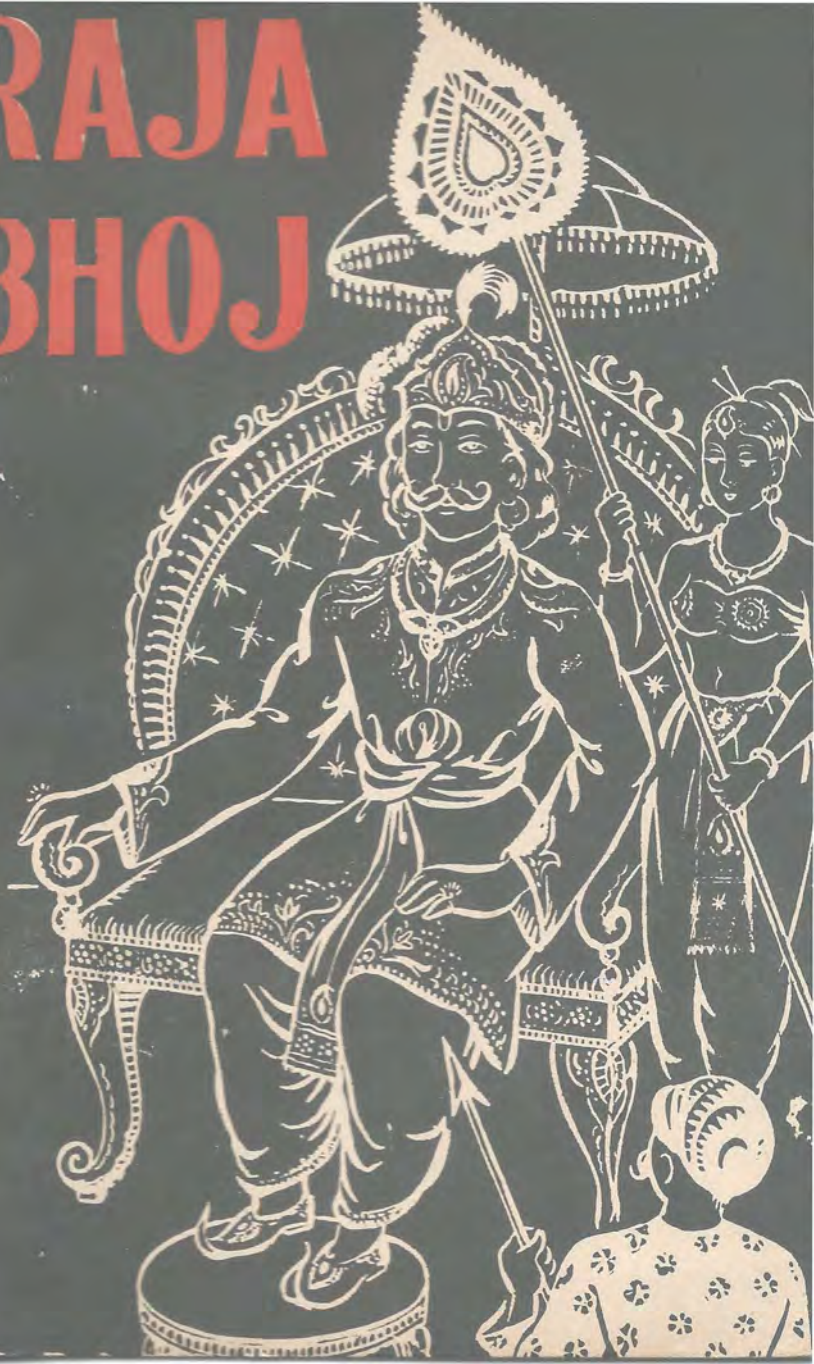


# RAJA BHOJ



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# RAJA BHOJ

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## P R E F A C E

In the Indian history of middle ages, Raja Bhoj holds an eminent place. Next to Vir Vikramaditya, he has dominated the Indian mind. His power and influence, religious and philanthropic deeds, and his practice of showering honours and gifts on poets and scholars have come down to posterity in folklore, folk tales, literature, stone engravings ; and all this places him in the galaxy of great literary and historical figures of India.

Nearly 34 works are attributed to Bhoj. Among these are works on such subjects as *Dharma Shastras*, astrology, medicine, grammar, poetics, *yoga*, fine arts, drama, and many others.

In many works of Sanskrit literature, the writers have quoted from the writings of Bhoj and many volumes have been written on him.

I have tried to give a peep into the life and times of this great and good ruler, and historical and literary figure, who is the hero of folklore and many folk tales. As this booklet is meant for neoliterates, I have included here only those things which may be of interest to them.

For writing this booklet, I have taken help from such volumes as "Raja Bhoj", "Bhoj-Prabandh",

“Bhoj Aur Kalidas”, “Singhasan Dwatrinshati”, and some journals. I would like to express my indebtedness to their authors.

I present this booklet to the reader with the hope that besides providing some entertainment, it will present to him a cultural picture of the times of Bhoj and will also add in some way to his general knowledge.

—*Author.*



## RAJA BHOJ

There may not be many people in India who have not heard the name of Bhoj. He lived nearly 950 years ago, but his name is immortal. Indian people often talk about him in their homes. However, we do not talk of him merely because he was a powerful and great ruler, but because he was himself a great scholar and a poet and showed great regard for other scholars and poets.

He who has some qualities in himself can recognise merit in others. Raja Bhoj was himself a scholar and a poet ; this is the reason why he showed great regard for scholars and poets and honoured them with open heart and abandon. In return, the scholars and poets have made him immortal. Nevertheless, his own scholarship and worth is more responsible for his immortality. It is said that he gave a prize of lakhs on a single poem of merit. There may be some exaggeration in this talk about gifts of lakhs. But there can be no exaggeration

in saying that among the many rulers who showed great regard for poets and scholars, the name of Raja Bhoj will rank amongst the foremost.

Bhoj ruled over Malwa, with his capital located in a town named 'Dhara'. He was born in a Kshtriya clan called Parmar. The name of his grandfather was Shri Harsha, who was also known by another name, Singhbhatta. Shri Harsha had two sons ; the name of the elder one was Munj or Vakpatiraj and that of the younger one was Sindhul or Sindhuraj. Bhoj was the son of Sindhul. As Munj had no son, he adopted Bhoj as his son and made him the heir of his throne.

There is a story about the birth of the Parmar clan : Once Rishi Vasishta used to live in an *ashram* in Abu. Vishwamitra and Vasishta were sworn enemies. One day, Vishwamitra drove away a cow of Vasishta. On this, Arundhati, the wife of Vasishta, started crying and Vasishta got enraged. He chanted a mantra from Atharva Veda and with that put an offering in the *havan kund* (receptacle for sacrificial fire). In an instant, a brave man appeared

out of the fire. On Vasishta's command, he killed Vishwamitra's men and rescued the cow. Vasishta was pleased and gave this brave man the name of Parmar, which means 'one who kills the enemy' ('Par'—enemy, and 'mar'—killer). It was one of



the descendants of this brave man—Raja Upendraraj, who laid the foundation of the Parmar clan of Malwa.

In his accounts of travels through India, the well-known traveller Alberuni has recorded an extraordinary tale about Bhoj. He writes : In Dhara, the capital of Malwa, where Raja



Bhoj rules at present, on the door of the palace, there is a long piece of silver in which a person can see his reflection. People relate a tale about this as follows :—

“In olden times, a man once brought a chemical preparation of remarkable qualities to his ruler. Its property was such that by taking the compound, a person could become immortal, free from decay and death would be rendered invincible, and could have any desire fulfilled. That man, after stating all the details about this compound, told the ruler that he could meet him at an appointed time and test its efficacy. The ruler accepted his story and ordered the servants to collect everything for this compound.

After this, for many days, he went on boiling oil in a pan. When this oil became viscous, he asked the Raja to plunge into that boiling oil, after which he would proceed with the rest of his work. But the Raja faltered at the sight of the boiling oil.

Seeing this, the man told the Raja that if he was afraid to take a plunge, he himself may be allowed to do so, so that he could attain

perfection. The Raja accepted this. Thereupon, that man gave to the Raja many small packets of medicines and indicated the various symptoms, on the appearance of which each medicine was to be put in the oil. Having explained everything, that man took the plunge in the oil and after some time got boiled so that the entire thing became a thick compound. The Raja went on putting medicines according to indications. When only one medicine remained, the Raja thought that if in reality that man was correct, he would come out with an immortal life and would be rendered invincible. And then what will become of his own position and his kingdom. Having thought thus, he did put last medicine in the oil. The result was that when the oil cooled down, the compound came to the surface and solidified into a silver piece of the shape of that man."

Raja Bhoj was born in the ninth generation of the clan of Upendraraj. His times are said to be near about A.D. 1010. After Raja Bhoj, there were 18 rajas in his line, the last of the Parmars being Jaisinghdev.

Raja Munj, the great uncle of Bhoj died a

hero's death fighting Tailap, the ruler of Telang. At this time, Raja Bhoj was just a minor ; so his father Sindhul sat on the throne of Malwa till Bhoj attained majority. After some years, Sindhul also died fighting Chamundraj, the Solanki king of Gujrat. After the death of his father, Bhoj sat on the throne at the age of 20. He is supposed to have died near about A.D. 1065. On this basis, one can say that Raja Bhoj died at the age of 65 after a rule of nearly 45 years. But the greatness of his life still lingers in the world. It is said that after Vikramaditya there has been no ruler whose charities and greatness are so well known, as those of Raja Bhoj.

Besides being a scholar and philanthropist, Raja Bhoj was also a hero. After occupying the throne, he defeated many princes. Narmada in the North and Godavari in the South were the frontiers of his kingdom. He also defeated the rulers of Konkan and Karnataka and thus extended his kingdom. In some manuscripts, one also finds references to his battles with Muslim rulers. Scholars believe that Raja Bhoj gave considerable help to Raja Jaipal of



Lahore in his fight against Mahmood Ghaznavi. Mewar was also under him.

The forebears of Bhoj used to rule over Malwa with Ujjain as capital, but Raja Bhoj made Dhara as his capital, which is now called Dhar. For this reason, Raja Bhoj is also called 'Dhareshwar' or the 'Ruler of Dhara'. In addition, Bhoj had many other titles, for example, Parambhattarak, Maharaj-adhiraj, Parmeshwar and Malwa-Chakravarti.

In commemoration of his victories over Raja Gangeyadeva of Chedi and Jaisingh of Telangana, Raja Bhoj erected a solid iron pillar in Dhara. Near this he had made a *math* for holy men. When Dhara came under the Muslim rule, a Muslim Raja named Dilawar Khan Ghauri turned this *math* into a mosque, which still exists and is known as *Lat Masjid*. But later people wove an entertaining story around the iron pillar. The story is like this :—

Once upon a time, there lived in Dhara an oil presser woman, named Gangli. In her build, she was not less than a she-demon ; this



iron pillar was the beam of her balance, and the stones which lie strewn around the pillar, even now, were her weights. Her home was in a village called Nalchha. When she returned after selling oil, she used to dust her skirt. The sand which came out of the skirt by this process piled up into a hillock. That hillock became famous later on by the name '*Telan-Tekri*'. This '*Telan-Tekri*' still exists in Nalchha. There is a saying also after this woman's name—"Where is the comparison between Raja Bhoj and Gangli *Telan*." That is, Gangli might be big in her build, but she cannot stand comparison with the great Raja Bhoj.

Scholars believe in view of this anecdote that the story of Gangli is imaginary. Perhaps the saying might have been current in the beginning in this form :—"Where is the comparison between Raja Bhoj and Gangeya and Telangraj", but later 'Gangey' and 'Telang' might have been vulgarised into Gangli and Telan.

Bhopal of today is also said to have been established by Bhoj. From Bhojpur or its earlier name Bhojpalit, the town became Bhopal.

The great lake of Bhopal is also said to have been built by Bhoj.

Raja Bhoj had also established a Sanskrit Pathshala (School) in his capital Dhara which was named Bhojshala. Near this he also built a well which was called Saraswati-koop. People had firm belief that any one who drank water from this well won the favours of Saraswati. Nowadays, this well is known as Akkal-kui.

In the times of Raja Bhoj, Dhara was a prosperous and fortified town. The town was surrounded by a wall and a trench on all sides. This trench is now divided into various water tanks. People call these by the name of 12.1/2 tanks. In the town, there were 84 crossings and 84 large temples. There was a big institution called Sharda Sadan, in which scholars from India and abroad used to live. In this Sharda Sadan, there was a beautiful and huge statue of Saraswati, which is now in the British Museum. The inscription on the feet of this figure indicates that it was built by the order of Raja Bhoj.

Raja Bhoj was himself a devotee of Shiva, but he had no ill-will against people of other

faiths and beliefs. In his court, many Jain scholars used to be treated with reverence. Nearly 500 scholars adorned his court.

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Raja Bhoj after attending to his daily routine used to go to the court every day at a particular time and used to distribute gifts to the needy coming from far and near according to their wishes. On account of this generosity of the Raja, a Minister named Rohak got worried. He thought : "If the Raja continues like this, then very soon the treasury will be emptied. The Raja will be in trouble. As far as possible, the hand of the Raja must be stayed."

But he had no courage to speak up in the open court. He, therefore, got inscribed this saying on the gateway of the court : "One must save money for the rainy day."

Next day, while entering the court, Raja Bhoj saw this inscription. On enquiry, he could not find out the name of the person who had got these words inscribed. Then he ordered that underneath the above inscription this sentence should also be inscribed : "How can the fortunate come to grief ?"



The Minister read this and had another sentence written below, which read : "Even fortune frowns sometimes."

The Raja read this one also and had another sentence written there : "When fortune frowns even the saved up treasures are destroyed."

In the end, the Minister had to ask for forgiveness. This incident shows clearly how much Raja Bhoj was charitably inclined.

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There is another well-known story about the childhood of Raja Bhoj. In the story, Sindhul, the father of Bhoj, has been described as the elder brother of Munj. The story is like this :—

At the time of the death of Raja Sindhul, Bhoj was only five years old and so Sindhul handed over his throne to Munj, his younger brother, and entrusted Bhoj to his care. After some days, an astrologer came to the ruler's court. Munj gave the horoscope of Bhoj to him for reading. The astrologer after going through the horoscope said : "Even Brahma Himself cannot



relate in detail the fortune of Bhoj ; what can an humble man like myself do. But I can say this much that Bhoj will rule over the entire Southern country including Bengal for 55 years 7 months and 3 days.”

It is said that on hearing this forecast, the face of Munj turned pale. Now Bhoj appeared to him as an awesome rival. He did not sleep the whole night. Next morning he called his Minister Vatsaraj and commanded him : “From the Pathshala, take Bhoj to the forest of Bhuvaneshwari Devi and bring, his severed head.”

Vatsaraj at first tried to dissuade Munj from this evil design but instead of seeing reason he got angry with Vatsaraj as well. So Vatsaraj had no alternative but to carry out the ruler’s command. He went to the Pathshala and taking Bhoj from there, took him to the forest of Bhuvaneshwari Devi and informed him of the Raja’s orders.

Bhoj listened to this command with great patience. He then said to Vatsaraj : “You carry out the orders of your ruler without fear,

but I will give you a letter which you may deliver to him without fail."

Vatsaraj agreed. Bhoj took a *peepal* leaf and made a cup of it. Then he made an incision in his leg with a knife and put some



blood into that cup. Dripping a straw into that cup he wrote a couplet (*shloka*) on another leaf and handed it to Vatsaraj. Then he was ready to die. But the heart of Vatsaraj was restless. His eyes were brimmed with tears. He folded his hands and begged forgiveness from the prince. Then he put him in a horse

carriage and after taking him to his town house, hid him there. Thereafter he went to a proficient sculptor and got the likeness of the severed head of Bhoj made. In the darkness of night he took that head and put it before Munj.

Munj glanced at the head once and asked Vatsaraj : "What did Bhoj say at the time of his death ?"

In reply Vatsaraj silently handed over to Munj the letter of Bhoj. The Rani brought a lamp and the Raja started reading the letter in this light. The meaning of the couplet written on the *peepal* leaf was : "O Raja ! Raja Mandhata who added splendour to *Satyuga* also left this world. And Ram who built a bridge across the ocean, and killed Ravana, does not live today either. Likewise Yudhishtira and other kings had also to leave this world. This earth has accompanied none, but I must say that it will surely accompany you."

On understanding the meaning of this couplet, Raja Munj was filled with remorse. He was himself ready to die. Vatsaraj whispered to the Prime Minister Buddhisagar the news



about Bhoj being alive. Then both of them jointly brought a *yogi* and presented him to Munj. The *yogi* told the Raja that by power of *yoga*, he could bring the corpse of Bhoj to life again, and the same night he brought the living Bhoj before the Raja. The Raja embraced Bhoj. He handed over the throne to Bhoj, renounced the world, and went with his wife for '*tapasya*' (concentrated devotion).

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One night Raja Bhoj woke up suddenly. He looked out from the window and saw that the entire town was bathed in moonlight. And then he saw the moon in the sky and was charmed. In a moment of inspiration he muttered a couplet : "In the moon those small dark patches which are adding to its charm, people call them hare, but in my opinion they are not hare." He repeated these two lines several times. But another two lines were required to complete the verse and in spite of his best efforts, these did not occur to him.

Just then a voice completed the verse with the two remaining lines. In verse, the voice said : "O Prince ! in my opinion the black spots that



you see in the moon are the scars left by the fire particles from the oblique glances of the love-lorn ladies of the enemies that you have killed.” This meant that in the various battles many princes had been killed by Bhoj. Their widows were so much filled with passion that their eyes emitted fire. All this meant, of course, that Bhoj was a great hero, a great conqueror.

When the Raja looked in the direction from which the voice was coming, he saw a man standing in a corner of the palace. On enquiring, he learnt that that man had entered the palace with the intention of committing a theft. The Raja had him confined to a room for the night. The next morning, he called him to the court and pleased with his couplet, gave him a reward of 10 crore gold coins.

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The following story would show how generous he was to the poor. Once a poor Brahmin came to his court and recited a poem, which meant: “O King ! My mother is not pleased with me nor with my wife. My wife is not pleased either with me or her mother-in-law. I am also neither pleased with my mother nor

with my wife. Then tell me whose fault it is ?”

Raja Bhoj grasped the situation in a trice and said that this was nobody's fault, but that of poverty. Then he gave to the poor Brahmin so much wealth that there remained no chance for quarrels or ill-feelings in his household.

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There is another story of the same type. Once in a wintry night he was moving about incognito in the town. Roaming about, he passed by a temple. A poor man in bewailing his own poverty was reciting a poem which meant : “I am passing my days in this cold weather with great difficulty. I am drowned in the ocean of worries which is as cold as the water of the month of *Magh*. Even while blowing at cold cinders, my lips shiver. My abdomen has dried up with hunger. Like a dishonoured wife, sleep has left me. And like the wealth given in charity to a really deserving person, this night does not wish to end.”

The Raja listened calmly to his pathetic tale.

He sent for that Brahmin early next morning. He asked him how he had passed so many days in cold weather. The Brahmin replied in poetry, which meant : “O King ! I have passed the cold weather with the help of my knees, the sun and fire—at night, by putting my knees against my breast, during the day by basking in the sun and in the mornings and evenings by sitting before the fire.”

The Raja gave him 3 lakh gold coins not only because he was a poor man, but also because he was a poet.

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In the days of Raja Bhoj, the courts of rulers were such that those who were entrenched there did not like the intrusion of new elements in the court easily. Poet Shekhar tried his best to enter the court after reaching the city of Dhara, but he was unsuccessful because of the conspiracy of courtiers. He began to waste his life in poverty there. One day, Raja Bhoj was passing through that part of the city on his elephant where Shekhar was collecting grains strewn over the earth.





Bhoj saw him and said with disdain : “A man who cannot even earn his daily bread lives in this world in vain.”

Then that poor Shekhar replied : “He who is in a position to do good but does not do so, is living in the world in vain.

The Raja got angry with this sharp answer and said : “O Mother ! Do not give birth to a beggar.”

Then Shekhar gave a tit for tat answer : “O Mother Earth ! Do not allow on yourself those



who do not pay any heed to the appeals of the needy."

It was then not difficult for the Raja to realize that the beggar-like man was not a beggar in reality. The Raja asked him as to who he was. The beggar replied : "O King ! I am a poet named Shekhar. But your court poets did not allow me to reach your court. That is the reason why I had to adopt this course."

The Raja asked Shekhar to come to his court. He satisfied him by giving him a lot of money.

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It has been written above that in the court of Raja Bhoj, there were scholars and poets of many shades of opinions. A Jain poet named Dhan Pal was very shrewd and proficient. He used many stratagems to turn the Raja from violence to non-violence.

Once Raja Bhoj started on a hunting expedition. Poet Dhan Pal was also with him. The Raja asked him a question in verse, which meant : "Dhan Pal ! Why does the deer jump

towards the sky while the swine burrows into the earth."

Dhan Pal replied adroitly : "O King ! Afraid of your arms the deer wants to take refuge behind his own kin in the moon while the swine wants to hide behind Vishnu who supports the Mother earth in his incarnation as 'Varah' which is his own likeness.

Even this did not move the Raja much. He struck a deer with an arrow. The deer received injury and began to writhe with agony. Then the Raja asked Dhan Pal to describe this scene. At once, Dhan Pal said in a Sanskrit verse, which meant : "May this manly courage of yours be destroyed in which there is no pity. This is injustice. The refugee is not at all at fault. Alas ! There is nobody to question anybody else. That is why the powerful kill the weak."

On hearing this, Bhoj was much annoyed. On this Dhan Pal said again : "O King ! If a dying enemy puts a straw in his mouth, he is left alone. But these poor creatures always eat straw, then why are they killed in this fashion ?"

This time what Dhan Pal said had great influence on Raja Bhoj. From that day he gave up hunting.

When he was returning, by coincidence a *yagna* was being performed on the way. Raja Bhoj happened to turn his eyes towards the *yagna mandap*. A goat tied to a pillar for sacrifice was bleating. The Raja asked Dhan Pal for the cause of the goat's bleating. Dhan Pal narrated the cause thus : "O King ! That goat is saying, 'I neither crave for paradise, nor do I entreat you for that. O good man ! I am always happy eating the grass. Then why are you so keen to send me to paradise ? If the animals sacrificed in *yagna* do really go to paradise, then why don't you complete your *yagna* by sacrificing your father, mother, children and relations so that they go easily to paradise.' "

The Raja was astonished with this reply. Then Dhan Pal said again : "If by raising a pillar, by animal sacrifice and by killing animals and splashing blood, any one can go to heaven, then who will go to hell ? O King ! the holy men say that truth alone is the pillar of *yagna* ;



*tapas* is the fire ; and one's own *karmas* are the firewood. And in such a *yagna kunda* the offering should be that of *ahimsa*."

It is said that like this Dhan Pal changed the mind of Bhoj from violence and rituals of *yagna*.

In the times of Raja Bhoj, Raja Bhim ruled over Gujrat. Being neighbours, they were rivals and inimical to each other. Once Raja Bhoj wanted to test the intelligence of Raja Bhim. For this purpose, he sent a message to Raja Bhim asking him to send four things. These were :

(1) That which is here but not in the other world,

(2) That which is in the other world, but is not in this world,

(3) That which is in this world as well as in the other world, and

(4) That which is neither in this world nor in the other world.

The royal emissary took the message to the court of Raja Bhim. But none of the scholars of his court could think of what these four



things could be. On this Bhim was worried. He was afraid of ignominy. Then a prostitute explained the meaning of these four things to the Raja.

She explained the meaning of these four things in these words : "O King ! the first thing that Raja Bhoj has asked for is a prostitute, for she enjoys the comforts of this world but not those of the other world. The second thing meant is a *tapasvi*, for he does not enjoy in this world, but gets all sorts of comforts in the other world. The third thing means a philanthropist, who enjoys in this as well as in the next world. The fourth thing is a gambler who is happy neither here nor there."

Raja Bhim was very pleased with the intelligence of that prostitute. He sent all these four things to the court of Bhoj.

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It has been said before that in the court of Raja Bhoj, there were many court-poets. Raja Bhoj himself was a great poet. The poets of the court had given him the title of "the Prince among poets." Among the poets of the court,

Kalidas was the greatest. Bhoj used to respect him the most.

Scholars believe that there have been many poets of the name of Kalidas. Hundreds of years before, a poet, named Kalidas lived at the court of Vikramaditya. He was different from the poet Kalidas of the court of Bhoj. Be that as it may, Kalidas of the court of Bhoj was also a genius.

One day Raja Bhoj entered his private mansions without intimation. His Rani Lila



Wati was highly educated ; she, too, was a poetess. At that time she was engaged in conversation with a friend. Seeing the Raja enter in this manner without proper intimation, she uttered involuntarily : “fool”.

The Rani had uttered this word in a low tone, but the Raja heard it. He silently left the place and returned to his court. He could not understand the meaning of that word coming from the lips of the Rani. He wanted to unravel the mystery. And so he addressed by way of welcome any pandit who entered the court : “Come fool”. This new incident amazed the pandits a great deal. But no one understood the inner mystery.

After some time poet Kalidas also reached the court. The Raja used the same word “fool” for him. Kalidas was equally surprised. But he could not contain himself. At once, he asked in Sanskrit verse from the Raja. The meaning of the verse is like this : “Raja Bhoj ! I don’t walk on the road while eating, nor do I speak while laughing, nor do I grieve over the past, nor do I get puffed up with my



actions, and I also do not interrupt when two persons are talking. Then how am I a fool ?”

Hearing this, it at once dawned on the Raja why the Rani had called him a fool. It was because the Rani at that time was talking to another woman. He was pleased with Kalidas and rewarded him amply.

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One day Raja Bhoj was strolling with Kalidas in a park. At that time a scholar named Manibhadra also arrived there. He started strolling with them too. On the right of Bhoj was Kalidas and on the left Manibhadra. After some time the latter thought of a mischief in order to dishonour Kalidas. He recited a poem in praise of the left hand, the meaning of which is as follows :

“The left hand catches hold of the head of the enemy in the battlefield. It stops a racing horse. Holding a shield and a bow, it goes forward in the battlefield. But it does not know how to gamble, steal, embrace a woman or to take an oath.”



When Manibhadra had said only three verses, Kalidas guessed his meaning. With a laugh he himself completed it with the fourth verse. The meaning of the fourth verse was : "Ah Brother ! What you say is correct. But *Vidhata* finding the left hand wanting in giving charity, has entrusted it with the dirty work."

Hearing this retort of Kalidas, Raja Bhoj was very pleased and Manibhadra was downcast.

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Kalidas was not only a poet but a person with a charitable disposition. When opportunity arose, he used to help the helpless in the court of the Raja.

Once a poor Brahmin, taking a small bundle of sugarcane pieces, started towards Dhara in order to present them to Raja Bhoj. Night fell on the way and he slept there. Finding him asleep, a rascal took out all the sugarcane pieces and replaced them with pieces of dry wood. Next day the Brahmin took his bundle and proceeded towards Dhara. In the court, he offered the bundle to the Raja. But when

the bundle was opened, pieces of wood were found ; the Brahmin was terrified and the Raja annoyed.

Seeing the Brahmin's pitiable state, Kalidas was filled with great feeling for him. He took the Brahmin's side and recited a poem. The purport of the poem was : "O King ! The powerful Arjuna burnt to ashes beautiful Khandawa forest full of green trees, and the powerful Hanumana burnt down the golden Lanka. And Shankara reduced to ashes *Kamadeva* who gives pleasure to all beings. Were all those actions of theirs correct ? I would consider it worth something if someone destroys poverty which troubles all persons."

The meaning behind what Kalidas said was that the Brahmin had brought these pieces of wood as if they were symbols of poverty. O King ! I would acknowledge if you save this man from his poverty. Raja Bhoj was pleased. He gave a lot of money to that Brahmin and he went away satisfied.

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It is said that as the fame of his charities

and the praises of his great scholars spread far and wide, Raja Bhoj became conceited. The old Minister came to know of his pride. On getting an opportunity, he took out an account book, in which charities of his times were



listed. The amounts given in charities by others were far in excess of what Raja Bhoj had distributed. Seeing this Raja Bhoj became normal again.

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Raja Bhoj and Raja Bhim of Gujrat had



agreed upon certain conventions for correspondence. But once ignoring these conventions, Raja Bhoja wanted to test the intelligence of the people of Gujrat. In a letter, he wrote : "The powerful lion, at the mouth of whose den the heads of big elephants have been rent asunder is neither friendly nor inimical to the deer."

Reading these lines which were full of disdain, Raja Bhim asked his great scholar Govindacharya to send a reply. Govindacharya replied :

"For the hundred sons of Dhritrashtra, Brahma sent Bhima as their death. Bhima killed all the hundred of them. Then why should he bother about a person like you ?"

Getting this sharp retort, Bhoj became silent.

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Once poet Raj Shekhar was sleeping with his family in the days of his poverty in the Mahakal temple of Ujjaini. All were hungry. At night his son began to cry on account of extreme hunger. Seeing his son crying, Shekhar told his wife : "O Beloved Wife ! Pass somehow the hot weather by feeding these children.



When the rainy season starts, we will have many vegetables like gourd, pumpkin, cucumber, and we will be happier than princes."

By a coincidence Raja Bhoj was moving there. Knowing about the poverty of the poet, he gave him so much that he became wealthy. He wrote a *shloka* (couplet) in praise of this gift. The *shloka* means : "The dry lake in which the frogs living in slush have become half dead ; the tortoises have hid themselves in mud by digging holes (for lack of water) ; the fish were breathing their last, on the same lake clouds poured rains out of season and filled it to the brim so that herds of elephants can come and take bath in that lake now and drink water there."

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There was an extremely poor Brahmin named Sankarshan. His wife was very faithful. She prevailed upon her husband to prepare himself for some worthwhile endeavour.

The Brahmin thought : "Let me go to Raja Bhoj. I may get something from him. If nothing else, he may at least give me a cow or

a buffalo. We do not want anything else. There will be some milk for the children and both of us will live by taking some butter-milk. But I can't go to the Raja without something ; and I have nothing to take to him."

At last he found a *bel* (the wood-apple). He took it and started towards Dhara.

When he found in the court of Bhoj 1400 pandits including poets like Kalidas, he was scared. It was his first opportunity to visit a court. After some time he somehow picked up courage and stepped forward in front of the Raja and blessed him.

Raja Bhoj guessed from this man's ways and manners that he had come to the court for the first time. Therefore he asked him : "Tell us please, revered Brahmin, from where you happen to come?"

The Brahmin replied : "O King ! I have come from Kailash."

Now the Raja enquired : "God Shankara must be doing well, I hope?"

The Brahmin replied with a pathetic voice : "Sire, alas ! He is dead, indeed."

Hearing this, the Raja was surprised. He said : "How can Shankara die, he is the Death of death itself."

The Brahmin said : "You may rest assured ; I will furnish proofs of Shankara's death before you. Please listen to the state of Shankara and his household : Half the body of Shankara has been stolen by God Vishnu, the remaining half by Parvati. Ganges which was in his forehead has flowed down to the ocean. The digit of the moon on his head has reached the sky and, Sire, the kings of cobras and snakes have gone to the under-world. There were two special things of Shankara ; he was the ruler of the three worlds and was omniscient ; both these have come to you. Now only one thing alone has remained—"begging". That has come to me, Sire."

The Raja was very pleased with this intelligent description of Shankara. He told the Brahmin : "Oh excellent among Brahmins ! Please ask for anything you wish. I will give you whatever you ask for."

The Brahmin thought for a while and said : "Sire, I am very poor. I don't even have



enough to eat. I have small children at home. They don't even get milk. If you can give me a good milch cow or buffalo, may God bless you." Instantly, the Raja asked his Minister to give the Brahmin a good milch buffalo. The Minister conveyed the order to his subordinates. The servants were mischievous. They got hold of a barren buffalo, well built but old, and gave the buffalo to the Brahmin.

The Brahmin looked at the buffalo and grasped the situation.



The Brahmin went over to the buffalo and whispered something in her ear. Then he put his own ear near the buffalo's mouth and came back.

Seeing the Brahmin do all this the Raja was surprised. He could not help asking the Brahmin : "What was this that you did ? Please let me know."

The Brahmin replied shrewdly : "Sire, I saw that she had no young one and so I asked her whether she was pregnant. She replied, 'In *Satyuga*, my husband Mahishasura was killed by Durga Devi. From that time till today, I have been living as a widow according to my *Dharma*. Now my teeth have fallen and my teats have also become flaccid. I am old. In this state you are asking me whether I am pregnant. Are you not ashamed' ? "

The Raja was highly pleased with the intelligence of the Brahmin and gave him a good buffalo as a gift. He also punished those who had given him the old buffalo.

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In the town Amravati, there used to live a

Brahmin family ; scholarly yet indigent. There were only four members in that family : the Brahmin himself, his wife, his son and the son's wife. When they heard that Raja Bhoj honours and rewards scholars and showers gifts on them that they ask for, then all the four started towards the town of Dhara, the capital city of Bhoj's kingdom.

Near Dhara town, they met a Brahmin, who asked them : "Where are you going ?"

The reply came : "We are going to Raja Bhoj, the knower of the Vedas and the Shastras."

The Brahmin said : "It is all a lie. He does not know how to read and write. If he had known, he would not have given me more wealth than was written in my forehead, *i.e.* according to my fortune."

Saying this the Brahmin went his way. But hearing this the four were happy inwardly. Outside Dhara town they stopped under a banyan tree and sent a message to the Raja that a Saraswati family had come to his town in



order to visit him and if he gave permission they would enter the town.

Hearing that it was a Saraswati family, Raja Bhoj thought of testing whether in reality the family was worthy of calling itself a Saraswati family or not.

The Raja asked for a utensil full of milk to be given by a shrewd servant to the Saraswati family. The servant took the utensil and handed it to the Brahmin and told him that the Raja had sent it.

The Brahmin understood the Raja's meaning. The Raja had indicated that Dhara town was as full of people as this vessel of milk and there is no unfilled place in the town.

The Brahmin put some sugar and asked the servant to take the milk to the Raja.

The Brahmin tried to explain by putting sugar in the milk that just as, in spite of there being no place left, the sugar got absorbed in the milk, they may also be absorbed in Dhara town.

The servant related all that had happened

to the Raja. The Raja was impressed by the Brahmin's intelligence. But the Raja thought that another test should be given. With this end in view, he changed his dress and reached the place where the Saraswati family was



staying. On enquiring, he learnt that the Brahmin and his son had gone to take bath in a tank. The Raja also reached there. He sat near the Brahmin's son who was absorbed in prayer near the tank and began drinking water from the tank with a cupped hand, so that the

Brahmin's son could see. He meant to convey that Rishi Agastya had drunk off the entire ocean in this manner ; and that he would acknowledge the Brahmin boy if the latter could even exhaust water of that tank.

The Brahmin's son understood the whole thing. He took small pebbles from the bank and threw them in the water. Seeing this the Raja was pleased and returned to his palace. By throwing pebbles, the Brahmin's son wished the Raja to understand that Raja Ramachandra was a *kshatriya* and Bhoj, too, was a *kshatriya*. The former had been able to make stone slabs float on water. He would acknowledge Bhoj if the latter could even make these small pebbles float on the water.

The Raja was very much impressed by the knowledge and intelligence of this family and he satisfied them with honours and gifts.

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How much Raja Bhoj used to love Kalidas may be apparent from the following incident :

Once Raja Bhoj and Kalidas had some differences. Consequently Kalidas left the



court of Bhoj and started living secretly somewhere else. But this made Bhoj unhappy. Without Kalidas, the court appeared to Bhoj devoid of life and taste. He became impatient to find Kalidas again. Bhoj tried to find the clue as to Kalidas's whereabouts, but was not successful. Ultimately, he thought of a ruse.

Raja Bhoj had it announced everywhere that any one who brought a new couplet, would be rewarded rupees one lakh. At the same time, he tutored three pandits, one of whom could remember a *shloka* by listening to it once, the second by listening twice and the third by listening three times. Consequently, whenever anyone recited a new *shloka*, the first pandit repeated it and called it an old one, the second and the third would then recite it by having listened to it twice and thrice, respectively. And so it would be proved beyond doubt that the *shloka* was an old one ; and so no one qualified for the reward.

Kalidas from his secret place came to know of this. He thought of giving a slip to Raja Bhoj. He sent an old Brahmin with a *shloka* to the court of Bhoj. Its meaning was : "Maharaj

Bhoj ! May you prosper ! Your father was a great religious person ; this is known to the entire world. Your father had taken 99 crore precious stones from me on loan. This truth is known to all the pandits. So you should settle the debt of your father. If your pandits refuse to acknowledge this as true, then you may believe me as the composer of this *shloka* and give me one lakh of rupees as reward.”

Hearing this *shloka*, the pandits of the court were in quandry. They began to look at each other's face. If they said that the *shloka* was an old one, then Raja Bhoj would be declared debtor to the extent of 99 crore precious stones. If they called it new, then the Raja would have to pay rupees one lakh in prize. But Raja Bhoj understood the shrewd import of the *shloka* and was convinced inwardly that no one except Kalidas could be the composer of the *shloka*. Bhoj gave to that old man the prize of rupees one lakh and calling him aside, asked for the name and address of the composer of the *shloka* and went there himself. The Raja on reaching there found that the composer was Kalidas himself. Raja Bhoj embraced him

with great affection and brought him to the court with honour.

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It has already been said that Raja Bhoj was himself a great scholar. Instead of giving himself up to pleasures and indulgence, he remained a worshipper of Saraswati throughout his life *i.e.* he devoted himself to the joy of mind and spirit. And so he wrote a number of volumes on several subjects. The number of his books is estimated to be 30 to 35. These books are on astrology, *yoga shastras*, politics, *dharma shastra*, *alankara shastra*, drama, poetry, grammar, medicine and on many other subjects. His priceless books are still extant. In addition to this the court poet of Raja Bhoj, Damodra Mishra, composed the well-known Sanskrit drama *Hanuman Natak*. It is said about this drama that it had been originally composed by Shri Hanuman. Hanuman wrote one Ramayana and showed it to Valmiki. Valmiki was inwardly jealous that if that Ramayana became popular, no one would look at his own Ramayana. And so he contrived to throw into the sea the stone slabs on which Hanuman's



Ramayana was engraved. Later Raja Bhoj found the stone slabs on the sea-shore which Damodra Mishra pieced together.

Magh, the well-known poet and author of "Shishupal Vadh", is also said to be a court-poet of Raja Bhoj. Such famous scholars and poets were the ornaments of Bhoj's court.

Many rajas were jealous of the influence and fame of Raja Bhoj. It is said that Karna, the Raja of Kashi and Raja Bhim of Gujrat jointly attacked Dhara. By a coincidence, Raja Bhoj died at the same time. A little before his death, he gave away a lot in charity. He also gave orders to his Ministers that when his bier is being carried out, his hands should be put out so that people may understand that—"Wife and sons, gold and land, parks and gardens—at last everything will be left behind. Man comes alone into this world and in the end goes alone, empty-handed."

### A Folk Tale about Bhoj

Once Raja Bhoj and Magha Pandit went out on an outing. While returning, they lost their way. Then both of them reflected : We

have lost the way. Now whom should we ask. Then the Pandit pleaded : "Nearby an old woman is watching over a wheat field. Let us ask her."

Raja Bhoj said : "All right. Let us go to her."

Both went to the old woman and said : "Ram Ram."

The old woman said : "Brothers come, Ram Ram."



Then both of them said : "Where does this path go ?"

The old woman answered : "This path will remain where it is ; only those who walk over it will go ! Brothers, who are ye ?"

"Sister, we are wayfarers."

The old woman said : "There are two wayfarers. The sun and the moon. Which wayfarers, are ye ? Brothers, tell me the truth, who are ye ?"

"Sister, we are guests."

"There are two guests, wealth and beauty. Brothers ! who are ye ?"

Bhoj said : "I am a Raja."

"There are two Rajas, Indra and Yam. Which one are ye ?" The old woman said.

"Sister, we are vehicles of *shakti* (creatix)."

"There are two vehicles of *shakti*, earth and woman. Brothers, who are ye ?"

"We are holy men."



“There are two holy men, Saturn and Contentment. Who are ye ?”

“Sister, we are strangers.”

“There are two strangers, one the soul and the second water of the tree. Who are ye ?”

“We are poor.”

“There are two poor beings, one is the little one of a goat and the second a girl.”

“Sister, we are proficients.”

“There are two proficient ones, food and water. Who are ye ? tell me the truth Brothers ?”

After all this Raja Bhoj and Magha Pandit felt crest-fallen and said : “We are the defeated ones.” The old woman said : “There are two defeated ones, one is the debtor and the other, the father of a daughter. Who are ye ?”

On this both said : “We do not know anything. You know all.”

Then the old woman said, you are Raja Bhoj and this one is Pandit Magha. Go, this path that leads to Ujjaini.

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### The Throne of Vikramaditya

Near the old capital of Bhoj, Ujjaini, there used to live a farmer. In order to look after his fields, at night, he constructed a *machan*.

He went up the *machan* the very first day and something indescribable happened to him. He began to bawl out : "O people ! Make haste ! Call our Prime Minister and soldiers. Make a fort here and collect war material because we have to wage a battle with Raja Bhoj and kill him."

By a coincidence, four soldiers of Raja Bhoj were passing nearby. They stopped and listened to find out what had happened. They thought why not arrest this fellow and take him to Raja Bhoj. But one of them said : "At this time we must do the work allotted to us. We will settle with him later on."

As part of their duty, they called on Raja Bhoj ; and took the opportunity to relate what they had heard the farmer say. Hearing this, Raja Bhoj took some soldiers and arrived near the *machan*. At that time also, that farmer was saying the same thing : "Get hold of Raja Bhoj

and bring him here before me. I want to punish him for his deeds.”

Listening to the talk of the farmer, Raja Bhoj was frightened and returned to his palace.

The next day he called astrologers and related to them all that had happened. The astrologers after making calculations said, “This place is the abode of Lakshmi. If excavations are carried out, then a lot of wealth will be discovered there.”

Then Raja Bhoj employed hundreds of labourers and commenced the excavation of that place.

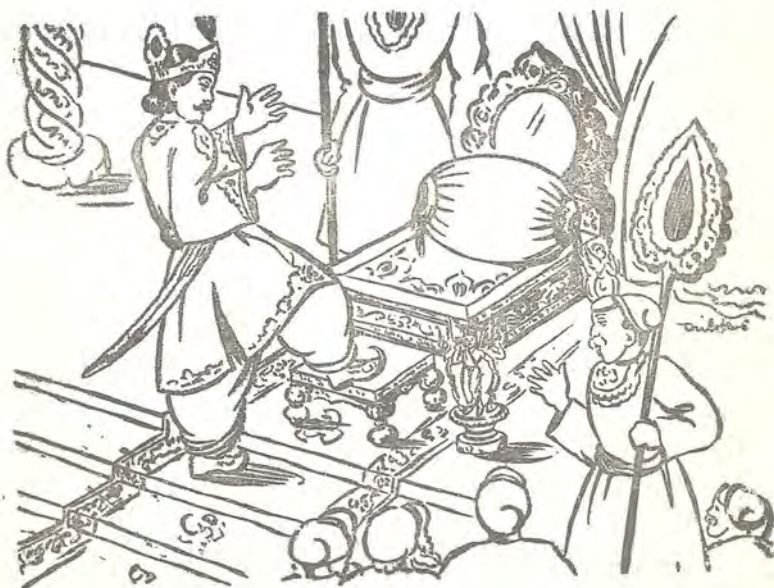
They had just begun when the hoes struck against something hard. They went on carefully. After digging a little more, a throne was uncovered. On seeing this throne, Raja Bhoj was very pleased. On each of the four legs of that throne, there were images of 8 puppets each. And with each puppet there was one lotus flower. That throne was cleaned properly and then it began to shine all the more.

All said : “Maharaj ! this throne is fit for you.”



This idea had entered the mind of Bhoj already. At last an astrologer after seeing the planetary position fixed the date for the Raja to sit on that throne. On that date many people gathered in the town and there was a lot of activity. On all sides, people were playing on musical instruments and were shouting slogans in praise of Raja Bhoj.

Now came the auspicious moment of sitting on the throne. The purohits were chanting



*mantras*. When Raja Bhoj advanced his right foot towards the throne and wanted to put it on the throne, then all the 32 puppets began to laugh loudly. Hearing this laughter the face of Raja Bhoj fell. He stepped back and stood there.

Seeing the Raja standing thus, one of the puppets spoke out : "O Raja Bhoj ! First listen to what I say and then sit on the throne. This throne belongs to Vir Vikramaditya. Only one who is as just and powerful as Vikramaditya can sit on this throne."

Then she related the story about Vikramaditya and said : "O Raja Bhoj ! This throne is only for one who is as renowned as Vikramaditya. As yet your renown is not as wide as his ; you should not, therefore, insist on sitting on this throne. Having listened to the two puppets, Raja Bhoj returned to his palace. The next day when he wanted to sit on the throne, the second puppet spoke out. The third one spoke on the third day and so on. Full 32 days went by like this. The 32nd puppet after

relating the story began to cry while recalling the memories of Vikramaditya and then all the 32 puppets spread out their wings and shouting *jaikaras* (slogans) in honour of Vikramaditya flew with the throne to heaven.

