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# Translation

Jardar Kouto<sup>i</sup>

Ramkrishna Mandal<sup>ii</sup>

After the completion of *Puja* (Here *Puja* refers to Durgapuja—Four- Day-Worship of the goddess Durga in the Late Autumn season), Hemlata was leaving the home of her first son Purnendu for that of her second and last son Ardhendu. She used to stay for two months each with her two sons by rotation. She now turned into a share-out mother. Getting accompanied by her granddaughter-in-law Ratna, she was going to Ardhendu's home. Ratna loved this old grandmother-in-law. She used to bicker pleasurably with this old woman. At the same time, Ratna used to secretly buy grandmother-in-law several things or food items as desired by her. The old woman always cherished desire to have so many things and Ratna loved to supply those secretly.

Hemlata told—Ratan, ask the rickshaw puller to stop the rickshaw. I need to have *jarda* (a kind of tobacco used with betel leaf as a kind of spice). That is Dhalu's panmashla shop.

She lovingly called Ratna as Ratan. That calling made Ratna feel happy. Ratna told—Hand me over your *kouto* (a small cylindrical pot with a lid). Instantly, she (Hemlata) cautiously untied the pinch of selvage and brought out the *jarda kouto* made of *chandi* (pure silver) given by her husband.

Ratna told—Grandmother, let me see your token of love. Taking the *kouto* in her hand Ratna was gazing at every side of it minutely. Before this time Ratna had seen this so many times. But that kind of asking for that *kouto* in order to see with sincerity always brightened her face with happiness and joy. Ratna wanted to see that appearance. She asked the old woman—Well, did the grandfather-in-law get your name encrusted on this *Kouto*?

There was a spark of laughter in the toothless mouth. She told—Y-e-s, *didi* (older/younger sister). Otherwise, who will do this? Your husband?

--Grandmother-in-law, what do you say? That very young guy has not yet learned to give me proper gift of love. You were really a woman with a high profiled beauty. Tell me how you could grab that from grandfather-in-law.

--Listen, I take too much *jarda*. Every morning and evening I repeatedly placed my demand before him (my husband)-- Fetch *jarda*, Fetch *jarda*.

One day he placed an order to a goldsmith to have *kouto* with flowers on the body and my name on the lid encrusted. Getting that done, he gave it to me and said—Take this. Remember this particular day. Then it instantly came to my mind—O' that very day was our marriage day, *didi*.

Ratna started laughing with the *hee-hee* sound and embraced the old woman. She told—the love of both of yours had the strength in the real sense, grandmother-in-law. That is why, he could take a young sixteen year

old beautiful girl from her home and marry her. He did not even fear police. He did not care anybody. Really, he had the courage worthy of appreciation.

Ratna had heard these words innumerable times from this old woman. Old words got renewed. The light of joy spread over the face of the old woman who said—Listen, your grandfather-in-law was enamoured by this sharp nose of mine. And he had to pay for that, sister. I made him tour along with me in different places. Today some place and tomorrow another one. While telling this old woman sighed—along with words sadness befell—Today the elephant (referring to herself) has fallen in mud. Daughters-in-law have laced my nose with a thread made of jute. This one pulls me once and that one, once. Now I am none but a share-out mother.

Ratna kept the old woman embraced and pressing her she said—Grandmother-in-law, do not think. I am always with you. You will get whatever you need. Only one condition is there. You will have to tell me stories.

Hemlata said with elation—Hundred times.

2

Youngest daughter-in-law Ilora told—Stop your mother taking *jarda*. She has asthmas and in addition, she repeatedly belches with *heo heo* sound. On the other side, see what an amount of *jarda* she takes. The *kouto* was gifted by him (father-in-law)—too much excessiveness. One day I will throw out that *kouto*.

Ardhendu said—Old woman. Do not say so. If she listens to this, she will get hurt.

--Let her get hurt. You have learned to have indulgence. All bogus.

Truly, Ilora got irritated and threw out the *kouto* one day. That day Ardhendu forgot to bring *jarda* from the market and for that the old woman was angrily talking to herself. Coming to the bed of her mother-in-law Ilora took the *kouto* kept by the side of the bed and hurled that out. That fell into the nest of a crow hanging from a branch of a mango tree.

Ratna observed everything from her room. Coming to the old woman she said—Do not be angry. I will search for that. But that should not come to the notice of my mother-in-law.

Normally, the younger daughter-in-law Ilora used to burn in anger whenever she encountered her old mother-in-law. She thrashed every movement of the old woman with her heated words. Throwing out the *kouto* she could force her mother-in-law to stop taking *jarda*.

3

At a winter night Hemlata's heat got motionless. She did not give opportunity to call in a doctor. In the morning the neighbours started making uproar--Nantu's (Ratna's husband) grandmother has walked away at night and only the body has been left. For the cremation of that Nantu informed the cremation association in the morning.

Before the dead body was carried out of the home, Ilora had beckoned her husband and whispered—Ogo (an address), my husband, please go to the goldsmith's shop and buy a *kouto* made of *chandi* and then buy a *kouto*

of *Sundari Jarda* (*jarda* named after a brand company name). I have heard that if something expected to have during life time of a person remains unfulfilled, the departed soul of that person returns to this living world time and again. His or her best loved thing should be offered to his or her dead body. Towards the end of her life I did not allow her to take *jarda*. I threw out the *kouto*.

From the market Ardhendu brought a *kouto* and *jarda* along with other items for funeral ceremony.

The pall had been decorated. Now the dead body of Hemlata would be put on that. Ilora took the *kouto* from Ardhendu's hand. In order to put that in the hand of Hemlata she lifted the quilt up and got astonished to an utmost degree. Something was seen glittering within the fist of the old woman. One friend of Nantu opened up the fist. With her enlarged astonishing eyes, Ilora saw that very *Kouto* of *Chandi* in the fist of her mother-in-law. On the lid of that the name was seen glittering—Hemalata.

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<sup>i</sup> The short story *Jardar Kouto* (a cylindrical pot with a lid for keeping a kind of tobacco called *jarda* used with betel leaf as a kind of spice) was published in the anthology *Sabuj Machh* (Green Fish) in 2000.

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