This book belongs to

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BALA THE BUNNY AND OTHER STORIES

Published by PRAXIS – Institute for Participatory Practices
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Bala the bunny plants carrots all day long. She arrives before sunrise and leaves after sunset. But Bala the bunny does not own the land. She does not even own the carrots. Bhula the Bad Business Bear owns everything. He pays Bala 100 carrots a month, just enough for her to survive. As the sun sets, Bala the bunny marks off another hot, sweaty day.
“Only 29 more days until I get those carrots!” she says to herself.

Soon, it is the end of the month and Bala the bunny goes to collect her 100 carrots. But Bhula the Bad Business Bear has some news for her.

“Times are bad. Profits are low,” says Bhula. He is greasy and fat, sucking the meat off some mutton bones. “From now on, you will have to stay and work until 10 pm every night.”

Bala the bunny is stunned. She already works at least twelve hours a day. An extra four is impossible! “How much extra,” asks Bala the bunny, “will I be paid?”

Bhula the Bad Business Bear raises one of his huge eyebrows, flicks a bone towards her, and lights a beedi. “Extra?” he snorts. “Just be happy you have a job.”

Bala the bunny drags her tired self back to her little rabbit hole. Finding a farming job in the carrot field was difficult, thinks Bala, so I should just do whatever I can to keep my job. “Even if it means more hours for the same amount of carrots.”

The next month, Bala works longer hours. From early morning to late night, she picks bright juicy carrots, sleeping just a few hours each night. Finally, it is the end of the month; the moon is full like a mango. Bala the bunny hops over to Bhula’s office to collect her carrots. But yet again, there is more news.
“Times are bad. Profits are low,” he says, sitting behind a big oak desk. Mountains of carrots are piled around him and a pile of bones are stacked on a plate on his desk. He puffs on a beedi. “From now on, your pay will be only 50 carrots a month.”

Bala the bunny laughs until she realises it is not a joke. “But just last month,” Bala fumes, “I started working for longer hours. How can you lower my pay?”

“I’m the boss,” growls Bhula the Bad Business Bear, jabbing his thumb at his chest. “You’re the worker! These are my carrots,” he says as he thrusts a handful of them
towards her. “If you don’t want them, you can leave!”

Bala is not sure what to do. She is just a little bunny. How could she make a big bear like Bhula pay her more? What power, Bala the bunny thinks, do I have? She quietly takes her 50 carrots and goes home.

That night, near her cosy rabbit hole, all the village rabbits are talking. To her surprise, everyone in the village who works for Bhula the Bad Business Bear works until very late. And just like her, they receive only 50 carrots a month. None of the bunnies agree on what to do. Some say they should keep quiet, others say they should quit. Finally, Bala the bunny clears her throat and says to the others, “We must demand better pay and hours. If we stand together, Bhula will not be able to stop us.”

The next morning, hundreds of bunnies march up to Bhula’s office. They tell Bhula that unless he pays them more carrots and lowers the hours of labour, they won’t work and his fields will rot like rubbish in a bin. Bhula the Bad Business Bear does not look impressed.

“Like I said,” he growls, “if you don’t want to work, find a different job!”

“We will not work your fields,” repeats Bala the bunny, “until you meet our demands.”

Bhula puts his hands to his round stomach and howls with delight. “We?” he laughs, “looks more like you!”

Bala turns around to find all the other bunnies gone.
They have run away. I’m the only one left, she thinks.

“Get lost,” roars Bhula the Bad Business Bear, dragging Bala into his kitchen. Get lost or I shall roast you in my tandoor (oven).”

“NO,” says Bala. “Not until you pay me what is fair.”

What do you think happened next? Why did you choose to end the story this way?
As long as anyone in the village could remember, they were friends. Sure, dogs and cats lived, prayed, and married separately, but they worked in the same fields, shopped in the same market, struggled to survive in the same India. But of late there has been some tension.

Dogs say cats are foreigners and don’t belong in the village. The cats say the dogs do not treat them well. No one is able to find a solution.
But for Kavita the cat, her only worry is work. She irons clothes in the market, earning just enough money to eat. Her hair has turned grey over the years and her tail limps behind her. Kavita the cat is growing old. That is why the latest dog and cat worries do not bother her. She has no ill feelings towards dogs, why should they dislike her? Kavita works beside Dinesh the dog’s tea stall, irons saris and kurtas for his relatives, and drinks tea from Dinesh the dog’s stall. Most of her costumers are dogs.

“Delicious,” Kavita mews, drinking a cup of Dinesh’s chai.

“Thanks,” says Dinesh the dog. “Kavita, please be careful. The bloodhounds have been barking for days. They want the cats to leave the village.”

“Thanks,” says Kavita, “But I’ll be fine.”

The next day, the bloodhounds post notices saying cats must pass a test or leave the village forever. The village cats: fat and skinny, furry and bald, sharp toothed and toothless gather in the market. None wants to leave the village. All they know are their fields and shops, markets and temples. What would they do, they ask each other, if they leave the village? Where would they go?

The Governor is the most powerful dog in town. Stout and jowly, he wears a top hat and walks with a cane. He is known for his hatred of all animals except canines. He
explains the test. “It’s simple,” barks the Governor. “Any cat wishing to stay must become a dog.”

All the cats mew among themselves. How, they wonder, will we cats become dogs?

“Tomorrow,” growls the Governor, “we start the test.” That night, the cats gather on their side of the village to discuss. They decide that to become dogs they must wear snouts like dogs. So the following morning, the cats fill the village square wearing snouts of many sizes. Some have big teeth, others have small teeth, some have long noses and others pug noses. Some noses are red and others are black.

The Governor sits behind a desk at the front of the village square. The cats line up in front of the desk for
inspection. But one by one, the Governor rejects them. “You’re no dog,” he growls, “leave the village.”

Late that night, the cats gather again. Some say they should leave and find new homes. Others differ. They say they should stay back and try different dog costumes.

Kavita the cat speaks up. “We must not leave our homes or dress like dogs. We should stay back here as cats.” No one listens to her. They decide to try different costumes.

At the inspection site the following afternoon, the cats approach the Governor’s desk disguised in dog coats: some with long hair, others with short hair, some shaggy and others scruffy. Some cats wear white and others wear brown. And one by one, the mean dog, the Governor, sends them away with a gruff.

“You are not a dog,” he howls, “leave the village!” But the cats do not leave. They gather one last time on their side of the village. This time they listen to Kavita the cat who irons clothes in the main market.

“We are cats. There is nothing we can do to change that. We are not outsiders or foreigners, but friends and neighbours. We must live side by side with the dogs.”

The next morning, all the cats gather in the village. They do not wear fur, snouts or bigger tails.

“Well, well,” says the Governor from behind his desk. “Not a single dog in sight.”
All the cats join Kavita, calling for Dog/Cat unity. But what they do not see is the Governor’s gang: mean dogs, ferocious hounds and mangy mutts.

“You cats never learn!” huffs the Governor. And with that, his gang pounces on the cats, biting them, scratching them, kicking them, chasing them. Kavita the cat is terrified and runs away from the village without her iron, money or belongings. Many cats follow. They spend the night in a nearby village where cats live. The next day, scared and hurt, most cats decide to stay back. But Kavita has no money and wants to return home.

So she walks back to her village, the place she was born, the stretch of land that her entire family had lived on for several generations. She knows no other home.

She sneaks into the main market and sees a sight she has never seen before. All activities are on as always, but she does not see any cats.

What do you think happened next?
Why did you choose to end the story this way?
For breakfast, Kirti the cow pushes her face into the green grass. Eating is her favourite daily activity. Not only are the meals delicious, they are free, too. In fact, none of the cows cook. The fields of grass surrounding them like an endless ocean provide them food. The field is where the village cows live and graze and play.

Kirti looks like an enormous black and white potato, round and splotchy, with floppy ears and a dangling tail.
After breakfast, Kirti the cow settles into the soft grass for a nap, but no sooner does she fall asleep than she is awakened by a sharp thud. Just near her head stands Bhula the Bad Business Bear hammering something into Kirti’s field.

“So sorry to wake you up,” growls Bhula the Bad Business Bear. “But the village is building a railway track.”

Kirti does not understand. The field has been her home forever. Her parents lived here and their parents before them. How, she asks Bhula the Bad Business Bear, can he build a railway track through her home?

“That is not your business,” replies Bhula, spitting a stream of red paan onto the grass that Kirti eats. “I own a construction company and I decide what does and does not get built.” And he continues to hammer away at the new railway track running through the field.

Kirti the cow, not knowing what else to do, simply moves to the other side of the field. Here, she thinks, there will be no track. After a lunch of fresh grass, she lies down next to a big banyan tree. The sky is blue and the air is warm. Perfect, Kirti the cow thinks, now I will finally get some rest. But no sooner does she doze off does she hear a shrill pounding. Kirti shoots up like she has been stung by a bee. Just to her left is Bhula the Bad Business Bear with a drill.

“You can build railway tracks on the other side of the
field, but not here!” protests Kirti the cow. Bhula the Bad Business Bear stops drilling and takes a swig from a bottle.

“I’m not building the track,” he says, taking another drink. The smell makes Kirti the cow wince. “I am building a dam. You must move to another part of the field because come tomorrow, this place will be under water.”

How, Kirti the cow asks Bhula the Bad Business Bear, can he flood her home?

“That is not your business,” he growls. “I own a construction company and I decide what does and does not get flooded.”

So Kirti the cow shifts to the last free part of the field. She is not against trains or dams, but is just upset at how they are built without her consent. She feels left out of important decisions that will surely come to affect her life. Kirti the cow chews a mouthful of grass. The sun begins to set and stars fill the sky. She settles into a warm patch of dirt and falls asleep.

Like all, Kirti dreams. But tonight she has a nightmare! Instead of greener grass and larger lakes, two things she always dreams of, there is only dirt, roads, trash, and trains. She wakes up, sweat trickling down her back.

Kirti the cow realises that she has got no power over what Bhula the Bad Business Bear does. That is why he
builds tracks and dams instead of planting what Kirti will need, like more patches of green grass.

The next morning, she wakes up to the sound of earth being broken. Kirti the cow finds Bhula the Bad Business Bear digging a giant, deep hole.

“You need to include me in all these projects,” demands Kirti the cow. “You have no right to change things without asking me first. I live here!”

Bhula the Bad Business Bear lights a beedi and leans against his shovel. His whiskers are yellow and limp from all the smoke.

“Don’t worry,” he says, his beedi smoke blowing into the wind. “This time you will be included.”

Kirti the cow sighs. She was scared that pretty soon she would have no more grass to eat or field to live in. How, she asks Bhula the Bad Business Bear, can she help with the new project? Bhula tells Kirti the cow to jump into the hole he has dug. Kirti is so excited to finally be a part of the project that she jumps right into the dark hole.

What do you think happened next? Why did you choose to end the story this way?
Laxmi the lizard lives in a forest near a village. She has always played in the tall trees and thick underbrush. Laxmi the lizard is light green and has a long red tongue. She jumps over branches and under banana leaves. Laxmi the lizard also farms potatoes and tomatoes. Luckily for her, the land is fertile and food grows without problems. She only has to toss seeds into the silky soil for juicy plump tomatoes and potatoes to grow.
But one day Captain Crow flies into her forest. He is the head of administration in the village. No one likes Captain Crow except the policemen. He walks around the village in a pin-striped suit with a tie knotted around his neck. His voice is like gravel from smoking too much and his oily black beak looks like a knife.

“Hey darling,” Captain Crow says. “You are Laxmi the lizard, right?”

Laxmi says yes.

“Well, then it’s your lucky day,” laughs Captain Crow. “The village needs this land to build a factory. Will you sell your land. You will get much money?”

Why, Laxmi thinks, should she sell her land? She has lived in the forest all her life. She does not even know anyone in the village. Besides, she thinks, what would she do outside the forest? Laxmi the lizard, eager to return to work, tells Captain Crow that he will have to search for a different property.

“Sorry,” Laxmi the lizard shrugs, “not for sale.”

This makes Captain Crow upset. Face turning purple, he looks like he might bite off Laxmi’s tail! Instead, Captain Crow lights another cigarette and says confidently, “You’ll sell.” As he flaps away he yells out to her, “Eventually, everyone sells!”

The next morning, while Laxmi the lizard plants potatoes near the river, Captain Crow swoops back into the forest. This time, though, he brings his friends. Everyone wears the same striped suit and feathered black caps.

“Laxmi baby,” says Captain Crow. “Just sell your land
and I promise, we will find you a new home and give you a job in the factory. See these friends of mine? We are the village authorities. You can trust us.”

Laxmi does not want to sell her land. Why, she asks herself, would she want to work in a factory? Shouldn’t she be able to choose how she earns money? Why do village authorities bother someone who doesn’t even live in the village?

“No,” she tells Captain Crow. “Besides, I do not know anything but farming in the forest.” Suddenly, Captain Crow turns angry again. His face bright purple, he and his buddies surround Laxmi the lizard, their beaks sharp as blades.

“Listen lizard,” fumes Captain Crow. “I am not asking. I am ordering you to sell!”

Laxmi the lizard builds some courage before shouting, “I will not sell come what may!” But before she finishes, Captain Crow and his friends fly away. She is relieved.

The next morning, Laxmi the lizard wakes up to the clack-clacking of hammers. On the edge of her land are Captain Crow and his friends. Right inside the beautiful forest the crooks have built a long and tall fence! Laxmi the lizard runs over to them and asks them to stop. But Captain Crow just laughs and says, “Wish you had sold yesterday? Too late, now. We are building the factory like it or not.”

“But this is my home,” she protests.

Captain Crow holds up his wing to signal for quiet. Everyone goes silent. Captain Crow unfolds a piece of paper from his coat pocket.

“All you have to do is sign here,” says Captain Crow,
pointing to the bottom of the page. “You will work in the factory, receive a new house. You will be taken care of.”

Laxmi the lizard studies the contract and right in front of everyone, tears it up. A strong wind picks up the pieces and blows them around like cotton wool.

“I will NEVER sell my land,” shouts Laxmi.

What do you think happened next? Why did you choose to end the story this way?
Madhura the Mouse

Madhura the Mouse strolls to the market from her corn field. All her life she has lived in a hole hidden under a tree stump in the enormous field. She owns the field, but ever since she can remember, her family has used the field only to run and play. This never seemed to be a problem, but now as food is expensive, Madhura needs to earn money. Today, she will start a new life with a new job:
farming. Many of the village’s other animals have good jobs. Bhula the Bad Business Bear owns a construction company and many farms. Arjuna the frog owns a chai stall. Even Bala the bunny rabbit builds roads and works on a carrot farm. Why, thinks Madhura the mouse, can I not be a farmer?

She arrives at Max the monkey’s store to buy the seeds, fertilisers, and tools to start growing corn, Madhura’s favourite food. Max’s face looks like sandpaper and he smells dirty and unwashed. The entire village says the only thing Max the monkey knows how to do is drink too much whisky, even if he has the best store in the village. Madhura asks him how much it will cost to plant her first crop.

“Ta, ta, too much!” Max stutters, before stumbling to the ground. “Take a loan.” Madhura is confused. She has never heard of the word “loan” and hesitantly and shyly asks what it is.

“It’s something nobody wants, but everybody needs. Go to Srijan the snake, he gives loans.”

Srijan the snake lives in a smelly, cold cave. Bones and skulls litter the floor and there are no windows.

“Good afternoon. Is Srijan the snake home?” asks Madhura into the blackness. She asks again, but the only response is her own echo. Then, out from under a rock, a slick glimmer slithers forward. It is Srijan the snake.

“Hello, Madhura my dear,” hisses Srijan. His forked
tongue whips out and he curls around her, his long scaly body growing tense. “What can I do for you?”
Madhura the mouse tells Srijan how she needs money to start her farm.
“No problem. I will gladly loan the money. But we have
to make a promise.”

“What sort of promise?” asks Madhura the mouse, scratching at her whiskers.

“Well, what will I do if you do not return my money? I must have,” he pauses, “assurances.” Srijan the snake explains that he will lend the money, but that Madhura must pay him back double what he originally gives after she harvests her corn. Double! Madhura is shocked. But all she can think about is the corn she will grow and the meals she will cook: corn curry, corn cutlets, and corn soup. They strike a deal, shake paw to tail, and as Madhura the mouse leaves the dark cave with the money, Srijan the snake hisses, “Don’t forget our little after-harvest date.”

After buying the seeds and tools, Madhura starts work on her new farm. All the animals in the village come to help plant and plough the once-empty field. Even Bhula the Bad Business Bear stops by to offer a hand. When everything is planted, Madhura returns to her small mouse hole under the tree stump.

“All there is to do now is wait for the rain,” she says with a smile.

But it doesn’t rain much, a few drops here and there. When it is time to harvest, only ten corn stalks can be seen: just enough to feed Madhura the mouse until the planting season next year. She had hoped to grow enough to sell at the market and use the money to plant more and
maybe even buy some paneer. But this year, like all those before, she will have to do without such luxuries. As she sits down for a dinner of corn soup, Madhura hears a hiss at the door.

“Madhura dear, it’s your friend, Srijan the snake.”

Madhura asks if he would like a bowl of soup; she is heating some over the fire.

“No appetite dear, just my money.”

Madhura the mouse can’t help crying at her plight, nearly flooding her home. She tells Srijan about the poor rains and how she could not grow much corn to sell.

“That is not my fault. Give back my money...,” he warns.

Just then, the corn soup boils over and Madhura rushes to turn it off. She hands Srijan the snake her soup and the rest of her corn stalks.

“Take everything I have,” she says. “I promise to pay you back next year along with the extra.”

“Fine Madhura, I’ll be back after the next harvest.

Time flies past and Madhura manages to forget about Srijan’s loan. Soon it’s planting season and again the entire village comes to plant her field, hoping for a better yield. Afterwards, she returns to her hole.

“All there is to do now is wait for the rain,” she says confidently.

But again, like last year, it does not rain. Only eleven stalks grow, just enough for Madhura the mouse to live on. As Madhura starts a fire, she hears a slither at the door.
“Madhura dear, I’m back for my money,” says Srijan the snake.

Madhura the mouse explains about the bad rains and how it is not her fault. But Srijan the snake has already wrapped himself around Madhura’s little body. His scales become tense and he coils himself tighter and tighter.

What do you think happened next?
Why did you choose to end the story this way?
‘End the story’ contest

Discuss the stories with friends & end each story the way you think best. Send us your entries and tell us why you chose to end the stories this way in the attached format. Email your entries to us along with the scanned feedback form overleaf to readaloud@praxisinida.org

Or just post it to
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The best entries will find their way to http://www.praxisindia.org/?q=readaloud

All entries by one child must be accompanied by one completed feedback form.

Send us your email ids for updates about our next issue/contests etc
Feedback Form

Name ..............................................................

Age ..................    Sex  ......................

Address ..............................................................

Email id ..............................................................

Did you like this book and why? Y / N
I liked/disliked Bala the Bunny And Other Stories because..............................

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..............................................................................

Would you like to write stories on similar issues that you may have come across around you for the next issue of Read Aloud? Y / N
Name of story ...........................

How I think this story ended
I ended the story this way because
Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices is a not for profit organisation that works to promote participatory practices in all forms of human development. It believes that participation can only happen when the poor and the marginalised can exercise their right to have a say in matters that affect their lives.

The Read Aloud series is an effort to sensitise children to important social issues in a gentle way so that they can, with time, grow more inclined to empathise with participatory development.
Read Aloud is a series of books that gives voice to those whose voices have got lost or drowned out because nobody has the time to listen to them.

We invite you to read these stories aloud, alone and with friends, talk about the buddies you will make in the book and discuss with your friends, teachers and parents about how they could have changed their lives.

We invite you to then complete the stories telling us how you think their lives should have changed and why.

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