

KULDHAR'S DAUGHTER

Long ago in the city of Champapuri, there lived a very rich merchant named Kuldhar and his wife Kulnanda. The merchant had seven daughters. He named them Kamalashri, Kamlavati, Kamla, Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Jayamati, and Priyakarini. All his daughters were married to rich merchants and were very happy. Kuldhar and his wife Kulnanda gave birth to their eighth daughter, but somehow they were not happy, at her birth. They did not perform a naming ceremony. The eighth girl was less fortunate. As she grew up, her father did not care to find her a husband. If someone brought this matter to his attention, he would only say that she would be settled as soon as he found the right groom for her. He was not worried about her happiness at all.

One day while Kuldhar was at his work, a strange young man came up to him. The man was dressed poorly, his hair was a mess, and he was covered with lice. The merchant asked him, "Where are you from? What are you doing here?" The young man replied, "My father's name is Nandi and my mother's name is Soma. They are in Koshalpur. My name is Nandan. I went to Chandadesha to look for work. One merchant gave me a job to deliver this letter to a man named Vasantdev who lives in your city."

Kuldhar was not listening to him, All he was thinking about was giving his daughter to this man. He told the young man "I am going to send someone with you, and as soon as you deliver the letter, I want you to come back and talk to me." Meanwhile, Kuldhar arranged his servants to prepare a bath, some clothes, and some food for this young man. When Nandan returned, he took a bath, changed his clothes, and finished eating. After that Kuldhar offered him his daughter to marry. Nandan said, "I was to return to Chandadesha immediately." The merchant said, "Young man, it will not take long to arrange the wedding. I will give you money for both of you until you get to Chandadesha."

A few hours later they were married, and the time came for his daughter to say goodbye to her parents. The couple then headed to Chandadesha. It was getting dark and they were getting tired. They found a temple and decided to spend a night there. After his wife went to sleep, Nandan thought, "I will not reach Chandadesha in time because my wife cannot walk as fast as I can. Also, it would take too much money for us both to live. So, what would happen later on? I

would have to beg." He did not like the idea of begging, so he decided to leave his wife behind.

At sunrise when the daughter of Kuldhar woke up, she realized that her husband was gone, and he took all the money with him. She started thinking, "What will happen to me without my husband." At first she considered going back to her parent's house. But then she thought that she was not treated well there either, so what was the use of going back there? Thought of begging sent chills through her body. She decided that she would look for work and support herself. But she did not know where to go or which town she may reach next. She did not have any choice. She started on the same road they were going before.

After sometime, she reached the city named Avantidesh. She went to the market place to look for work. The first person she saw was a merchant named Manibhadra. She stood there and looked at him, and developed a good feeling about this man. So she asked him for work. At first Manibhadra felt sorry for her, but was afraid to employ a stranger. The merchant decided to find out who she was. So he asked her, "Who are you?" She told him, "I am the daughter of Kuldhar from Champapuri. I was on my way to Chandadesh with my husband, but we were separated on the way. So, now I am looking for work to support myself till I find him."

Manibhadra felt comfortable with her now. He invited her to stay in his house and appointed her in charge of his household affairs. He sent several men to search for her husband but they could not find him. He also checked on her parents, and found out that she was telling the truth.

As time passed, everyone in the family began to like her, and show her a lot of affection. Later on, Manibhadra built a big Jain temple with large gates and colorful flags. Kuldhar's daughter went to the temple every day to worship Jina, and there she met many nuns. As she became involved with the nuns, and learned the Jain doctrine and nava tattva (nine fundamentals), she accepted the vows of a shravika, and felt much better about her life.

One day Kuldhar's daughter noticed that Manibhadra seemed depressed. She asked him the reason. He said, "The king has trusted me to upkeep the garden,

and supply him with flowers every day. I don't know how but suddenly the garden has turned dry. I do not know how am I going to provide flowers for the king. I am afraid the king will become upset, and I do not know what he will do." Kuldhar's daughter made a resolution that until the garden was restored with flowers, she would not eat any food, or drink any liquids. So she returned to the temple.

After she bowed to Jina, she went into deep kayotsarg (penance). Two days went by, and on the third day, the goddess appeared and said, "My daughter, your vow is fulfilled and in the morning the garden will be restored."

The next morning, a miracle happened. The garden was more beautiful than ever. It had more fresh flowers than anyone could hope for. The merchant now accepted her as his daughter in his mind. He rushed to the temple to congratulate her for the beautiful garden. The whole town rushed to the temple after they heard the surprising news, and everybody praised her.

After realizing that the garden was revived, she broke her fast after offering food to the nuns. One night while lying in bed, Kuldhar's daughter thought, "By good fortune, I came into the contact of temple and nuns. I must make the best of this." So she changed her life. She would fast for two, three or four days. Sometimes she would fast for a month. She lived a very pious life. When her life came to an end, she went to heaven.