



Arunachal Pradesh and Assam The Lands of Rich Folk Tales

KEYWORDS

Tais, Folktale, Village, River, Little stream, Monk, Stepmother.

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ABSTRACT *The Tai Folktales are either written in verse form or orally passed down generations, and it is therefore natural that one folk tale may be told in different ways by different people. The Tais of this region are very rich in culture and folk tales which they have kept and preserved the same in tact and fully secured. The Tai people have preserved in their folk tales and tradition a sense of common origin, which is evident in their language and culture. Despite variations in dialect and accents over the years leading to their divergence, there still is some degree of mutual understanding among them. Apart from fulfilling the craving for listening to stories among small children, folktales can and do play a pivotal role in transmitting the traditions and customs of a particular culture to the next generation. Just as folktales can contain religious or mythic elements, in like manner, it can be equally infused with the mundane and ordinary traditions of daily life. As a matter of fact, folktales perform a very significant function in educating the members of a cultural group about the customs and traditions peculiar to that particular culture.*

Objective of the study: The present study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

- To study the folktales of the Tai People.
- To make a general estimate of the folktales of the Tai People.

1. Introduction:

The Tais of this region are very rich in culture and folk tales which they have inherited the same from their forefathers. The Tai people have preserved in their folk tales and tradition a sense of common origin, which is evident in their language and culture. Despite variations in dialect and accents over the years leading to their divergence, there still is some degree of mutual understanding among them. The typical Tai folk tales are mostly about kings and queens, princes and princesses, probably due to the fact that their history is all about one kingdom being established when the previous one crumbled. The Tai stories are either written in verse form or orally passed down generations, and it is therefore natural that one folk tale may be told in different ways by different people. Some of the popular folk tales that are prevalent among the Tais and especially the Tai Khamptis are enumerated below briefly:

2. Discussion:

(A) Wo Pem Samlo:

In a village on the banks of a mighty river, there lived a farmer, his wife and five daughters. One day, the river flooded its banks and swallowed the village. The farmer's wife and four daughters were washed away by the floods leaving the farmer and his youngest daughter Wo Pem. The farmer later married a beautiful but wicked woman who had no intention of playing mother to someone else's child except her own daughter Oak Pin.

Wo Pem and Oak Pin were two very different individuals. Oak Pin was very quick but her work was slipshod. She was selfish and demanding, always bullying Wo Pem and making fun of her. Wo Pem, on the other hand, was a good-natured girl who did her work slowly and diligently. As the farmer was growing old, one day he said to his wife, "I think it is time we got our children married and

let our sons-in-law help us with our work". "Let us get our daughter Oak Pin married off to Samlo," his wife suggested. "He has no parents and is very hard working. He can live here with us". Samlo readily agreed for the marriage as he thought Wo Pem would make a good wife. When the farmer related the story to his wife, she became furious, for Samlo had chosen Wo Pem and not her daughter. Both husband and wife enjoyed working together. He was also an ideal son-in-law.

The step mother could not bear to see two of them together. Her feelings towards Wo Pem grew more bitter day by day. "If only I could get rid of her," she thought. No decent man in the village wanted to marry Oak Pin because of her quarrelsome nature. Matters worsened when Wo Pem was expecting her first child. Samlo had no idea that Wo Pem was ill treated and disliked by her stepmother, for the cunning woman was double faced. The stepmother's evil mind worked overtime, trying to think of ways to get rid of Wo Pem without arousing anyone's suspicion. She took a long strip of cane and whittled one side of it till it was as sharp as a blade. She rolled it and hid it among her baskets so that no one saw it.

One day when Samlo had gone fishing, the stepmother sent Wo Pem to the river to fetch water. While Wo Pem was filling the waterpot, her stepmother quickly tied the strip of cane to the handrail, keeping the sharpened edge upward. After her evil deed was done, she went to her room and shut the door. Wo Pem returned home from the river with a pot of water resting on her hip and the crook off her arm. While climbing up the steps she ran her palm over the handrail and cried out in pain as the cane sliced through her fingers and blood gushed freely from the gaping wound. The poor girl lost her balance and tumbled down, her waterpot on one side of the steps and she on the other. The woman emerged from her room pretending surprise and shock only after she heard the neighbours exclaimed that Wo Pem was dead.

When Samlo returned home and saw his beloved wife lying in a bloodied shroud, he wept in anguish. Unable to cope with the sudden loss, Samlo took his own life so that

he could join her in the spirit world. Neighbours carried their bodies to the riverside and buried them next to each other. The stepmother blamed Wo Pem for his death and to punish the poor girl erected a bamboo fence separating the two graves from one another.

Wo Pem and Samlo came back as stars, with Samlo being the larger of the two. If we look at the heavens we will see two bright stars coming close to each other. Just as they are about to touch one another, they slowly move further and further apart. Wo Pem and Samlo can never be united even as stars because of the fence that separates them.

(B)Pona Changsang and the Spirit Judge:

Pona Changsang was a wise old man who liked to go for long walks along the river bank. In his younger days, Pona Changsang was fond of fishing and it was not unusual for him to take a raft and scour the river for a good place to cast his net. One day, Pona Changsang sat hunched over the bank and peered into crystal clear water. He could see little fishes darting to and fro among the stones in the bottom. Just then a huge silvery fish swam into view. Pona Changsang felt he could almost touch it, if he waded into the water. He looked longingly at the fish and counted the many ways in which he could cook it, had he caught it. He started off with the tail end. First of all, he would fry the tail to a crisp and have it with his rice beer. Next, he would salt and smoke the middle portion over burning coals. That might even take an entire evening but the effort would be worth it. If the fish had eggs, which looking by the size of it seemed most probable, he would boil the eggs with herbs and have it for dinner. The last and most delicious part of it, the head, would be soaked in herbs and steamed. Pona Changsang smacked his lips and could almost taste the fish that was still very much alive and swimming.

All along, the Great Spirit judge was jotting down Pona Changsang's evil thoughts. When the weight of his evil intentions became too heavy, the spirit judge revealed himself and caught hold of Pona Changsang. The old man was taken by surprise. He tried to wriggle out of the grasp of the spirit judge, but Pona Changsang was no longer the strong youngster of old. "Where are you taking me?" Pona Changsang asked his grim faced captor. "What crime have I committed?" "I am taking you to hell, where you will be thrown into a pot of boiling water." The spirit judge replied without any emotion. "I have been observing you and I think you deserve to be punished." The spirit judge lifted Pona Changsang effortlessly and carried him away to hell. Along the way, Pona changsang saw a beautiful green meadow. "Wouldn't it be nice if I were able to build a temple here?. It would benefit all of mankind," he pointed out. The spirit judge heard him, but did not reply.

They were flying past a hill when he remarked, "This is the ideal place to build a pagoda. How beautiful it would look." Again, the spirit judge heard him, but did not stop. They were now gliding along a river bank when Pona Changsang remarked, "What a lovely spot to build a rest house for pilgrims." The spirit judge stopped in his tracks and let go of the old man. His good intentions having outweighed the bad, he had become too hot and heavy for the spirit judge to carry him any further. "You are free to go because your thoughts have become pure," the spirit judge told him.

Pona Changsang did not give up eating fish, but he learnt to respect the life of other creatures. He also learnt that

thoughts count as much as action, for it is thought that is the seed of all actions.

(C)The Hunter and the Monks:

A long time ago the abbot in charge of a monastery sent his pupils to the jungle and told them not to return until they had learnt to master their thoughts. The group of novice monks, five hundred strong, gathered on a hill top to practise the art of meditation. They sat lotus posture, mindfully breathing in and breathing out till the time hunger proved stronger than will power. Abandoning their unfinished lesson they decided to return to the monastery. Halfway down, they came across Ngachem the hunter, returning home from a hunt. He had a deer slung across his shoulder. "Where are you all heading for?" he asked. "Back to the Monastery", they told him. "Will you be kind enough to tell the little stream you meet along the way that Ngachem needs water to wash and cook?" Ngachem said. "Alright brother, we shall pass on your message to the little stream", they replied, wondering if he was mad.

They came to the little stream that Ngachem had told them about. "Little stream, Ngachem the hunter has summoned you to his home," they said in all politeness, eventhough they found it absurd. The little stream gurgled loudly and with a sudden twist, changed its normal course and snaked its way up hill. The monks could not believe their eyes. They followed the little stream till they came to Ngachem's home. He was busy washing the meat and took no notice of the five hundred monks crowding around him. "Ngachem", one of them said. "We want to know your secret. How did you get the stream to do your bidding?" Ngachem looked up and smiled. "If you have the determination to succeed and believe in yourself you can achieve the impossible." The monks were not satisfied with the explanation. "Teach us your secret," they implored. Ngachem showed them the tallest manna tree in the jungle and told them to make a ladder tall enough to reach the top most branches. The monks got down to work and with the help of the ladder, they scaled the lofty branches of the manna tree. Ngachem chopped the ladder and used it as firewood to cook his meal.

The monks sat meditating for days without food and water till their stomachs rumbled in protest. Desperation compelled a monk to try the impossible. "It is better to die trying than to stay here and die", he pondered. Spreading out his arms he jumped off the branch. His robes ballooned out in the wind and he sailed freely, like a bird in the sky. "I can fly!" he shouted joyfully, making a perfect landing and encouraging the others to follow him. And follow him they did, one after the other till the tree was truly bare. Ngachem gazed up at the manna tree and smiled in approval when he saw the monks flying down like a spray of ochre blossoms in the wind.

3.Conclusion:

The telling of stories appears to be prevalent in all cultural groups, irrespective of whether the society is simple or complex. However, apart from fulfilling the craving for listening to stories among small children, folktales can and do play a pivotal role in transmitting the traditions and customs of a particular culture to the next generation. Just as folktales can contain religious or mythic elements, in like manner, sometimes it can be equally infused with the mundane and ordinary traditions of daily life. As a matter of fact, folktales perform a very significant function in educating the members of a cultural group about the customs and traditions peculiar to that particular

culture. The folk-tales discussed above clearly eulogies the sterling qualities of honesty, truthfulness, simplicity and virtue. These are indeed high quality moral folk tales who intend to tell the society that one should not inflict pain, either mental or physical, on his fellow beings. Such acts are unjust, immoral and unethical. Moreover, these folk tales also seem to point out to us that no sinful deed can be concealed for long. Another characteristic feature of their folk tales is that some of them have roots in the pre-Buddhist period. Such tales reflect their earlier or indigenous culture and life style.

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