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# The Mystery of Language

Long ago, there was an able ruler in Bengal, called Maharaja Krishna Chandra. He had a court jester, Gopal, who possessed a razor-sharp wit with a kind heart.

One day a new visitor arrived at Maharaja Krishna Chandra's court. He could recite in perfect Sanskrit, speak excellent Arabic and Persian and communicate to people in perfect Bengali. He knew half a dozen other languages. But no one knew which part of the country he belonged to. It was a mystery not just to the maharaja but everyone else.

"Where are you from?" asked the maharaja again and again.

"This country, Your Majesty," replied the scholar, "I belong right here—with the rest of you."

"And your language?"

"The language of your land."

"Where are your parents?"

"Here, Sire. The king is the father of all his subjects."

It was useless to question him. He always came up with vague, poetic answers. Gradually people began to call him "pundit masai" because he seemed all-knowing.

"I wish I knew who he is and where he comes from," the maharaja said to Gopal one day.

"I could find out what his language is," said Gopal.

"Then please do," said the maharaja. "I want you success."

Gopal reached the pundit's house late in the evening. The pundit masai had gone to the market and the house was dark and empty. Gopal quickly hid all the lamps and lanterns. By the time pundit masai reached home, everything was in complete darkness. He opened the door and groped about.

But all lamps, lanterns and matches seemed to have vanished! Pundit masai could not imagine what had happened. Who could have possibly taken them? He felt very annoyed! As he fumbled in the darkness, he stumbled onto Gopal who was hiding in a corner.

"You fool!" the pundit cried in Oriya. "Are you blind?" Gopal chuckled and ran away into the darkness before pundit masai could discover who he was.

**maharaja:** a Sanskrit title for a ruler or king; **Sire:** a respectful form of address for someone of high social status, especially a king; **pundit:** an expert in a particular subject or field whose opinions are held in high regard; **masai:** Bengali equivalent of "mister"





He went straight to the palace and asked to see the maharaja.

"Sire, I have the solution to your problem," Gopal told the king, laughing.

"Do you mean about pundit masai?" asked the maharaja, eagerly. "Have you managed to discover what his language is? And which part of the country he belongs to?" "Yes I have found out both. He is from Orissa and his language is Oriya," said Gopal, triumphantly.

"But how can you possibly be sure?" asked the maharaja, "the man has mastered so many languages! His language could be any one of them."

"But I am sure, Your Majesty," said Gopal. "You can ask him tomorrow."

"But tell me what makes you so sure," said the maharaja.

"Sire, when a person is off guard, the

language that comes instinctively to his mind is his own mother tongue," said Gopal. "Pundit masai was not expecting any one to be there at that time so when he suddenly stumbled on me, he exclaimed in Oriya and not in any other language."

The next morning, when the maharaja saw pundit masai in court he said, "Well, pundit masai, so you are from Orissa? Your language is Oriya, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is," said pundit masai with a broad smile, "how did you find out?"

"Why didn't you tell me right at the start?" asked the maharaja.

"I enjoyed myself while everyone tried to guess my real identity," said pundit masai, "but please tell me how you managed to discover it."

"Well, actually it was Gopal who did," said the maharaja, smiling.



## A. Comprehension

1. There is an error in each of the following sentences. Rewrite them correctly.
  - a. Gopal, the court jester, was a dull and cruel man.  
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  - b. The new visitor who arrived in the king's court could only speak the language of the land.  
.....  
.....
  - c. The maharaja was not interested in finding out where the visitor belonged to.  
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2. Why did the people call the visitor 'pundit masai'?  
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3. Where did the visitor say his parents were?  
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4. What did Gopal offer to find out?  
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.....
5. How did Gopal find out the pundit's origin?  
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.....  
.....
6. Replace the following dictionary definitions by single words from the passage.
  - a. unprepared for a surprise or a difficulty: .....
  - b. do or handle something clumsily: .....
  - c. of uncertain or unclear meaning: .....





