

## The Moon and the Bogs Story

*Many thousands of years ago, Karjat was full of bogs. It was nothing like it is today. There were no hills, forests and coconut trees; just pools of dark glossy water as thick as hair oil. Every night when the moon rose up in the sky she would bless the sky and the elements around it with her moonbeams. But she was temperamental. On some nights she would not show up at all. She claimed she was too tired and that she needed rest in order to preserve her beauty. And when she did not show up, the stars stayed away as well, afraid to be alone without her in the black night. Who could blame them? For many a vile creature roamed the marshes on those nights. On the days the Moon did not appear, the sky would remain black and the werewolves would guard the night with their eerie and piercing howls. The black crabs, crayfish and ugly scorpions would scuttle out of the dark pools to meet their friends and feed on anything they could lay their claws on. No one could escape their evil eyes because these creatures dwelt in the glories of darkness and its distorting shadows. There was a strangeness and wildness in the air that no one could comprehend. On those nights no human being dared to venture out.*

*The sky and the water and the grass and the clouds waited and waited for the Moon, longing for her beauty, yearning for those droplets of light that fell so gracefully from her face to show them the way. They prayed and meditated and beseeched her to come out but she would not listen. They would implore, "Dear Goddess who rules the night and the tides and all that is dark within us. O Queen of shadows! Do not abandon us like this. You are our only source of light in the night." But she ignored them and gathered her cape tightly over her face and did not budge. What a moody creature! She truly was the Queen of deception because no one really understood her motivations.*

*One day, when, the sky complained of this for the hundredth time, the Moon felt a little guilty and decided to find out why everyone was so troubled by her absence. So she climbed down to earth on the ladder made especially for her by the clouds and wrapped herself in a black coat so she wouldn't be noticed. She walked on amidst the slimy bogs for a while but couldn't see anything. Then, suddenly, she missed a step and plunged into the dark water. Nobody could see her and she could not see anything. There was not even a small branch she could hold on to. The white marsh had engulfed her like sticky rice. As she swam on, shivering in the dark, she could hear a soft wailing. She could not see anything but knew that someone was in deep trouble. For that moment, she forgot her own danger and knew she had to do something to help. For, like her, the poor person could not see anything in the dark. She struggled hard for some time and managed to get rid of her heavy cloak. As soon as she did that, the darkness fell away with the cloak and as if by magic, there was light everywhere. The poor man, who had lost his way, was afraid of the night. But as soon as he saw light he got on his knees and prayed to the Moon Goddess to show him the way out of the marshy bog. She threw her light far into the distance where he could see the silent grey towers and the gateway beyond. He quickly freed himself from the branches and hurried out across the marshes toward firm land.*

“Wait, Mayyaji, this is not how it ends. What happened to the Moon after the man left? How kind and generous of the Moon to help him. You see, she isn't selfish and deceptive after all!” Tara would insist.

“Ah! Taro, you always like to complicate things. Aren't you pleased that the poor man found his way home safely?”

“No” Tara would insist. “That is so boring. What happened to the vile creatures that stalked the bogs on dark nights? Surely they didn’t stand by and watch? And what about that ungrateful man? How could he have walked away, knowing that the Moon was in danger? Couldn’t he have called someone? Done something? Or did he let them capture the Moon?”

“Maybe the man didn’t know what to do and couldn’t do anything. It was after all, a desolate and dangerous place. We don’t have the right to judge other people’s actions. It isn’t nice,” said Ma rather fiercely. “And you are too young to understand.” Tara had not noticed Ma enter the room. But at the time she hadn’t been convinced by Mayyaji’s explanation and continued to argue with her till Ma intervened with her outburst.

“Taro, dear, the man, sadly, *did* walk away. We can do nothing to change *that*. But the vile creatures stayed,” Mayyaji said, placing her hand gently on Ma’s shoulder.

“But we can change that! It’s just a story and I don’t like the way the man acted” persisted Tara grumpily.

Mayyaji shook her head and said. “No, Taro, dear in *my* story he did walk away. Whether its right or wrong is not for you to decide. We don’t know why the man left. I’m sure he had his reasons.”

“That’s not fair, Mayyaji. You are taking Ma’s side,” pleaded the young Tara.

“No, child this is the way the story goes. Now stop interrupting and listen. It has a happy ending.” She lifted Tara into her lap and continued while Ma sat gloomily.

*These dark and ugly creatures managed to take the Moon's cloak and cover her up. They tied her up in such a way that she could not remove the cloak again. They even spun a web around her so that her light could not escape. The poor Moon shivered and crouched and prayed for a miracle convinced that there was no hope. But soon, dawn approached and the mighty and forgiving Sun lit up the sky again. The vicious elves grew afraid. They did not know what to do with their prisoner. They were clearly afraid of the Sun's power and there was no place to hide the Moon while He was looking. So they agreed to bury her deep in the bogs where the Sun's rays could not penetrate and no one could find her. Two goblins were left behind to watch over her grave.*

*Many days passed and everyone in the forest wondered what would happen at the time of the full moon. What would the good folk do when the Moon stayed away from the sky? And sure enough, when the night of the full moon was as dark as death, the fisher folk wondered what had happened. They argued and debated but no one could solve the mystery of the missing Moon. "This is odd, no matter how much she sulks, she always comes out on the night of the full moon with her splendid brilliance" said one young man. "For she is vain." No one could understand this until one old man, who was watching them debate, quietly told them how the Moon had saved him and that he probably knew where she was. Everyone rejoiced and followed him to the bogs where the poor Moon maiden lay buried. They found the wicked goblins by the mound and drove them away before they dug up the earth and rescued the Moon. The Moon, of course, could never have been in danger in Mother Earth's lap. The foolish evil creatures did not know this. From then onward the Moon lit up the sky everyday. She smiled down on the good fisher folk and gave light to every living creature in the night. The stars, too, felt*

*secure and unafraid to come out and help her. Karjat has always been safe since then.*

*And, the Moon shines brighter here than anywhere else in the universe.*