

KING SANGARA'S HORSE

A shadow-puppet play from Ancient India
A Hindu tale – arranged and rewritten by Reg Down
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Originally written for the fifth grade at the Monadnock Waldorf School in Keene, New Hampshire, in 1999, and performed as part of their studies of ancient India. A large screen was used to accommodate a number of puppeteers.

The term 'chorus' is used loosely. It can be any group of children, even a single child. Everybody in the class will, no doubt, want to be a puppeteer. In a large class this means that any given chorus might have different children in it over the course of the play. Alternately, each child can be assigned to a chorus and speaks their part regardless of whether they are active as a puppeteer or not. This will keep the 'voice' of each chorus distinct and consistent.

Prologue

(Music and song then)

Narrator chorus (everybody)

Hearken, all ye sleepers and dreamers, and listen to my tale! Many tales have I told you; like leaves on the trees they are – old, and ancient, and ever renewing.

You have heard the tale of the wise Manu, who lead his people from Atlantis, the land that flourished, grew evil, and sank beneath the waves. But Manu led his true-hearted people to a new place upon the earth – the land we call India.

(Lighting brightens; revealing an Indian landscape with Manu and people working the fields. Manu has an elaborate head dress or halo indicating his highly developed astral body.)

Everything that is made is unmade! No longer could people use their magic Atlantean powers; no longer could they cause the trees to weave a roof over their heads and give them shelter; no longer could they control the wind and weather. Now they must work:- tilling the soil, planting seeds, and waiting for sun and rain to make the plants sprout and grow strong. Now they must follow the seasons; to plow at the right time; sow at the right time and harvest at the right time. Manu taught them all these things.

(Add red)

Three seasons are there in India: the hot season when the sun shines fiercely, and no cloud cools the earth. Animals, and plants and people seek shade, and those who cannot find shade wither and perish.

(Add blue)

Then clouds appear; the whole sky is filled with clouds. Dark and heavy they are, with lightning and thunder, roaring and flashing, and torrents of rain let loose upon the earth. Then the plants sprout and grow again, and the earth is covered with green.

(Red, blue and white)

After the season of rain the sky clears. Then it is warm, but not hot; cool, but not cold. This is the season of joy and plentifulness, and all creatures are glad.

But, my listeners, hear also what the wise Manu taught his people.

Manu chorus narrates:

(Enter Brahma from above)

“Just as there is a season of rain which gives life to everything,” said Manu, “so too in heaven is Brahma the highest God, who created the world, and gave it life.”

(Enter Vishnu from above)

“And just as there is a season in which plants ripen and are fruitful, so too is there a God who takes care of the world – and this God is called Vishnu.”

(Enter Shiva above)

“But there is also a season of burning heat, when all things wither and die – and so too is there a God who brings death and destruction in order to make room for new life. This god’s name is Shiva.”

“Worship them, O ye people, for they are a mystery. They are the beginning and the end. They are three, and they are one!”

(Lighting dims)

Scene One

(Music and song – lights come up, revealing an Indian King’s palace.)

Narrator chorus

(Enter Sangara)

Hearken, all ye sleepers and dreamers, and listen to my tale. Hear of King Sangara, the mighty King Sangara; he with a thousand wives and ten thousand sons! Hear how Sangara displeased the gods, and brought sorrow to his soul.

(Enter stallion)

But listen, ye sleepers and dreamers – how did mighty Sangara displease the gods? Not by foul or treacherous deed. No! King Sangara had a stallion. A wondrous stallion, the finest there ever was – white as snow, pure as water, with eyes that gleamed with the fire of diamonds.

King Sangara chorus

“Tomorrow,” cried King Sangara, “I shall sacrifice my stallion to Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Then the God-head will be pleased, and good fortune and abundant crops will come upon my land and I shall prosper.”

Narrator chorus

(Enter Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.)

But my listeners, the gods were not pleased. Why should they grant King Sangara’s every desire? Why should the finest of steeds, the pure white stallion, be slain upon the alter?

(Lights dim - add blue)

(The gods depart. Vishnu appears as a human being. Even though he has a human form he still is distinguished by the puppet having an elaborate aura.)

So in the night Vishnu came down to earth. He took human shape, stole the white stallion, and rode it into the darkness. Far he took it – far, far away – and hid it where no man could find it.

(Drumming) (Exit Vishnu)

King Sangara chorus

(Enter Sangara, and a moment later, his sons) (Lighting brightens)

King Sangara was furious.

“Who dares steal Sangara’s horse!” he cried, and calling his sons he bid them search everywhere, and to leave no stone unturned.

Narrator chorus

The princes searched far and wide. In deserts and jungles, over mountains and plains they searched the whole world, but the white stallion was not to be found.

King Sangara chorus

(Sons return. Enter Sangara) (Add red)

King Sangara’s eyes were black with anger, and in a terrible voice cried: “Dig deep into the earth. Dig deep! The thief must have hidden my stallion in a cave below the earth.”

(Song or drumming)

(Lights dim)

Scene Two

(Music and song, then lights brighten revealing a huge hole being dug into the earth by Sangara's sons. Above are clouds, and above the clouds are the three gods.)

Narrator chorus

Hearken, O ye sleepers and dreamers! Listen to what came to pass.
Deep Sangara's sons dug. They took spades and dug deep into the earth. So deep
that the earth cried out in pain.

Earth chorus (female voices)

"O, Brahma, Lord of Lords," cried the earth. "I am suffering. The sons of Sangara
defile me!"

Brahma chorus

And Brahma called to Vishnu, saying: "You are the protector! You are the keeper
of life. Go down to the world and protect the earth from the sons of Sangara."

(Exit gods)

Narrator chorus

(Enter Vishnu as human being)

Vishnu descended to earth again, and took the form of a man. Looking into the
hole the sons had dug he could hear the earth crying out in pain.

Vishnu chorus

"Do not disturb the Mother Earth with your useless digging," he called in a mighty
voice. "The white stallion is not in her depths. I am the one who took the horse. I
am the one who knows where it is hidden."

Narrator chorus

The sons of Sangara heard him, and shouted: "Here is the thief who has stolen the
King's stallion!" They rushed at him, and struck him with their spades.

(Flashing - add red)

But listen, ye sleepers and dreamers, Vishnu is not a man; he is a god! And when the sons struck him a searing flame leapt from his body. O flame of death! It struck them down and killed them, and burnt them to ashes!

(Gray ash heaps appear; above them, attached by a string to the ashes, are butterflies.)

But, oh! This was no normal death. The souls of Sangara's sons were not released! Oh, terrible death! Bound to their ashes their souls were, and they could not rise to heaven – for they had attacked a god!

(Music and/or song - minor key – tragic)

(Lighting dims)

Scene Three

(Music and song, then a scene similar to scene three, but a partial palace is visible at one side. The palace is removed when the grandson rides off.)

Narrator chorus

(Enter Sangara)

Hearken, ye sleepers and dreamers, and listen to what unfolds. Hear how King Sangara wept bitter tears when he heard his sons were dead. Yet more bitter by far were the tears he wept when he heard that their souls were bound to their ashes, and would never rise to heaven.

King Sangara chorus

(Enter grandson)

"Come, my eldest grandson," commanded Sangara. "Ride forth with this golden casket and bring me the ashes of my sons. Bring them to me, every one."

(Enter horse; the grandson mounts)

Narrator chorus

Onward rode Sangara's grandson; far through the day he rode. But what did he see, my listeners, when he neared the place of death?

(Enter eagle)

O, what did he see, but a mighty eagle descending from the sky. Wide were his wings; fierce the glint in his eye, sharp as razors the talons on his feet! Ever lower the eagle descended, and landed on a rocky crag.

Eagle chorus

"From Brahma, the Lord and Creator, I bring a message," spoke the eagle. "Tell King Sangara that the gods see his sorrow. Tell him that the souls of his sons cannot rise to heaven because they attacked Vishnu, a god of the heavens! But tell him also, that great joy will come of this. For it is the will of Vishnu that Sangara's sons rise up and join him in the heights."

Narrator chorus (or grandson)

"How shall this come about?" asked the grandson.

Eagle chorus

“High in the Himalayas, the highest of mountains, eternal ice and snow reign. But once, long ages ago, a river flowed from these mountains in great beauty upon the earth. Ganges is its name, and its goodness cleansed all sins.

But the gods saw its loveliness, and raised it into heaven. Tell Sangara, that from his children’s children there will come a king who is so pure of heart, so pure of soul, that the gods will bring the river Ganges back to earth. Then may the ashes be strewn in the river and wiped clean of sin, and the souls of the sons of Sangara will rise up to heaven, and join Vishnu in the heights.”

Narrator chorus

Ah! Listeners! Then the eagle spread its wings, and beat the air. The sound of a storm it was, and the trees bent to the ground! A whirlwind it was, and the eagle mounted the heavens till it was seen no more.

Then Sangara’s grandson gathered up the ashes into the golden box and rode back to the palace.

(Lighting dims)

Epilogue

(Music and song, then a temple scene with alter. On the alter is a casket. The butterflies, attached by their string, flit above the casket.)

Narrator chorus

Hearken, O ye sleepers and dreamers, and listen how this tale ends. Hear how King Sangara was overjoyed to learn that from his children's children a king would come; one so pure that the river Ganges would flow on the earth once more.

(Enter Sangara)

A temple Sangara built, and within the temple lay the golden casket. A flame was lit before it, and day and night, season after season, year after year, generation after generation, the flame was tended, and never allowed to die. And the people waited; long the people waited for the pure one who would bring the river Ganges back to earth.

(Exit Sangara)

But listen, ye sleepers and dreamers, many tales have I told – countless tales, like fruit on a tree – and this tale is ended, for it is ripe and full grown.

But oh, my sleepers and dreamers, when the season of rain returns, then will new leaves and new fruit spring forth from my tree of tales. Only then, my listeners, shall the tale of the pure-hearted king be told.

(Lights dim)

(Music and song)