

Indian

# Folklife



A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

Serial No.21 April 2006



## Folklore and Children's Literature

Guest Editor

Jaya Bhattacharji



## NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC) is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, registered in Chennai dedicated to the promotion of Indian folklore research, education, training, networking and publications. The aim of the centre is to integrate scholarship with activism, aesthetic appreciation with community development, comparative folklore studies with cultural diversities and identities, dissemination of information with multi-disciplinary dialogues, folklore fieldwork with developmental issues and folklore advocacy with public programming events. Folklore is a tradition based on any expressive behaviour that brings a group together, creates a convention and commits it to cultural memory. NFSC aims to achieve its goals through cooperative and experimental activities at various levels. NFSC is supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

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Cover illustration and design motifs in this issue are from the genre 'Children Wooden Toys'.

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## Folklore and Children's Literature

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Putting together this issue on Folklore and Children's Literature' has been tough because a symbiotic relationship between the two genres is taken for granted, whereas it is actually yoking together of two very distinct genres. The other problem is that there is really no consensus on how to define literature for children. C S Lewis wrote years ago that literature for adults that has stood the test of time is what is ultimately considered suitable for children. As a definition, this seems a plausible rule of thumb. Then there is an increasing difficulty of defining "child." Without knowing who a child is, how can one talk about children's literature? Publishers slot books according to age groups of 3 or 4 years, but because one cannot fix the stages of childhood, I find it more useful to categorise books aimed at readers between 2 and 20 years as children's and young adult literature, without breaking these into smaller categories. Children's literature today is experimental, abundant, and various. Fantasy, reality fiction, biographies, nature and animals, historical fiction, science fiction, detective stories, romance, chick lit, poetry, folktales, mythology, graphic novels and comics crowd bookshop shelves.

Folktales have always been made available with different interpretations and packaging in India, but recently there has been marked growth of folktales publications, a lot of it for children. There are folklore anthologies in the market for every age group, from picture and colouring books for pre-schoolers to more sophisticated collections for 12-year olds and above. This could indicate a demand for such books and a healthier publishing industry for children. Or it could be that while negotiating existence in a global village, nations/cultures/communities are trying to find common ground within their region and not necessarily with the rest of the world. Folklore is an excellent place to begin as it documents society and is hence an excellent repository of information. Since these are oral tales that are being written down, every collection, interpretation is unique as what elements of the "original" tale are retained depends upon the teller. So, in a sense, commodification of folktales as children's literature fulfils the need to connect the present to the past, but also creates a sense of a common identity within a community.

The fact that folktales have had to be rewritten for children suggests that folk and children's stories are not synonymous, yet there must be a hidden relationship between them which is exploited when folk tales have to be converted into children's literature. Collecting,

collating and canonizing folklore is a relatively recent phenomenon, but converting it into something "suitable" for children begins around the latter part of the nineteenth century. The Brothers Grimm had not been shy to include unpleasant truths—e.g., parents who exchange an unborn child for salad leaves, as in "Rapunzel"—in their stories, but in the sanitised versions re-written for children, Rapunzel is kidnapped by a wicked witch, while the culpability of Rapunzel's parents is resolved by throwing them out of the story altogether.

In fact, folklore has been like the cultural bedrock that people turn to, especially in times when there seems to be an attempt or a movement to define "national literature". Folktales are inevitably produced, recorded and regurgitated for public consumption as they are considered to be the repositories of indigenous knowledge and culture. This need to define a national literature, especially for a new nation state, was what spurred the Germans and the British in the nineteenth century into documenting their folklore, and then there was the Irish National Movement of Literature with Lady Gregory, Synge, Yeats and Douglas Hyde at the forefront which led to the establishment of the Irish Folklore Commission in 1935. In India, there were some publications like Flora Annie Steele and R. C. Temple's *Tales of the Punjab Told by the People* or R. E. Enthoven's *Folklore Notes*. After 1947, the anthropologist Verrier Elwin and poet and critic A.K.Ramanujan attempted to collect folktales from the North East Frontier Province and Southern India respectively. These are considered seminal collections.

Children's literature has always relied a great deal on folklore for material and form. Folktales usually have a simple narrative, repetitive elements that are reminiscent of its oral past, anthropomorphic characters as in the *Jataka* and *Panchatantra* tales, and they are usually stories about ordinary people and incidents but may also include tales about creation and the supernatural. They can be political, allegorical, with religious and pagan or tribal elements, and moral and psychological dimensions. Sometimes there is an elision between folklore and religious mythology. Stories of one region are often very similar to those in another region and or country since it is known that tales travel and are adapted by the teller and to local flavours. Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* is a classic example of this. It is about the quests of the Cornish King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table, but is actually a pot pourri of Cornish, French and Scottish stories that travelled with the fifteenth century tin traders between France, Glastonbury and Cornwall.

The articles in this issue focus on the use of folklore in children's literature. Their basic premise is that folktales are the cultural bedrock of a nation, but they consider questions like what were the origins of the tales? What were the elements from the original tale or versions thereof that were removed to make it presentable for children? Which of the tales continue to be popular through the ages; which were political in nature, originally, but were subsequently tempered down or

simply lost their relevance as political parables, but survived since they were good stories? Does converting a story from an oral tradition to the written word change the fabric of the story? Does it make it more rigid, less flexible and hence impervious to any further adaptations as before? Are all folktales necessarily to be remodelled to make them suitable for children? We hope that debate on the yoking of folklore and children's literature will continue.



## Collecting Children - The Schools' Manuscripts Collections

Anna Bale

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There is a scene in the well-known Disney film *Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang* where the "Child-catcher" trundles into town to gather-up any stray children who might be wandering the streets. He is, in effect, collecting children. In this instance, however, I am using the term "collecting children" to refer to children as collectors of folklore. In Ireland in 1937 a scheme was devised by the newly formed Folklore Commission to recruit the help of schoolchildren and their teachers in the task of collecting folklore. The Department of Education was brought on board and a circular was drafted entitled *Circular to Managers and Teachers of National Schools: Scheme for the Collection and Preservation of Folklore and Oral Traditions*. This outlined the working of the scheme and reads as follows:

Material collected by the pupils may be entered in their school jotters and the compositions written in their copybooks from that material. These compositions, or as much of them as is not unduly repeated, together with stories, songs, proverbs and other material collected, should be transcribed by selected pupils into the official Manuscript Books which were issued to all National Schools..... All Manuscript Books officially supplied... should be forwarded to this office at the end of the current school year – June 1938 – for immediate transmission to the Folklore commission. The composition copybooks, or a selected number of them, should also be forwarded to this Office.

And so, from this emerged what is now known as The Schools' Manuscripts Collections. It consists of 1,128

bound and paginated volumes, in addition to an estimated 40,000 unbound original copybooks. The collecting scheme was carried out by children. 11-14 years of age, under the direction of their teachers, who followed specially prepared guidelines. Some 50,000 children took part and the scheme resulted in large amounts of folklore material being recorded, much of it from parts of the country not served by full-time or other collectors<sup>1</sup>.

The aforementioned guidelines were drafted by the Folklore Commission's archivist, Seán Ó Súilleabháin, who had extensive experience of field-collecting, archiving and indexing procedures. In the guidelines, which appeared in booklet form entitled *Irish Folklore and Tradition*, Ó Súilleabháin lists fifty-five separate topics as "Subjects for Compositions"<sup>2</sup>, and outlined the questions the children might ask of their parents and neighbours about these local traditions. For instance, under the topic of "Old Story" the following suggestions were made:

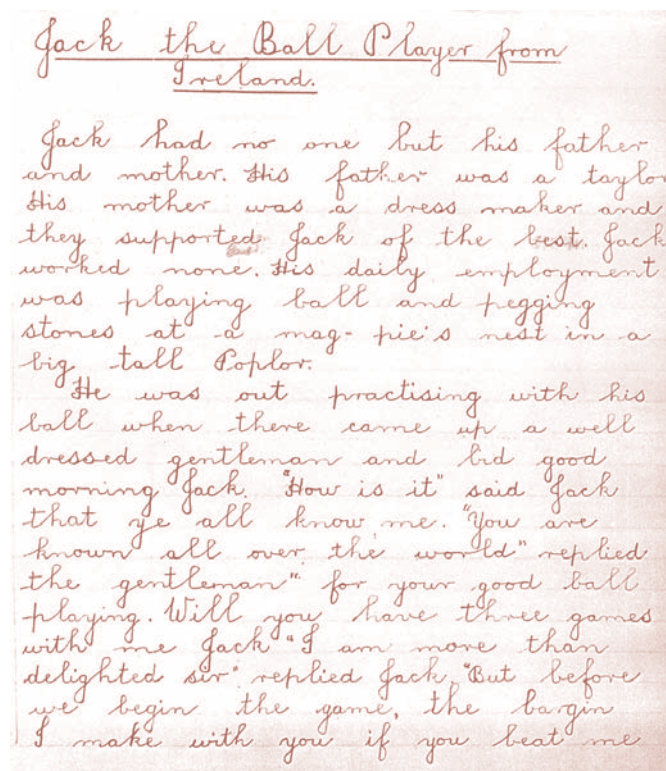
Write down an old story as told by the elderly people while sitting round the fire on winter nights. It may be about a king or a queen or their children, or perhaps a widow's son or a poor boy that set out from home to seek his fortune. It may be about a cruel stepmother who was very strict with her stepson or stepdaughter. It may be about Gobán Saor or the Bárrscológ or Conall Gulban or Céatach or some such person about whom tales are told beside the fire. It may deal with magical helpers (The Man with His Ear to the Ground; The Man with His Leg tied under His Belt etc.) or with helpful horses or cats or with boats that go over land and sea. Or with soldiers killed in battle each day and were alive again next morning. If you know (or hear locally) a story that you know or are told has been "in print already" do not be deterred by this, but write it down, giving storyteller's

name, age, and address. Even incomplete stories should be recorded. Try to discover from the storyteller where he (or she) got the story and when.

Ah, not a television nor computer game in sight! One would have to question whether this very idyllic picture of rural life in 1930s Ireland was in fact a reality. Did people really have to time to sit down after a long hard day working on the farm and tell stories long into the night? Whether they did or not, the material poured into the Irish Folklore Commission's offices in Dublin and when the scheme ended in January 1938, more than 20 Tons of copy-books and Manuscript Books had been amassed.

This invaluable collection is now housed and available for consultation in the UCD (University College Dublin) Delargy Centre for Irish Folklore and the National Folklore Collection.

*Scanned image of the sample manuscript*



#### Old Story: Jack the Ball Player from Ireland.

Jack had no one but his father and mother. His father was a taylor. His mother was a dressmaker and they supported Jack of the best. Jack worked none (sic.). His daily employment was playing ball and pegging stones at a magpie's nest in a big tall poplar [tree].

He was out practising with his ball when there came up a well-dressed gentleman and bid "Good morning Jack". "How is it" said Jack "that ye all know me?". "You are known all over the world" replied the gentleman, "for your good ball playing,. Will you have three games with

me Jack?" "I am more than delighted sir, replied Jack. "But before we begin the game, the bargain I make with you is if you beat me in any of the games any request you ask of me I will fulfill, and if I beat you, you have to do what I tell you", said the gentleman. ....

There follows a long international folktale of wishes granted and impossible tasks imposed. Jack is sent on a quest to find a certain Lord Ureul in order to obtain his daughter's hand in marriage. Jack's failure will result in his beheading. He is helped along the way by supernatural helpers in the form of Swan Maidens. He reaches his destination eventually only to have three impossible tasks to complete, i.e. to clean out a shed with a fork – for every forkful of dirt thrown out, ten lots are thrown back in; to empty a well – every bucket emptied brings back ten and to catch a horse which is roaming a thousand acres and has not been seen for a century. With the help of his betrothed, he succeeds. The story continues with a tale of pursuit and enchantment and ends up with a marriage happy ever after.

This story was written by a school child in 1937 who collected it from an elderly neighbour who was then 78 years old. The teacher has written a comment at the end of the story, giving details of the lady in question and stating that "She is at present as smart and active in mind and limb as many young people under 30. She always worked very hard – never took sugar in tea – though she is a confirmed tea-drinker!

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Information taken from Proceedings from the McGlinchey Summer School 1998, article by Séamas Ó Catháin *Scéim na Scol*.

<sup>2</sup> The composition subjects listed were: Hidden Treasures; A Funny Story; A Collection of Riddles; Weather Lore; Local Heroes; Local Happenings; Severe Weather; Old Schools; Old Crafts; Local Marriage Customs; In the Penal Times; Local Place names; Bird Lore; Local Cures; Home-made Toys; Lore of Certain Days; Travelling Folk; Fairy Forts; Local Poets; Famine Times; Games I Play; The Local Roads; My Home District; Our Holy Wells; Herbs; The Potato Crop; Proverbs; Festival Customs; The Care of Our Farm Animals; Churning; The Care of the Feet; The Local Forge; Clothes Made Locally; Stories of the Holy Family; The Local Patron Saint; The Local Fairs; The Landlord; Food in Olden Times; Hurling and Football Matches; An Old Story; Old Irish Tales; A Song; Local Monuments; Bread; Buying and Selling; Old Houses; Stories of Giants and Warriors; The Leipseachan or The Mermaid; Local Ruins; Religious Stories; The Old Graveyards; A Collection of Prayers; Emblems and Objects of Value; Historical Tradition; Strange Animals. ✽



## Chinese Folklore: Impact on Children's Literature

Zhou Chun

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### Introduction

In China, the term "children's literature" originated from "May 4<sup>th</sup>" age. Regarded as a new type of literature, children's literature was understood gradually and spread widely among the masses from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in China. When it came to the age of "May 4<sup>th</sup> new cultural movement", this genre developed fast with in the modern ideology. Children's literature became the newest, most popular and hottest topic in literature, education and publishing circles.

Although the term "children's literature" appeared first in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in China, literature for children has existed since the ancient times. The literature for children included folklore. Research indicates that the primary source of literature for children was oral narratives that were passed from generation to generation and existed in communities. Some of the more common forms were folklore, fairy tales, nursery rhymes and folk ballads. Even now, when people refer to folk literature, it usually encompasses fairy tales, nursery rhymes and folk ballads learnt as children. These genres have played an important role in their formative years, by not only enriching their life, but also influencing their view of life and world. If we accept folklore as literature and recognize that it belongs to children's literature, then it is obvious that the origin of children's literature dates far back. This article will deal with "children's literature" in narrow sense, namely the main readers of this type of literature are children, children's life and their feelings are taken from children's angle. Also it should be writer's creation.

We know that folk literature was a collective community effort and spread orally. "Collectivization" means the folk literature was produced and spread by masses. It uses the literary and artistic works loved by the people to express their life, idea, emotion and sense, thus a way of cultural accumulation of a nation in a long time. Oral character means folk literature is produced and spread orally. There is corresponding way of expressing and its particular style. These characters of folk literature help it overcome time limit and influences contemporary writers' writing, especially their writing on children's literature. Folk literature has important effect on children's literature production. To some extent, it can be said to be the basis of children's literature. Hereinafter the writer will analyze its influence from four respects.

### Subjects of the Chinese folk literature: Impact on children's literature

Children's literature often draws its materials and nourishment on folklore in subjects, and folklore is the inexhaustible source of children's literature. It has been accepted by the academic circles of children's literature that early works of children's literature mainly originates from adapting or polishing the folklore works. For example, Ge Cui-ling's "wild grape", Zhang Shi-jie's "Fishing Boy", Ruan Zhang-jing's "Golden Conch" and some other works, all these are based on related folklore. Some works of children's literature even directly draw their materials on folklore. Zhang Tian-yi's "Grey Wolf" and Qiao Yu's "Orchard Sisters" both draw their material on model stories of "Wolf Grandmother", Lao She's "Treasured Boat" and "knight Frog" on the folk stories of the same names of Han nationality (Sino) and Zang respectively. Ren De-yao's "Malan Flower" on those "Snake Man" model, and "Golden Conch" on the girl-river-snail-modeled ones.

Ge Cui-ling's representative work, "Wild Grape", is a fairy tale based on folk legend, praising the pursuit of the bright ideal and the excellent characters of kindness, bravery and ready-to-help-others, which embodies love, one of the three themes of children's literature. In "Grey Wolf", the bright oldest daughter, Da Niu, penetrates the grey wolf's disguise, and cleverly catches the tricky and ferocious wolf, with the help of her two sisters.

In "Orchard Sisters", the mother went to see the grandmother, leaving her three daughters – the oldest, Door Bar; the second, Bolt Staple; the youngest, Broom to look after their home. At night, a wolf disguised herself as the grandmother visited their home. The clever Door Bar saw through the wolf and led her two sisters to fight a battle of wits and bravery against the Wolf, and finally won a victory with the help of the fruit trees. "Orchard Sisters" is the only opera Qiao Yu wrote for children, which won the prize awarded by Song Qing-ling herself. And it was "Orchard Sisters" that made the image "Grey Wolf" popular among children all over China. "Treasured Boat", the only play Lao She had written for children, tells about kind-hearted Little Wang. Little Wang received a magic boat from an old man he had saved out of a river when a flood came. Little Wang took advantage of the magic boat and saved a snake, an ant, a bee, and a boy who is son of a rich man. However, the boy presented the magic boat to the emperor and became an official and millionaire. Even worse, he thought of tricks to kill Little Wang. But thanks to the

help of the snake, ant and bee, Little Wang defeated him. At last, he was punished and Little Wang married the princess and went back to hometown. "Magic Boat" also draws its material directly on a folk story of Han nationality.

"Golden conch", a long fairy poem written by Yuan Zhang-jin, also directly draws material on a popular folk tale – "Girl River-Snail". Long long ago, there lived a young fellow on the beach. Poor but happy, he went fishing and sang heartily every day. One day, the young fellow freed a captive golden fish. Days afterwards, his net always caught a golden conch and he took it home, keeping it in a vat. After that, every day the young fellow saw meals ready on the table when he came back from fishing. Later, he found out that it was the golden conch, the Girl Conch, who was always looking after him. It was the golden fish, who changed herself into Girl Conch to pay a debt of gratitude. Therefore, they live a happy life. But unfortunately, soon the Sea Goddess took Girl Conch back to the sea. The young fellow went in a boat to search for her. At last, he gained the Goddess's admission that Girl Conch should come back and live together with him if he could stand three severe tests. The pen in the writer's hand polished the old and plain folk tale and coloured it with magnificent fairy emotion. This work has been translated into Mongolian, Korean, English, and French. In 1980 it won the first-class prize the second award at the national literature creation for children.

The varied styles and material of Chinese Folklore, provides effective original version and valuable resources for children's literary works creation. Chen Bo-chui, a famous children's literature writer, has said "The folk fairy tales are a treasure house of fairy tales, with plentiful, uncut jade. It has always been developing the people's optimistic spirit, rousing the people's confidence in overcoming natural and man-made calamities. The spiritual essence of the folk fairy tales adapted and polished by the writers' pens can be the best quality spiritual food for children." As well as they directly touch the fairy tales creation in children's literature, these words were suitable to recognize the impact of the folklore on other types of children's literature.

### **Ideological Content of Chinese Folklore: Impact on Children's Literature**

The ideological content of the folklore also has great impact on children's literature creation. It has been mentioned formerly that the folk literature is collectively created and spread collectively, it is a long time infiltration of a nation culture, and it is an embodiment of the cream of a nation culture. Using the ideological content of the folklore and emphasizing the intension of national culture in it are often made use of by the children's literature creation as the effective tool to develop children's aesthetic conceptions and mould children's sound moral integrity.

The idea that "Good is rewarded; and evil with evil" is deeply rooted in Chinese traditional mind, and the

theme of punishing evil-doers and encouraging people to do good floods in Chinese folklore works. "Magic Brusher Ma Liang" written by Hong Xun-tao is an example embodying such a theme.

Long ago, a cowboy named Ma Liang loved drawing. He was poor that he was unable to afford a brush. Once he begged a painter for a brush. The painter did nothing but laugh at him. Without a brush, Ma Liang practiced drawing with branches or charcoal. One day, a god gave him a magic brush with which what Ma Liang had drawn all came into reality. Ma Liang drew for poor peasants. But a greedy rich man seized him and ordered him to draw gold. Ma Liang refused and was locked up in a stable. He drew a ladder with the magic brush and escaped. Later the emperor knew of the magic brush and had Ma Liang taken to the Palace. The emperor robbed Ma Liang of his brush, but what other people drew with the magic brush did not change. The emperor had to force Ma Liang to draw Gold Hill. Ma Liang drew a sea. In the sea, a gold hill and a great boat. The emperor hurried into the boat to get the gold. Ma Liang drew a storm and the storm engulfed the boat and the emperor. Ma Liang left the palace with the magic brush and went on to draw for the working people what they needed. "Magic Brusher Ma Liang" embodied the working people's will "Punish evil-doer and praise good". The work tells the sharp conflicts between good and evil through Magic Brusher. Ma Liang's actions——draw for the poor people and fight against the official authorities. This work intends to develop and influence children's pursuit of the good and the beautiful to encourage them to look forward to good and beautiful, as well to hate the bad and evil. Hong Xun-tao used the usual theme of the folk literature and adopted the style of treasure stories in the folk fairy tales and created this popular work. The theme "Good for Good, Evil for Evil" appears in many children's literature works.

Loving family, hometown, political society, and country is another usual theme of Chinese folk works. To Chinese tradition, they are both the root to sustain spirit and life on, because traditionally Chinese people lived under the ceiling that family and hometown is pocket political society and country while the political society and country is magnified family and hometown. This cultural theme is outstanding in the folk literature. From the legends of Pan Gu (who created heaven and earth) and Nv wa (who patched the hole of heaven by colourful stones) to the Yangs stories of the Yangs and the Boxing Heroes, these folk literature works handed down generation by generation, mirror the national firm spirit of improving oneself unceasingly when we eventful nationality was faced with the danger of extermination. Many works of children's literature carried on this kind of ideological content and expressed patriotism as strong as the folk literature had displayed. The famous children's novel "Yulai—Little Hero" written by Guan Hua had appeared in Chinese teaching material of middle and primary schools fifty years ago. The image of Yulai has commanded deep reverence among the

people as a patriotic hero, and educated and influenced more than a generation. Guan Hua said when recollecting his experience that those stories about the heroes who served their country with unreserved loyalty tuned his creation. The well known phrase "We are Chinese, and we love China", which has encouraged innumerable people, is consistent with the spirit of those patriots. "Shark Scout", a imaginary novel written by Zhang Wenguang, also holds this patriotic theme. In this novel, the shark became an excellent scout under the human mind and served mankind with his talent. It came to a perfect integration of ideology and art by combined fierce patriotism and passionate feelings against evil with the undersea world with some imagination and some reality. This makes children receive education of patriotism while enjoying the beauty.

Pursuit for the truth, the good and beautiful lashing against the false, the evil and the ugly in the folk literature have a great impact on the practical creation of Chinese literature works for children. Also, those good themes are carried on and used by children's literature, and deeply influence and educate the mass of children.

#### **Artistic manifestation of Chinese Folklore: Impact on Children's Literature**

As far as artistic manifestation is concerned, folk literature has great impact on the literary genre, narrative modes and representation skills of children's literature. More attention should be paid to its influence.

Firstly, the genres of folk literature exert the fundamental influence on children's literature. Lu Xun once said that songs, poetries and *qu* (a type of Chinese verse in literature) all originated from folk literatures, and were used by Chinese poets and literati again to create their own literary works. Children's literature is part of pure literature of writers' creations, so almost every kind of genres of children's literature originated from folk literature. The myths, legends and stories in the form of essay and the ballads, proverbs in the form of verse are all important reference to the form and development of children's literature. Some of them become the literature genres as transition to children literature. For instance, magic tales, spirit stories, children's songs and nursery rhyme are all imitated and borrowed by children's literature. This just explains why it is difficult to distinguish the fairy tales and verses out of the folk from those created by writers.

Secondly, the narrative modes have extreme impact on the creation of children literature. Fairy tales, legends and stories usually have complete narrative modes, namely the stress of time, characters, process and result. This kind of mode influences children's literature directly. The Three-stage mode or repetitive mode, which is often used in folklore, is also widely used in children's literature. Not only fairy tales and stories but also science fictions use this mode often. As Ye Yong-lie, a famous writer of science fiction put it: "We can use three-stage mode to make science fiction interesting and full of

suspension. Three-stage mode is often used in fairy tales, which is mostly 'this way does not do—then that way, but it does not do either—then take lessons from the last two tries and finally succeed'. The mode develops from a peaceful beginning to exciting ending, full of suspension of trials and failures and instructive spirit." The reason that this mode is paid so much attention to is that it has a simple but profound philosophy that failure upon failure sometimes results in success. This form can also influence children a deep impression, helping them to understand the importance of determination and persistence and encouraging them to manage to overcome difficulties. This philosophy is embodied in the form of narrative stories, developed into a underlying culture and passed on generation by generation. This long accumulated undoubtedly culture would be valued by writers. Beside the three-stage mode, the pursuit of happy ending in folklore can also be found. Folklore describes people's pursuit of optimistic spirit, bright future and happy ending. Many children's literatures also embody these themes in them, with a happy ending.

Thirdly, the representative skills of folk literature also have great impact on children's literature. In folk literatures, it is common that human beings and other beings could talk and live together. For example, fairies could descend to the world as the kindhearted wife of farmers; swans and field snails could change themselves into beauties; a frog could change himself into the prince; cimelia could help a kind man to punish baddies. Some artistic means of surrealism such as distortion, exaggeration, imagination and impersonation are very common in folk literature, which were used for reference by children's literature and became artistic means in common use. For instance, wild fancy is a base of many successful children's literary works. Imagination is a supernormal representation skill in literature. Just as Cao Wen-xuan said, imagination is the reason why children's literature exists. "Macro fancy literature" series published by the 21 Century Press are just this kind of children's literary works full of fancy, composed of *For Who Cicada Sing* by Zhang Zhi-lu, *Dream Moor* by Mu Ling and *Little Cuspidal Hat* by Dai Zhen, and etc. These works are full of fantastic imagination and arouse the children's imagination and creativity.

Folk literature accumulates rich and colourful artistic types and means in its long history. These artistic types were cherished by masses for a long time, used for references by writers of children's literatures extensively in many areas and bring endless vitality to children's literature.

#### **Language of Chinese Folklore: Impact on Children's Literature**

Folk literature is spread orally and language of folk literature is a rich mine. Language of folk literature is plain and pithy. Moreover, many glossaries with thick cultural meaning and great art were abstracted and

accumulated during the long oral expressive activity. Language of folk literature is crystal of the populace's wisdom, and is the root of the creation of children's literature. The creation of children's literature absorb nutrition consciously from the mine of the language of folk literature. On one side, children's literary works are written with plain, nearly spoken words that children may comprehend; on the other side, they adopt the concise, visual and lively words to give children beautiful enjoyment.

Conciseness is the basic quality for the language of children's literature. There is a children's song *Wash Hands*:

Huahua Liushui Qingyouqing  
The water is clear and clean  
XiXi Xiaoshou Jiang Weisheng  
Wash my hands clean  
Dajia Shenshou Biyibi  
Let's show our hands  
Kankan Shuide Zui Ganjing  
To see whose hands are the most clean

In this song, the theme of keeping hands clean is clearly expressed. Children can understand it at the hearing of it. So the song is suitable for children's ability of understanding, thus achieves the effect it is expected to have.

A poem named *The Sea is Asleep* in Liu Rao-min's poem anthology *Song of the Sea* is:

Feng'er Bunaole  
The wind stopped playing  
Lang'er Buxiaole  
The wave stopped laughing  
Shenye Li  
It's midnight  
Dahai shuijiaole

The sea is asleep  
Ta Baozhe Mingyue  
She hugs the bright moon  
Ta Beizhe Xingxing  
She carries the stars on her back  
Na Qingqingde Chaosheng A  
The gently sound of her tide  
Shi Ta Shuishu De Hansheng  
Is her snore

The song describes the peaceful night sea for us with just a few vivid words. Liu personified the sea with "Baozhe (hug)", "Beizhe (carry ...on her back)", "Hansheng (snore)" to show to us the graceful and peaceful mother—the sea at night. This kind of works can not only attract children to read them, but also can improve their ability of taste beauty and the ability of expressing what they want to express with simple but beautiful words.

By absorbing and inheriting the folklore in a critical way, the language of children's literature is enriched. It has become and is becoming more and more suitable to children's ability to understand and appreciate it, making it suitable for children.

#### Conclusion

In a word, children's literature has close contact with folk literature. During the shape and development of children's literature, children's literature was deeply affected by folk literature on contents, ideas, artistic manifestation and language. On some certain meaning, it's the base of children's literature. The writers of children's literature should be more conscious to absorb nourishment from folk literature to create more children's literature and contribute to the development and boom of children's literature. ❖

## FIFTH ISSUE



ISSN 0972-6462

## Indian Folklore Research Journal (IFRJ)

Volume 2, Issue 5, December 2005

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## For all children, the first books they read are the keys to the magic of the world ...

Dr. Zakir Hussain, 1967

SAMINA MISHRA is a film maker and an author of children's books based in New Delhi.

Two years ago I worked on a project, *the Magic Key*, a collection of six children's stories written by Dr. Zakir Husain in Urdu. *The Magic Key* series is in English, Hindi and four other Indian languages. I had heard these stories as a child because the writer was my great-grandfather. But their readership was extremely limited because they were only available in Urdu (and some badly translated, badly produced versions in Hindi and English). As a media practitioner who had done a fair amount of work with and for children, I felt that these were a bunch of stories waiting to get into the minds of children across India. They were written in colloquial Hindustani, in simple prose and had a parable-like quality. It was apparent that some of the stories like *Poori Jo Kadhai Mein Se Nikal Bhagi*, were retold versions of fables like the Gingerbread Man but their localised flavour and language was their fresh appeal - a poori running away from a kadhai, a chicken called *Choozu Mian* from the Hindi word Chooza for chicken, a charpai being placed in an angan.

I grew up on Hans Christian Anderson and Enid Blyton and I'm sure they have a lot to do with my love for reading. So, while I think that children across the world should continue to read them, I am uncomfortable with the virtual monopoly that western children's books have had in English, in India. I think children across the world should also read stories that come from other parts of the world. And so, an Indian version of a popular European fairy tale can become a way for us to show children that there are both multiple versions of reality as well as multiple versions of fantasy. The *Magic Key* stories do this. Using the fantastic and the familiar, the simple narrative of such stories can draw children in and at the same time, widen the landscapes in their minds.

*The Magic Key* stories are also windows to the world of small town and village India. A farmer who asks the landless labour to help out in his fields on a festival day, an old man who lives alone in the hills with just his goat for company, a woodcutter who lights a fire and boils potatoes for lunch while he cuts wood deep in the forest, a little girl whose mother is sick and has been getting treated by hakims. These are not realities that today's urbanised children are familiar with and yet they are still some of the realities of modern India. Children's stories can be a way to familiarise children with these realities in a casual manner without unduly exoticising them. These are the characters of *the Magic Key* stories

but it is not this that the stories are about. The stories are about other things, ideas that are more universal - the desire for freedom, the fulfilling of a promise, pride and it's proverbial fall. And so, without drawing attention to the fact that the stories are set in a world so different from the reader's, these stories can make a place in children's minds for the diversity and plurality that need to be acknowledged in today's world.

Another thing about these stories that appealed to me was the language. Written in spoken Hindustani, the stories used words that are less and less available in the mainstream. For example, a character praying to God and calling him Allah Mian or the wind whose *daman* gets stuck in a thorny bush or the fragrant harsingar flowers which waft down in the breeze. These are words derived from a cultural terrain that is more marginalised today and it is important to fight this marginalisation through a more commonplace usage of words like these. Then there were the names - Mian Chut Dumey Khargosh, Bi Mut Dumee Lomdi, Bibi Luplup. The words Mian, Bi or Bibi are so rarely heard but were once common words of respectful address in North India. Including them in a casual manner in a story can, thus, become a way to inform children about these cultural nuances, without unnecessary exoticising. And so, even in the English versions of the stories, we decided to keep the Hindustani words for those terms which did not have an equivalent in English. Mr Bob Tailed Rabbit, Madam Bushy Tailed Fox or Mrs Slobbering Dog just aren't the same thing!

Sometimes, fable like stories such as these, which have been written in an earlier time are also untouched by the social and political realities of the times we now live in. So, in the version that I and children of my generation read, the hunter in Red Riding Hood cut open the wolf's tummy to free Red Riding Hood and her grandmother. This seemingly violent act has led to more sanitised versions of the fairy tale being written to suit the more sanitised understanding of childhood today. As a reader of the 'violent' version, I don't remember being traumatised by the story. I just remember being entertained by the drama of Good triumphing over Evil. Fantasy is about the fantastic and as children, we find an instinctive understanding of characters that are not real, performing acts that are not real. But it is also true that stories derived from an oral tradition lend themselves to being changed as they move through changing times. This is, perhaps, inevitable. But should political correctness affect these tales so much that they lose their primary ability—that of entertaining children and drawing them into a world of books?



## Indian Children's Literature: How the Past is Eroding the Present

Deepa Agarwal

DEEPA AGARWAL, D-123, Preet Vihar, Delhi.

Even though they were not originally created as stories for children, the classical myths of Greece and Rome, stories from Norse mythology and our own great religious epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and the Puranas have proved to be both popular and enduring when retold for young readers. Unlike the myths of the west, which are well liked as fascinating stories, Indian myths being part of living religious beliefs serve a more important purpose. They help to impart ethical values and religious knowledge; hence their narration enjoys a validity that survives to this day. Paradoxically, this enormous bank of traditional stories in our country, which could have served to stimulate creativity, has actually stifled the growth of original children's literature.

Along with other tales from the oral tradition, myths became popular as children's stories when grandfathers and grandmothers discovered they were excellent for providing moral and religious instruction to children besides diverting them. Thus, generations of Indian children grew up listening to these stories while they were coaxed into finishing their meals or going to sleep.

This tradition had a significant effect on the evolution of children's literature in India. When printing was introduced and the importance of developing a separate body of reading material for children was recognized, this fund of stories supplied easily accessible material for writers and publishers to draw upon. And since stories for children have always had an aim beyond improving reading skills or providing information or knowledge—to guide young minds—this literature, ratified over the ages for its values, seemed ideal.

In the course of time, original literature for children began to be created. However, even when it displayed excellent quality, it failed to match the allure of the retold myths. The main reason being that in a country like ours where tradition is sacrosanct, parents, who usually select books for their children, feel far more comfortable buying retold versions of stories based on mythology. Being familiar with these tales from their own childhood, they are confident that they are providing the right kind of literature for their kids. Reading myths will keep the young in touch with their heritage, culture or religion, they feel, and inculcate the correct values. These issues acquire greater weight in urban nuclear families where grandparents, who traditionally passed on these stories, are not around and the pressures of contemporary existence mean that parents have little time to fulfill this role themselves.

This fascination with myths is evident when we consider that the greatest success story of publishing for children in our country is the *Amar Chitra Katha* series of comic books, largely based on traditional stories. On the other hand it would be hard to identify even one book by a contemporary Indian writer that has enjoyed nationwide popularity.

But can we blame parents for rejecting original contemporary children's literature? The truth is, they have no way of assessing its worth. Children's books are seldom reviewed in newspapers or magazines, nor are their writers given any kind of exposure in the media. Publishers too either lack resources or feel it is not worth their while to promote such books. Reading promotion programmes, which could disseminate such information, are scattered and remain ineffective.

How does this effect the development of a vibrant body of children's literature in our country? It is wonderful that our children have access to a vast treasure of captivating myths. But they also need a literature that tells their own stories and provides role models drawn from their immediate lives. While they might be moved by the story of Rama's exemplary life, thrilled by Hanuman's feats, inspired by Arjun's valour and fascinated by Krishna's complex personality, their reading experience remains incomplete without a fiction which is more present-day. They need stories that deal with current issues, science fiction, the adventures of children like themselves and all the different kinds of stories that are being written for children in other parts of the world.

Award winning children's writer Katherine Paterson states in *A Sense of Wonder*, her fascinating book on writing for children, "Mythology and fairy tales deal directly with archetypes...they help children...to face and conquer their inner dragons." She goes on to talk about fiction: "In fiction, you see, our medium is not the archetypal forms but human experience, which is truth at a very earthly level."

It is this human experience and truth at the earthly level that is sadly in short supply for Indian children. While many talented writers have struggled to offer their best for children, this conservative attitude on the part of parents and publishers, combined with the indifference of the media, ensures that there are few takers for their work. In the meantime, shoddily produced, poorly written and indifferently selected stories from mythology continue to flood the market and our children remain deprived of a variety of choice in their reading matter even as Indian children's literature continues to remain short of originality.



## Mongolian Folklore and perception of space

Mashbat O. Sarlagtay\_\_\_\_\_

MASHBAT O. SARLAGTAY, C/o, MAJ. Munkh Ochir Dorjngder, Institute for Strategic Studies, Ministry of Defence, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Mongolia is known for its rich folklore tradition. Genres of folklore, such as ancient myths, proverbs, sayings, good wishes, blessings, children's tales, and epics depicting happiness, yearning and wisdom of the people have been inherited and passed down orally, from generation to generation, since time immemorial.<sup>1</sup> Mongolian folktales survived and thrived thanks to the tradition of storytelling. Only in the 20th century did Mongolian academics begin to collect them to write them down. As academician P. Khorloo and other scholars point out,

... Even in the primitive stage of development during the struggle with nature and the domestication of wild animals, labor songs, and verses and melodies on livestock breeding emerged and came down to our day, evolving in accordance with our cultural development.<sup>2</sup>

It is a millennia-long history of herdsmen's long, drawn-out songs, verses and melodies related to herding horses, fencing sheep and other national peculiarities, melodious and eloquent verses, proverbs, tales and epics that has passed down to the present generation.

As storytellers added a few details, the tales themselves evolved during the centuries. And - as the Mongolian people say - there are as many different versions of a story as there are people telling it.

Mongolian folktales can be classified into four main groups:<sup>3</sup>

- Zoomorphic and anthropomorphic tales featuring animals acting like humans.
- Tales that tell of a hero who defeats his enemy and wins the beautiful, young woman. There is a difference to the European stories: in the Mongolian tales this young man is often not a prince but a simple hunter or the son of a poor shepherd.
- Tales about magic beings such as magic horses, fairies and - instead of the dragon in European tales - the Mongolians have the "*Mangus*," a truly horrible beast.
- Tales discussing the problems of everyday life. Into this group fit the tales about one special figure

within the Mongolian tales: *The Badarcin*, a traveling monk, who resembles *Robin Hood* or, even more, *Till Eulenspiegel*. He helps the poor against the rich, fighting with humor and intelligence.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the most significant feature of Mongolian folktales is its temporal and spatial perceptions, often reflected in the mentality of the Mongolians even at present. As nomadic people, the Mongolians do not like boundaries or limits. The mentality and lifestyle determined by animal husbandry cannot recognize any limits in any dimensions, including time and space. Liberty means, for Mongolians, "no limits."

There are many Mongolian folk tales and myths in which space and time become meaningless. For example:

... A giant was escaping from a courageous knight. He saw a little old man herding his sheep and begged him to help. Old man said 'Go into my nostrils.' The giant went into nostrils of the old man's nose. Then the courageous knight came and asked, 'Have you seen a giant escaping?' The old man answered: 'Yes, he is in my nostrils.' The knight also entered the old man's nose. He found the giant there and they fought. The old man's nose began to irritate him and he coughed, and both the giant and the knight fell out of his nose.<sup>5</sup>

The tale continues in this way. We see that space is flexible and changeable in the story. A giant goes inside the little hole of an old man's nose. And a knight, too. I want to emphasize that in this tale both of them were riding horses. There are no limits to space!

This is not the only tale, which telescopes time and space. There are lot of such stories; for example, another which says that "a battalion of ten thousand troops landed in the single bone of a dead sheep by the order of the Khan, to punish a foxy old woman living in the bone," and so forth.

Unlike in modern society the concepts of private ownership of land was meaningless in the nomadic mentality. Land was something like air or the ocean, impossible to divide and possess. It was not even public property, but simply a limitless expanse where people live and more. Nomads wanted to travel everywhere and across everything, without any limits. Can you imagine their thoughts, if a stranger appeared before them, saying, "This piece of land is mine" and prohibiting them from

going across it? To own a little piece of landmass of the universe, saying, "It is mine," sounds to them like "this cubic meter of air is mine, so you cannot breathe it!" It is impossible to imagine. It is said that the Native Americans have a quite similar view.

Hence, from the Mongolian nomadic lifestyle and its influence on the folktales we can trace some unique traits in Mongolian mentality: abstract notions of time and space, further reflected in a rather reluctant acceptance of the modern capitalist concept of private ownership of land.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> P.Khorloo, D.Sandagdorj and N.Jantsannorov, *Introduction to Mongolian Art, Folk Tradition and Music*.

See <http://www.indiana.edu/~mongsoc/mong/artmusic.htm>

<sup>2</sup> *Mongolian Folktales*, See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/alabaster/A577992>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Mashbat O. Sarlagtay, "Cultural Aspect of Security within the Concept of Mongolian Civilization Problem," in *Regional Security Issues and Mongolia*, Vol.17, Ulaanbaatar, 2003, pp. 4-5.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

The theme of  
July 2006 issue of  
*Indian Folklife*  
is

"Globalization  
and Tribes of  
Northeast India"

Guest Editor:

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## Thematic Introduction

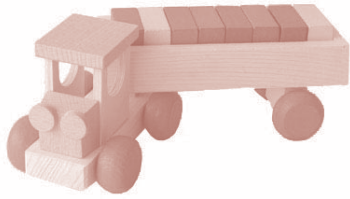
Loosely considered globalization is a process of integration of people and cultures through free trade resulting in an increased interdependence among countries of the world. It is not a natural process, as the rich countries of the world under regimes such as WTO have initiated it. The metaphoric allusion to such a process that "the world is a village" or "we live in a global village" sounds good as it underlines a sense of bonhomie and felicity but the mechanism of globalization is not that sweet as it raises question of political sovereignty of countries, unethical trade practices and marginalizing the already

marginalized by reducing their purchasing power, ironically, in a market flooded with commodities increasing a consumer's options for making choices. However, in many countries and informed quarters globalization is viewed with anxiety. There are aggressive advocates in both camps for and against globalization. The common charge against globalization is that it is an extension of western capitalism; empowered by free market economy it perpetuates neo-colonialism. Under its sway, the powerful force it unleashes, it is argued, preservation of cultures and identities in their pristine/undiluted state becomes impossible resulting, on the one hand, in alienation of identities and, on the other, in cultural chaos.

Beyond the economic and political debates, it is presumed that globalization is a challenge to cultures, in particular, to marginalized communities and their identities. Interestingly, when we look around us today we find what is specific and local acquires the object of global desire while the so-called global circulates freely, unhindered in the local market. In such a scenario where the local and the global seem to overlap, the discursive articulation of the difference of identities and social and cultural practices become more crucial. In the context of the tribes of Northeast, it is feared that globalization may bring in large-scale commodification of their cultures and would erase their unique identities that are so far consolidated mostly on the premise of ethnic *difference*. We need to examine how far these anxieties and fears are genuine while keeping in mind the fact that culture is a productive space and it undergoes mutations.

One serious critique of globalization is that under its regime identities are dehistoricized. Although globalization dehistoricizes, it cannot certainly erase an identity totally except creating hybrid identities. For identities are under a period of rapid evolution today in matters of rights, articulations and solidarity movements and so on in our country is it then feasible to preserve a pure, uncontaminated identity with a romantic notion of its uniqueness? As "Northeast" and "tribe"(s) are inescapable givens, any discussion on/about identity or culture in the context of the tribes of Northeast, in the wake of globalization, has to be negotiated through the trope of in-betweenness. The in-betweenness as a frame of reference has to take into account general assumptions often invoked around constructs such as "Northeast" and "tribe"(s) and specific examples of particularity in the context of a particular identity and culture.

As identity is a construct can it be essentialised when all other contributing conditions to its constitution change? Beyond and beside identity, we need to examine what happens to cultural products such as indigenous music, textile designs, handicrafts, herbal medicines, dance forms and so on under globalization? In its wake as globalization unleashes the market forces can indigenous cultural products remain what they are or will they respond to the market forces and bring in economic prosperity to the people? These are some of the issues we need to ponder over when we write about globalization and its impact on tribes of Northeast and their cultures.



## Rapunzel in the classroom

Shobhana Bhattacharji

SHOBHANA BHATTACHARJI, D-1008, New Friends Colony, New Delhi.

The Grimm Brothers' first collection of stories appeared in 1812, but variations of "Rapunzel" had existed in Europe long before then. It has been published repeatedly since 1812, sometimes in radically altered aspects.

The basic story remains more or less the same. The baby daughter of poor parents is given to a rich woman in exchange for a herb — rampion / rapunzel / rhubarb — which the mother craves in her pregnancy. When the girl is 12 years old, the woman locks her in a tower that has a window but no door or staircase. She climbs up Rapunzel's long hair when she wants to visit her. A prince hears Rapunzel singing, they fall in love, and plan to elope, but then the foster mother discovers them. Enraged, she leaves Rapunzel in a lonely desert, and throws the prince into a thorn bush which blinds him. After many years of wandering about, he hears Rapunzel singing, and follows her voice. Her tears of joy fall upon his eyes and restore his sight. They return to his kingdom where they live happily ever after.

In its social topography, the rich and the careful live next door to the poor and the feckless. The high wall around the rich woman's garden implies that individuals must guard their own property, the abundance of produce in her garden suggests that she is a careful worker. There is much hidden information here.

But the story's variations especially fascinate students, especially with regard to the foster mother whom they wrongly call a witch. In older versions, she is kind, clever, and possibly rich, vestiges of which continue in most modern versions. The woman doesn't mistreat Rapunzel in the way that girls are mistreated in folk tales. She doesn't starve her, or make her cook, sweep, scrub the floor, wash clothes and pots and pans, or fetch water and wood. Far from being her chattel, Rapunzel calls her "Mother" in many versions. Even though she locks Rapunzel in the tower, she visits her regularly. This doesn't impress my students who point out that the older woman is Rapunzel's only companion, and how can locking up the girl be a kindness? We discuss the social controls placed upon girls from the time of puberty, accompanied by the propaganda that the controls are for their safety. They identify with this. They discuss the fear of female sexuality, and the representation of women in popular and serious literature as monsters who tempt men from their true and heroic journey through life.

The foster mother is single, wealthy, lives alone, and apparently manages her land and wealth competently without male help. Possibly because she is so unusual, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the ideal middle class woman was supposed to be feminine and submissive, she is called "enchantress." By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, she becomes a witch. After a discussion about the construction and persecution of witches, we notice that the kindness of Rapunzel's foster mother is progressively underplayed until in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it disappears, and Rapunzel sleeps on straw in a dark, damp room. The development of the foster mother and her relationship with Rapunzel also coincides with the idealization of middle class childhood from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a fallout of which is that children are sought to be insulated from unpalatable truths. E.g., They are not sent away by their parents but are kidnapped. The desire to protect children in this way at a time when many of them experience domestic rupture either directly or through the media seems odd.<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of "Rapunzel" do not flinch from the fact that parents do abandon their children, or that they can love each other more than they love their children, but recent retellings start with Rapunzel being kidnapped by a witch. Idealisation and dumbing down accompany the transition of "Rapunzel" from folk tale to children's story. In the folk tale, Rapunzel becomes pregnant and has twins; in modern versions aimed at children, she is sexually chaste.

The curious figure of the rich female neighbour may be a remnant of an older matriarchal society. She certainly has something to do with selling daughters. Google produces 150 results for "Sale of a daughter," but only 28 for the sale of a son, and these refer to selling a son in a film, the sale of the son of a horse, and the adoption of a male orphan by a childless male, which is less a sale than the child being born into a new family.<sup>2</sup> Daughters, however, are actually sold, as ancient texts from many countries including India tell us. Fathers have Biblical permission to sell their daughters of a tender age as maid-servants to rich men in order to eventually become their concubines (Exodus 21: 7-11).<sup>3</sup> Mothers did not have similar authority. In the Middle Ages a European woman was convicted for selling her daughter for an acre of land.<sup>4</sup> Poverty may have compelled her to sell her daughter, as poor parents from Japan to Africa continue to be. "Rapunzel" opens with the father bartering his daughter for a handful of salad leaves but there's a twist. Fantasy, integral to folk and fairy tales, is evident in the story's abrupt transitions, the disappearance of the parents and foster mother, and in Rapunzel's efficiently having twins

all by herself in the desert. But its finest fantasy is that Rapunzel is not given to a man as his concubine or chattel, but to a woman who treats her like a daughter.<sup>5</sup> We could add it to the comforting aspects of this story reported by Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment*.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Contemporary children's stories are more realistic. They include the grief that modern children live with.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.armworld.co.uk/images/OrphanSpirit.pdf> Accessed 26.2.2006.

<sup>3</sup> See <<http://www.deminbuster.com/slaves.html>> Accessed 26.2.2006.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/hyams-dausale.html>. Accessed 26.2.2006.

<sup>5</sup> Some modern commentators feel that the woman thinks of the prince as her rival for Rapunzel's sexual favours, but Bruno Bettelheim feels that she punishes the young couple because they betrayed her trust, and were she truly wicked, she might have cursed or killed them, whereas she only separates them. Besides, after a time, their fortunes are restored.

*This is an extract from an actual correspondence between a Grandfather concerned about his seven-year old grand-daughter's questions about leprechauns and an Irish diplomat.*

— Original Message —

To,

Officer I/C Cultural & Literary Affairs  
ABC Embassy, New Delhi.

Dear Sir,

I am 70 years, while my Grand Daughter Medha is 7 years old. I am at Faridabad while she is at Bostan USA. Studying in class 2 under an Irish teacher, Medha has been told about a legendary insect of Irish Fabler which is supposed to be very mischievous. She has written to me that it is called leprechauns which are tricky because they trick you when you want to get their gold. If you tell a leprechaun to promise you something. They want always do it. She thinks they have lot of gold. Leprechauns slide down rainbows. She wants to know "WHERE THEY GET THEIR GOLD FROM?"

Well I don't know the answer! Can you answer the question so that I could reply her!

Soliciting your esteemed reply

Mr. X,  
Faridabad  
Haryana 121006

## Reply

Dear Mr. X,

Thank you for your recent enquiry. I apologise for the delay in replying but, because of the highly sensitive and secret issues involved, I had to refer to senior authorities in the Irish Government administration - the Department of Administration of Fairy Folk Issues (DAFFI), for guidance as to the level of 'classification' of information on this subject, and how much I was allowed to divulge to the public. I am sure a man with your background will understand the need for discretion in such matters of national and international security.

Your grand-daughter's teacher seems well-informed about Fairy Folk, and this is of course not surprising. Magical creatures tend to concentrate in areas of high magical power. Ireland is of course the global centre of magical power and has the highest concentration of magical creature populations. High magic concentrations are also found in regions which have large populations of Irish migrants, and Boston is one of these, so it is not surprising that Medha's teacher should be more attuned to these issues.

However, she is wrong on one fundamental issue. Leprechauns are not insects, but are actually humanoid in form, although much smaller. In common with some insects, they are capable of flight and one leading theory is that they achieve their invisibility (for they cannot be seen under normal circumstances by humans with the naked eye) through the very rapid beating of their wings, which causes distortion in the transmission of light waves. Anyway, I do not want to get too technical; the point is that they are small (child-sized) flying humanoids, and are likely indeed to be highly offended if they come to know they are being called insects. Your granddaughter does NOT want to get a 'leprechaun' offended - they can, as her teacher points out, be quite 'tricky', and have the ability to inflict various curses and spells.

There are various theories about the nature of 'leprechaun' society. One is that they are 'conmen/women' who embezzle gold from unsuspecting or gullible humans with promises of magical favours. However, our research indicates that this description better suits lawyers, real estate agents and plastic surgeons, and is disputed by much of the evidence to hand. We believe instead that 'leprechauns' are in fact the Police force of the 'lower element' and our archives indicate that the name actually derives from the term 'LEP recon' (LEP being an acronym for Lower Element Police and 'recon' short for reconnaissance), and that their main function is to regulate the boundaries between the Lower Element - the world inhabited by dwarves, goblins, trolls and other Fairy Folk - and the human dimension. Their gold, according to this school of thought, is honestly come by, and is used as a power source for their transport devices (known as 'rainbows')

necessary for travel to the 'surface' (the human world) in order to re-charge their magical potential (this is done in rituals at certain high-magic locations such as the Hill of Tara in Ireland, the Bermuda Triangle etc). The gold may also be retained as 'ransom' in case of an incident of Fairy Folk being captured or abducted by criminal humans (shocking, I know, but it happens). All of this information comes from DAFFI documents, and I would be grateful if you could treat it confidentially. You may of course share it with your grand-daughter, who sounds like a sensible and questioning young person, and her teacher (who clearly needs some clarifications in her ideas on Fairy Folk issues), but please do not spread this around too widely.

The reason I ask for discretion is that the quest for Leprechaun gold has been known to lead to 'gold-hunting' expeditions by unscrupulous humans, and these adventures have the potential to disrupt serious research into these important matters and, more worryingly, to augment tension between the Lower Element and the human world through, for example, the kind of abductions mentioned above. It is not widely known, but a number of potential human-fairy folk wars have been narrowly averted over the centuries, confrontation having been triggered by such 'gold-hunters'. I am sure you will agree that we diplomats have enough to do in trying to stop human neighbours from going to war with

each other without having to worry about smoothing ruffled feathers (or wings at least) of our fairy cousins! Even for Irish diplomats, relations with the wee folk are a sensitive challenge.

Medha is, I think, at an age where she could read and appreciate some of the better written works concerning Fairy Folk and Leprechauns and I would advise that she pursue further research in the works of Eoin Colfer. His books offer a superb (and very entertaining and amusing) insight into the world of the Lower Element, and will tell her (and her teacher) all she needs to know about the subject. More information can be found at [www.artemisfowl.com](http://www.artemisfowl.com) and I recommend that she click her way along there as soon as possible.

In the meantime, I hope the foregoing is of some help, and please do not hesitate to contact us again if we can be of further assistance in this or any other matter.

Yours faithfully,

Mr. Z

First Secretary

(Science, Technology and Fairy Folk issues)

Officer I/C Cultural & Literary Affairs

ABC Embassy, New Delhi.



## Bengali Folklore and Children's Literature

Barnita Bagchi

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'Is there anything more *swadeshi* than *Thakurmar Jhuli*, the Grandmother's Bag? But alas, in recent times even this bag full of sweets has come already manufactured from the factories of Manchester. Nowadays, fairy tales from the West have become almost the sole recourse of our boys. The Grandmother Companies from our own country are bankrupt. If one rattles their bags, perhaps a copy of Martin's Ethics or Burke's notebooks on the French Revolution might pop out—but where are our princes, our magic birds *byangama* and *byangami*, or the gem of seven kings that lies beyond seven seas and thirteen oceans?'

Thus wrote Rabindranath Tagore, in the preface to Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar's distinguished and

beloved collection of Bengali folk and fairy tales, *Thakurmar Jhuli* (1907). In this short piece, which will necessarily unearth only the tip of a huge ice-berg, I shall be looking at the way in which the vast treasure-house of mostly oral Bengali folklore was both recovered and recreated/ reinvented by educated Bengali middle-class writers, mostly male, in the twentieth century. As Rabindranath's preface shows, there was a distinct political and nationalist edge to this enterprise of recovering the heritage of *pallibangla* or rural Bengal, an edge which fitted neatly into the steadily growing anti-colonial and anti-British movement in Bengal, embodied most famously in the 1905 movement against *bangabhanga* or the first attempted partition of Bengal. The yearning to capture a pastoral of innocence and folksiness for the 'boys' (note the gender) of Bengal is part of a modernizing Bengali bourgeoisie's attempt to recapture a world of tradition, which seems always to be eluding the grasp of the jaded urban middle-class man.

Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar (1877-1957) was born, like most of the other figures who figure simultaneously in the history of Bengali children's literature and that of the recovery of its folklore, in today's Bangladesh, the east Bengal of those days; Mymensingh, the district where he and Upendrakishore Roy Chowdhury were born, had a particularly rich history of folk narratives, including the *Mymensingh Geetikas*, which were ballad-like songs. Both Dakshinaranjan and the famous Bengali *pallikavi* or village poet Jasimuddin were inspired by the enthusiasm and scholarship shown in the recovery of Bengali folk literature by the great scholar Dineshchandra Sen. In addition to *Thakurmar Jhuli*, Dakshinaranjan published three other collections of folk and fairy tales, namely *Thakurdadar Jhuli* (1909), *Thandidir Thale* (1909), and *Dadamashayer Thale* (1913). The title of each of these collections alludes to these stories' belonging to a grandparent—again, we have a sense of a precious heritage that is entrusted to a generation of robust but fragile elderly people.

Each of the collections is subtitled to make subtle generic distinctions. While *Thakumar Jhuli* is subtitled *banglar rupkatha, or Fairy Tales of Bengal*, *Thakurdadar Jhuli* is subtitled *banglar kathasahitya, or the Narrative Literature of Bengal*, and *Dadamashayer Thale* is subtitled *banglar rasakatha, or Humorous Tales of Bengal*. *Thakurdadar Jhuli* offers a series of heroine-centred romances or novellas, in which the chastity, valour, and devotion to family and conjugality of a series of Bengali women validates an ideological project of the construction of a brand of traditional, but heroic (*punyabati* and *sati*, pious, virtuous, and chaste) femininity. If one looks at the glowing endorsements of Dakshinaranjan's collections that are even today reprinted in modern editions of the books, one is struck by the litany of names of nationalist leaders who eulogized his work: Sri Aurobindo, Chittaranjan Das, Sir Surendranath Banerjee, to take some prominent examples.

Nilkamal and Lalkamal, two half-brothers who fight together despite the fact that one is the son of a woman, while the other is the son of a *rakshasi* or demon, or the seven brothers who protect the beloved only sister Champa—such narratives of Dakshinaranjan's quickly became commonplace lore in Bengali middle-class households, and could also easily assume moral-political contours.

Jasimuddin (1903-1976), who became one of the iconic poets of liberated EastPakistan, namely Bangladesh, was also heavily influenced by Dineshchandra Sen, under whom he worked as Ramtanu Lahiri Assistant Research Fellow from 1931 to 1937, collecting folk literature. His very first book of verse, *Rakhali* (shepherd) (1927) offered evidence of his passionate love and commitment to rural Bengal as a utopian and lyrical locus. Some of his most famous works were *Naksi Kanthar Math* (*The Field of the*

*Embroidered Quilt*) (1929) and *Bangalir Hasir Galpa* (*Humorous Tales of Bengalis*). Again, Jasimuddin's deep involvement in non-communal socio-political movements championing the cause of Bengali language and literature gives his lyric and folksy poetry a keen edge of commitment and protest. His poems are popular as part of school curricula in West Bengal, India as much as in Bangladesh.

Satyajit Ray records in his autobiography that he was taught in school by Jasimuddin. In 1968, Ray directed a film which is to date one of the most loved works, among children and adults alike: *Goopy Byne Bagha Byne* (*The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha*). The folk-tale like story on which the film is based was written by Ray's grandfather Upendrakishore Roy Chowdhury (1863-1915), a man of numerous talents like his son Sukumar Ray and his grandson Satyajit. It was Upendrakishore who started the legendary children's magazine *Sandesh*, which was revived by Satyajit and his cousins, and which is still published.

*Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* is the story of two simple village lads, who speak a distinctive East Bengal dialect. In Ray's hands, the earthiness, good nature, and simplicity of the lower-caste Goopy, the singer, and Bagha, the drummer, assume a particularly potent positive force when contrasted with the exploitative, parasitic, rapacious malice of the upper caste village elders Goopy is banished by. A bad singer and a bad drummer, Goopy and Bagha are blessed by a marvellously eerie King of Ghosts, who give them three boons whereby they can eat what they want, go where they want, and please people with their music. On their adventures, Goopy and Bagha go off to a country misruled by a wicked, imperialistic, warmongering minister—again, Ray's social commentary, in the context of the anti-US imperialist movement of the late 1960s is obvious. Alongside, Ray created charming, lilting songs that are still on the lips of most Bengalis.

This article has argued that the subtle but ideologically loaded reworkings of Bengali folk literature as Bengali middle-class children's literature need to be approached as *Kunstmärchen*, artfully reconstructed folktales, and as examples of pastoral, which, we know, is always political. Ray's beautifully wrought, enjoyable, aesthetically pleasing, humanist *Goopy Gyne* is proof that such reinventions can be both critical and pleasurable, bringing to urban and rural children alike a joyful, peaceloving, songloving, lifegiving ethos and vision.

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**COURTESY: Cathy Spagnoli**

The world of Indian Stories: a teaching resource of folktales from every state  
(*Tulika, Chennai, 2003*) pp.113-115.

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## Notes on Tale Types

As teachers, tellers, and scholars explore the world of storytelling and oral traditions, they often use several tools to explore story connections. Several of the books that list folk tale types and motifs do not include many stories from recent Asian collections; however, they still give us a comparative tool of some use. In this list, I've suggested types and motifs from the two references below, and shared some of the variants found. I hope this will help teachers to understand the "shared experience" of stories through the commonality of themes, motifs, and characters.

Aarne, Antti and Stith Thompson. *The Types of the Folktale*. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1960. (FF Communication 184). This classic collection of tale types (each type labeled AT below), lists hundreds of separate types of tales. In FF Communication 180, from the same Academia in 1960, *Types of Indic Oral Tales* are covered by Thompson and Warren E. Roberts. A supplement to that was published by the Academia in 1989 by Heda Jason, as FF Communication 242.

MacDonald, Margaret Read and B. Sturm. *The Storyteller's Sourcebook*. Two volumes are now published, both from Gale Group, N.Y. (The motifs used in this book come from Stith Thompson's famous, multi-volume *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, listing thousands of themes and motifs found in folk tales; labelled below with Motif before a letter and number.)

### Andhra Pradesh *A Ruby Returned*

Although Indian tricksters like Birbal at Akbar's court, Gopal Bhand of Bengal and Tenali Rama of Vijayanagara have all solved problems and found culprits, this tale features a "true" judge who uses wit to solve many of his cases. The story illustrates tale type AT 926 C - The clever judge. Other famous judges in world folklore include Princess Learned-in-the-Law of Myanmar, Judge Ooka of Japan, Judge Bao of China, and Judge Rabbit of Cambodia.

### Arunachal Pradesh *A Porcupine's Tricks*

The trickster tale is one of the most popular genres in Indian and worldwide folklore, known as type 1539 - Tricksters and their victims. Smaller, weaker animal tricksters (Motif J 1117) frequently outwit larger creatures in many cultures. However, the porcupine is not a common trickster figure, which adds interest to this tale. A few of the more usual animal tricksters include Coyote of Mexico, Kancil the mousedeer of Indonesia and

Malaysia, Raven of Northwest Native Americans, and the fox in much of Europe, China, Korea, and Japan.

### Assam *A Fair Deal*

An arrogant ruler is humbled in this tale of animal teamwork (illustrating Motif L400 - Pride brought low, and B299.1 - Animals take revenge on man). The animal army is not a common theme, but the loyalty of the little animal (frog) to the old couple is more familiar. Similar tales of small animals helping humans can be found from the Northwest Coast of Canada where a tiny mouse helps a girl escape to the friendly bees that save a Balinese woman from an attack.

### Bihar *Baawan Ganga*

Here is a tale with a rich range of themes and characters, one in which the humans and animals work in total harmony to defy even the heavens. The parrot often plays an important role in folk stories as a helper of humans, just as Puss-in-Boots does in a European Tale. The role of the clever woman is an important one, too (AT 875 - The clever peasant girl), and found in many cultures; this heroine impresses us not just with her wisdom but also with her kindness. Finally, the story ends with an origin motif - A910 (Origin of water features) - as it explains the origin of the small pool named Baawan Ganga.

### Chhattisgarh *The Karam Story*

A very important theme for today is shared here: to hurt a tree is to hurt a human. Good fortune is tied to respecting Nature is seen as well in the rich tale, "A Flowering Tree," from Karnataka. The importance of honoring and caring for nature is a theme found especially among Native American and other indigenous peoples even today. Variants are found in other tribal traditions in India and in Hindi and Kashmiri. The tale reminds us that song and dance are vital to life, as it shares the origin of a special dance (Motif A1542 - Origin of religious dances).

### Delhi *The Lost Camel / The Lost Money*

The first tale, of the camel, is not widely told, but there are many other tales of wisdom that remind us all to use our eyes to nurture our brains. The second tale is one of the many about Birbal, the beloved Indian trickster (related to Motif J 1124 - Clever court jester). There are several famous tales of both Birbal and the South Indian wit Tenali Rama as they expose court corruption; this tale seems to be less known. Birbal, as a court wit, bears a great resemblance to Trang Quynh of Vietnam and A-Chey of Cambodia.

### Goa *The Foolish Farmers of Moira*

Towns of foolish people are found around the world: Gotham in England, Chelm in Poland, Lagos in Mexico, Schildburg of Germany, to name a few. Moira's inhabitants, like those in other towns named, try to move buildings by pushing them, plant and harvest in strange ways, make silly bargains, and do much more. The

unusual planting method in this tale resembles AT 1201 (The ploughing), one of the many such tale types. The more unusual tale of a language mix-up in church, however, reflects the faith and blend of cultures found in Goa.

#### **Gujarat *The Wisdom Seller***

A shrewd young man doles out wisdom and lives by his wits (AT 1542: The clever boy) in a story echoed in Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Punjabi, Tamil, and Telugu. The giving of advice is a popular theme (AT 910 - The good precepts), whether the advice comes from a sadhu, a wise woman, a fellow traveller, or a young person. Three pieces of advice are often given (or sold) and they usually result in a fortune gained or a life saved.

#### **Haryana *True Strength***

In an unexpected twist, quite by accident, the rakshas here imparts a lesson in family values. The importance of unity is stressed in tales from "Nyangara" of West Africa (where children unite to save their leader) to the story of the carpenter's fingers (that refuse to work together and thus harm the body) in Laos. The Indian rakshas is often a fierce creature, similar to the oni of Japan, the tokaebi of Korea, and the ogre of European tales; but all of them at times can be fooled or scared, and can show kindness, too.

#### **Himachal Pradesh *The Hunt***

Another rakshas, or creature, interacts with a human here but must change her form to entice him, as in AT 424 - Youth wed to a she-devil. The foxes of East Asia are especially known for similar transformations into beautiful, but ultimately dangerous women. This story warns listeners not to trust appearances or strangers; such tales were often told to teenagers in Native American and African cultures, with a snake, monkey or other animal appearing as a handsome, yet harmful, stranger.

#### **Jharkhand *The First Plough***

This tale reminds listeners of gender injustice and the power that male gods had (and still have) in some cultures. The story is also an origin tale sharing the invention of the plough, a variant of AT 1400 - Origin of human culture and, as such, can be compared with origin tales worldwide.

#### **Jammu and Kashmir *Suyya and the River***

This story of a resourceful engineer moved from early writings in Kashmir into oral legends. The character has parallels with other early inventors and engineers: the Mayans of Mexico and the Egyptians who built amazing pyramids, the South Indian temple builders, Korea's Admiral Yi Sun Sin who invented the armored Turtle Boat to save his land from invaders, among many.

#### **Karnataka *The Laughing Pearl Necklace***

One of countless quest stories found worldwide, this one follows AT 460B - The journey in search of fortune.

The decision of this hero to take books as a reward, though unusual, is certainly a wise one. The help of a supernatural being is also common in folklore, although most do not laugh in pearls. Similar tales of a quest are recorded in Assamese, Bengali, Gondi, Hindi, Kota, Punjabi, Santhali, and Tamil.

#### **Kerala *The Guru***

A lesson in humility is very well wrapped in this tale of martial arts. Similar teaching tales used in martial arts training were found in Japan, Korea and China, and among the European knights of old. Qualities beyond valour were stressed in many such traditions. The motifs in this tale include Q66 - Humility rewarded, and Q86 - Reward for industry.

#### **Madya Pradesh *Buying a Song***

A tale to remind us that anything is of use - even words heard accidentally. Similar tales include the American "Old One-Eye" where an old woman scares away a one-eyed thief, and "On Choro-Choro" from Japan about an old couple who chant words about a mouse and frighten a thief. Other tales are recorded in Bengali, Gondi, Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Punjabi, Rajasthani, and Tamil.

#### **Maharashtra *Parvatibai and the Dacoits***

Tales of clever women are told around the world: some trick with words, some with strength and cunning, and some with kindness. The use of hospitality and gentleness to win over the robbers is wonderful indeed. A tale type would be AT 750B - Hospitality rewarded. Tales of hospitality are still told often in Japan, Korea, India, and in many non-Western countries.

#### **Manipur *Journey to the Sun***

This elaborate story has several motifs and types flowing through it. The healing plant is found in other tales having AT 612 - The three snake leaves. The friendship between man and dog is related to a powerful theme in Korea and Japan folklore: a dog sacrificing himself for his master. The actual journey to the sun is a theme of the quest, while the chase scene is a form of Motif D672 - Obstacle flight. His happy return reminds us of Rip Van Winkle in the U.S. and Urashima Taro in Japan, who both return home to find much has changed.

#### **Meghalaya *A Tale of the Eclipse***

Another rich story with many layers, this tale is as well an origin tale to explain the eclipse. But there are also the motifs of kidnapping, the escape from a monster by help of a small animal (AT 75 - Help of the weak), the transformation of the girl (Motif D 195.3 - Girl to frog) and the destruction of a disguise, similar to the famous Frog Prince of Germany and elsewhere.

#### **Mizoram *The Munia and the Dove***

Chain tales are told and loved throughout the world; they are found under the category Formula Tales. This story is one of the variants with the theme: "Who's to Blame?"

Some such tales give an origin note at the end, as this does, others do not. Similar tales include a story of the otter seeking justice from King Solomon when her children are killed by weasel, the Filipino tale of the mosquito who causes destruction, and the Chilean tale of tenca the songbird who is hurt by the snow, all examples of AT 2042A - Trial among the animals.

### **Nagaland Of Two Worlds**

This tale of love between two different worlds has variants abroad and even in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*. In Japan, the similar story of the sky-maiden and cow herder is celebrated on a special day in the Tanabata Festival. The motif of a magic object is also widespread, as is the theme of the human's search for his wife: AT 400 - Man on a quest for his lost wife.

### **Orissa Rani Shuka Dei**

A simple legend that shares two important themes: the physical bravery and skill of the ruler (W 32 - Bravery), and the kindness and compassion that she showed (W11 - Generosity). Although there are tales of heroic or strong women, the added mercy at the end is not always found. And, sadly, there are still not as many stories, true or traditional, of female rulers. Ahalyabhai Holkar of Indore, India would be another worthy example of such a brave and enlightened ruler.

### **Punjab Very Hungry Man**

Here is a 'fool tale', plain and simple. The foolish bridegroom (AT 1685) and son-in-law (AT 1685A) are extremely popular themes worldwide (more than the foolish daughter-in-law or bride!). Often, the 'fool' is given advice when he goes to visit in-laws. Usually, although he tries, things don't work out. In many tales, he gets into trouble through his stomach: stuffing raw eggs in his mouth (Sheikh Chili), getting covered with cotton in Nepal, hitting his father-in-law in a Tibetan tale.

### **Rajasthan Lightning Strikes**

By a twist of fate, the outcome is the opposite of what is expected in this tale, with variants recorded in Hindi, Kashmiri, Punjabi and in much of Europe and North America. A motif would be N130 - Changing of luck or fate.

### **Sikkim Sweet Potatoes**

Here is a tragic origin tale. Perhaps since a bird's cry often echoes a human voice, origin tales abound about birds (Motif D150 - Transformation of man to bird). Many such tales share sorrow: often the human becomes a bird because s/he is unkind, selfish, or disobedient. At other times, the human turned bird is the victim of cruelty and becomes a bird to haunt or torment. The theme of famine and great hardship also is found in folklore, often with unhappy endings, as in the Lao tale of children abandoned during a famine, who turn into monkeys of the woods.

### **Tamilnadu Kumanan's Sacrifice**

The words in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* - "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" - seem suited to the envy and greed that threaten the land as the story unfolds. The theme of a feud and jealousy between blood brothers is an old one - from the Biblical Cain and Abel through the many folktales of brothers abandoned or hurt. The reigns of righteous rulers were often praised in older Indian literature and folklore; stories of just kings from Ashoka of India to Sejong of Korea have entered into the repertoires of storytellers and writers. But the clever, unusual trick of the banana stalk head could work only in the tropics.

### **Tripura Sacred River**

In this tale of union between two worlds, the ending is happier than the one from Nagaland. Separation still occurs, as does misunderstanding and prejudice (Motif T97 - Father opposed to daughter's marriage), yet husband and wife remain together and help their relatives. The theme of the jealous wives who substitute objects for children to hurt the co-wife is also widespread. These several themes intertwine to create the story of Tripura's origin.

### **Uttaranchal A Learning Journey**

Another quest tale: AT 460B - The journey in search of fortune. One man's quest soon turns into a search for several answers, as he collects questions from others on his way. When he faithfully asks and then receives answers, he is able to help both others and himself. Story quests can lead one under the sea, up to the heavens, across the ocean, but one of the most beautiful settings must surely be the Himalayas that form the backdrop for this tale.

### **Uttar Pradesh Sheikh Chili and the Khichdi / Going Shopping**

Foolish fellows are loved everywhere; they make us feel so smart! Sheikh Chili is a most popular character in U.P., and his tales are enjoyed in much of North India. They often make mistakes in instructions or in words remembered, as Sheikh Chili does here (AT 1204 - Fool keeps repeating instructions), Elsewhere in Asia, a Chinese fellow ends up congratulating those at a funeral and offering sympathy to those at a wedding while Pak Pandir, the popular Malay character mislabels a tiger as a policeman and winds up in trouble.

### **West Bengal Strange Friends**

People, animals, and objects often work together to outwit thieves and monsters in folklore, sharing Motif K1161 - Animals hidden in house to attack. In Vietnam, a long list of objects cause the death of an evil creature, and in Japan's popular "Monkey and Crab," the crab's children revenge their mother's death with the help of an egg, a mortar, a needle, and more. This tale is especially nice, however, because it ends with the woman's kindness and the raja's respect. ❖

## The Pleiades and the Pine Tree

COURTESY: Rohin Chowdhury: *The Three Princes of Persia: Children in world myth* (Puffin Books, New Delhi, 2005) Reprinted with permission from the publisher.

Long ago, when the world was still new and did not have in it all the things it has today, there lived seven young boys. The boys spent all their time playing the gatayusti game, which is a game played by rolling a stone wheel along the ground and striking it with a curved stick. All day long the boys would play gatayusti, never stopping, never doing anything else, never working in the cornfields.

Their mother scolded the boys. 'Stop your game,' they would say. 'Go and work in the cornfields like the other boys.' But these seven boys never listened and never stopped playing the gatayusti game.

One day, the mothers were really fed up. They collected some gatayusti stones and boiled them along with the corn for the boys' dinner. When the boys came home hungry after playing the gatayusti game all day, their mothers fished out the gatayusti stones from the pot and served them to the boys. 'You like gatayusti better than the cornfields,' scolded the mothers. 'Now eat gatayusti for your dinner instead of corn!'

At this, the boys became really angry. They went off, all together, to the place where they played their gatayusti game. 'We'll go away,' they said to each other. 'We'll go away to a place where we will never bother them again. And slowly the boys began to dance, round and round in a circle, praying to the spirits to help them get away.

The mothers of the boys waited, thinking their sons would be back once their anger had cooled, but the boys did not come back. At last, the mothers went out to look for their sons. They saw them dancing, round and round in a circle, praying to the spirits to help them get away. And as the mothers watched, they saw that their sons' feet were no longer touching the earth. With every circle that they completed, the boys rose higher in the air.

The mothers ran towards their sons, to stop them from flying away altogether. But it was too late. By that time the boys had risen so high that their mothers could not reach them. All except one boy, whose mother managed to pull him down with the help of a gatayusti pole. But this boy fell to the ground so hard that he sank into the earth and vanished.

The six boys who were left rose higher and higher till they reached the sky and were turned into stars. We call them the Pleiades, but the Cherokees still call them 'Ani'tsutsa', which means 'The Boys'. Their people mourned and grieved over the boys for a long time, but they remained shining far up in the sky.

And the mother whose son had vanished into the earth wept the longest. Every day she would sit by the spot where her son had vanished and weep tears of grief and sorrow into the earth. Till one day a little green shoot peeped out of the earth. The mother watered the little shoot with her tears, and slowly it grew into a tall and stately tree. We call this tree the Pine.

And the Pleiades and the Pine tree are of one kind and both shine with the same light even to this day. ✘

## The Powers of Children

COURTESY: Amita Sarin: *Akbar and Birbal* (Puffin books, New Delhi, 2005) Printed with permission from the publisher.

One morning, Birbal arrived late in court. The emperor had been waiting impatiently for him. 'Why are you late, Birbal? You know I do not like to be kept waiting.'

'A million apologies, Your Majesty! Normally I never allow anything to keep me from my duties. But today... well, it was just unavoidable.'

Akbar wouldn't let it go at that. His curiosity was aroused. 'But what happened, Birbal? What was important enough to keep you from your king?'

Surprisingly, Birbal, who always had a smooth and prompt answer for everything, seemed embarrassed. He didn't want to discuss the matter in front of the other nobles. But when Akbar persisted in probing, he finally admitted: 'Well, Majesty, it was my little grandson. His toy was broken and he wouldn't let me leave the house until I had fixed it for him'.

Akbar was flabbergasted. 'You allowed a mere child to get the better of you! Why, you are an adult! Surely you could have reasoned with him and explained that you would fix it later.'

'But, Majesty, one can't reason with a little child who is throwing a tantrum. Children are powerful creatures. They can humble the greatest adults if they wish.'

Akbar was not convinced. 'Bring your grandchild to court this minute. I will show you how to handle him.'

Birbal obediently fetched his two-year-old grandson into the emperor's presence. The toddler smiled sweetly at the king, and even agreed to come and sit in his lap.

Akbar looked triumphantly at Birbal. 'See how well I handle him. I have many grandchildren of my own.'

Then the boy began to fidget and shift. 'I'm hungry now,' he said, looking up at the king.

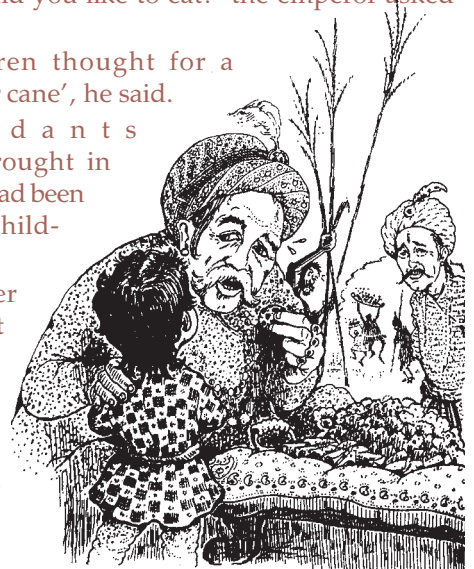
'What would you like to eat?' the emperor asked kindly.

The children thought for a moment. 'Sugar cane', he said.

Attendants immediately brought in sugar cane that had been cut into tiny child-sized pieces.

The toddler refused to eat any of it. 'No-no, not like that, I want the big sugar cane.'

Akbar snapped his fingers and his



servants brought in a large stick of sugar cane that had not been cut up. But even this did not please the child.

He began to sniffle. 'I want all the little pieces to be put back together to make a big one, like it used to be.'

'But that is impossible, child!' The emperor was beginning to get impatient. 'No one can join together a sugar cane that has been chopped up.'

'That's what I want. I will eat only that. Put it back together again this instant.' The boy stamped his foot and began to cry.

Desperately, the emperor tried to comfort him and distract him with other foods. Plates and plates of colourful and delicious sweets were brought in for the child. Then all kinds of fruits. But the child wouldn't have any of it. His wails grew louder and louder.

Akbar threw up his hands in defeat and handed the crying child back to his grandfather. 'I suppose you were right, Birbal. You cannot reason with small children, and therein lies their power. They can humble even the greatest adults.' ❖

## You reap as you sow

COURTESY: *Inayat-ur-rahman: Folk Tales of Swat: Part 2 (Peshawar, 1984)*

Many, many years ago, there was a grocer in a certain village in Swāt; his name was Ragēsh. He had no son and so was an unhappy man.

One day, so the story goes, Ragēsh called on the astrologer of the area named Vānglup and said to him, "O famous astrologer, tell me if I shall some day have a son". Vānglup looked at the palm of his hands with great care. He then made some scratches on the ground, closed his eyes and muttered some verses.

Then turning to Ragēsh, the astrologer said, "You have done evil in your previous birth, so you are punished for that in this life. Therefore, you must do good deeds from now on, and when you are reborn, you will have a son in a better life".

Ragēsh was so convinced by the sermon of Vānglup that he began doing good deeds every day, bringing happiness to many - yet he himself was a sad and unhappy man.

It is said that a certain village healer heard about Ragēsh's unhappy life and took pity on him. One day, he gave him a herbal preparation and said to him, "Give this medicine to your wife and she will surely bear you a lucky son".

Ragēsh happily accepted the prescription and went to his home. He gave it to his wife as directed by the healer.

Some time passed and Ragēsh actually became a father. He then went to the astrologer, Vānglup, and said

to him, "Your calculation of the stars has proved wrong, for I have at last been blessed with a son".

Vānglup then closed his eyes as if in trance and after a moment said to Ragēsh, "My calculation was perfectly right but you can wash away all your previous sins if you do a sufficient number of good deeds in your present life. In fact, you reap as you sow - it makes no difference who, when or where".

*This story was told by Lālā Abnāshay Ram of Mingōra, Swāt, who died at the age of 81 years. ❖*

## How Tenali Rama became a Jester

COURTESY: A.K. Ramanujan (ed) *Folktales from India: A selection of Oral Tales from Twenty-two languages* (Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1991)

In a South Indian village called Tenali there lived a clever Brahman boy. His name was Rama. Once, a wandering *sannyasi* was impressed with the boy's looks and clever ways. So he taught him a chant and told him. 'If you go to the goddess Kali's temple one night and recite these words three million times, she will appear before you with all her thousand faces and give you what you ask for-if you don't let her scare you.'

Rama waited for an auspicious day, went to the Kali temple outside his village, and did as he was told. As he finished his three-millionth chant, the goddess did appear before him with her thousand faces and two hands. When the boy looked at her horrific appearance, he wasn't frightened. He fell into a fit of laughter. No one had ever dared to laugh in the presence of this fearsome goddess. Offended, she asked him, 'You little scalawag, why are you laughing at me?'

He answered, O Mother, we mortals have enough trouble wiping our noses when we catch a cold, though we have two hands and only one nose. If you, with your thousand faces, should catch a cold, how would you manage with just two hands for all those thousand runny noses?'

The goddess was furious. She said, 'Because you laughed at me, you'll make a living only by laughter. You'll be a *vikatakavi*, a jester.'

'Oh, a *vi-ka-ta-ka-vi*! That's terrific! It's a palindrome. It reads *vi-ka-ta-ka-vi* whether you read it from right to left or from left to right,' replied Rama. The goddess was pleased by Rama's cleverness that saw a joke even in a curse. She at once relented and said, 'You'll be a *vikatakavi*, but you will be jester to a king.' And she vanished.

Soon after that, Tenali Rama began to make a living as jester to the king of Vijayanagara. ❖

## Aming Niwa

COURTESY: Kunzang Choden: *Folktales of Bhutan*  
(White Lotus, Bangkok, 1994 rpt 2002).

**D**angbo...o...o Dingbo...o...o.. a small group of houses stood on a mountainside. This was a quiet picturesque village that was surrounded by willow trees. Nearly everybody in the village owned some sheep but all the sheep were herded by a poor orphan girl. She was the village shepherd. Every day she would take them to the pastures near the blue pine forests where there was always ample grass and shade for the sheep. While the sheep grazed she would sit on a big rock and spin the wool. She would drop her spindle down from the rock and watch the long lengths of wool twirl and spin into a smooth thread. She never tired of watching this and every time she would try and drop the spindle further and further down to see how far she could get.

Every day, when the sun was directly overhead she would eat her lunch of *kaptang*, a flat circular bread made of buckwheat or wheat flour, and chili paste. When the sun began to sink towards the western mountain she would round up the sheep and guide them back to the village. She did this day after day and she had done it for as long as she could remember.

Now one day as usual she was sitting on the rock and spinning when she saw that the sun was directly overhead and she knew it was lunch time. So she began to unwrap the *kaptang* from the *torrath*, the cloth in which here lunch was packed, when the whole thing slipped out of her hands and rolled down the hill. The shepherd scrambled off the rock and ran after her *kaptang*. The packet rolled down the hill, bouncing off the boulders, dodging between the trees until it was nearly at the bottom of the hill. Just as she was about to get it, the packet fell into a mouse hole. She stood there quite helpless. Then she called out, "Aming Niwa, even if you eat the *kaptang*, please give me back the *torrath*."

"Why don't you come down?" came the prompt reply.

"How can I come down? The hole is too small."

"Just close your eyes and step right in" advised the mouse.

The shepherd closed her eyes and stepped into the mouse hole. Instantly she found herself in the home of the mouse. The mouse at once said, "Night is falling, why don't you sleep here tonight?"

The shepherd was surprised but agreed. The mouse then asked her what she would like for her supper. To this the shepherd replied, "I am a very poor girl, I can eat anything. Some leftovers would be fine for me."

But the mouse prepared her a sumptuous meal fit for a king. After the meal was over the mouse asked her, "How shall I prepare your bed?"

"I can sleep on some rags," said the shepherd.

The mouse made her a comfortable bed. She slept that night on a *boden* with soft blankets and a pillow stuffed with the softest cotton. Before she went to bed



She would drop her spindle down from the rock and watch the long lengths of wool twirl and spin into a smooth thread

the mouse warned her that there might be a lot of hustle and bustle in the night and she might actually feel her hair being touched but that she must try not to be disturbed. Indeed, there was much noise and movement in the mouse's house and she could feel little pulls and tugs on her hair throughout the night.

Next morning when she got up the mouse was already busy preparing her morning meal. After a hearty breakfast she was just about to leave when the mouse gave back her *torrath*, which was made into a packet.

"Don't unwrap the *torrath* until you reach home. Now close your eyes," said the mouse.

The shepherd took the *torrath* and closed her eyes. When she opened her eyes she was back in the pasture with her sheep. She felt her hair, and every strand of her hair was strung with a precious jewel, turquoise, zis, and corals. She ran home and opened the *torrath* and it was full of more jewels.

The rich girl in the village soon heard about the shepherd's lucky adventure and she asked her about it. The shepherd in her simplicity and kindness told her everything. The rich girl was filled with greed and she too wanted to get the jewels. So the next day she took the sheep to graze and did everything that the shepherd had done. But when the mouse asked her what she wanted for supper, the girl stated confidently, "I am a rich girl, and I am used to eating well, so I expect a very good supper." The mouse gave her some old *khuli*. The cold buckwheat pancakes were served with some even colder turnip *tsavem*.

When she was asked, "How shall I prepare your bed?" she replied, "I am a rich girl, I am used to sleeping very comfortably!" The mouse pulled some rags from a corner and gave them to the girl. So she had to sleep on some rags and cover herself with some more rags.

Before she went to bed the mouse cautioned, "Do not be disturbed by the noises in the house tonight."

The girl thought she knew exactly what she was to expect. So when the noises started and there were little pulls and tugs at her hair she could hardly contain her excitement. As she peeked through her half-closed eyes she saw many mice around her and they started stringing things on her hair. The rich girl was extremely excited as she imagined all the jewels in her hair.

The following morning the mouse gave her back her *torrath* and told her to close her eyes. When she opened her eyes she was with the sheep. She felt her hair and every strand of her hair had been strung with mouse dung. She did not wait to go home but unwrapped the *torrath*. It was full of more dung, dried grasses, and mosses. The rich girl was fuming with anger as bitter tears of shame and humiliation stung her eyes. This was the price she had paid for her greed and condescension. ❖

### New NFSC Publication



### Indian Folktales from Mauritius

Dawood Auleer and Lee Haring

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Illustrations by Kalamkari C. Subramaniam,  
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Rs.200 in Mauritian rupees in Mauritius,  
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ISBN 81-901481-7-6

## How peacocks came on this earth (Garo)

COURTESY: G.K. Ghosh and Shukla Ghosh — *Fables and Folk-tales of Meghalaya (Firnina KLM Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1998)*

In olden times there was a rich Garo who had a very beautiful daughter. According to the custom among the Garos she was to be the heir of her father's property. When she grew up married one of her maternal cousin as the custom with the Garos. Her father owned a very attractive piece of silk woven with many coloured threads. This was a magic silk. A goddess had given it to the great grandmother of the Garo's wife. There was a mantra or incantation which one had to utter while touching this silk. Otherwise something grim was predicted.

In course of time, the Garo and his wife grew old and died. The girl and her husband got all the property of the rich Garo. They also got the magic silk. They were living happily. On a bright day the girl put the piece of silk out side to sun it. She was feeling carefree and joyful and wanted to go to catch some prawns in the nearby stream. She took a chakka (triangular fishing basket) and a Koksi (fish creel) with her. Before going out she asked her husband not to touch the silk even if there be heavy rain.

It was a matter of chance that she did not tell her husband about the magic quality of the silk and did not teach him the incantation which one should recite while touching this silk. But now there was no time for it. She was not worried, as there was very slight chance of rain on such a sunny day.

But the will of God is unknown. The clear sky darkened. A mass of black clouds gathered and it rained heavily. The silk cloth got soaked. The husband anxiously shouted for his wife at the top of his voice. The girl came running fast. But as soon as she reached home she found that, in his excitement, her husband has forgotten what she told him about the piece of silk and he had touched it.

And lo! as soon as he touched it, the cloth stuck to him and his body slowly underwent a change. He started changing into a bird with splashing colours on his wings and tail. The girl was very sad and was moved by what had happened. Lost in grief she touched the bit of silk left, forgetting to recite the incantation and she was also turned into a female bird. Her plumes became less colourful as most of the silk was already absorbed into her husband's body.

Therefore they live as peacock and peahen. Whenever clouds gather, in the sky, lightning flashes and thunder roars, they cry with fear lest the rains should away their garment of many coloured plumes. ❖