

Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY - MINNEAPOLIS

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Iron Ring

By
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Based on the Book by
Lloyd Alexander

Iron Ring was first presented by Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis in the 2009-2010 season.

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Characters

Tamar

Rajaswami

Jaya/ Chandala

Hashkat

Mirri

Garuda

Prince Shesha

Queen Shila Rani

Vati

Nahusha

Ashwara

Soma-Nandi

Villagers/Gopi villagers/Soldiers

NOTE

The Gopi's are not called by name- but their names are-

Gopi 1 Mina [Has fish eyes]

Gopi 2 Lakshmi [A Goddess]

Gopi 3 Lalita [Femine]

Gopi4 Camela [Lotus]

The Iron Ring

[Enter Villager one in great excitement, he addresses the audience]

V1 He's here-he's here dear villagers-just a heart beat away-two heartbeats-at the most.

[Excited cries off]

V1 That's him-your long wait in the sun is nearly over.

[More cries off]

V1 Oh such excitement-you can hardly contain yourselves—I can see.

Oh joy of joys Rajaswami is here.

[Rajaswami is carried on by villagers. He carries a white umbrella.]

Villagers [Chant/Sing] Rajaswami-Rajaswami-Rajaswami-Rajaswami.

Rajaswami Yes, yes-pleased to meet you too-could you—just

Villagers Praise, Praise to Rajaswami.

Rajaswami Thank you so much, dear boy---

[He is however swept up again by the overexcited villagers-who sing--]

Villagers Praise, Praise to Rajaswami

Older and wiser than any man

Whoever talked

Whoever walked

Upon the earth.

Praise, praise to Rajaswami-

V1 There's nothing I can do sir-they are overjoyed.

Ansa We are so proud to have you here

In our humble village

Sheena A Brahmana like yourself

So rare and good and true.

Rajaswami Very kind- but if I could simply
 [He is swept up again]

Villagers Praise, praise to Rajaswami
 You have come home to us
 Through heat and dust
 Great teacher to our king
 To the tell the tale-of TAMAR
 The King of Sundari.
 [They let him down-the music continues]

Rajaswami Yes-that much is true—

Dean Bring the man some drink

Autumn Bring the man some food

Duncan Fetch a stool for him to sit

Rajaswami That's very sweet of you.

Zack We have never seen the King ourselves

Allison Is he as handsome as they say?

Sam Is he braver than a tiger?

Autumn Graceful as a bird?

Ansa Swifter than a snake

Dean Is what we heard.

Rajaswami [He drinks] Thankyou.

Villagers Tell us everything you know-Rajaswami
 We want to hear the whole
 Tale from head to toe
 Speak of Soma-Nandi

Of Hashkat and Garuda

Mirri and Ashwara

We want to hear it all-every episode

Before you go-wise and true-

RAJASWAMI! RAJASWAMI! RAJASWAMI! RAJASWAMI!

[As the song ends the villagers sit as one]

Rajaswami Namaste.

Villagers Namaste.

Rajaswami It seems dear villagers that the tale of Tamar-is already well known to you.

Ansa But we have never heard the whole story.

Sam From chin to shin.

Zack From the lips of one who made the great journey with him.

Rajaswami I expect you were hoping for more than just one old man-no doubt you had dancers, singers, and musicians in mind?

Autumn Oh but great teacher we can sing.

[At which one villager gets up and sings a single note most horribly]

Sheena And dance.

Dean And I'm good at the drums sir-as well as being handsome.

[The villagers laugh and pull him down to sit]

V1 All we need is you Brahmin-who has shown great mercy and kindness by even speaking to those as poor as we.

[The villagers bow low]

Rajaswami Nonsense dear boy-nonsense. Well-as you know it all started with a game of Aksha.

Villagers AKSHA.

Rajaswami It was a warm night, and it was late. The young king of Sundari-

[V 1 stands up and the villagers laugh and he is about to sit--]

No-no- you will do young man-of course the King himself is a little taller-but

V1 But I will do it nicely-I promise-everyone.

Rajaswami I'm sure you will. The young King was nearly ready for bed.

V1 Come-come.

[The villagers become the King's servants and suddenly V1 is dressed in a flowing night robe and he is Tamar]

Rajaswami There was a light breeze through the palace and stars stood still and bright in the great sky when suddenly he heard the sound of an—

[A villager makes the sound of an elephant]

Rajaswami Yes indeed.

Tamar An elephant, in Sundari palace?

Rajaswami In fact, half a dozen elephants.

[Half a dozen villagers make the sound]

Tamar What is it Rajaswami? I was just going to bed.

Rajaswami Dress quickly, someone called King Jaya has arrived.

Tamar Who is he? What does he want?

Rajaswami I haven't the slightest idea, but he demands to see you.

Tamar Demands?

Rajaswami He is very wealthy, a real Maharajah and he would see you now.

Tamar At this hour?

Rajaswami A king must always be polite

Even in the dead of night.

Tamar Yes. Show him in.

[Strange music as Jaya enters-the music seems to exercise some power over Rajaswami and the servants who enter a trance like state. Tamar's night gown is now replaced with a more formal robe.]

Tamar Welcome King Jaya.

Jaya Forgive my intrusion.

Tamar I do, but I wonder what business you have so urgent it can't wait till morning?

Jaya My people and animals will rest in your palace. There is no other urgent business-unless you can offer a weary traveller a little-entertainment.

Tamar Some music?

Jaya It would not please-in my kingdom I keep musicians who cannot be bettered.

Tamar Some singers then?

Jaya It would not please. I have wonderful singers and to hear lesser voices would be a discomfort.

Tamar Dancers? Acrobats? Jugglers?

Jaya Do you play Aksha?

Servants AKSHA.

Tamar If you wish.

Jaya Why not? It's such a friendly little game.

[Music as two servants-trancelike- bring forward cushions and the game itself]

Jaya Sundari? I had not heard of your kingdom.

Tamar Nor I of yours.

Jaya Mahapura-in the mountains to the north. [The game is set] Now-The simplest rules are the best. Three throws each, whoever throws the highest number wins. As your guest it is my right to place the first bet.

Tamar I had forgot it was a gambling game.

Jaya Perhaps this little diamond-will do.

[A shiver of music as Jaya places a huge diamond before Tamar]

Jaya Oh -if you have no diamonds of your own to play with-I will withdraw it.

Tamar No-the wager stands. This diamond could pay for many things for my people.

Jaya Perhaps you will win it for them.

Tamar I shall match it with all the jewels from my treasury. Rajaswami?

Jaya No need-you are a King-a king is always true to his word-and if I'm not mistaken you are a warrior too- a Kshatriya?

Tamar Yes.

Jaya It's in your bearing [He throws the dice] Nine, nine, nine. Beat that, beat that.
[Tamar throws]

Tamar Ten.

Jaya Oh. Chance favours you. The diamond is yours.

Tamar [Takes the diamond] No. Forgive me King Jaya. You are my guest - I should not exploit your desire for entertainment by taking such a precious jewel in a trivial game. Have it back-please.

Jaya A game? A trivial game?

Tamar I did not mean—

Jaya How dare you dishonour me.

Tamar I meant no disrespect.

Jaya You pour scorn on what you have rightfully won after you agreed to the rules of Aksha. Three throws. Three. If you end the game now what chance have I of winning it back? Shame on you-

Tamar Please throw the dice.

Jaya Do you wish to raise the stakes?

Tamar The diamond is enough. Please-

Jaya [Throws] Ten,ten, ten. Beat that.
[Tamar throws]

Jaya Oh.

Tamar Eleven.

Jaya I trust you are as honourable as you are lucky.

Tamar I am bound by the teachings of the great Rajaswami, by my Kingship and my caste.

Jaya Good. One last throw. This time I lay down the stakes.

Tamar Anything you wish.

Jaya Your life against mine.

[Music]

Tamar I don't understand.

Jaya Very simple-if you win my life is yours to do with as you please. Turn me into a slave-or-or kill me if it pleases you. If you lose your life belongs to me. What? Are you scared-a Kshatriya?

Tamar Throw the dice!

Jaya [Throws] A -a—Oh a four. Such a low score and so much at stake.

Tamar [Grins and throws] A- a—

Jaya A two-I believe. A two.

[Music]

Jaya Tamar King of Sundari-your life belongs to me.

Tamar My life?

Jaya That was the wager.

Tamar This is folly- madness.

Jaya You made a promise-and are bound by your Dharma to keep it. From this moment you will do as I command. Stand up. Stand up! You will come to my palace in Mahapura. There I will decide what to do with your life.

Tamar Mahapura?

Jaya It's a long journey-follow the Sabla river north toward the Snow Mountains beyond *Ranapura*. This Iron Ring I place upon your finger as a symbol of your pledge to do this.

[Music as the ring is placed on Tamar's finger. He cries out in pain as the ring goes on]

Tamar And what will you do with-my life?

Jaya Must I explain myself to a dog-if I decide to kill him. Come to Mahapura- I command it. Take off the ring and I will know ---

[Music-Jaya takes off his robe and vanishes from Tamar's sight. The servants are released from their trance. Tamar falls muttering--.]

Tamar I am not your dog. I am not your dog.

Rajaswami Tamar. Tamar?

Tamar Where is he? Where is King Jaya?

Rajaswami King who? No one's been here.

Tamar He came with horses-elephants. You introduced him yourself.

Rajaswami Dear boy, I haven't left my bed until I heard you shouting, 'I am not your dog' or some such.

Tamar What have I done?

Rajaswami No idea. Do tell.

Tamar I have to go to Mahapura?

Rajaswami Mahapura?

Tamar And there I must give him my life-as I promised.

Rajaswami I have never heard of this kingdom-or this king-you had a dream and you do not have to keep a promise made in a dream which this most surely was.

Tamar Is this ring- a dream?

Rajaswami My, my.

Tamar An Iron ring to remind me that my life is his-but Rajaswami - I cannot leave the people of my country.

Rajaswami Then stay.

Tamar But neither can I break my word to King Jaya.

Rajaswami Then go.

Tamar You are no help at all. Oh my teacher-tell me what to do.

Rajaswami Do as I have taught you. Dream or no dream- you are a King-obey the rules of your caste and your Dharma-you cannot break them.

Tamar Then I will leave straightaway before I am persuaded otherwise.

Rajaswami And so the young King bade farewell to his people and they sang to him with tears in their eyes.

The People (Dean) Tamar, King of Sundari-
(Sheena) Listen to your people-
(All) listen to our plea
(Sheena) We beg you not to go on this journey
(All) -on our knees.
(Sheena) Surely we are more-important
(All) than a dream.

Tamar Bring me my sword and bow.

People (Dean) Tamar can't you hear us?
(Duncan) See him change his robes for the buckskin of a hunter.
His only weapons a sword and bow.
Do not go-do not go! Do not go!

Tamar My people how can you understand the obligations of a king?

People Then take the army with you.
Take a thousand men
Do not go alone, unprepared
In the jungle there is danger- everywhere.
[silence]

Tamar Here-place my sandals on the throne as a symbol that even when I'm gone I am still your King and one day-perhaps- I shall return and wear them once again.
[Tamar puts his sandals down and the people gather round them. Exit Tamar.]

People [Dean] What if he is killed?
(Zack) Bitten by a snake?

(All) Or eaten by a bear?

In the jungle there is danger-everywhere.

[Sounds of the jungle can now be heard-the people exit as the scene changes to the Jungle. Tamar enters-alert sword drawn.]

Garuda (offstage) Schmaa

Tamar Who's there? My name is Tamar and I'm not afraid-of anything-or-anything else. I am a Kshatriya-a warrior of the highest caste.

[Rajaswami enters rather dishevelled.]

Rajaswami!

Rajaswami Ah dear boy-found you at last.

Tamar What are you doing here? I could have killed you.

Rajaswami I've been following you-several times I lost you-but I discovered that if I listened to a certain sound.

Garuda{off} Shmaa

Rajaswami Like that-a bird I think-I was never far behind. Oh my legs.

Tamar Rajaswami you cannot come on this adventure-the hardship will be more than you can bear.

Rajaswami I swore to your parents I would always be at your side. Dear boy- I was there when you were born-and if it comes to it-I shall be there when you die. It's my dharma. You can't order me to break it.

Tamar Nor do I wish to. [He bows before his teacher]

Garuda{off} Shmaa

Tamar Are you hungry?

Rajaswami Extremely.

Tamar Me too – and that bird is asking to be eaten.

[Tamar-hunts with his bow and arrow]

Rajaswami Be careful dear boy this forest is-

Garuda {off} Shmaa

Rajaswami Very strange.

Tamar Don't be afraid -one forest is much like another.

Rajaswami Not this one.

[Tamar releases an arrow]

Tamar I missed. [He looks at the bow]

Garuda{off} Shmaa

Tamar I never miss

Rajaswami This forest was old when much of the world was young. It was full grown even in the golden age when god's and goddesses walked the earth and forest creatures could speak to human kind.

Garuda{off} Shmaa

Rajaswami Like so. Never mind Tamar; besides, as a Brahmana, I would never eat the flesh of another creature. Food is not so important when one has the mental power to overcome hunger-all one has to do is breathe deeply-and enter a trance, like this—

[A sudden loud screeching of birds and monkeys]

Rajaswami What on earth?

Tamar Don't worry Achayara-I'll protect you.

[Tamar draws his sword as a monkey the size of a man wearing a breast plate of steel runs past Tamar and Rajaswami-on seeing them he turns and screeches loudly before running off]

Tamar What was that?

Rajaswami A monkey.

Tamar Wearing armour?

[Enter Hashkat]

Hashkat Run,run,run.

Tamar From what?

Hashkat A snake.

Tamar A snake?

Hashkat A snake.

Tamar I see no snakes.

Hashkat There.

Tamar Where?

Hashkat Everywhere!

 [Music as the head of a huge serpent, with a jewel between its eyes appears on one side of the stage-on the other side its tail can be seen.]

Tamar What do we do?

Rajaswami Once again we -breathe deeply as if we were not here. With any luck it will think we are dead and move on.

Hashkat RUN.

 [Hashkat tries to escape but is caught up in the coils of the tail.]

Hashkat Help, help.

 [The head of the snake bears down on Tamar.]

Hashkat Have mercy on me, I beg you, save me from this-overgrown worm. He'll squeeze me to death unless you-HELP ME!

Tamar What should I do?

 [Rajaswami-is breathing deeply with eyes closed. Hashkat yells in pain.]

Tamar Very well—I'll cut you loose.

 [Tamar lifts his sword but is pinned back by the snake's head]

Shesha SSSS-you have no right to interfere.

Tamar This monkey begged me for help. I said I would give it. Now it's a matter between you and me.

Shesha You spoke too sssswiftly. You don't know what he's done to deserve his death.

Rajaswami [With his eyes still closed] He has a point.

Hashkat Pay no attention-I'm innocent!

Tamar I'll be the judge of that. Set the monkey down-he's in my charge while I hear your accusations.

[The serpent's head comes down very close to Tamar to see if the boy can be trusted. Suddenly Hashkat is released--]

Hashkat And thank you.

Tamar Be still.

Shesha I am Shesha, Prince of the Naga-loka. The sapphire on my skull is proof that what I say is true. As I slept this insolent ape-

Hashkat Objection. I'm a monkey-not an ape.

Shesha Tried to steal my sapphire-but he woke me—

Hashkat Overruled! I didn't wake you. It was some stupid bird going-shmaa shmaa.

Shesha Now I have to punish him.

Tamar So, what is your story?

Hashkat My story? Boy have I got a story for you—I'm royalty too you know. Oh yes-I am Hashkat-King of the Bandar-loka-the monkey realm. [He bangs his armour] Ow.

Tamar Then tell it-swiftly.

Hashkat Its not my fault-Its his.

Shesha SSSSS.

Hashkat There I was innocently-searching for my friend-a lost monkey called little Akka-about this size-very cute-seen him? And it so happened that this serpent's seductive sapphire caught my eye and as any self-respecting monkey knows if something isn't nailed down then it's free for the taking. Everyone in the jungle knows this-so it's his fault for leading me into temptation.

Shesha SSSS

Hashkat SSSSame to you.

Rajaswami Dear boy—[He whispers to Tamar]

Tamar It seems —Shesha-Prince-that you still have the sapphire.

Hashkat Yeah-right where I left it.

Tamar Since nothing has been stolen I can see no reason to take a life.

Shesha Who are you, boy, to make such a judgement? You don't know this land.

Tamar True, but I can't stand by and watch you kill this monkey.

Shesha If you wish to die for him, that's your concern.

 [Music-the snake attacks Tamar-and he drops his sword]

Rajaswami Dear boy.

Hashkat Don't just stand there-help him.

Rajaswami I am a Brahmana-I don't fight-it's against my principles. You, however, may help as much as you like.

Hashkat Thank you-

 [Hashkat rushes forward picks up the sword but is knocked over . He is then confronted by the head of an even larger serpent. Hashkat screeches and runs off.]

Rajaswami Oh my!

Shila Rani Shesha! Shesha my son.

Shesha Oops [retreats]

Shila Rani Stand up, King of Sundari.

Tamar Who are you, and how do you know my name?

Shila Rani I am Shila Rani, Queen of the serpent realm, mother to Prince Shesha. Our domain reaches through all waterways, and we have observed you Tamar-as you have taken your ease at stream and lake.

Tamar Why should I be of interest to you?

Shila Rani The deeds of kings are always of great interest, since the actions of the powerful have a bearing on us all. Shesha?

Shesha This boy challenged me.

Tamar That's true.

Shesha Just to save a monkey, and because of his interference the villain has escaped. I urge you Mother, let me have vengeance on this 'King' in return.

Shila Rani You wish to kill him?

Shesha He has dishonoured me.

Shila Rani My son-you are angry-and perhaps your anger is justified-
[Shesha hisses gleefully]
But there is something you should know before you act in haste.

Rajaswami Have courage my boy.
[Music as Shila Rani narrates, the villagers act out/dance the story.]

Shila Rani One day beside a brook, a half grown boy
Played in the grass and laughed with joy
To see a serpent hatching from its shell.
The lad was strong and could have crushed
The feeble snake beneath his heel
Without a second thought
As his friends appealed for him to do.

Boys Kill the Naga-kill the snake!
What, are you afraid?
Show the thing that you are King
Of all that you survey.
Kill the Naga-kill the snake.
If you wish to be our friend
Do not stay your hand
Kill the Naga-kill the snake
Kill, kill, kill, kill.

Shila Rani They sang in deadly unison
Waiting for the little snake to die
Beneath his foot-
But then to their dismay he turned aside.

He let the Naga live
Who but for his grace
Would otherwise have died.

[The boys bully and hit the villager playing young Tamar and then leave. After this the image fades.]

Shila Rani You Shesha were the snake, and you Tamar were the boy.

Tamar I don't remember.

Shila Rani We are an ancient race—we forget nothing. Shesha?

Shesha Tamar—King of Sundari, for the life you once gave me, I give you a life in return.

Shila Rani And what else my son?

Shesha The monkey offended me and I was right to punish him—but—

Shila Rani But what?

Shesha Mother! The punishment of death was beyond reason and justice.
 Therefore I—I apologise.

Tamar Thank you, Shesha—you are wise.

[Shesha retreats]

Rajaswami Well done dear boy—well done indeed.

Shila Rani So Tamar—what is the nature of your journey?

Tamar I am bound by oath to King Jaya and must travel to his kingdom in Mahapura.

Shila Rani I have never heard of this kingdom.

Tamar It's in the north—through Ranapura.

Shila Rani Gentle King—do not go through Ranapura. Ranapura is at war with itself.

Tamar At war with itself?

Shila Rani The lawful King Ashwara and his brothers were ambushed by their cousin
 Nahusha. The brothers were murdered but Ashwara escaped into the jungle.
 Nahusha has seized the throne of Ranapura for himself.

Tamar I am on my own path. I don't intend to get involved in the squabbles of another country. I will pass through Ranapura unseen-like a ghost.

Shila Ran Go safely Tamar. King of Sundari.

[Music as the snakes retreat into the darkness.]

Rajaswami My poor heart.

Tamar Forgive me Rajaswami-I put your life at risk-over some ungrateful ape.

[Hashkat enters]

Hashkat Monkey! Are they dead yet? Why those slip sliding double dealing drainpipes-show yourselves. Hah scared of a monkey hey? I don't blame them. [He bangs his armour once]

Tamar [Picks up his sword] Do you always get someone else to fight your battles?

Hashkat You chose to fight. I just asked you to.

Tamar What do you make of that old teacher?

Rajaswami He's a monkey, you can't blame him for sticking to his principles.

Hashkat That's right young King-a-ma-thing, and the greatest monkey principle of all is, 'don't get eaten'. The second greatest is, 'get to eat'.

[He holds out his hands and he has food-in a bowl]

Tamar You have food?

Hashkat This is a jungle, jungle-food. Food-jungle. It's the same word with different letters.

Rajaswami I am rather-after all that excitement.

Tamar This food is cooked.

Hashkat Cooked? No-

Tamar Perhaps jungle also spells, 'kitchen'.

Hashkat Well-I-there was a village.

Tamar Presumably it wasn't nailed down-but then how does one nail down a bowl of lentils?

Rajaswami It does seem a shame however- to waste such a-a gift.

Tamar But great teacher-I thought it was against our principles to eat stolen goods.

Rajaswami Only the proud refuse the gifts of heaven.
The humble receive what chance has given.

Tamar Oh.
[They eat vigorously]

Hashkat Enjoy. Like I say I am searching for a missing monkey-little Akka. I love this little monkey-you'll love him too-about this big-with a smile like—but one day he just-disappeared. What are you doing here?

Rajaswami I hardly think his majesties purpose is any concern of yours.

Hashkat You sound less humble with your mouth full.

Rajaswami It's simply not your business.

Hashkat Whenever someone says that-I get this irresistible urge to stick my nose right into it.

Tamar It's alright Rajaswami-in brief-Hashkat-I lost my kingdom and my life in a game of dice and now I must travel to Mahapura to pay the debt.

Hashkat You're going somewhere to die?

Tamar I made a promise.

Hashkat Why don't you just 'break it'?

Tamar A monkey would hardly understand a warrior's code of honour.

Hashkat You'd be surprised-I was once a warrior, borne into a warrior cast.

Tamar You, a Kshatriya?

Hashkat Strange but true-you see I wasn't always a monkey.

Garuda{off} Shmaa.

Hashkat Come down here you big feather duster-you nearly got me killed waking up that snake with your-

Garuda [Off} Shmaa.

Tamar What do you mean? You were once human?

Hashkat Long story, perhaps I'll tell it you on our way through Ranapura. Why not? -I can fetch forage and filch. In f-fact I'm the f-f-finest in the f-f-forest.

Tamar And what can we offer you in return?

Hashkat Protection.

Tamar What do you think Rajaswami?

Rajaswami I think we should go round Ranapura.

Tamar That would take weeks. I will go by the shortest, quickest route.

Rajaswami The shortest route is not always the quickest.

Tamar Come.

Hashkat [To Rajaswami] It's a warrior thing. We're kind of direct. How were the lentils? I can't myself cos lentils have a deadly effect on me-you know you should cover your head - the sun is bouncing off your-your baldness.

Tamar Time to go Hashkat-King of the monkeys.

[Music as the Jungle 'changes colour']

Rajaswami Leaving the Serpent realm behind, we struggled north,
Along the way we fought with thorns and briars,
Spiders, leeches, bats and bugs of every hue
The sun burning our backs - until at last—

Tamar What is it Hashkat?

Hashkat There's a lake-just ahead.

Tamar A lake-Rajaswami, we can wash-and swim

Rajaswami Swim? One cannot think when one is wet. You go dear boy, I'll just sit here and-and-breathe.

Tamar He's exhausted. Old teacher- a swim would make you feel so much better after so much sun.

Hashkat And to tell you the truth- great, wise and thoughtful one-you smell worse than a monkey's armpit-no offence.

Rajaswami I never take offence. Go with Tamar-look after him-while I rest here--

[Exit Hashkat and Tamar-as Rajaswami narrates 'The lake' appears.]

Which I did, while the young king ran toward the lake

As if he'd never seen or felt the joy of water in his life.

Tamar Hashkat, this is the most beautiful lake I have ever seen in my life. [Takes off his buckskin over garments]

Hashkat Well-it's a lake-what can I say-I prefer trees naturally.

Tamar If anyone comes by –you call me.

Hashkat Yes –yes.

Tamar And watch my clothes.

Hashkat Sure that's my thing-watching clothes. What did you do today king of the monkeys? Oh well I-spent the day-watching clothes.

[Tamar leaps in and shouts with glee]

Hashkat Don't tell me-

H+T It's lovely once you're in.

Tamar So Hashkat-You said you hadn't always been a monkey. What happened?

Hashkat What happened? One minute I was a young man-the next I was a monkey-what can I say.

Tamar But why?

Hashkat You won't tell—

Tamar Cross my heart.

Hashkat One day I see this old man asleep- he looked a bit like your Brahmana-but his beard was longer- and-I was bored-- I was so bored I thought it would be fun if I tied this old man's beard to his ankles. You may laugh but when he woke up he wasn't so amused. I climbed up a tree-to escape him- and that's when he said the words.

Tamar The words?

Hashkat The words. Monkey's just the same as you

Do as a Monkey-be a monkey too.

[Enter a group of Gopi's , female cow herders and milkmaids who have come to wash clothes in the river-Hashkat flees and Tamar hasn't seen the girls. Mirri enters a little behind the main group. Music.]

Tamar How strange, he must have been a very powerful Brahmana. Hashkat? Hashkat!

Vati Look there in the water.

Autumn What is it Vati?

Vati Come over here girls.

Bria What do you see?

Vati There's something in the water.

Tamar Hello-excuse me-those are my clothes.

Vati Oh these? But they're all wet.

Tamar Hashkat! I'll get you for this. Who are you?

Vati Never fear-

Ashwini We won't harm you-

Vati [Sings] We're only bashful Gopis.

Gopis Cow tenders, milk maids

You see how shy we are.

Tamar Please-I'm getting rather—

Gopis {sing} Down to the water's edge we come

To clean our sari's, have some fun.

What do we see with our lotus eyes?

A creature from the riverbed rise.

(Vati) Young man-where did you come from?

(Autumn) Did you swim all the way?

(Vati) He's handsome when he blushes

I hope he's going to stay

For one of us to choose

(Vati) His teeth are chattering

(Mirri) And his lips that were red

Are now very blue--

(All) Down to the water's edge we come

To clean our sari's, have some fun.

What do we see with our lotus eye?

A creature from the riverbed rise.

Vati Young man, have you come for the choosing?

Tamar The choosing? I don't even know what it is.

Autumn That's when we Gopis choose whom we love.

Bria It's our tradition.

Allison It only happens once a year.

Vati Today.

Mirri Give him his clothes you cruel creatures.

Ashwini We were just having some fun Mirri.

Mirri Give them to me now!

Vati Why-what do you want with them?

[Mirri reaches out and Vati throws them away. Mirri picks up another garment and walks into the lake. The Gopis gasp.]

Gopis Mirri!

Mirri Please forgive my sisters.

Tamar I-I do

Mirri You must be getting-

Tamar I-I am.

Mirri Put this on-we'll find your clothes later.

Vati Look at her

Autumn Looking straight into his eyes

Vati How bold she is.

Autumn How forward.

Ashwini I wish it were me.

[Tamar now in women's clothes steps out of the lake-which' vanishes'. The girls run off laughing- except Vati who gives Mirri a competitive stare. Mirri smiles]

Tamar Will you laugh at me too? If so you can join your sisters.

Mirri They're not really sisters-they are my childhood friends and all very excited. Today each girl chooses a young man who pleases her.

Tamar Well-that's of no interest to me.

Mirri I see.

Tamar Because- I-I'm on a great journey.

Mirri Perhaps you should continue it dressed in your own clothes. They'll be in the village.

Tamar I didn't know that Gopis welcomed strangers.

Mirri We do. Today especially-What is your name?

Tamar Tamar.

Mirri I am Mirri.

[Music as we enter The Village. Enter young men and women. The men will perform acrobatic feats for the women-and they all dance and sing. At some point Vati returns Tamar's clothes neatly folded-and by doing Vati acknowledges that Tamar is not hers to choose. The rivalry over, she smiles at Mirri who smiles back.]

Mirri Watch Tamar-not many from outside the village ever see this ritual.

[During the following song, when a girl chooses a boy, she gives him a garland of flowers.]

Villagers The choosing is the time to make our move

 When we see a man we like-then we choose.

 Village lad and cowherd vie

Striving to catch a Gopi's eye.
Gopi's raise melodious voice
And then declare our loving choice.
A wreath of flowers is the token
Of a pledge that's never broken.
Handsome youth and maiden fair
Join to make a happy pair.
Feats are set , musicians play
To make this joyful-wedding day.

Tamar [Eating casually] So Mirri-whom will you choose?

Mirri I don't care to make a choice.

Tamar There's no one here you like?

[Mirri gives him a direct look but he is quite unaware of its meaning. Rajaswami enters, looking very bedraggled and sun burnt.]

Tamar Rajaswami.

Rajaswami Where am I? Where's Tamar? Why is everyone dancing?

[The music comes to a grinding halt and the villagers step back and stare.]

Tamar Rajaswami! Here I am-this is Mirri-a girl from this village. They have fed and clothed me. Mirri, this is my oldest dearest friend and teacher Rajaswami.

Rajaswami Pleased to greet you-have you seen Tamar?

Mirri Sir-you have caught the sun.

Rajaswami Yes-caught it fair and square.

Mirri Perhaps some water sir—

Rajaswami No-I don't need an —an um-I need I need Tamar—we're going on a great journey-to the north —to the snow mountains-

[He half collapses and Tamar catches him.]

Tamar How thoughtless I've been. Thankyou for helping me, now I must look after my teacher.
You'll excuse me .Farewell and good luck-to you all in your choices.

Ashwini Come back next year- and I might choose you. I'll be sixteen then—

[Vati pulls her away-the villagers exit singing softly and waving farewell as
they go.]

Villagers Handsome youth and maiden fair

Join to make a happy pair.

Feats are set , musicians play

To make this joyful-wedding day.

[Mirri is left holding her garland.]

Tamar As you can see I must go.

Mirri On a great journey-

Tamar It's not easy to explain. Goodbye Mirri-I won't forget you.

[Mirri stares at Tamar as he turns away Rajaswami on his back. Exit Mirri. The Jungle]

Rajaswami So sad-so sad.

Tamar What's that?

Rajaswami Her eyes-

Tamar What?

Rajaswami Such sad eyes.

Tamar You're talking gibberish. Hashkat!

[Enter Hashkat]

Hashkat Ah there you are-I was frantic with worry—

[Tamar drops Rajaswami and advances on Hashkat-]

Tamar You left me alone-in the water-without any clothes.

Hashkat I told you- I've got a short attention span-and an umbrella.

[He gives it to Rajaswami]

Rajaswami How kind of you.

Tamar [Grabs the umbrella] Where'd you get this?

Hashkat [Grabs the umbrella] Hey, I stole it first. [He gives it back to Rajaswami.]

Rajaswami My-this looks familiar.

Garuda {off} Shmaa.

Tamar That annoying bird again.

Garuda{off} Shmaa

Tamar Stop that, and stop following us-or I'll-I'll-

 [Tamar searches for a stone]

Hashkat What's wrong with his Kingship?

Rajaswami He doesn't know yet-but she's very beautiful.

 [Tamar throws the stone there is a screech off.]

Tamar I hit it-I think I hit it!

 [Enter Garuda a very scruffy looking eagle]

Garuda That's it-that is it! I've had it up to here- and here. I have been shot at, persecuted, verbally abused and now hit on the head by a rock and what for? What have I done?

Tamar What have you done? You've done Shmaa, Shmaa for the past three weeks. Shmaa.

Garuda [Under his breath] What's wrong with him?

Hashkat He doesn't know yet-but she's very beautiful.

Garuda I deserve an apology. I deserve an apology.

Tamar You deserve to be eaten.

Garuda Shmaa.

Tamar Stop that!

Hashkat Let me handle this. Okay Shmaa. What are you and why have you been following us?

Garuda Well-obviously-[S/He looks down at him/herself] I'm a bird.

Hashkat Between you and me-it's not that obvious.

Garuda And I haven't been following you- at least- I don't think so.

Hashkat Then –Shmaa-where are you going?

Garuda I don't know, all I know is-is-my name isn't Shmaa- and a few moments ago I knew exactly what I doing and where I was going but then a rock hit me on the head and now I can't remember a thing. For which loss I want recompense.

Hashkat Recompense? Why you good for nothing oversized, overweight duck.

Garuda I'm not a duck.

Hashkat What are you then?

Garuda I can't remember! I can't remember!

Hashkat Well I do remember-you're the one who woke the snake that nearly ate me- and you want recompense?

Rajaswami It was Tamar who shot the arrow-

 [They look at him]

 That made the bird screech-that woke the snake-that nearly ate you.

Hashkat Gee-why not blame the arrow?

Tamar Stop it- all of you-stop. Listen.

 [Sound of drums off-which build during the following]

Rajaswami Sounds like—

Tamar A hunt?

Garuda Shmaa

 [Enter Mirri]

Tamar Mirri!

Mirri There's no time to explain- you must run-now.

Rajaswami Run?

Mirri There are men-soldiers approaching with spears.

Garuda Run-run- or fly- fly.

Tamar Rajaswami-

Rajaswami I cannot run dear boy-you go -I'll hold them off with-with some conversation.

Tamar Go Hashkat go.

[Hashkat goes taking Garuda with him who has been hopelessly running round in circles. As the others try to leave- they are cut off by two masked /helmeted soldiers. Tamar draws a sword and to his surprise Mirri does the same. The soldiers attack and after a good defence are thrown back but then more soldiers enter and surround them-slowly they move in.]

Rajaswami Dear boy- I fear we may be at the end of this particular existence. I've been proud to serve you- and – and-oh my!

[Lights fade-end of Act one]