

Significance of the Lotha Nagas' Folktale of Longlapa

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Abstract: *Storytelling has been playing an important part in the Lotha community. The stories are of diverse content and tone, which involves various elements such as entertainment, education, humanity, and many other purposes. In this way, the folktales give people a collection of values, beliefs, attitudes, sense of belonging, and open the minds of people to their immediate surroundings and the world in general. Folktales are the pearls of wisdom or manifestation of the culture, as their essence contains the shared reminiscences of a tribe. It is also performed to instigate the audience with the value system and the body of knowledge infatuated and cherished by the oral society. Stories stand for the way humans explain reality to themselves. In oral cultures, the storyteller's task is fundamental in codifying truths which have been painstakingly acquired, and in creating images that reflect the underlying principle on which such truths are based. Being artistic representations of life, folktales challenge and may even shock into action while training the mind in the quest for wisdom.*

Keywords: Folklore, Folktale of Longlapa, Lotha Society, Oral Tradition

Introduction

Folktales are images of private conduct and public morality, as the storyteller is society's soul-searcher. The stories do not present a systematic exposition of dogma or the belief system, but the explanation of morality, social organization, of knowledge. They only reveal these elements indirectly, as they are dramatic representations that mirror the ancient and common wisdom of a tribe, which they express in a simple and down-to-earth fashion, especially through the actions of various characters. Social and moral values are taught and are absorbed through an emotional involvement in the performance. Oral societies have devised mechanisms for easy retention or memorization and therefore for easy recall. The great concern is that knowledge is retrievable because, as Ong states, "what cannot be recalled is wasted."¹ While in a literate society, books are used to store and spread knowledge, the only means of preserving knowledge in an oral society is man's memory, which must be helped to minimize wastage. Some material is learned through verbatim ('word for word') memorization, especially poetry and important formulaic sentences, such as proverbs. Other materials are stored in memory through simple, general content memorization, the creation of bold images, and artistic creative techniques and formulae, based on the use of parallelisms, repetitions, etc.

Folktales, like all oral literature, must be performed. Therefore, Scheub refers to performance as "an artistically pleasing manner"² of transmission that involves the whole being, through word, rhythm, and dance. This "dramatization of values"³ is a phenomenon that leads to socialization, since social standards are embodied in the hero. This reinforces the ethos on which community life is based.

Folktales are also educational as they sometimes reveal human curiosity about the knowledge of naturally observable phenomena (e.g., why crabs are flat? How did humans gain supremacy over the creatures? Why do humans die and snakes regenerate?) And offer simple and imaginative answers to children's endless questions. A powerful stimulation of the 'faculty of imagination in children remains the basis for future discoveries. According to Levi- Strauss' structural analysis of myth, "folktales reveal the opposing symbols used to delimit and better define cosmological and natural oppositions such as earth/sky, male/female,

¹Ong Walter J., *Op cit*.

²Scheub, Harlod, *The Technique of the Expansible Image in Xhosa Ntsomi Performances. In Researching African Literatures, Vol. 1, No. 2., 1970.*

³ *Ibid*

water/fire, nature/culture, animal/ human, innocent/guilty, etc. Conflict and opposition are at the heart of a narrative. The identification of the opposing characters and social forces, or the ideals they stand for, is the key to the folktale educational system.”⁴

The language of folktales is an important part of children’s literary heritage. Because of the oral tradition, the language in a folktale is musical, rhythmic, and melodic. In addition, the characters’ direct dialogue punctuated with quick action excites readers’ and listeners’ interest. By listening to and reading these tales, children acquire language.

One of the important aspects of a folktale is its impact on society as well as society’s influence on a folktale. Folktale has a symbiotic relationship with society in that it causes changes in the society and the social changes also affect modifications in folktale. Consequently, the nature of the folktale has transformed over the ages. This inter-relationship is indeed inseparable, but experts argue that since folktale is the product of society and not vice-versa, the influence of the society on the folktale is much greater than the influence of the folktale on the society. This makes folktale animate, substantially absorbing social changes and, in parallel, moving with the society.

Folktales remain a relevant and competitive genre that will continue to build the community’s knowledge. They cultivate, build, and maintain positive relationships, internally and externally. They make people think differently from animals and try to be responsible in the way they live. Even if they are constantly confronted with the perception that they are of a lesser value than other disciplines, they will continue to address very important diverse issues.

In the context of the Lotha Nagas, folktales or oral traditions are the souls of the living culture. One cannot appreciate the beauty of culture without knowing the tales and how they are related to it.

The Lotha Naga Folktale of Longlapa

It was a time of headhunting and chasing of one community by another for settlement. This story took place in one of the deserted Lotha Naga village known as Longlapa which is situated 7 kilometers away from Wokha, in between Wokha and Yikhum village.

A handsome, young, and talented man named Kidungshuma lived in Longlapa with his folks. However, the people in his community were jealous of his talents and achievements so one day they plotted a plan to assassinate him. The following day they visited Kidungshuma’s place and told him that they had organized an event to showcase their talent in the village and every young man must participate. Unaware of their evil plans Kidungshuma went to participate and suddenly the people gathered saying, “O Kidungshuma, you are perfect, you are perfect” and little by little they pushed him towards the edge of the cliff and finally they pushed him down from the cliff and Kidungshuma, the most talented man met his fatal end. It is also said that one day after the death of Kidungshuma, a tiger came to Longlapa village and ate up some members of the community, but other members did not go to rescue them and stayed behind the closed doors of their houses. As a result, their population was lessened day by day and some escaped from their village and in that course of time, the village was deserted⁵.

Significance of the Folktale

From the folktale of Longlapa, we see that no community can develop without love and unity among the people. Jealousy and hatred prevailed ever since the beginning of human settlements as we have seen in the folktale how the life of a young, handsome, and talented man in the village came to an end, and how Longlapa village was deserted because of jealousy and hatred. If they had love and unity, they would neither plan to kill Kidungshuma nor would they stay behind closed doors when the tiger came and eat some members of their community. They would have gathered to rescue their fellow beings from the hands of the wild animal.

The planning and plotting of murdering Kidungshuma can be elaborated as a failure to appreciate a fellow being by others for one’s talent and achievements. Jealousy and hatred do no good to anyone; rather it brings

⁴ Levi – Strauss, Claude, *Structural Anthropology*, Allen Lane, London, 1968.

⁵ Interview with Lt. Mhonbemo Tungoe, Wokha Village, 2019.

chaos and destruction. So as individuals and responsible members of society, we must come together and support one another by helping each other for the betterment of society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that folklores and folktales can be taken as depository values that deliberately attempt to make people conscious of the meaning that they have; personal, community, social; economic, religious, spiritual; cultural and political values which shape the character and personality of one's traits. As C.S. Song said, "Folklores and Folktales are a book consisting largely of people's stories,"⁶ which are very human; a story of love, a story of hate, a story of conflict etc. Thus, the oral tradition of any community opens a storehouse of myths, legends, customs, rituals, proverbs, etc. which helps to trace back to the root; the origin of the respective indigenous community.

⁶ Song, "Christian Theology: An Asian Way," 26.