R. Needham

Kodi fables

In: Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 113 (1957), no: 4, Leiden, 361-379

This PDF-file was downloaded from <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl>

KODI FABLES

The following eight stories come from the district of Kodi in the extreme west of the island of Sumba, in eastern Indonesia.¹ I learned of the existence of this type of analogic fable not long before I left the island, so my collection is not large and I cannot say what the range of sentiments and topics may be, nor am I in a position to describe the situations in which the stories are related. Those I record here were collected for me by my assistant M. Maru Mahemba, and my part has been merely to translate them and add an occasional note of elucidation. I have kept as close as possible to the original texts, including repetitions and inconsequentialities even where these disturb the narrative in western eyes, but have occasionally inserted a clarificatory word in square brackets.

Strictly speaking, "Kodi" is the name of a territory, and the people of that district refer to themselves as *tou Kodi*, "people of Kodi". For literary convenience, however, and in accordance with ethnographic convention, I use "Kodi" to refer also to individuals and the entire people, as an adjective, and to designate the language.

I have the impression that in the voluminous records of the stories of simple societies fables — i.e. stories conveying some useful lessons, and commonly concluding with their explicit enunciation — are rare. These Kodi tales may therefore have especial interest, since each of them so ends with lessons and moral comments which Kodi are intended to appreciate. But my aim in publishing them is not just to relate stories which are readable in their own right or because their form

¹ My research on Sumba in 1954—55 was carried out with a Senior Studentship awarded by the Treasury ("Scarborough") Committee for Studentships in Foreign Languages and Cultures, whose support I gratefully acknowledge. I am also indebted to the Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford, and to Merton College, Oxford, which provided me with further means and facilities to continue my work.

It gives me particular pleasure, on this first convenient occasion of publication about my work in Indonesia, to record my gratitude to H. Ranga Horo, Radja of Kodi, to Dr L. Onvlee, and to the Indonesian Government, for hospitality, many kindnesses, and various services which afforded me perfect conditions for field research.

may be unusual, or even to begin an ethnographic record of a strange people, but to give some indication in Kodi terms of Kodi values. The fables will later afford illustration of points to be made in future publications dealing with more specific and intricate issues in Kodi society and civilisation.

I

Mada and his wife.

There was once a man called Mada Perokonda, and he had a wife called Randa Pada. She was pregnant, and one day she said, "I would so much like to have some venison", so Mada Perokonda went hunting. He hunted all day long but got nothing, and went home empty-handed. While he was on his way back, suddenly he saw two snakes copulating. Without a moment's thought he unsheathed his sword and cut at the snakes. The tail of the female snake was cut right off, the male snake fled. Soon [another] male snake came, the husband of the female snake, and when he saw his wife he asked her, "How is it that your tail has been amputated?" She answered, "It was Mada who cut off my tail."

"Why did he do that?"

"There was no reason. While I was sleeping he cut it right off."

Then said her husband, "So that's how it was. Well, then, I shall go soon to his house to gain revenge." When it was evening the male snake went to Mada's house for revenge, and when he got there he went to the door of his room² in order to wait for him. While the snake was waiting Mada and his wife were eating, and while they were eating Mada told his wife about where he had been while hunting deer, and about how he had met two snakes copulating and had cut at them with his sword. While the husband and wife were talking the snake was listening. When he heard this story he realised that Mada had done nothing wicked which it would be proper for him to avenge. From the story it was clear that it was his own wife who was at fault, in that she had committed adultery with another snake. Because of this the snake decided to repay Mada's goodness with goodness.

When Mada and his wife had finished eating Mada got up and went towards the door of the room. When he got to the door the snake swayed his head, on purpose so that Mada should see him. Mada was

² Not actually a European-style room, since traditional Sumbanese houses have none, but the word serves.

startled and afraid. But the snake said, "Don't be afraid, Mada. As a matter of fact I did come here to strike you down, but when I heard the story you told your wife I repented of my purpose. Because of this you may ask whatever you wish and I shall give it to you." Then Mada answered, "I should like to have the gift of knowledge so that I shall be able understand the speech of all the animals in the world."

"Very well", said the snake. Then he gave him two small stones looking like pearls, saying, "These stones will help you to understand the languages of animals." After this the snake went back to his own place. It is not known whether he did anything to his wife: the story goes on about Mada.³

One day Mada and his wife were rubbing their bodies with coconut oil.⁴ Along came some cockroaches to lick their legs. Said the cockroaches at the wife's legs, "It is all dry here, we cannot lick anything at all", but at Mada's legs they said, "Here there is lots of coconut oil that we can lick up, for it is not quite dry." When Mada heard what the cockroaches were saying he laughed, and his wife asked him what he was laughing about. He replied, "I was listening to what those cockroaches were saying about our legs."

"Can you understand the speech of cockroaches?"

Mada replied, "I can understand the speech of any animal."

"Well, then, please explain to me how it is done, so that I shall understand too."

Mada answered, "Wait four days⁵ and then I shall tell you."

Four days later Mada and his wife were eating sugarcane. They threw the chewed cane out of the house and ants came to suck at the remains. The ants said, "What a pity. In the wife's sugarcane pulp there is no juice at all left." But at the sugarcane pulp that Mada had thrown away they said, "We can satisfy ourselves at Mada's cane because there is lots of juice still in it." When Mada heard what the ants were saying he laughed. His wife said, "This is the second time

³ This comment is part of the original narrative, not a response to a question from me.

⁴ A common Sumbanese cosmetic practice. It keeps the skin sleek, and when the inunction is fresh imparts a smell which Kodi find agreeable. The oil is sometimes perfumed with scents, made from wild blossoms and roots, which have aphrodisiac significance.

⁵ Four is a sacred number (*kavuku hari*) of great and general symbolic significance in Kodi culture, and must form the matter of an article in itself. The number of days here is conventional and not intended to give a particular passage of time any importance in the plot.

that you laugh like that. Please tell me why you are laughing." Mada replied, "I was laughing because the ants said that there was no juice in the cane you threw away, while there was still lots in mine, so that they were full." His wife said, "Tell me how it is that you understand the speech of animals," and Mada answered, "Wait four days and then I shall tell you."

Four days later Mada and his wife went to his garden to inspect the crops. When they got there they saw a male goat and a female goat who were husband and wife. The female goat said to her husband, "Go and get that flower for me." The husband answered her, "I'd rather not. That flower is right on the edge of a steep bank. It is dangerous to take that one. I might fall over the edge."

"If you don't get it" said the female goat, "I shall throw myself over the edge and then you will be a widower." But the husband goat answered, "Supposing you did throw yourself over the edge and kill yourself — there are plenty of [other] female goats. Right now there are ten [whom I could marry]."

When Mada heard what the goat was saying he laughed. When Mada laughed his wife said to him, "That is the third time you laugh like that. If you don't teach me every word in the speech of animals I shall kill myself: I shall throw myself from this bank so that I shall die and you will be a widower." Then Mada repeated what the goat had said, and he answered his wife, "Go ahead and kill yourself, there are plenty of women. There are ten women whom I could marry on this very day if I wanted to."

In this story there are two lessons:

1. The story of the snake that intended to kill Mada: It is certain that every good deed will be repaid with good.
2. About the words of the male goat that were repeated by Mada: Never tell your secrets to your wife, however true she may seem.

II

Ndalapo and the monkeys.

One day Ndalapo caught a monkey in a trap and took it to his house and burned off the fur. Then he cut it in two and took out the intestines. He gave these to his wife Pati Kaka so that she should clean them at the

stream and remove the contents. While she was cleaning the monkey-intestines along came another monkey and asked her, "What intestines are those that you are cleaning?" Pati Kaka replied, "These are hen's intestines."

The monkey said, "It is impossible that the intestines of a hen should be so big."

"Oh", said Pati Kaka, "They are the intestines of a pig."

Said the monkey, "That too is impossible."

"Well, then, they are the intestines of a dog."⁶

"They are not that either", said the monkey. "They are not the intestines of a buffalo, either, or a horse, or a goat, or a deer." For the monkey was not deceived by Pati Kaka.

Then Pati Kaka burst out in an angry voice, "They are your intestines!" (meaning that they were the intestines of a monkey).⁷ So the monkey ran into the forest and called other monkeys to go and kill Ndalapo in revenge.

The next day, at midday, about fifty monkeys came, male and female. When they arrived at Ndalapo's house they seated themselves on the verandah and called to Ndalapo to come out. Ndalapo said, "But I am still eating." As a matter of fact he was not eating at all but was blackening his teeth.⁸ When he had finished blackening his teeth he came out smiling. As soon as the monkeys saw his teeth shining black their anger vanished completely. The oldest monkey asked, "What medicine is it that you use to polish your teeth so black?" Ndalapo replied, "Last night my wife put me in a rice-container⁹ and pounded it with a wooden pestle, while my lips were parted and my teeth showed. After it had been pounded for some time I came out, and now my teeth are like this."

The oldest monkey asked, "Is it possible for you to have this done to us so that we shall be like that too?" Ndalapo replied, "Of course, if you want to." So the monkeys got themselves ready and entered the big rice-container and the mouth was tied up. Then Ndalapo got a rice-pounder and bludgeoned the container where the monkeys were. When he did this the smaller monkeys moved themselves in between the bigger ones so that they should not be struck by the pounder. Ndalapo thought to himself, "Surely none can have escaped", and

⁶ Dogs are eaten on Sumba.

⁷ Again, this parenthetical comment is part of the original story.

⁸ A cosmetic practice.

⁹ A tall, soft-woven container into which a man could easily enter.

he opened the mouth of the container. When he tipped it up Ndalapo was startled to see the small monkeys run out and escape. But all the other monkeys, and there were many of them, were quite dead.

The morals of this story are:

1. This is certain, that men are destroyed by vanity.
2. He who wants to become rich in one day will meet with disaster.¹⁰

III

Coro Pongga who got jammed in the branches of a breadfruit tree.

Once upon a time Coro Pongga was going to look for a breadfruit tree. When he found the tree he was looking for, and saw that it was a breadfruit tree, he raised his head to look up in the top of it for its fruit. But all that he saw was just one fruit. Then he climbed up to pick it, and while he was trying to pick the fruit the branch on which he was snapped and he fell; but he did not fall right to the ground, he fell between two branches and was stuck there. He was jammed and could not free himself.

When he had been there four days along a man called Rangka Mone, a man with a big belly and fine clothes¹¹ who was looking for a girl to marry. When he came by the tree he was surprised to hear a voice from above asking him where he was going. He immediately stopped his horse under the tree and looking up saw Coro Pongga stuck in the branches. The man in the tree asked him, "In which direction are you going?" and he replied "I am going to the village over there to look for a girl to marry."

"What a pity. I think it would be better if you got yourself ready first, and then you could go to the village."

"What more should I do to get myself ready? I am already wearing the most dashing clothes."

¹⁰ Imparting a fine ebony polish to the teeth is a laborious affair, lasting a very long time. There is no way of blackening them permanently and beautifully with just one application of traditional Kodi materials. Similarly, acquiring wealth is an ambition constantly in the minds of Kodi men and constantly spoken of by them — and in the Kodi economy to become rich in one day is just as impossible.

¹¹ Conventional attributes of a man of substance.

"That is true, but the people in that village do not care for fine clothes. What they like is people with small plates,¹² without big bellies. That is the very reason why I am here. The day before yesterday I was there but the people of the village said that my belly was still too big, so here I am to make my belly smaller so that I shall be acceptable."

"Well, friend, if that's the way it is, what about me? Couldn't I do the same?"

"If you want to, you can come up this tree. My belly is small now, so you can come up and get me out and take my place. Then we can both get married at the same time."

Then without reflection Rangga Mone dismounted from his horse, took off his clothes, and climbed up into the tree. When he got to the branches where Coro Pongga was he gave a great pull at one so that Coro Pongga was freed. As soon as he was released the two men had a discussion and came to a decision. Coro Pongga said, "Every morning for four days I shall bring you some food, and then we shall go to the village together. There we shall get married at the same time to two very pretty girls whom I picked out some time ago." Then he pulled at one of the branches and opened a gap between them. Rangga Mone got in between. As soon as he was in the narrowest part Coro Pongga released the branch and he was clamped tight.

Coro Pongga descended the tree, took Rangga Mone's horse and clothes, and went home — without the slightest intention of releasing him as long as he lived.

The morals of this story are:

- 1 Be wary of sweet-sounding talk lest you place yourself in danger.
2. What God¹³ does can never be changed by man, however wicked it may seem.¹⁴

¹² People of modest means. (The Kodi have their own plates and serving-dishes, carved of wood and stained black.)

¹³ Kodi: *Inya Bokol Bapa Bokol*, one of the names and aspects of "God".

¹⁴ The elucidation of this moral is rather complex. To Kodi this is a very funny story, but it is conventionally proper to add the moralistic note (as well as the other practical advice). Coro Pongga's conduct was certainly bad in conventional Kodi moral terms; but he is also an admirable figure, a "man of many wiles", in everyday evaluation. At the same time, some comfort is offered to victims of others' cunning in the implication that God must have a good reason for what he does or allows, and in the assertion that in any case there is nothing to be done about it.

3. Never base your life on the advice of others but let your own opinion be your guide.

IV

The crocodile and the monkey.

Once upon a time a monkey went looking for food. He got twenty ears of maize and a cucumber, and with these turned home. On the way he had to cross a river, but when he got there the canoe was on the other side. So he shouted to anybody who might be on the other side to bring the canoe over; but though he shouted again and again no one brought it — there was not even an answer. Even though no one answered the monkey went on calling, until along came a crocodile who asked, "Who are you, shouting like that?"

The monkey answered, "I am a friend who wants to cross the river. Bring me the canoe, friend."

The crocodile said, "It's great pity, my friend, that I don't know how to paddle, but if my friend wishes to let my body replace the canoe . . .?"

To this the monkey answered. "Certainly I should like that very much, if my friend's intentions are honest and sympathetic."

Said the crocodile, "I am an animal who of all animals is the most reliable and honest, and full of affection for my friends. I like to help comrades who are in difficulty."

So the monkey said. "Well, if that's the way it is, come, my friend, and help me." And the crocodile came near and placed his body so that the monkey could sit on his back to be taken to the opposite bank. The monkey got on the crocodile's back with his load of food. When they were in midstream the crocodile said, "Let's play at riddles, brother monkey." The monkey replied, "Of course, if it's a straightforward riddle", and the crocodile said, "Certainly it is a straightforward riddle that I am thinking of, my friend." Then he pronounced his riddle, saying, "Listen to my riddle, friend: In another ten minutes friend crocodile is going to eat the liver and heart of a fat monkey." The monkey answered, "And this is my riddle: In a couple of days' time friend monkey is going to eat the liver and heart of a vicious and wicked crocodile." While they were exchanging riddles they had approached the bank of the river, over which hung the branches of a tree, and the monkey sprang up into them, leaving his burden behind.

The crocodile asked, "Hey, friend monkey, what sort of a suspicious mind do you have that you flee and leave your things behind?" To

which the monkey replied, "That's all right, my friend, just so long as I am out of danger." The crocodile went back to the headwaters of the river, to look for food and also to give the monkey time to forget everything that had happened during the crossing.

The next day, in the morning, the crocodile came back to the place where he had met the monkey, and saw the monkey drawing water. The crocodile drew near, disguising himself as a floating log. He stretched out slowly and seized the monkey's paw. But the monkey did not lose his presence of mind, and immediately laughed like mad, saying, "Who has been so silly as to grab the branch of a tree, thinking it to be the paw of a monkey?" When the crocodile heard this he let go of the monkey's paw.

As soon as he was free of the grip of the crocodile the monkey ran up a tree and called out, "Hey, friend crocodile, let us play at riddles." "All right," said the crocodile, and the monkey pronounced his riddle. "Friend crocodile who is very stupid was tricked by a small and humble monkey, so that he let go the monkey's paw when he had seized it." Then he propounded another riddle: "Friend, tomorrow at midday friend monkey is going to eat the liver and heart of a vicious and stupid crocodile." Then he said, "Now I am going back to my home, which is a hole in a rock at the edge of the river," and he went off. The crocodile thought to himself, "It would be a good idea if I went overland to the monkey's house in the hole in the rock. Once I get in there it will be easy for me to attack this creature who is always making fun of me." He came out on land and went straight to the monkey's hole. When he got there he went inside to look for the monkey, but at the time the monkey was not there. So the crocodile thought to himself, "I'd better not go out, but stay here in the hole and just wait until the monkey decides to enter his house," and he stayed there to wait for the monkey.

Not long afterwards the monkey came to the hole, and he was surprised to see marks as though someone had been dragging a log. He investigated them carefully and perceived that they were none other than the trail of a crocodile. Then he said [aloud], "I shall wait till later in the afternoon before I go into my house. Right now I shall have a rest first." But he did not sit down, nor did he lie down, but he gathered a lot of wood and stopped up the mouth of the hole. Then he took dry grasses and fire and set fire to the wood. As soon as the wood caught fire the crocodile began to scream because of the heat, and shouted out in a loud voice. But the monkey said, "Excellent,

friend, now you're, comfortable, aren't you?" And the crocodile died of the heat, and as soon as he was dead the monkey went off into the forest to call his friends to share the meat.¹⁵ The meat of the crocodile was all shared out.

The lessons of this story are:

1. However big and tall you may be, if you are not clever and adroit you will easily be brought down, and will end up as the victim of cleverer people.
2. However small and ugly you may be, if you are informed and cunning you will be able to confound people who are big and good-looking.

V

Rua Ngedo the orphan.

There was a man and his wife who was pregnant, and they lived in a small village in Kodi. When the time came near for her to give birth she went to the gardens and cut four clumps of bananas. She placed two bunches to the left of the place where she intended to bear the child and two the right. Two days later she gave birth to a son and he was named Rua Ngedo. Four days after that both the husband and the wife died.

¹⁵ The sharing of meat is supremely symbolic of social solidarity.

The possibility and extent of Hindu influence on Sumbanese culture is a large matter to which I intend to devote considerable attention in later publications, and I do not wish to make too definite a connection on the basis of this isolated story; but the reader also may be struck by similarities between this fable and the story of the monkey and the crocodile in the fourth book of the *Pañcatantra*. The chief difference is that in the Kodi fable the crocodile has no wife, and it is his own evil mind and not his wife's urging which leads him to try to eat the monkey's heart; but otherwise the two stories are very alike (Franklin Edgerton, *The Panchatantra reconstructed*, New Haven 1924, vol. 2, pp. 102—4, 393—400). In one version of the *Pañcatantra* tale there is even mention also of the crocodile being burned to death. The parallel is distant, since in this it is the crocodile who swears to burn himself alive when he learns that his wife is dead (Alfred Williams, *Tales from the Panchatantra*, Oxford 1930, pp. 170—175), but it is of interest none the less that this element occurs in both tales. If these similarities are accorded some historical value then the Kodi fable is of added interest as evidence of a further extension of the *Pañcatantra* eastward in Indonesia than has yet been recorded (cf. Johannes Hertel, *Das Pañcatantra: seine Geschichte und seine Verbreitung*, Leipzig-Berlin 1914, pp. 338—356).

When the child's father and mother died he was very sad. There was nobody to bury their bodies, and they remained in the house: they rotted away completely, the flesh below the house and only the bones remaining up in the house.¹⁶ But the child was between the two clumps of bananas, so that by turning to the right he could suck at ripe bananas, and by turning to the left he could suck bananas. It is a surprising thing, but the child stayed alive and these very bananas lasted six years. When the child was six years old he was able to cook his own food.

So he went up into the loft of the house to get some of the rice which his father and mother had put there. When he was twelve he dug a hole near the edge of the house and buried the bones of his mother and father. When this was done he worked in a small garden near the house, and when he had cleared it he planted maize there. When it began to sprout a wild fowl came and scratched it up. When Rua Ngedo saw the jungle fowl was eating his maize he set a noose, and it was not long before he caught it. Then he went to get the jungle fowl, saying, "What luck, now I have something to eat with my rice"; but the fowl answered, "Why do you want to make a dish of me when I entered your noose on purpose in order to help you in your hardship?" Rua Ngedo answered, "Then what shall I do with you?" and the fowl said, "Just release me, so that I can go to your house with you." So Rua Ngedo released the jungle fowl and they went together back to the house.

Not long after that, when the maize was ripe, a monkey came and took an ear, so Rua Ngedo set a noose. Soon the monkey was caught in the noose, and Rua Ngedo took a length of wood to hit the monkey with. When the monkey saw him holding the stick he asked, "What's that length of wood for, Rua Ngedo?" and Rua Ngedo answered, "It's to hit you with." "Don't do that", said the monkey, "I got caught in the noose on purpose so that I could help you in your difficulties." So Rua Ngedo released the monkey, which came to the house and stayed there with the jungle fowl.

Not long after this a wild pig came to eat the maize, and the same thing happened. So in Rua Ngedo's house there were now a hen, a monkey, and a wild pig.

When night came there was the sound of gongs, and the monkey asked, "Whose gongs are those, Rua Ngedo?" Rua Ngedo replied, "That's Rato¹⁷ Ndelo. His daughter doesn't like any man, and he is

¹⁶ A Kodi house is raised high on piles.

¹⁷ A title of aristocratic rank.

giving a feast so that she shall choose one that she likes there." Then the monkey said, "Let's go there, Rua Ngedo," but Rua Ngedo replied, "Oh, brother monkey, I am too ashamed."¹⁸ "Come on", said the monkey, "You wait outside the entrance to the village and I shall go in by myself", because he wanted to force Rua Ngedo to go. So Rua Ngedo followed the monkey, and when they got to the entrance of the village¹⁹ he stayed outside while the monkey went in.

When the monkey arrived in the village he went up to the house of Rato Ndelo and asked where his daughter was. He was answered that she was in her room. He looked left and right and saw a stack of wooden plates, and asked, "What are those, Rato Ndelo?"

"Those are plates", said Rato Ndelo.

"And what are those over there?"

Rato Ndelo answered, "Those are water jars."

Then the monkey saw some bunches of horsehair on the edge of a sword-sheath, and he asked "What's that, Rato Ndelo?", and Rato Ndelo answered, "That's ornamentation that men wear when they go to war or when they dance".

Then the monkey said, "Please get it for me so that I can wear it and dance like you." Rato Ndelo got up, and since he was not wearing drawers,²⁰ and his loincloth was not wide enough, his testicles showed. The monkey immediately grabbed them and asked, "And what are these, Rato Ndelo?" Though he was very ashamed Rato Ndelo explained what they were, namely that they were testicles. Because he was in this situation Rato Ndelo told the monkey to go and call Rua Ngedo, and the monkey went and said, "Come, Rua Ngedo. Rato Ndelo welcomes us with a goat." Rua Ngedo was still shy but he went.

When they got to the house Rato Ndelo recounted everything that the monkey had done. They were kept there that night in the house, and Rati Ndelo prepared three kinds of wood and wrapped them up: namely, that of the gourd-creeper, lime tree, and the jackfruit tree. His plan was that if Rua Ngedo and the monkey could not recognise them the next day he would kill them and the pig and fowl as well.

In the night a big mosquito came and buzzed near the ear of Rua Ngedo, and when he heard it he said, "Watch out, you: if I catch you

¹⁸ Evidently because of his poverty — a great bar to marriage.

¹⁹ A Kodi village is surrounded by stone ramparts for defence, in which at a ritually prescribed point is an entrance.

²⁰ A modern touch. Kodi men traditionally and usually do not wear drawers under their loincloths.

I shall crush you." The mosquito replied, "If you kill me you yourself will certainly be killed tomorrow."

"If that's the way it is I shall not kill you, just so long as you help me."

So the mosquito told him the name of each kind of wood that Rato Ndelo had got ready. The next morning Rato Ndelo asked Rua Ngedo to tell what each wood was, but since he was shy the monkey [instead] named them. Then Rato Ndelo asked Rua Ngedo to match the jungle fowl against his cock, the wild pig against his pig, and the monkey against his dog. But Rua Ngedo's three animals won, and seeing this Rato Ndelo asked Rua Ngedo to marry his daughter. The monkey said, "All right, on condition that Rato Ndelo sends a tombstone ²¹ with his daughter, so that his in-laws can be [properly] buried", and Rato Ndelo agreed to this condition.

The three animals took it upon themselves to provide the marriage payment ²² for Rato Ndelo's daughter: namely, the pig guaranteed the horses and cattle, the monkey guaranteed a slave, and the jungle fowl undertook to provide the gold ornaments. They made these things appear in a surprising manner. The pig leapt once, and there were the horses and cattle; the monkey danced once, and there was the slave; the fowl flapped its wings once, and the gold ornaments appeared. Now that the marriage payment was completed Rua Ngedo and Rato Ndelo's daughter were married on that very day.

After this Rato Ndelo got his daughter ready, with the return-payment ²³ which he was making, and he called people to help with the tombstone. On that same day the two parties, with the tombstone, arrived at Rua Ngedo's village; and the next day Rua Ngedo's parents were placed in the sarcophagus and a funeral feast was celebrated. After the feast was over everyone returned to his own home, and the three animals — the monkey, the wild pig, and the jungle fowl — returned to the jungle whence they had come. Rua Ngedo, with his wife and his slaves, stayed in the house, in comfort, security and plenty.

The morals of this story are:

1. Often people who are in distress when they are small receive extraordinary blessings ²⁴ from God.²⁵

²¹ A large very heavy stone sarcophagus, traditional in Sumba.

²² Kodi: *valli*.

²³ Kodi: *lipyoko*.

²⁴ Kodi: *vei hyuhu*.

²⁵ Kodi: *Inya Bokol Bapa Bokol*.

2. People who are poor from childhood to adulthood may yet be favoured [by God] when they are old.²⁶

VI

The goat who was a thief.

A long time ago there were five animals, namely a buffalo, a horse, a pig, a dog, and a cock. One day they discussed how they should make a garden, and they decided that on the first day the pig should look after the house and prepare food for his companions. When they had decided this the other four animals went off together to the place where they intended to make the garden, while the pig took some rice, husked it, and set it to boil. A little later along came a goat who lived in a cave in a small wood near the house. He called out, "Hey, pig, you'd better clear away the weeds round the house: otherwise you will be fined for not keeping the place clean."²⁷ The pig replied, "Wait till the garden is finished, then we shall take care of the surroundings of the house." Then the goat asked, "What is it that you are cooking?", and the pig replied, "It is rice that I am cooking for my friends who are making a garden at the moment."

"Well, then, perhaps you would give me some of the rice-water, for I have travelled a long way and am hungry."

"All right", said the pig, "I'll give you some of the rice-water", and he then scratched his head because it was itching.

The goat asked, "Why is my friend scratching like that? Do you have lice?"

"Too many, my friend", said the pig.

"In that case, come and let me try to find them."

The pig came and sat at the side of the goat, but the goat said, "Lie down, so that it will be easier for me to find the lice." The pig lay down, went to sleep, and was soon quite unconscious. The goat immediately got up, grabbed the cooking-pot with the rice in it, and ran off to his place in the wood. Afterwards, the pig started up and was surprised to see that the goat was no longer there and that the cooking-pot was missing.

²⁶ This lesson is almost a repetition of the former, but is recorded since it is in the fable as given to me. Also, there is a slight difference in that the former refers to general distress and the second specifically to material poverty.

²⁷ In a Kodi village certain persons are traditionally charged to keep the public area clean and houseowners are responsible for keeping their environs tidy.

At midday his friends came back from work and entered the house, and as soon as they arrived they asked for the food. But the pig said, "Oh, my friends, you may well be angry with me, but I was cheated by a thieving goat. While I was asleep he stole the rice and the pot as well."

Then the buffalo said, "No wonder, if you leave someone who is afraid and stupid to look after the house he is going to be tricked by bad people. Tomorrow I shall look after the house. If that goat's intestines are not strewn on the ground by my horns, and if his flesh is not made a dish for us, then indeed I am as stupid as a pig."

The next day four animals went off to work in the garden while the buffalo stayed behind in the house to guard it and to cook food for his friends. As soon as the others were gone he took some rice and husked it, and then set it to cook. While the rice was on the fire the goat came along, and said softly, "Hey, buffalo my friend, I have been sent to inspect each village to see whether they are clean, and if any house is not the people there are to be seized and taken away to be punished.²⁸ I should really arrest you, my friend, because your house is very disorderly. But you are not a stranger,²⁹ so I shall pardon you for the time being — but tomorrow your house must be neat."

"Very well", said the buffalo. "Praise be that you are of such a patient disposition. With somebody else I should certainly have been punished."

The goat said, "It is true that among all the officials it is I who am praised, and in fact I am in charge of all of my fellows." Then the goat added, "What are you cooking there?", and was answered, "This is rice that I am cooking for my friends who are working in the garden." Then the goat said, "Perhaps my friend would give me some of the rice-water, for I have come a long way and am very hungry." The buffalo answered, "It is right that someone who is good-hearted and patient should be helped", and he gave some rice-water to the goat, who drank it. After this, the buffalo scratched his head because it itched, and seeing this the goat asked, "Do you have lice?" and the buffalo answered that he had.

The goat said, 'Come here so that I can search for them,' and the buffalo lay down at the side of the goat and straightway fell asleep.

²⁸ This is modern, conforming with the centralised administration of Kodi under the Indonesian government. Formerly was no central authority with power to hale off and punish in the way threatened here.

²⁹ I.e. the alleged offender is a fellow-Kodi, a person with whom moral ties are admitted.

The goat got up, took the cooking-pot, and ran away. When the buffalo awoke he was shocked to discover that the goat was no longer there and that the cooking-pot with the rice in it was gone. His companions came back and immediately asked for food, but the buffalo said, "Oh dear, friends, it is true that the goat is very cunning, as the pig said — so much so that even I was tricked."

Then the horse said, "Tomorrow I'd better look after the house", but he too was deceived exactly as were the pig and the buffalo. On the last day the smallest of them all, namely the cock, guarded the house. As soon as the others were gone the cock husked rice and set it to boil, and while it was cooking the cunning goat came to the house. He said, "Whose house is this that it is so dirty? The owner must be punished", and the cock replied, "Very well, if there is justification for it." The goat responded, "Certainly there is justification for my friend to be punished, since the house is so untidy."

"So it is, my friend, but tell me — who gave you authority to inspect people's houses? Explain to me by whose orders you do this."

"I was only joking, friend cock", said the goat. Then he asked, "What are you cooking?" and was told that it was rice.

"Please give me some rice-water."

"All right, you can have some of the rice-water, but I can't give you any of the rice because it is for my friends who are working in the garden."

"I shall be thankful for the water," said the goat, and when the rice was cooked the cook gave him half and kept half for himself.

The goat kept looking at the cock, thinking that he would scratch his head or his body, but the cock just drank the rice-water, using his beak as a spoon to ladle it up with. When the water was finished the cock began pecking repeatedly at the rice. The goat was very surprised to see what he was doing and said, "How good it is to see you eating, and how good it would be if you would let me do the same."

The cock answered, "It would be fine if you could eat in the same manner as I do, but you are in the same position as I was yesterday. I saw a friend of mine eating like this, and I kept asking him how he was able to do it. He answered that the king of the forest had made him able to do it. He was hung up with hind legs upwards and his head hanging down, and then he was beaten on the neck with the branch of a lime-tree, and after that he was able to eat in this way. So I asked my friend to have it done to me, and he agreed, and then I found I could eat like this."

The goat then asked, "Would it be possible for me to be treated so that we could eat together?" and the cock said, "If you want to. It would be all over in an hour, and then you could eat in the same way as I do." So the goat said, "Do it to me, my friend, so that we shall both be the same."

Then the cock went up to the loft of the house and got two lengths of rope. With one he tied the hind legs of the goat together, and with the other he strung him up from one of the beams. But he did not try to find a branch of a lime tree: he took a very sharp sword, and a large wooden plate, which he placed under the goat's head. He tied another rope to his horns and tied this to another beam. It was then as easy as anything to cut the goat's throat. The goat cried out, but in vain, and his blood poured into the plate placed there by the cock who had been wiser than he.

When the goat was dead the other animals came back from the garden, and they were surprised to see the thief hanging dead through the cleverness of the cock who was so small. The five friends boiled part of the meat, fried some, and grilled the rest.

The lessons of this story are:

1. Ill-doing leads to perdition.
2. People thought stupid and dull may yet bring down the clever and strong.

VII

Ngila and his wife.

There was once a man called Ngila and his wife, and they lived in a small village. One day he said to her, "This evening I am going to the beach to fish by torchlight and to look for octopus, and I should like you to prepare some food for me [for when I get back]." When it was dark he set off to the beach with his torch and he got a number of fish and some octopus as well. He brought them to dry land, cooked the fish and took out the bones, and packed the meat in leaves. When he got home he quietly climbed up into the house, found the rice which his wife had cooked for him, and took it down back to the ground. There he ate it all, with the fish he had caught, and put the cooking-pot back in its place.

When he had done all this he woke his wife, who was still asleep, and when she was up he told her to cook the octopus. When she had cooked them she took up the cooking-pot and the ladle, but when she started to ladle out the rice that she thought was there she was startled to see that the pot was quite empty. Then that wicked husband of hers beat her and ate all the octopus himself. And he did the same every day for three days.

On the fourth day³⁰ the wife went to the beach in the morning and caught a large crab. "What luck", she said, "to get such a dish to go with the rice." But the crab said, "Don't. Take me to the house instead, so that I can keep watch for that thief who steals the rice every night." When they got to the house the woman said, "Hey, crab, where shall I put you?" and the crab replied, "Put me in the cooking-pot where you usually put the rice."

The woman put him in the pot, and later the thief — that is, the husband — came back from fishing. When he arrived at the house he quietly went up, took the pot, and left the house again. He opened the pot and put his hand in, but he did not get any rice. Instead, his finger was nipped by the crab. He shouted with pain, and his wife ran out with a stick and began beating the thief with it. Even though he kept shouting, "I am your husband!" she kept on beating him, and shouted out, "I have caught the thief! I have caught the thief who stole the rice!" And then she took the case to the elders of the village.

The case was heard next day. The wife would not pardon her husband and insisted on a divorce.

The lessons of this story are:

1. This is certain, that rotten things stink.
2. Whoever sows evil will reap disaster.
3. A jackfruit tree cannot bear bananas or limes.

VIII

*The Karendi man called Kuri Karendi.*³¹

One day a man called Ngila Mananga was going to a village called

³⁰ Four marks the turning-point (cf. note 5).

³¹ The people of the little district of Karendi, to the northeast of Kodi, are in tradition and everyday allusion models of utter stupidity and the objects of contemptuous amusement, of which this story is illustration.

Homba Vavi,³² looking for a wife. When Kuri Karendi saw him on the way he asked him, "Where are you going, friend?", and Ngila Mananga answered, "I am going to Homba Vavi to look for a wife."

Kuri Karendi asked him, "Are you going to look for a pig-woman, then?"

"No", said Ngila Mananga, "I am looking for a girl."

Then Kuri Karendi asked again, "Are you going to look for a pig-woman?"

"No", said Ngila Mananga, "I am looking for a girl."

Once again Kuri Karendi asked, "Are you going to look for a pig-woman?"

Ngila Mananga was fed up by this time, so he answered, "Yes!" When Kuri Karendi heard this reply he decided to look for a pig-woman too. He dressed himself in a shoulder-cloth, loincloth, and head-cloth, took his betel-nut pouch, and set off.

When he got to the village he saw a sow underneath a house, took off his betel-pouch, and offered it to the sow. But the sow gave him a red-eyed look, raised her head, and appeared angry. Kuri Karendi pleaded with her: "Don't be like that, miss, but accept this betel."³³ He pressed the pouch upon her, but the sow sprang at it and bit it to shreds; so that even the lime-container³⁴ was split. However, even though she behaved in this way Kuri Karendi forced his way into the pig-pen; but the sow attacked him and tried to bite his genitals, so Kuri Karendi ran away in shame.

The morals of this story are:

1. Be careful what questions you ask your companions, lest you be put on the wrong track.
2. Do not just follow other people who are following their own plans.
3. Whatever you think of doing, first consider very carefully the advantages and disadvantages.

RODNEY NEEDHAM.

Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford.

³² Literally, "pig pool".

³³ A gesture of courtship, one of the many meanings attached in varying contexts to the offer or exchange of betel.

³⁴ Normally made of bamboo or horn and very strong.