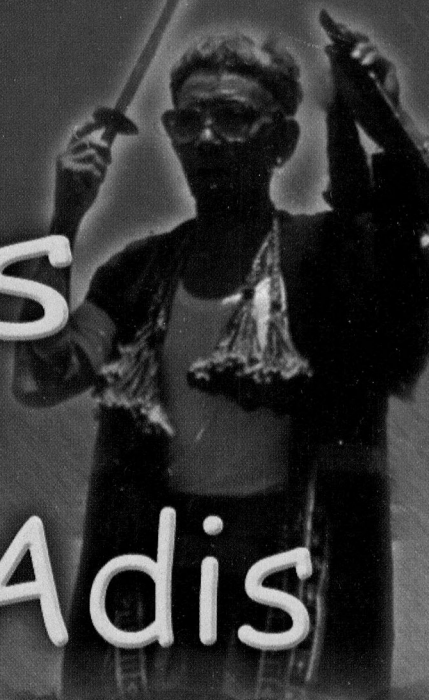


Folk Tales of The Adis



Obang Tayeng

A MITTAL PUBLICATION

The Adis, one of the main tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, live mostly in West Siang, Upper Siang, East Siang and Lower Dibang Valley districts of the State. Traditionally, they are believers of the Donyi-Polo tradition though they practise an animistic creed and propitiate various gods and goddesses on different occasions.

The Adis believe in a number of divine and malevolent spirits. They propitiate the benevolent ones to win their approval and the malevolent ones to wean them away from inflicting pains to them. Innumerable tales and myths are woven around them which constitute a major part of their social mythos.

Besides the myths there are a large number of tales known to the tribe's members some of which are parables in nature while many others are illustrations of their cultural icons.

This anthology of 57 folktales of the Adis has been compiled by the author after research spread over a number of years and in consultation with folk tale singers-Miris-who pass them on from generation to generation by word of mouth. The tales have been briefly and simply presented, along with a list of keywords at the end of the tales.

Along with the anthology of tales a large number of illustrations depicting facets of the social and cultural life of the Adis provide an appropriate context of the tales and add great value to this excellent book.

Rs. 250



OBANG TAYENG (b. 1961) graduated from Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasighat with Honours in Political Science. He has long been associated with Adi cultural and literary activities in various capacities.

Besides writing features and articles from time to time in local newspapers, he has also edited two anthologies of Adi poetry and co-edited two other books. Presently, he is working on folk tales of the Mishmis of Lohit District.

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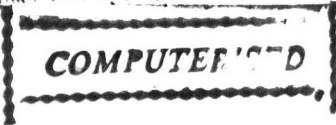
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Dedicated to

Late **TALOM RUKBO**,
writer, poet, dramatist, social reformer,
thinker and pioneer of
Adi cultural and literary movement; and,
A great soul and a master folklorist,
who nurtured and kindled
my interest in folk tales.

PREFACE

The Adis are one of the main tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. They live mostly in West Siang, Upper Siang, East Siang, and Lower Dibang Valley Districts of the state. They are a major community of *Tani* group, who claim to have descended from *Tani*, their mythical forefather. Traditionally, they are believers in *Donyi-Polo* tradition though they practice an animistic creed and propitiate various gods and goddesses on different occasions.

They perform a number of festivals throughout the year, the chief among them being *Solung*, *Mopin*, *Aaran* or *Unying*, and *Pime*. *Solung* and *Mopin* are two fertility festivals in which the people propitiate the goddesses, *Kine Nane* and *Mopin* respectively. In addition to these, they also pray to various gods for their family and social well-being. *Aaran* or *Unying* as it is called by some, is observed to welcome the New Year as well as to bid farewell to the old one. *Pime* is observed just before the start of harvesting winter crops during which they organise community hunting and perform *Delong* dance.

Song and dance is an integral part of their socio-cultural life. *Delong*, *Ponung*, *Yakjong*, and *Tapu* are the main forms of dance for the people. Usually, a singer leader, called, *Miri* leads the dance, who narrates a particular storyline or a theme impromptu by holding a rattling sword in order to harmonise his song with the dance. One of the main themes of singing on such occasions is *Aabang*-narration of certain specific subjects-, which is presented by the singer leader in a ballad, the refrains of which are echoed by the

dancers. *Bari* is another form of song which is performed in *Aaran* (Unying) festival and other joyful events. Usually, only two singers compete in a *Bari* without accompaniment of any dancers. In most of these songs, the themes range from the story of creation to any relevant subject.

Another prominent feature of their way of life is the existence of a village and an inter village council, called, *Kebang* and *Bango Kebang* respectively through which all disputes are settled and major decisions are adopted. Usually, the councils are held in the village community building, called, *Musup* or *Dere*, which are constructed by villagers specifically for organising community activities.

Because of their practice of an animistic tradition, Adis believe in a number of divine and malevolent spirits, which govern their mundane and spiritual life equally. They propitiate the benevolent ones from time to time to earn their approval, and malevolent ones, to wean them away from inflicting pains to them. Innumerable tales and myths are therefore, woven around them which constitutes a major part of their social mythos.

The most important source of Adi myths is *Aabang*, which is mostly narrated by the *Miri* in festivals and other social occasions through his song. The main *Aabang* is the *Solung Aabang*, which is performed during celebration of *Solung* festival, in the form of *Ponung* song. Besides this, this *Aabang* is narrated by the *Delong Miri* through a different song form on *Solung Etor* festival. The same storyline is also presented by the *Bari* singer in *Aaran* (Unying) festival. It is cosmogonic in nature as it deals at length about creation or rather, evolution of universe, and birth of all divine, living as well as non-living beings.

Apart from *Solung Aabang*, many other smaller *Aabangs* that explain various subjects and narrate folk stories also exist. Many of them are popularly described in lyrical form by knowledgeable singer leaders on different occasions.

Besides this, there are innumerable tales prevalent in the society some of which are parables in nature while

many others are illustrations of their culture heroes. The most prominent culture hero is *Tani*, also called *Nibo*, who is considered the victor of evil powers embodied by his elder brother, called *Robo*. The two brothers engage in an internecine battle for possession of their parental properties by employing all possible means of force and treachery. Finally, *Tani* overcomes his odds and wins his prolonged battle against his brother with the support and guidance of benevolent gods.

There are however, certain variations in some stories among the people, though the main storyline remains similar throughout: for example, the story of how paddy was procured by human beings in the beginning. According to popular version, the people got the seeds from *Kine Nane*, the goddess of crops, while some others trace its source from *Miti-Mitang* people, who were the originators of yeast and winemaking. Likewise, there are certain variations in some other stories at different places though the main storyline, particularly; the *Solung Aabang* remains throughout uniform.

I gratefully acknowledge Oshong Ering, Dr. Tamo Mibang, Kaling Borang, Arak Megu, Taluk Tamuk, Ojing Rukbo, Tapon Jomang, Ogom Dai, Prasanta Das, P. Tamai, and finally but immeasurably, Kirong, for their help and support in various ways.

This anthology has been collected by me over a period of many years from different sources. I have made all possible attempts to retain the originality of each story without trying to embellish it anyway. In order to assist readers (Particularly outside ones) in understanding certain terms and concepts, a list of keyword is also added at the end of the stories. For convenience of all types of readers and easier grasp of the themes, most of the stories have also been made brief and simple.

OBANG TAYENG

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KEYUM-KERO

In the beginning, emptiness pervaded the space. There was no light, no matter, and no sound in the space. This state of emptiness was known as *Keyum-Kero*.

In course of time, however, a spontaneous process of evolution unfolded itself from that vacuum. A tiny, imperceptible patch of darkness gradually developed from *Keyum-Kero*. It began to be called *Yumkang*. After a long time, that imperceptible patch of darkness generated *Kasi*. *Kasi* was still as inappreciable as *Yumkang*. It had no form, no size, and no existence. Then *Kasi* brought forth *Siang*, yet another invisible, tiny particle of mist. It began to waft around the empty space. The process continued spontaneously until, very slowly, little specks of moist, dark particles resembling clouds began to evolve from *Siang*. It was *Bomuk*, and it began floating in a semi-visible state in the space. Many days later, another evolutionary stage came into being. It was *Mukseng*-an inky, tiny layer of cloud hovering vacuously in the space. Finally, *Sedi* and *Melo* came into being from *Mukseng*.

Sedi and *Melo* were the first physical manifestations emerging from the incomprehensible *Keyum-Kero*. *Sedi*, a female being, turned into the earth, while *Melo*, a male, became the sky. In order to continue the creative process, they married each other, and began to produce various offspring in the world.

At that time, *Sedi* was an encompassing, dirt-filled mass in a semi-liquid form. It was inhabitable for living beings. Besides, there was no light, no air, and no habitable land. In due course of time, *Sedi* yielded various objects. Her huge, unending streams of mucous grew into rivers and lakes; her hairs, into grasses and trees. Her bodily fluid turned into huge masses of water; her breathes, into air; and began to circulate the earth's surface.

The earth was enveloped in darkness at that stage. Except for a few spiritual beings born out of *Sedi* and *Melo's* union, there was no other living beings at that time. Two such spiritual beings, *Resi Yokmo* and *Reman Yokmo* became very concerned with the state of the wet, watery earth. They were great designers and architects. They learned one day that two eye corneas born out from *Keyum-Kero* lay hidden in a big pond. Therefore, they set out for the pond one day. Arriving there, the two architects culled out the eyes from the deep pond, and washed the two corneas in a stream called, *Sedi Irbo Sikol*. As the corneas were rubbed and washed, they became clean and luminous. Soon, they started shining brightly, emitting light and heat. *Resi Yokmo* and *Reman Yokmo* then grafted them on the axis of the spirit of earthquake, and set them to revolve around the earth. One of them eventually turned into the sun, and the other, into the moon. Since then, they started revolving round the earth, giving light and heat. They also heated and dried out the huge content of water on the surface of the earth. In due course of time, the earth became a solid mass on which all living beings began to inhabit.

Sedi and *Melo* now began to live as wife and husband. They came into spiritual union from time to time, begetting offspring of various forms and nature. Eventually, they started ruling over different spheres of life on the earth. Their first progenies were *Sepi Yokmo* and *Sepang Yokmo*, who were gods of smithery. *Dinom Yokmo* was born next. He was the originator of wild birds and animals. *Sengor*

Orne, the god of light was also born from *Sedi* and *Melo*. The first soothsayer, *Tinggi Taabe* then came into being from their union. He started predicting future events and guided human beings in difficult moments.

Later on, *Sedi* and *Melo* also gave birth to *Kine Nane*, the goddess of crops who began to dwell in the nether world. Another god, *Kongki-Komang*, who designed fate and fortune of humans, also came out of them. Gods and many other spiritual beings like *Doying Bote*, *Yidum Bote*, *Linggen Sobo*, *Dende Sobo*, *Limir Sobo*, *Kunggum Sobo*, *Polung Sobo*, and *Litung* and *Limang* were born next.

When *Litung* and *Limang* married, they begot *Pedong Nane*. *Pedong Nane*, in turn married *Yidum Bote*, the god of wind. Together, they gave birth to millions of offspring who filled the world later on. Their children were the spirits, human beings, snakes, frogs, monkeys, and many others.