

The Doves' Journey

Adapted from an Indian Folktale



One summer long ago in India, near the great Himalayan mountains, a terrible drought struck. Food and water were nearly impossible to find. Panting from the heat, a flock of doves flew for long miles, desperate for something to eat. Joban, a young dove with keen eyesight, swooped low over a forest and spotted plump rice plants under a banyan tree.

"Look!" he cried. "Rice to eat!"

But the King of Doves warned, "Rice grows in open fields, not deep in the forest. I sense a trap. We must keep going."

Joban said, "But clearly, it's rice!" The doves were so hungry that they rushed to gobble the grains.

Suddenly, a huge net fell from the tree, pinning the whole flock to the ground. Fluttering helplessly, they saw a hunter running toward them. He shouted, "*Ati uttam!* I've caught enough birds to feed the whole village!"

The doves turned to their king. "You tried to warn us, but the rice was too tempting. What can we do *now*?" Joban cried.

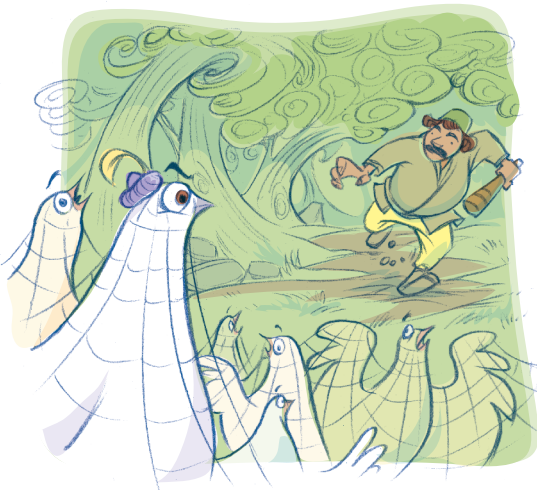
As the hunter drew closer, the wise king called to the flock, "Grab the net with your beaks and fly!"

A few birds flapped their wings, but soon fell back to the ground. "Quickly! Everyone must work *in unity*. Now!" exclaimed the king.

This time, every bird flapped, straining upward. Just as the hunter's fingers grasped for the net, the doves, pulling together, lifted it out of reach! The hunter shook his club in frustration.

Before long, Joban began to complain. "This net is so heavy. We can't go any farther." The others joined in.

"Just a little longer, *mitra*," counseled the king. "Be strong. Follow me to the hill of white frangipani trees. I know a friend who can help."



With the king's encouragement, they found the strength to continue. Reaching the hill, they collapsed. Immediately, the king called, "O Queen of Mice!"

A noble mouse scampered forward. "Greetings, friend," the queen squeaked. "How can I be of service?"

Joban laughed. "How can such a *little* creature help us?"

"Guard your tongue, Joban," the king cautioned. He humbly asked the mouse to nibble the ropes and set the doves free.

"Of course," she replied. "I will start with you."

But he said, "Please help the others first. Then I will enjoy my own freedom."



The queen gnawed the ropes until every dove was released, ending with the king. Taking pity on the exhausted birds, she invited them to join all the mice in a royal banquet of rice, cheese, and fresh water.

After the feast, the Dove King bowed to the Mouse Queen. The whole flock followed his example, cooing a grateful song. Joban sang loudest of all. Then they rose into the evening sky, happy to follow the Dove King back to their home.