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NAGA FOLK TALES



Kiran Shankar Maitra



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Kiran Shankar Maitra

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Preface

TO
BAMBINA AND JAYA

In the north of India, the Nagaland State has a hilly and mountainous terrain. It is a beautiful and romantic state, full of ever-enthralling clouds, serpentine roads, and green valleys. It is rightly called, 'the Switzerland of the East'.

While I had been in Nagaland for three years, I had the occasion to travel in the state extensively and know its people and its beautiful and romantic state, full of ever-enthralling clouds, serpentine roads, and green valleys. It is rightly called, 'the Switzerland of the East'.

The folk tales collected from different Nagas tribes are naturally edited and rewritten, but immense care and pains have been taken to preserve their original flavour, atmosphere and peculiarity.

My labour will be rewarded if the readers of all the groups like and cherish them.

I take this opportunity of thanking all my Nagas friends who helped me in writing this book.

Preface

To the north-east, along the borders of India, lies Nagaland, the sixteenth State of the Union. In this hilly small stretch of land live thirteen principal tribes, viz., Ao, Angami, Sema, Lotha, Rengma, Chakhesang, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Koniyak, Phom, Chang, Zeliang, Kuki, etc. Each of the tribes has its distinctive features in respect of language, dress and culture, and of course, folk tales of its own. These folk tales give expression to the traditional admiration for valour, dexterity in warfare and love for romantic episodes.

While I had been in Nagaland for more than three years I had the occasion to travel in the hilly state extensively and know its people closely. The beautiful and romantic state, full of lively cascades, ever-chanting clouds, serpentine paths and lush green valleys, is rightly called, 'the Switzerland of the East'.

The folk tales collected from different Naga tribes are naturally edited and rewritten, but immense care and pains have been taken to preserve their original flavour, atmosphere and peculiarity.

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Preface

To the north-east along the border of India lies Nagaland, the sixteenth state of the Union. In this fully small stretch of land live thirteen principal tribes, viz., Ao, Angami, Sema, Lohit, Meksang, Chakhesang, Sangan, Yimchunger, Konyak, Phom, Chang, Xiang, Kaki or Ekei of the tribes. It has its distinctive features in respect of language, dress and culture and of course folk tales of its own. These folk tales give expression to the national admiration for valour, dexterity, heroism and love for romantic episodes.

While I had been in Nagaland for more than three years I had the occasion to travel in the hills state extensively and know its people closely. The beautiful and romantic state, full of lively cascades, ever-changing clouds, serpentine paths and lush green valleys, is rightly called, the Switzerland of the East.

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Glossary

Angami	—one of the tribes of Nagaland.
Au phoh	—an expression of joy.
Bikhu	—a tree.
Chakhesang	—a Naga tribe.
Chitral	—a flower.
Dao	—chopper.
Doiyang	—a river.
Gaon-burrah	—village headman.
Kamkhu	—a fruit.
Kapu	—a hill.
Khang	—a basket made of bamboo and cane.
Kinnar	—half-god and half-human being according to the Hindu my- thology. In reality they are inhabitants of Himachal Pra- desh.

- Kinnarlok —the abode of Kinnars
Lotha —a Naga tribe
Madu —an indigenous intoxicated beverage of Nagaland
Manchi —a flower.
Melak —a river.
Morung —traditional dormitory for unmarried Naga youth.
Oris —one of the older tribes.
Prahara —four hour make a prahara.
Sangtubi —a bird.
Shravana —the fourth Indian month which runs in July-August.
Thunnin Nimong —harvest festival of the Yimchunger Nagas.
Tirinti —a bird.
Yaksha —Half god according to the Hindu mythology.
Yimchunger —a Naga tribe.

The Story of Rusta

It is a story of many years ago and of those days when Lotha tribe was fighting a hard battle to earn a place of supremacy among the Nagas.

In those early days of valour and heroism, one night in a Lotha family was born a son. The parents named him Rusta after his grandfather. Little is known of Rusta as a child except that he was full of vigour and vitality. Rusta's story began when misfortune struck his family—his father having been killed during a local warfare with traditional rivals of the Lothas, the Oris.

Rusta, who loved and worshipped his father so much, was numbed with shock. He did not

even touch a piece of bread for four days and four nights.

Gradually, out of intense grief and anger was born in him an everlasting vow—a determined will to avenge the death of his father.

From that day Rusta had only one aim, one goal in his life, to avenge himself on the Oris.

Rusta was a farsighted youth. In those days fire-arms were not known to them, even not the bow and arrow. The weapons used by them were a javeline with a pointed head and a sharp-edged heavy spade. Rusta practised hard to be able to use these to perfection. Besides, he learnt boxing and wrestling.

For five years Rusta went through the rigours of training and held himself in readiness. At the age of twenty he appeared before his tribesmen as a shining example of courage and strength. People said he was stronger than a lion and cleverer than a leopard. As strong as thunder and as cruel as a demon, his invincible arms knew no mercy. For all these qualities Rusta was looked upon by the Lothas as a leader sent by the gods.

The revenge for which Rusta had thus prepared himself came to him suddenly. A band of Orisemen one day snatched away a score of cattle from a field of the Lotha village. The angry Lothas went to Rusta and asked him to lead them against Oris, their traditional enemies. Rusta picked the most courageous men of his tribe and led them forward,

to the Oris stronghold, with a heart throbbing with excitement.

The fearless band of men under the leadership of Rusta invoked awe and fear in every village they passed through and the fear spread before them, into the Oris village. When the Lotha warriors met the Oris, they staged such a valiant fight that they could not resist the indomitable Lothas. Victorious Rusta struck as many enemy heads as he could with his long javeline. Thus, he satisfied his long-cherished desire of taking revenge upon the Oris. Wearing garlands of enemy skulls round their necks and war-music on their lips, the triumphant Lothas marched their way home. Keeping a strict vigil against sudden retaliation by the Oris, Rusta trailed behind his men. As a result, he found himself a little way behind his men.

One, who survived among the Oris tribe, had been watching Rusta as he trailed behind. He waited for Rusta to pass him so that he could drive his sharp spear into Rusta's stomach.

When Rusta walked along the road to join his people all of a sudden there was a speedy, sharp attack on him. It killed him almost instantly without any warning, without giving him a chance of defence.

But even in the throes of death, Rusta did not fall down. Collecting all his strength, he sat down on the roadside. He sat in a pose with a spear in the right hand and a shield in the left as if he was waiting for his enemies fearlessly to strike them.

While his body hardened with the cold hands of death upon him, Rusta left the earth happily as his ambition of life had been fulfilled.

When the Oris warrior who had killed Rusta reported this great achievement to his tribesmen, they hardly believed him. The villagers decided to go and see for themselves if his claim was really true.

But what did they see? They saw Rusta from a safe distance. He was sitting fearlessly on the roadside with the shield and spear in his hands to fight. The Oris people were furious with the man who claimed to have killed Rusta. As a result, they hacked Rusta's assassin to death. Thus Rusta's killer was killed by his own people who thought that they had been betrayed. Rusta was such a famous warrior! Even an armed group of the Oris did not dare to come forward.

For three days and three nights, the enemy camp kept a vigil over the body. But to their great astonishment, the body did not move even for a moment. On the fourth day, they mustered all their courage to go near Rusta's body. They saw a fly passing round Rusta's face. This convinced them that he was really dead.

They carried Rusta's body to their village to see what extraordinary qualities were possessed by Rusta that made him such a stout-hearted, invincible warrior.

It is said that when they tore open Rusta's heart they saw at the centre two large red ants fighting with each other ceaselessly to swallow one another.

Kiranshankar Maitra (b. 1935) after having completed his academic education in the Presidency College and Calcutta University, joined AIR, as a Programme Executive in 1965 and has since been travelling to different parts in India.

Basically a poet, he has made his mark in the literary world and has been writing in prestigious journals of the country in English, Bengali and Hindi.

He has already authored three books in English titled *Himalayan Dreamland: Journey to Kinnarlok*, *Nagaland: The Darling of North East* and *Now* (a book of verse).

A prolific writer as he has been, he has written many books in Bengali and made his mark in the arena of Bengali literature.

As an author, he has been noted in *International Writers and Authors Who's Who* (Cambridge, London), *Biography International*, *Asia International Who's Who* and *Indian Writers and Authors Who's Who* (Sahitya Academy, New Delhi) and many others.

The author has been holding many responsible posts in AIR and Doordarshan and at present is posted as Director, All India Radio, Jamshedpur.

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To the North-East of India lies the state of Nagaland which is the sixteenth and one of the smallest States of India. It is inhabited by thirteen main tribes such as Ao, Angami, Konyak, Chakhesang, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Lotha, Rengma, Phem, Chang, Zeliang and Kuki. All these tribes have their distinct characteristics and their own folk tales as well. The main theme of these tales are love, friendship, war and revenge.

The author had the privilege of knowing the Naga people from close quarter during his more than three years' stay in that enchanting State. The lovely valleys, ever-changing clouds, serpentine paths and beautiful scenic grandeur earned it most befittingly the title: 'The Switzerland of the East'. While rewriting the tales in English, proper care has been taken to keep their original beauty intact.