Before the creation of earth and all the things we see today, things moving or static, breathing or inert, there was only water, an endless stretch of water, the depth of which was known only to the gods. The water itself was in an endless stillness because there was no wind.

Our *buiyā-buris* tell us that out of the still stretch of unending water emerged a singular tree. It was quite like the banyan tree we see now, but so huge that its roots daunted the heart of the seabed and its several branches bending down into the water formed additional trunks. Some of those trunks were almost as broad as the main trunk, which was so broad that a light-flying cotton teal of our time would pant for breath to circle it.

Things were in that state for a long stretch of eternity. Then, Gozen, the sire of the universe, plucked a leaf from the tree, and, sitting on it, began to meditate. No one knows how long he sat thus, meditating, because time did not exist. Also, there was neither the sun to count the days nor the seasons to mark the years during which Gozen meditated. But from the tale that the ancestors of the Chakma people have told their children, it is learnt that Gozen sat in that liquid stillness, meditating for many thousand years.

At long last, he opened his eyes, and lo! Before him lay a wide stretch of land with the huge tree standing upright in the centre. He looked at the land and knew at once that while he was absorbed in deep meditation, Kāṅgāra the crab had toiled and toiled ceaselessly under the water, digging up with his claws the clay from the roots of the tree and slowly piling it in little mounds around the trunk to make this wonderful specimen of expertise.

Then Gozen set to work. He made another sea. He placed this sea upside down and high above the reach of the land and the sea below, and called it Āgāz the sky. In this sky-sea, he set afloat a boat. Then Gozen made Bel out of the heat of His body. And he made Chān from the calm light of His eyes. Having thus made Chān and Bel, Gozen called them brothers, and he assigned to them the duty of acting as the custodians of light, saying, “Go forth and illuminate the world.” Everyday, Bel the great ball would traverse the sky from the east to the west everyday and dispel the darkness that enveloped the world. Chān would also do the same work but only after the tired Bel rested in the evening.

So, days and nights were created. And he made the day warm and the night cool.

Then, Gozen bestowed plenitude on the land by making mountains and rivers, hills and dales, forests and plains. And he called the land *Pitthimi* and to every kind of creature that walked or crawled, flew or swam he gave separate names to each of them.

One day, it so came to pass that Gozen felt that he should take a close look at the world he had made. He came down from heaven to *Pitthimi* and was delighted at the fruitful abundance he saw around him. And he began to walk on the land. He walked and walked. While he was thus walking, delighted at his own creation, he suddenly felt that someone was following him. He stood and asked, “*Kedugā?*” (Who is it?) When no one replied, he started to walk again. Some time later, it again occurred to him that he was still being followed by that someone. He stood for a moment and repeated the same question. “*Kedugā?*” Again, no one replied.

When the same thing happened for the third time, Gozen became annoyed. “*Kedugā?*” He cried, “Why don’t you answer my call?” And he quickly turned around only to see his own shadow behind him. He was deeply embarrassed by his own foolish annoyance. “Bah!” he
said to himself, “It’s my own shadow and so long I have been trying to get an answer out of it.”

But the next moment, he contemplated something remarkable. “Why not fill this shadow of mine, which follows me, with clay and breathe life into it,” he thought. Soon Gozen moulded a creature in the shape of his own shadow and called him Kedugā after the first word he had uttered on mistaking his own shadow for a man.

And so the first man was created.

But the man was alone. He had no company to converse and beguile his leisure, none to share the emotions that swelled his heart and made him sigh. And so, Gozen, the sire of all creation, scratched the filth of his own body and accumulating it in the palms of his hand, made the woman out of it and called her Kedugi.

Then Gozen called them to his presence and told them “You’ll live on Pitthimi to be masters of it. I have given fruits to trees and flesh to animals, so that you may eat them and remain strong and healthy. I’ve also made the velvet grass for you to sleep on. Now go forth at your will and happily multiply your race.” Thus said, Gozen retired to heaven.

And the first man and the first woman were left to themselves to make their own living. At that time, they did not know how to make fire. They did not know how to Jum the land or how to produce the things we now eat. And they were naked and nomads, and, roaming the land, which Gozen made them masters of, they ate fruits, leaves, roots, tubers, and birds and animals and fish that did not taste bitter.

Time passed in this way. Then, one day, children were born to Kedugā and Kedugi. They grew up and, in the course of time, fathered their own children. In this way, many years passed, and the race of man multiplied amid peace and plenitude.

But, one day, a severe khabāt set in, ruthlessly laying its icy hands on the abundance Gozen had left for man to thrive on. A severe frost that occasioned the khabāt soon bared the trees of all foliage and fruition. It also penetrated deep into the soil to destroy the roots and tubers that grow there, and suddenly the children, Kedugā and Kedugi were left with no food to eat. The terrible frost had even killed the birds, the animals and the fish.

Helpless, man searched every corner of the earth but found only exhaustion and intense hunger. Very soon, it became obvious that their entire race would perish. Deeply moved by the suffering of man, Gozen decided that he must do something. So, he sent Kālayyā to replenish the earth again. He said, “O Kālayyā, a disastrous khabāt threatens to annihilate the race of Kedugā and Kedugi. Go down to Pitthimi and save them.”

Then Kālayyā came down to earth. And he restored the trees with foliage and fruits, the fish with scales, the birds with feathers and the animals with hide. And he breathed fresh life into every creature he restored and let them go out into the wild. Then he summoned the trees at one place and asked them, “Can you produce enough food for the children of Kedugā and Kedugi?” Not all trees were certain that they could do so, and some of them, ashamed of their inability, quietly stole away from Kālayyā’s presence. Only the jaganā tree, proud that it was of its plentiful fruits, came forward and cried out boldly, “O Kālayyā, why do you ask? Look at me. Already my limbs are aching with sweet fruition. Don’t you see that I alone am capable of sustaining the entire human race?”

And for sometime, the jaganā tree produced so much fruit that there was no scarcity.

But the human race continued to multiply and increase everyday. Then, one day, they had become so numerous like the stars of the night that the tree could not produce enough fruits for every one. On that day, some men went hungry. When Kālayyā heard about it, he came and asked the tree, “What is it that I hear?” The jaganā tree told him that animals had eaten some of its fruits, causing the day’s shortage. “But,” it said, “don’t you worry. No man will go hungry another day.”

Yet, the same thing happened on the following day. Again the jaganā tree laid the blame on the animals. This continued for days, then for weeks, then months. And finally, a year passed but no change occurred, and Kālayyā found it difficult to contain his rage. One
day, he cried out in anger, “That braggart of a tree must be taught a lesson!” And boiling with rage, he went down to the riverside where the jagan tree stood, and kicked it with so much of aggression that it writhed in pain and its body became twisted. And while it was still smarting in extreme pain, Kālayyā cursed it, saying, “Henceforth man will shun the fruits you bear.”

The Chakma people believe that since the day Kālayyā kicked it, the jagan tree has had a permanent curvature in its trunk. And the fruit of the same tree is no longer edible.

In the meantime, the food shortage with which the children of Kedug and Keduğ were beset began to turn acute, compelling Kālayyā to seek Gozen’s intervention. And after hearing all the facts Gozen sent Kālayyā to invite Māh-Lakkhi-mā to Pitthimi that the food shortage may end. So Kālayyā went to Māh-Lakkhi-mā and, appraising her of the sufferings of man, said, “O mother, you must come to Pitthimi. For, there is no one except you who may teach man the ways to produce grains.”

Māh-Lakkhi-mā told Kālayyā that she would accompany him on the morrow. “O Kālayyā, take a little rest tonight. You look so tired and the journey ahead is a long one,” she said to him. Then she called her attendants, and instructed them to see that the god lacked nothing during his stay. Actually, she wanted to test Kālayyā.

Soon the attendants served the god with all the delicacies of heaven, placing in front of him every variety of meat and wine. Kālayyā enjoyed the sumptuous feast and gorged on entire plates in gulps.

But once he took a sip of wine, he lost all restraint. He emptied tumbler after tumbler, forgetting who he was and where he had come. And in that state of inebriation, he began to show off, shouting and violently shaking his head and kicking utensils and breaking pots. When Māh-Lakkhi-mā came top see how her guest was doing, Kālayyā, who was then quite beside himself, began to prattle, addressing his hostess sometimes as jedai, sometimes as kāki, and sometimes as bhuji. When Māh-Lakkhi-mā saw the things that Kālayyā did, she became so annoyed that she decided not to accompany him.

Kālayyā’s failure prompted Gozen to send his son Biyetr on the same errand. And he blessed Biyetr, saying, “Surely you must succeed where Kālayyā failed and bring Māh-Lakkhi-mā to Pitthimi. Also remember not to dilute the respect she deserves.”

And Biyetr bowed his head and said, “O Father, I’ll do as you bid me. But allow me some time to dwell among the race of man so that I might know their ways of living.”

“So be it,” replied Gozen.

So Biyetr came down to Pitthimi and began to dwell with the children of Kedungā. And when he had lived with them for sometime, he saw that man lived under trees and in caves and ate only those things that tasted sweet. They did not know how to build a shelter. They did not even know how to cook and make palatable things that did not taste sweet. So he taught them to make the māzāgarh with bamboo and sunn grass, that they might live in comfort. Then he brought fire from heaven and taught them to cook food.

In this way some time passed. There had been no shortage of food since Biyetr came to live among man but he knew that at some time, in the unknown future, there would be problems unless man acquired the means to produce food to feed himself and his family. Besides, while he did these things, Biyetr never for a moment forgot that Gozen had asked him to bring Māh-Lakkhi-mā to live among man.

Then, one fine morning, Biyetr set out quietly, taking with him as companions Kāngāra the crab, Sūgar the boar and Mağarák the spider, and set out for the heavenly abode of Goddess Lakshmi. He walked and walked until he came to the shore of a weird and wonderful sea, somewhere between earth and heaven, in which there was no water but only milk. The waves of that sea broke softly and gently, like morning dew on the petals of the nākśā flower, against the shore, leaving behind thick layers of cream instead of foam. And Biyetr called this sea the Milk-Sea.

Then summoning the powers that enable gods to fly through the invisible air, he crossed the Milk-Sea, and when he had reached the other shore, he left his three
companions there and, asking them to await his return, proceeded all by himself to the abode of Māh-Lakkhi-mā. Biyetrā was welcomed and treated to a sumptuous feast of meat and wine, just as Kālayā was tested some time ago, but he was clever enough to spill the wine while pretending to gulp it down. Māh-Lakkhi-mā, who could see everything, was very pleased with Biyetrā, and she consented to accompany him to Piṭṭhimi.

Then she filled her bag with seeds of paddy, sesame, millet, cotton, and also with vegetables such as mārmāḥ, chindirā, brinjal, and varieties of yam and spinach. This done, she ascended the back of her bird-mount, Me-Me-Chāgli and set out on the precipitous descent to Piṭṭhimi. When they arrived near the Milk-Sea, Māh-Lakkhi-mā stood on the shore and looked doubtfully at it. She cried, “O Biyetrā, the Milk-Sea is too vast and Me-Me-Chāgli is not strong enough to take me across it.” Biyetrā knew that the goddess would look for some pretext to test his resolve. He had foreseen these things and had made all arrangements in advance. So he smiled now and said, “O Mother Goddess, I have already arranged a safe conveyance for you and for your mount across the Milk-Sea.”

Then he summoned Māgarak the spider and asked it to weave a thread long and strong enough, and connecting the opposite shores on the sea. The spider hesitated for a while but Māh-Lakkhi-mā, who knew what was in its mind, assured the creature, saying, “O Māgarak, do as Biyetrā bids you. I grant this boon that the thread you weave shall never end.” And so it was from that day that the spider acquired the ability to weave its thread endlessly.

Now, after the spider had connected with a thread the two shores of the Milk-Sea, Me-Me-Chāgli sat on the back of Sugar the boar while the boar stood on the back of Kāṅgārā the crab, which then swam slowly across the thick foam of milk and cream. Then Māh-Lakkhi-mā stood on the back of Me-Me-Chāgli and kept her balance by gripping firmly to the thread the spider had spun.

They arrived safely to the opposite shore. Māh-Lakkhi-mā was very pleased with the intelligence and gentle manners of Biyetrā, and blessed him with the words, “From this day, O Biyetrā, people will worship you before every other god.” Then, she blessed the pig and the crab. And from that day, the pig excelled all creatures in the possession of bodily fat, while the crab acquired the ability to move with equal agility in both land and water.

Having thus blessed Biyetrā and the three creatures that had patiently worked to bring her to Piṭṭhimi, Māh-Lakkhi-mā went to live among the children of Kedūgā and Kedugi. She would teach them the ways to produce food through juming. But that is another story, which Chakma Kadlagis still love to retell. ❆

 Folklore: The Unexplored World

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Folklore, a major genre of oral literature, is a cultural heritage of all communities. These tales, in the ancient societies of remote past, were told in the hours of rest after a hard day’s work. The story telling sessions were a means of relaxation. The listeners comprised of the young and the old. If the tales provided relaxation to the grow-ups, they played a more important role in shaping the younger minds. While giving a free reign to young minds’ imagination, these stories inculcated ethical values, religious practices, an idea about social organisation and customary laws. In fact, these tales constructed the self-identity of the society. Folklore also formed the ‘world-view’ of the youngsters. Oral literature is, to the