



STUDIO OCHENTA ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

CULTUREVERSE – EPISODE 10: THE LOYAL MONGOOSE

[0:06]

NARRATOR: This is the Cultureverse. A place where myths and legends come alive in a modern world.

NARRATOR: I'm your host, Yara Shahidi. Episode 10: The Loyal Mongoose.

NARRATOR: It's late Friday morning and Amita, a 12-year-old Indian girl who recently moved to the Northside of Chicago with her family, is getting ready for her first day at school.

(SFX: Door knocks)

MR. SINGH (from the other side of the door): Are you prepared, Amita?

AMITA (a little worried but trying to sound reassured):

Yes, papa.

MR. SINGH (from the other side of the door): Acha. Good.

NARRATOR: Amita puts on her backpack and with a deep breath starts making her way to the bus stop.

MONGOOSE: (From afar) Hi there! (Next to Amita) You must be the new kid that moved in next door! I'm Manbir, but everyone calls me Mongoose.

AMITA (shy but happy): Hi! I'm Amita. Just moved here from Punjab. Why do they call you Mongoose?

MONGOOSE (quickly): Well when I was little my dad nicknamed me Mongoose, like the Loyal

Mongoose from that old Indian story.

AMITA (quickly): Oh yeah! I know that one, where the mongoose is supposed to babysit, and then protects the baby from a snake...

MONGOOSE (quickly): ...And then the parents think it was the mongoose that hurt the baby.

AMITA (quickly): But the mongoose was just protecting it!

MONGOOSE (quickly): Yeah! So cool you actually know the story, my friends here didn't get the reference at all.

AMITA (quickly): Yeah, it's obvious. Mongoose is a pretty cool nickname.

(THEY LAUGH + SFX BUS)

[1:41]

NARRATOR: AMITA and Mongoose become fast friends on the way to school.

MONGOOSE: So, do you feel homesick?

AMITA: A little, sometimes. I really miss the food!

MONGOOSE: Oh me too! Here check this out.

(SFX: TAPPING IN THE PHONE)

MONGOOSE (as she types): There's this awesome restaurant that serves dishes from Punjab! You should go there with your family!

AMITA: Oh really? Do they have Chapati?

MONGOOSE: YES!

AMITA: Tandoori?

MONGOOSE: Oh Yeah! Oh, and the best part - my mom runs it!

AMITA: Cool!

NARRATOR:

Every morning they take the bus together and slowly Amita starts to feel more and more at

home in her new town.

NARRATOR:

A few weeks later during Saturday lunch with Amita's 16-year-old cousin Vinit, Mr. Singh notices that Amita is adjusting really well.

[2:27]

MR. SINGH: *How was school beta?*

AMITA: *Great!*

MR. SINGH: *Have you... made any new friends?*

AMITA: *Yeah, this Indian American kid called Mongoose, he actually lives next door!*

MR. SINGH: *A boy? Called Mongoose? That's an odd name...*

AMITA: *(excitedly): Yes, papa, and he's very nice, he even told me about this restaurant where they serve...*

MR. SINGH *(cutting her off): I think you should concentrate on your schoolwork! This is your first year in America and it will be hard to catch up with your schoolmates.*

AMITA: *Yes, Papa...*

MR. SINGH: *Why don't you follow the example of your cousin Vinit, he always has his head in a book.*

VINIT: *Huh? Oh yeah! Study hard lil' cuz!*

[3:06]

NARRATOR: *After lunch, Amita and Vinit hang out in the backyard. Amita is reading a book. Beside her, Vinit is busy texting some friends.*

(SFX cell phone ringing)

VINIT: *Hey! (PAUSE) just chillin' in my little cousin's back yard... So what's up? (LONG PAUSE) Wait! Are you serious? (LONG PAUSE) Can't you convince them (with emphasis) TO GO still? (LONG PAUSE) Oh, that sucks. Ok, well... guess I'm stayin' in this weekend... Yea, Ok... bye.*

VINIT: *What even is the point of having a big house if you do nothing with it?*

AMITA: What are you talking about?

VINIT: My friend Amy's parents had been planning this trip to the Bahamas for months, and my friends were planning on having a party at Amy's while they were gone. But they canceled the trip so now there's no party... ughh...

AMITA(amused, sarcastic): That's funny, Papa is always saying you were the wisest, MOST behaved, MOST kind out of all our cousins.

VINIT: Duh... 'Cause I do it on the down-low...

[4:03]

NARRATOR: Before she can reply, Mr. Singh, comes outside with some iced Chai tea.

MR. SINGH: Hey kids!

VINIT: Oh, hi, uncle.

MR. SINGH: Amita, we're going to spend next weekend at your auntie Raveena's house! She's having a little party to celebrate your cousin's engagement. Vinit you can come too if you like, I know your mother doesn't get along with Raveena, but you can join us!

VINIT: Oh, that's okay uncle, I have other plans, I have... a big test Monday.

MR. SINGH: Always studying, so smart! Amita, be... inspired!

NARRATOR: Mr. Singh walks back towards the house and Amita looks at Vinit surprised.

AMITA: I thought your party was canceled? Auntie Raveena has a pool! How can you pass that up??

VINIT: Oh, nothin... I just... had an idea.

NARRATOR: Amita rolls her eyes at Vinit. Then she hears something in the bushes by the fence.

MONGOOSE: Psst. Amita!

AMITA (excited): MONGOOSE! I'm sorry I haven't been catching the bus so often anymore, dad's been driving me to school these days!

MONGOOSE: No worries! Was just checking in to see if you were alright!

AMITA: Yeah! We're just hanging out with my cousin Vinit here.

VINIT: *Hey, Mongoose, cool nickname...*

[5:22]

NARRATOR: *Before they can become better acquainted, Mr. Singh comes back with some fresh fruit.*

(SFX BUSHES)

NARRATOR: *Mongoose steps out from behind the bushes when he sees Amita's dad.*

MONGOOSE: *Mr. Singh! It's such an honor to finally meet you! I'm Manbir Shah, but you can call me MONGOOSE.*

MR. SINGH: *Oh Mongoose, I've heard of you... So... you are real!*

MONGOOSE: *Yes! I just wanted to take the opportunity to invite you to my mom's restaurant this coming weekend.*

MR. SINGH: *Oh, that's very nice of you young man, but we're going to be going out of town, right Amita?*

AMITA: *Right! Maybe when we get back? Right, Dad?*

MR. SINGH: *Right, we'll see. I'm not sure we'll have the time. But I'll let you know...*

MR. SINGH: *Vinit, I was just thinking... Could you take care of the house while we're away? There won't be much to do, it's just two days, but I worry about my murtis. They are extremely valuable.*

[6:19]

NARRATOR: *Mr. Singh collects rare 19th century ceramic statuettes of different Hindu gods. They are called murtis, and he keeps them in a wooden hutch by the family altar in the living room.*

VINIT: *Don't worry, uncle. Your place is in good hands.*

AMITA: *In any case, we'll see about that restaurant soon, Mongoose!*

MONGOOSE: *Alright! See you soon!*

NARRATOR: *Amita and her dad drive off the next weekend to Auntie Raveena's. Mongoose heads home from Art Club and hears loud music coming from Amita's "supposedly" empty house...*

(SFX: Party sounds)

MONGOOSE: Hey, what's all that noise??

(SFX American music blasting, keys rattling in lock and door opening)

MONGOOSE: What the?

NARRATOR: Mongoose makes his way to the Singh house and is surprised to find Amita's cousin Vinit sitting on the front porch listening to music with some friends.

(SFX: Low chatter and vibey music in the background)

VINIT: MONGOOSE! Whatsup!

[7:17]

NARRATOR: Mongoose follows him inside.

(SFX: Ambience sounds build up)

MONGOOSE (Shocked): What are you um... what are you doing here?

VINIT: Um... this is my uncle's house... what are you doing here?

MONGOOSE: Mr. Singh... I mean, your uncle, asked you to look after the place while they are away, so you decide to have people over?

VINIT: It's a small gathering... Look, I don't have to explain myself to you.

VINIT (pretending, obnoxious): Look, I'm call him right now...

NARRATOR: Vinit holds his hand to his ear like a phone.

VINIT: beep beep beep. Hey uncle. Can I have a party at your house? "Yeah sure, you're my favorite nephew you can do no wrong." OKAY COOL BYE. Beep. Now get outta here man!

MONGOOSE: UGHH, FINE I get it...

[7:54]

NARRATOR: Vinit walks up to Mongoose and shoves him out of the house. Mongoose heads home worried.

(SFX: Full on party inside the house)

MONGOOSE: Maybe I should call Amita... (SFX PHONE) Oh man, no answer...

(TRANSITION TIME PASSING-SFX loud American music and teens yelling and laughing.)

NARRATOR: It's one o'clock in the morning, and Mongoose is awakened by loud music blasting from outside. He runs to the window and is horrified to see a full-blown party going on at the Singhs' house! He thinks of his mom's restaurant and what he would do if someone were to vandalize it like that...

[8:45]

MONGOOSE: The murtis! I've got to get over there!

(SFX music sounds louder and chatter from the teens in the yard)

(SFX going through the house)

MONGOOSE: Get out of the way, where's Vinit? Vinit! Vinit!

NARRATOR: Mongoose sees two guys playing catch with one of the oldest murtis, and he runs over to save it!

MONGOOSE: Let me have that!

RANDOM PEOPLE (cheering): Throw-it! Throw-it! Throw-it! Throw-it!

(SFX: Tinnitus sound before)

NARRATOR: The guy looks like he's about to toss one of the precious murtis to Mongoose!

GUY ONE: Mongoose! Here, catch!

[9:27]

MONGOOSE (slow mo): Noo!

RANDOM PEOPLE: He's dropping it! He's gonna drop it!!!

(SFX: Crowd holding their breath, exaggerated)

NARRATOR: Mongoose thrusts himself forward just as it's about to hit the floor and...

(SFX clapping)

GUY TWO: Whooooooooo Hooooooooooooo! Mongoose saved the day!

RANDOM PEOPLE: (Cheering):Mongoose! Mongoose! Mongoose!

MONGOOSE (Screaming): YOU ALL NEED TO LEAVE! NOW!!!!!!!!!!!!

NARRATOR: The rest of the teens stop dancing for a moment and turn towards Mongoose and then they keep dancing. Vinit pushes his way through the crowd.

VINIT: Sooo uncool...

MONGOOSE: Are you insane, Vinit? Your uncle is going to be so mad if anything gets damaged.

(SFX glass crashing sound)

VINIT (Laughing): Oops... I think it's too late for that!

[10:14]

NARRATOR: Mongoose shoves his way through the people crowding the hutch.

MONGOOSE (angrily): Get outta my way! Get outta my-

VINIT: Why are you being so lame Mongoose? Why don't you just relax and enjoy the party too? Everything will be fine!

(SFX rowdy teenagers partying)

MONGOOSE: You're crazy!

VINIT: I'm just having fun.

MONGOOSE: But the murtis!

(SFX - a new song comes on)

VINIT (yelling): That's my song!!!! YES!!!

(MONGOOSE takes a deep breath)

MONGOOSE: Okay. So the only real thing that matters is the murtis collection, right? Let's just

get them away from all this mess.

[10:49]

NARRATOR: He acts fast: running upstairs to Amita's room and yanking all the sheets and pillowcases off her bed. He runs back down to the hutch.

(SFX stairs)

MONGOOSE: Get out of the way! I'll wrap them up and put them under Amita's bed, they should be safe there.

(SFX police siren)

NARRATOR: The police show up and shut down the party. Mongoose hides under Amita's bed until everyone has cleared out, and makes his way downstairs.

MONGOOSE: What a mess. The entire house is a disaster. Beer cans and bottles everywhere... and the rooms are all trashed. OMG Is that an actual hole in the living room wall??!

MONGOOSE: Oh no Amita texted me!

AMITA: Sorry I missed your call earlier. My dad got into a big argument with my Auntie Raveena so we'll be back tomorrow morning! See you soon!

MONGOOSE: Okay they're arriving in the late morning so that gives me... (checks watch)... a few hours. I can do this. I can clean up. Oh hey Vinit...

VINIT: (YAWNING/ALMOST ASLEEP) Hi Mongoose, thanks... for... the murtis...

[12:02]

NARRATOR: Vinit falls back asleep on the couch and Mongoose gets to work, going through every room and cleaning everything.

(SFX: montage of cleaning)

(SFX birds chirping)

(SFX: Keys in door and door opens)

(MR. SINGH is speaking randomly about how bothered he is about Aunt Raveena's attitude)

MR. SINGH (super angry, yelling): WHAT IS THIS MESS! WHERE ARE MY MURTIS?

MR. SINGH (super angry, yelling): WHAT IS ALL THIS MESS!!!

MONGOOSE (screams, he was taken by surprise): AH!

AMITA (horrified): Mongoose! What did you do!

MONGOOSE (freaking out): OH YOU'RE HOME, YOU'RE---Amita, let me explain; I-

[12:45]

NARRATOR: Mr. Singh notices the fallen hutch, and his murtis are nowhere to be found. He turns around and yells at Mongoose again.

MR. SINGH (super angry, yelling): WHERE ARE MY MURTIS!???? Get out of my house now!

MONGOOSE: Mr. Singh, please let me-

MR. SINGH (super angry, yelling): GET OUT OF MY HOUSE!!!!!!!!!!

MONGOOSE: Amita! Please let me...

NARRATOR: Mongoose looks to Amita to save him, but there's nothing but a look of disappointment and betrayal in her eyes. Mongoose drops the broom in his hand and runs home.

(SFX running sound)

MR. SINGH (super angry): Amita, you have only been in this country for three months, and you are already befriendng criminals!

AMITA: I don't even know what to say!

MR. SINGH (super angry): Well, I do. Mongoose isn't welcome in this house. And you can forget about going to that restaurant of his... I knew that boy was bad news. I mean who calls their kid Mongoose?

AMITA (on the verge of tears): Dad!

[13:32]

NARRATOR: Amita runs up to her room and slams the door.

AMITA (voice breaks Where's my blanket?

(AMITA cries)

(SFX text alert)

NARRATOR: Amita receives a text from Mongoose that says "I'm really sorry..."

MONGOOSE: "I'm really sorry... It's not what it looks like. Look under your bed. I put them there for safekeeping."

(SFX: Amita looks under the bed)

AMITA (yelling and excited): Oh my god. Papa, Papa!

NARRATOR: She grabs her father's hand and drags him up to her bedroom, where he sees his murtis spread out carefully on her bed. He runs to them and cries.

(SFX glass crashing sound on IG video)

MR. SINGH: THE MURTIS! They're safe! But what---

AMITA: Mongoose was trying to help!

MR. SINGH (apologetic): I owe him an apology.

AMITA: It was Mongoose. He stashed them under my bed to keep them safe. If not, who knows what would have happened?

MR. SINGH (moved and relieved): We must pay a visit to our dear Mongoose and go to his restaurant while we're at it!

[14:30]

NARRATOR: Mr. Singh and Amita march over to Mongoose's house. There, Mongoose explains everything that happened and shows an IG video Vinit posted last night to prove it... (smiling) They all head out to the restaurant. As for Vinit, well, he wasn't invited.

(SFX:

MR. SINGH: Pass the Chapati!

AMITA: It's delicious!

MONGOOSE: Here you go, Mr. Singh, thank you!

(MR. SINGH, AMITA, MONGOOSE laugh together)

[15:10]

Narrator: This story is inspired by the Indian morality folktale about the Loyal Mongoose. An ancient tale from the Panchatantra collection, an enormously influential group of stories from ancient India. In this particular story, a farmer couple has a pet mongoose. One day, the couple leaves the mongoose with their baby, assured that he would guard their baby well. While they're gone, a snake enters the house and tries to attack the baby. The loyal mongoose attacks the snake to protect it. But, when the mother arrives home, she sees the mongoose with bloodstains. She thinks the mongoose tried to harm the baby. In her anger, she kills the loyal mongoose. When she enters her house, she sees her baby is fine with a dead snake beside him. She realizes what happened and regrets her actions.

[16:02]

NARRATOR: If you want to learn more about Indian legends and folktales check out the books The Panchatantra, by Sunita Parasuraman and [Arthur W. Ryder](#), and Tales of India: Folk Tales from Bengal, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu, by illustrators Svabhu Kohli and Viplov Singh.

NARRATOR: This podcast was produced by Studio Ochenta for TRAX on PRX and hosted by Yara Shahidi. Amita was voiced by Sakshi Sharma. Mongoose was voiced by Jacob Lukose. Vinit was voiced by Aaryan Arora. With Salim Mohammed as Mr. Singh.

[16:39]

NARRATOR: Special thanks to our Cultureverse editorial team for this episode: Robin Bwhanie and Sahaj Kholi, who brought their Indian experiences to this story.

NARRATOR: The Creative Director and Executive Producer for this series is Lory Martínez, founder of Studio Ochenta. Dr. Kiona is our consulting producer for all things culture. Our Senior Fiction Producer is Maru Lombardo. All original opening songs for this series were composed by Gabriel Dalmasso. Sound design by Chiara Santella. And our art is by Steve Aparicio. The Executive Producer for TRAX is Michelle Smawley and our scripts were edited by Nathan Yungerberg.

[17:21]

NARRATOR: Follow us on TikTok & IG @cultureversepod. Transcripts are available at ochentastudio.com/cultureverse.

NARRATOR: And I'm Yara Shahidi, your host. Thanks for listening!

(SFX: STUDIO OCHENTA AUDIO LOGO)

(SFX: TRAX/PRX AUDIO LOGO)

END OF EPISODE