

ព្រះគោព្រះកែវ : An Important Quasi-Historical Legend

It's not known when (or where) this legend began, but it's definitely one of the most popular and best-known stories in Cambodia, and one of the most emotionally charged folk legends for Khmers. It touches on and intersects with a quasi-historical legend shared by several of Cambodia's neighbor countries, but the bulk of the tale is purely Khmer. It involves Hindu gods, a main character named after a Buddha image, royalty, and a talking cow who flies and can supernaturally transform himself into a variety of creatures. And probably most significantly, this legend directly deals with—and explains—the historical transfer to Siam of knowledge, arts, science, literature and learned individuals which followed the Thai sacking of Angkor in 1431. This was a huge event, and marked the beginning of what are commonly termed Cambodia's "dark ages," as well as the beginning of Thailand's rise to power in the region, a rise that has continued to this day. We'll deal more with the historical aspects of the story (all of which take place in the second half of the tale) in Chapter Six of this textbook. For now, let's get acquainted with the first half of the story.

The tales unfolds as follows: there was a peasant couple, and the wife had a dream. In this dream, a holy man in white gave her three rings, which she soon



ព្រះគោព្រះកែវ ៖
the movie

lost. The man told her that the rings represented three types of បុណ្យ . Intrigued and puzzled by her dream, the woman sent her husband to a fortune teller. He told the husband that the dream meant his wife was pregnant with a child who would have great spiritual power or បុណ្យប្រារម្ភ . The fortune teller also warned her to avoid eating unripe mangoes at all costs. (it's very common for magical powers to be dependent on the avoidance of a taboo of some kind; for instance, if គ្រូខ្មែរ walk under a woman's skirt hanging on a clothesline, they lose their powers). Mangos also happen to be a food that Khmer pregnant women are commonly thought to crave (the Khmer version of "pickles and ice cream," or something like that). So of course, the woman got a craving for them. When her husband was off working the fields, she shimmied up a mango tree to try to pick one. While high up in the tree, she reached out for a lone fruit on a far branch. The branch she was perched on broke and she fell to her death.

As the woman hit the ground, her belly burst open and out came a baby—ព្រះ វិក័រ—and his older brother, a calf, who was born able to talk: ព្រះគោ . The father returned and was of course distraught at the scene. But the villagers reacted in a worse way. They were convinced that the death of a pregnant woman (bad enough to begin with, if you'll recall!) out of whose belly came an animal could not be a good omen, and they chased the man and his children out of the village. The father foraged for them the best that he could. Meanwhile, after moving on to another village, while talking with some village boys tending cows, the now young lad ព្រះវិក័រ is taunted for being poor and having no food to eat. At this, ព្រះគោ moos and from his mouth comes forth silver and gold dishes with all sorts of delicious food on them, so his brother could eat in style. When he was done eating, ព្រះគោ swallowed the dishes again. The cowherd boys run and tell their parents about the cow who had coughed up and then swallowed the gold and silver

plates. The villagers formed a posse to cut open ព្រះគោ's belly and take the riches for themselves. At that point in the story, we're introduced to yet another of ព្រះគោ's powers. He commands his younger brother to grab hold of this tail, and takes to the sky flying to escape.

Eventually ព្រះគោ and ព្រះកែវ's father dies in the forest of starvation, for ព្រះគោ explains that he was not allowed to provide magical food for their father, only for ព្រះកែវ. After ព្រះកែវ grows into a handsome young man, one day he stumbles upon the king's daughters bathing in a pond, and falls in love with the youngest, នាងពៅ. ព្រះកែវ complains to his brother that there's no way he could court a princess in his ragged and destitute state. ព្រះគោ once again opens his mouth, and this time produces an entire palace for ព្រះកែវ to live in, and splendid, regal clothes for the younger brother. A bit of flirting ensues between ព្រះកែវ and នាងពៅ, which is seen by her older sisters. Jealous, they report her "scandalous" behavior to her father the king. He is furious, and orders នាងពៅ executed (in some versions of the story, he simply banishes her to the forest). The royal guard drags her out of the palace and beheads her.

We'll leave you with that cliffhanger, and pick up the story again in Chapter Six. Now, you can read a few excerpts from the story in Khmer:

Excerpt #1: The Birth of ព្រះគោព្រះកែវ

ដោយនឹកចង់ស្វាយខ្ចីខ្ចាំងពេក រហូតដល់ទ្រាំលែងបាន ក៏ដើរទៅរកបេះ

ដោយខ្លួនឯង ។ នាងខំប្រថែប្រវា
 ឡើងដើមស្វាយម្នាក់ឯង ពេល
 ទៅដល់លើនាងតោងចមែកពុក
 មួយ ស្រាប់តែបាក់ធ្លាក់ចុះមក
 ដល់ដី ស្លាប់មួយរំពេច ។ ពេល
 នោះឆ្មាយពោះចេញកូនគោមួយ



ប្រុសមួយពីផ្លូវរបស់នាង ។ កូនគោចេញមកភ្លាមក៏ចេះដើរមួយរំពេច ឯ កូនមួយទៀតនៅក្នុងស្រោមនៅឡើយ ។

Excerpt #2: The Villagers Chase Out the Father and Twins

ពេលអ្នកស្រុកមកមើលឃើញមាណពបីកូនមួយមានទាំងកូនគោនៅក្បែរ ផង គេនាំគ្នាឆ្ងល់យ៉ាងខ្លាំង ហើយដឹងថាមានកូនកើតមកជាសត្វគោ ឯ ម្តាយបែកពោះស្លាប់ខុសគេខុសឯងដូច្នោះ អ្នកស្រុកយល់ថានឹងនាំឲ្យចង្រៃ ដល់ភូមិស្រុក ក៏នាំគ្នាស្តីលេងតាមវាយបណ្តោញមាណពនិងកូន លែងឲ្យមក ក្បែរភូមិ ។

Excerpt #3: ព្រះគោព្រះកែវ escape from the Second Group of Villagers

ពេលអ្នកស្រុកចូលបម្រុងនឹងធ្វើបាបព្រះគោ ភ្លាមនោះព្រះគោបានឲ្យប្អូន គោងកន្ទុយឲ្យដាប់ ហើយក៏ហោះឡើងសណ្តូកដើមកណ្តាលរលំបាក់លើ ពួកអស់នោះ ធ្វើឲ្យអ្នកខ្លះត្រូវបាក់ដៃបាក់ជើងបែកក្បាលស្ទើរគ្រប់ ។ គ្នា ហើយព្រះគោបានស្រែកប្រាប់ទៅអ្នកស្រុកដែលត្រូវរបួសថាឲ្យយកដើម កណ្តាលទៅដាំដីកនឹងជារីញហើយ ។ ពេលឮដូច្នោះ អ្នកខ្លះក៏បានកាប់ យកបួសកណ្តាលទៅដាំដីកដើម្បីព្យាបាលរបួសខ្លួនស្រាប់តែជាសះស្បើយ យ៉ាងសក្តិសិទ្ធិមែន ក៏នាំគ្នាកាប់ចាងយកដើមកណ្តាលទៅដាំដីកជាគ្រប់គ្នា ហើយគេក៏នឹកដល់ព្រះគោដែលមានប្តីប្រាមមីខ្លាំងពូកែលែងហ៊ានបៀត បៀនព្រះគោទៀត ។ ព្រះគោបានហោះទៅនៅក្នុងព្រៃជ្រៅឆ្ងាយពីភូមិ ស្រុកនានា ហើយរស់នៅតែពីរនាក់បងប្អូនក្បែរស្រះទឹកមួយយ៉ាងល្អ ។

មាណព is the name of ព្រះគោព្រះកែវ 's father; this is a common name given to male charac-
ters in stories, kind of like "Joe Farmer" or "Joe Everyday".
ដើមកណ្តាល the type of tree that the villagers tied ព្រះគោព្រះកែវ up to. Note that an incident
is included in the pair's escape which wasn't discussed earlier in the English synopsis.

Excerpt #4: នាងពៅ 's Sisters Report on Her Courtship with ព្រះកែវ to the King
 ពេលត្រឡប់ទៅដល់វាំងវិញ បង ៗ របស់នាងពៅចូលទៅគាល់ព្រះបិតាជា
 ធម្មតា ។ ដោយពុំឃើញនាងពៅចូលគាល់ ស្តេចក៏សួររក៖
 —នាងពៅទៅណា បានជាមិនឃើញដូច្នោះ ?
 —ព្រះបិតា! នាងមិនហ៊ានចូលគាល់ព្រះអង្គទេ ។
 —តើមានរឿងហេតុអ្វី បានជាមិនហ៊ានចូលមក ?
 —ព្រះបិតា! ពេលទៅស្រង់ទឹកលេងនោះ នាងពៅបានប្រឡែងលេងជាមួយ
 បុរសម្នាក់ដោយគ្មានខ្លាចក្រែងអ្វីឡើយ ។



Advanced Educated Vocabulary in នាងរំលាយសក់ and ព្រះគោព្រះកែវ

Audio Track Fifty-Seven		
សោយរាជ្យ to rule	សក្តិសិទ្ធិ effective because	
រក្ខត្តមហេសី queen; "first royal wife"	of holy power; holy 	
កេសី hair (royal.literary)	បុទ្ធិប្បារមី magical power	
បន្ទាយ fortress		
ធរណី earth (literary)		