

# Interreligious Insight

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### Vyadh (The Story of the Hunter)

*This is an excerpt, taken with the permission of the author, Vidyavachaspati Amarnath Shukla, from The Encyclopedia of Indian Mythology (Subhkamna Publishers, New Delhi. 2002). According to the author, the original source of this episode is the Brahma Purana.*

Hunting is the livelihood of a hunter, by which he supports himself and his family. There was once a hunter who went into the forest to hunt. He spread his net to ensnare birds or animals. But on this day, up until sunset, no animal or bird was caught in it. He was about to roll up the net when a she-pigeon became trapped in it. Thinking that this was divine dispensation, he put the pigeon in the cage.

Then suddenly the weather changed. The sky became overcast; it started raining heavily and storming. The hunter was caught, trapped himself in the bad weather. He was hungry and completely drenched, shivering and grinding his teeth from the cold. What to do now, the children would be waiting for him at home.

He took shelter under a tree. By coincidence it was the very tree that was the home of the pigeon trapped in his cage. She had made her nest in that tree and her mate was waiting there for her to return. The she-pigeon recognized the tree and heard the cooing of her husband. She called out to her husband, "I am trapped in the cage of this hunter. But don't worry for me. He is a guest who has come to our door.

He is going to die due to hunger and cold. He is also worried that his children are hungry at home. His wife and children would be waiting for his return as you are waiting for me. It will be a sin if a guest dies due to hunger and cold at our door. He is our enemy but he is in a very miserable condition.

He has trapped me, but it is the out-come of my previous deeds which I will have to face. You must do your duty. Guests should be treated in the same way as the gods, and the forefathers. Hospitality toward the guest makes all happy and satiated.

He is not begging from us himself but it is our duty to look after him. Though he has harmed you by trapping your wife, yet he is our guest. I am happy that my life would be meaningful by offering myself to the hungry family of the hunter."

Hearing such words from his wife, the good spirit aroused in the mind of the pigeon. He set aside his own problems and sorrows, came down from the tree and said to the hunter, "You are my guest. You are afflicted with cold and hunger; it is my duty to help you even at the cost of my life. Have patience while I make some arrangements for your relief."

With that, the pigeon flew up into the sky and returned with a burning twig. He put the burning twig on a heap of dry leaves and it caught fire giving the hunter relief from the cold. So that he was no longer shivering with cold.

Then pigeon circled around the fire and said to the hunter. “O hunter, you have got relief from the cold, now satiate your hunger by eating my roasted meat.” And it immediately jumped into the fire.

The hunter was surprised and said, “Oh, you have sacrificed your life for me. I am a sinner who kills innocent birds and animals to fill my belly. Curses on me.” He opened the door of the cage to free the she-pigeon.

But the hunter was even more surprised when the she-pigeon said, “My husband has sacrificed himself to satiate your hunger. This tree was our dwelling place. You took shelter under this tree to save yourself from the storm and cold. In this way you became our guest. It is the duty of the host to look after and provide hospitality to the guest. My husband has performed his duty. You need not worry for us. It was predestined. Take the roasted meat of my husband. There is no use in my living without the husband. I will follow his path. Use my meat for your starving family.” And with that, she also leaped into the fire.

The hunter was stupefied. He had no time to resist or do anything. He folded his hands in gratitude. All of a sudden two fire-flames ascended high from the fire and flew into the sky.

The hunter abandoned his profession and took a pledge to bring up his family by good means and to perform the duty of a good host throughout his life.

The place where this incident occurred is known as “Kapot Tirth” (Pigeon-shrine) near the bank of river Godavari.