A Fabled Makeover
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STORYTELLING

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Classic children's tales get lively retelling and modern packaging

Tara Katir, Hawaii

Move over Mickey Mouse, Karadi Bear is here! India's ancient moral tales, precursors to Aesop's fables, have reincarnated from the mouth of your local village storyteller into today's Barnes & Noble genre of children's audio read-along books. For this exclusive domain of Western publishers, change is in the airwaves. Two Indian enterprises, Sky Music Pvt. Ltd. and Tulika Books of Chennai, and a Canada-based distributor, The Banyan Tree, dedicated to "Bringing Culture to Life," have achieved synergistic magic.

"As I was reading a Barney story to my two-year-old daughter, Bavna, in 1997," Bala Bhagavat, Banyan Tree founder, told Hinduism Today, "it occurred to me that she was missing all the cultural and heritage elements given to me while I was raised in India. Parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts used to sit me down and recite stories. I thought, my daughter is going to miss all that wisdom because in the West there is little quality knowledge exchange. I thought many parents who truly believe in their culture and heritage must feel the same

way." A few months later Bhagavat sought out production companies in India who would be willing to produce authentic cultural material in a format appealing to children born in the West.

Bhagavat found Sky Music's audio-books of the Panchatantra. Returning to Canada, he played them for Bavna. For twenty minutes, her attention was riveted on the unfolding tales. Enthused by her response, he recruited Hari Venkatacharya, an expert in promoting South Asian culture among mainstream Americans and Canadians, to begin a dialog with Sky Music. Not limiting themselves to children of Asian descent, they chose to create an outstanding product for North American educators and children. Sky Music, formed in 1996 by educators and musicians, seemed a ripe candidate. Led by C.P. Viswanath, it was dedicated to producing audio read-along books based on South Asian fables and mythology.

Tulika Books was publishing multi-lingual learning books based on authentic South Asian folk tales with regional art designs. Both companies were committed to quality books reflecting India's rich literary heritage. The result? An extraordinary collection of kids' books that entertain and convey the oral tradition of the Sanatana Dharma.

For children six and up, Karadi Tales--or Karadi Tales Jr. for three and up--invite you to visit Karadi Bear's jungle home. Saeed Jaffrey and Naseeruddin Shah's fine voices give life to Karadi as he narrates Panchatantra and Jataka Tales: "The Blue Jackal," "The Foolish Lion," "The Four Friends," "The Musical Donkey" and more. They'll charm your child while conveying

values of honesty, friendship, courage and leadership.

Tulika Books' Under the Banyan series are gems written by Dr. Vayu Naidu, with music and lyrics by Narayan Parasuram and Shobha Viswanath. They portray authentic folklore characters which jump off the page with Usha Uthup's marvelous narration, in a setting of regional artwork by Mugha Shah. Your child also learns the geography and history of the region whence each story is drawn.

Produced entirely in India on glossy paper and with outstanding audio, all the products are first-class productions priced reasonably from us$11.99 to $15.99 (each package contains two books and one tape). They're available at fine bookstores and Amazon.com. The Banyan Tree sold 6,000 units in just seven months. While traditional musical instruments are a bit scarce on some tapes, the music and songs (follow along lyrics included) will especially appeal to kids accustomed to Sesame Street and Barney. 1Ã□21Ã□4

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