

A NEW BOOK
OF
TRIBAL FICTION

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PREFACE

This book is a successor or supplement to my earlier *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India* as well as, in a sense, to the three other collections of folk-tales which I have recorded - *Folk-Tales of Mahakoshal*, *Myths of Middle India* and *Tribal Myths of Orissa*.¹ I have never been a folklorist in the technical or exclusive sense but I have been impressed by the light thrown by stories, legends and myths on the customs and thinking of tribal people. I have thus not gone into their territory with the specific aim of collecting folk-tales but have always been engaged primarily on other work, sometimes on the study of religion, sometimes busy with social organization, art or crime, sometimes working in the field of applied anthropology. During the past ten years I have spent a great deal of time on long tours in the remotest hills of NEFA and during these I have collected stories wherever that was possible and time permitted.

In *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India* I published stories which were mainly concerned with the origins of things; most of them were myths in the technical sense of the word. I reserved others, most of which were more properly classified as fairy stories, for a second volume. This book does, in fact, contain a number of myths of origin which I recorded after the first book was published, but the longer and more interesting stories are of a general kind.

Since most of these stories, except the Singpho

¹These have been fully indexed in *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India* by H. H. Wilson and Jonas Balyassay, *Oral Tales of India* (Bloomington, 1917), pp. 201-202.

collection which was recorded mainly by my assistant, Mr Sundarlal Narmada, were taken down by me on tour I have prefaced each chapter with a brief Tour Diary to give, in a natural and unforced manner, brief glimpses of the people and countryside which I saw as I went slowly along. I had to rely on interpreters, inevitable when I was covering such a large area where many different languages and dialects are spoken, but my interpreters were very good and in each village where we recorded stories, the work was almost that of a committee, with one or often two interpreters, several village elders, Sundarlal and myself, and we were able to check and re-check the stories in the very place where they were told. During my Khampti tour, in the course of which I also obtained a few Singpho stories, I had the efficient and knowledgeable help of Mr T. K. M. Barua who has been with me on a number of expeditions.

One of the difficulties that face the investigator in all the tribal areas of India is that there is no standard, no canon of doctrine, titles or names, and the result is that it is possible to record stories in different villages where the plot is mainly the same but the characters have very different names. Sometimes even in the same village the people will not agree on the names of the hero or heroine and other characters.

I must express my obligation to Mr B. Das Shastri for generous help, given freely to me as to many others, and to Mr Someswar Lahiri, my stenographer, who did the first English renderings of many of the stories recorded in this book.

SHILLONG

VERRIER ELWIN

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PART ONE : INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The NEFA Background

In this book we visit three Divisions of the North-East Frontier Agency—Kameng for the Sherdukpens, Siang for the Ashings, Shimongs, Ramo-Pailibos and Khambas, and Lohit for the Khamptis and Singphos. To those who know these areas the stories will have a special appeal, indeed parts of them cannot be understood without some background knowledge of the tribes. For example, we have references to people looking up from underneath a house or creeping below a house in order to listen to what is being said inside. This is intelligible only when we realise that the majority of houses in this part of the world are built high above the ground on piles and that the space thus formed is left open; during the day pigs, dogs and fowls search for food which, since the floors of the houses are generally very badly made with many gaps, often falls down for their benefit. The houses also have verandas and in more than one story the development of the plot turns on the use of what I have called a drying-rack, a bamboo-frame which is hung above a central hearth and on which meat and fish is spread to dry. There is also generally a loft above the main room where things can be stored.

In these stories we get brief glimpses of the former institution of slavery, which has now almost disappeared from NEFA. In an Assam (2.13)

it is proposed that a girl, who is a thief, should be made into a slave, though the Village Council decides in the end that if she pays compensation this need not be done. Similarly, a Wiyu girl of low morals, who is also a thief, is declared a Mipak (outsider) and a slave. As such she is not allowed to go into the girls' dormitory (2.27). In former days it was common for a man, who was unable to pay a fine imposed on him by the Village Council, to be made a slave. In a Ramo-Pailibo story (4.5) Abo-Tani, who is unable to pay the bride-price for his wife, promises that he will give any children he has as slaves to his father-in-law and other relations in settlement of his debt. In another Ramo-Pailibo tale (4.8) Pollo the Moon unable to find a husband, seduces one of her father's slaves and this is why she only appears at night because she is so ashamed of what she has done, for any intimacy with a slave is regarded as a very serious matter by the Adis. There is also a Bori story¹ which attributes the eclipse to the institution of slavery : a great Wiyu (spirit) in the form of a bear kidnaps the Sun and Moon and keeps them to work in his fields as slaves. Men, animals and Wiyus redeem them in part, but they are unable to pay the whole price and from time to time the Wiyu comes to claim his debt and this causes an eclipse.

The Village Council (Kebang) is frequently mentioned in the Adi stories. In the Ashing tale of 'The Woodpecker and the Bees' (2.13) there is an account of a Kebang held to settle what is to be done to a girl who steals, and the story tells us that two

¹Verrier Elton, *Myths of the North-East Frontier* (Shillong, 1958), p. 39

of the men present are great drinkers and they drag on the discussion as long as possible so that they can go on drinking other people's rice-beer. It is a common charge against the old men on the Council that they lengthen the meetings out so that they will be able to drink more at the general expense. In another Ashing story (2.18), a Council is held to decide what should be done to the snakes who bite and kill people. This is a Council of Wiyus and they resolve that the fangs of the snakes should be removed as a punishment and their heads cut off in compensation. In a Shimong story (3.11), also about snakes, a Kebang decides that a snake who has bitten a man without any reason, should have its fangs broken and it must pay beads, which in those days snakes wore as necklaces, in compensation.

The Rasheng is an institution which organizes and disciplines the unmarried girls of an Adi village. The girls use this little hut, which is what it usually is, only at night and there they spin and weave and dance until they go to bed. It is under the leadership of an elder girl and as Roy says, 'it is a training institution for the girls in discipline, comradeship, responsibility and leadership¹'. The Rashengs are organized on a clan basis and are visited by boys who are seeking girls to marry. Roy quotes B. S. Guha as saying that : 'It also helps the growth of a spirit and comradeship among men and women and a life of healthy relaxation which provides the outlet for the release of tensions and repressed forces which otherwise would have developed

¹S. C. Roy, *Aspects of Padam-Minyong Culture* (Shillong, 1960), p. 201.

into factionalism and marred the development of a healthy tribal life¹. This institution plays its part in the stories, some of which cannot really be understood without knowing what it is.

Many stories have references to trade. The Khampti Choupet and his friend take ivory, the horns of deer and rhino to barter in distant villages (6.16). It is when Motik Gyelbo goes to trade that he is betrayed by his wife (5.1). Tsowa Tsongpon comes from Tibet to India with loads of beads, iron and salt and we have a vivid picture of the rigours of the two months' journey : The horses die; there is no firewood to keep the travellers warm in the thick snow; and they nearly perish from cold and hunger (5.2). Ashing stories describe how a Wiyu's wife takes her crab-daughter to Tibet to trade skins for salt and wool (2.14) and how the fly takes a small party of a bee, a caterpillar and a locust also to Tibet to obtain wool and food-stuffs (2.21).

There is a remarkable difference in atmosphere between the Adi and the Buddhist stories and I have often been struck by the fact that although some of the Buddhist tribes have taken Adi or other tribal items of theology into their thinking, the Adis themselves have hardly been influenced at all by the Buddhist groups who live so near them. The Ramos and Pailibos have a great deal to do with the Buddhist Membas with whom they trade and from whom they have at least learnt to drink milk and make butter, but I find very little influence of the Buddhist theology in their stories. Similarly the Shimongs and the Tangams live in frequent contact with the

¹ibid., p. 202.

Khambas of the Yang Sang Chu Valley but have borrowed little beyond a few ornaments and certain elements of dress.

Adi stories are dominated by the Wiyus, the unseen spirits who have so great an influence on human life and whom I describe at the beginning of Chapter 3. They also have a large number of animal stories; sometimes all the characters are animals, sometimes animals and human beings marry each other. A frog takes a Wiyu wife; a girl marries a bear. It is interesting that Goswami observes that 'not many Assamese tales illustrating this motif group are available'¹.

On the other hand, in the Buddhist stories, although there are plenty of animals, particularly among the Sherdukpens, they are not very prominent. Many of these stories have a moral, which other tribal stories rarely teach.

In general, the Buddhist stories are more sophisticated, perhaps because many of them have an ultimate literary origin. One fact may immediately strike the reader : the Adi tales refer to village elders or headmen, the Buddhist tales to kings and queens. There is not really very much difference. Some of the Adi elders had the authority and power of minor kings; some of the Buddhist "kings", ruling over their own small villages, are no more than landlords or headmen.

The Attitude to Women

In the Buddhist stories the attitude to women is often unfavourable. It is, of course, a common

¹P. Goswami, *Ballads and Tales of Assam* (Gauhati 1960), p. 178.

psychological device adopted by Buddhists to attain freedom from attachment to meditate on the unpleasant or transitory character of worldly things. Thus the devout Buddhist is enjoined to meditate on the filthy nature of the human body, to think about the graveyard and what happens to us there, to contemplate the dreadful speed with which human life passes away and the folly of attributing ultimate value or importance to it. To a monastic order one of the greatest temptations comes from women, and both in the traditional Buddhist literature and in these folk-tales we are shown that they are just not worth our attention. For example, the Mudu-pani Jataka¹ illustrates how impossible it is to keep women from going after their own desires. Even if a father holds a daughter by the hand it is impossible to guard her and the Jataka reminds us that though women are soft in speech they are insatiable and that a man should be free from them, for they will burn him like fuel in the fire. The Gulla-palobhana Jataka² points the same moral that women in the old days drive the most faithful souls to sin and the story emphasises the idea that a woman's company can make even an ascetic fall into evil for she is full of seductive wiles, deceitful and tempts the most pure-hearted to his fall. Again and again the Jatakas return to the same theme. The Gahapati Jataka³ insists that women can never be kept right; somehow or other they will sin and trick their husbands. The Radha Jataka⁴

¹*The Jataka*. Edited by E. B. Cowell (London, 1957), Vol. II, pp. 224 ff.

²*ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 228.

³*ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 94.

⁴*ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 309.

declares that it is impossible to keep guard over a woman ('No guard can keep a woman in the right path') and tells how a Brahmin entrusted his wife to the charge of a parrot when he had to go out on business whereupon she misconducted herself daily : there was no end to the stream of her lovers in and out of her house. And the Bodhisatta says that even though a man carries a woman about in his arms she will not be safe.

The Asatamanta Jataka¹ says that women 'are lustful, profligate, vile and degraded' and asks why any sensible person should allow himself to be 'tossed by passion' for them.

The Panchatantra and the Tibetan tales from the Kah-Gyur emphasise the ingratitude of women. A Tibetan story describes how a husband twice saves his wife's life, even cutting some flesh off his own thighs, giving it to her to eat and opening the veins of his arms and giving her his blood to drink. But in spite of this she conspires against him with a handless and footless cripple. The Panchatantra tale describes how a woman dies of thirst in a forest and the husband hears a voice saying that if he will give up half his own life she will be revived. Soon after her recovery her husband goes away somewhere and in a garden she hears a cripple singing so beautifully that she falls in love with him at once. She takes an early opportunity of pushing her husband into a well.

In our stories here there is an interesting contrast between the Adi and the Buddhist tales. On

¹ibid., Vol. I, p. 148

the whole, the Adi's attitude to women is more generous and more trustful. It is true that there are some bad girls. There is an Ashing story (2.13) of a girl who steals beads and gets into trouble for it. There are a number of faithless Wiyu girls—the lovely but wanton Wiyu Lodo (2.22), whose freedom results in an illegitimate child who is born dumb and ugly. There is another Wiyu girl who is hard to please and refuses to marry not only Wiyus in human form but animals as well. She steals and is condemned to slavery. In the end she conceives by the wind and gives birth to the cricket (2.27). Another girl, whose fault is not so much in the field of sexual morals as in cruelty, is at first human, but her husband dies and she becomes a Wiyu in the underworld. Her son goes to find her and she is so afraid that if the other Wiyus discover that she has a human husband and a human child they will laugh at her and perhaps drive her away, that she kills her son in a singularly cruel manner (2.31). A curious Shimong story (3.3) shows Pollo the Moon, who is here regarded as a woman, falling in love with a cock. Her husband the Sun catches her with her arms around her lover and the Village Council orders the cock to be mutilated in compensation. The wife of the hero of another Shimong story, 'The Adventurous Frog', is not unfaithful but she eats the food which her husband thinks she should have given to him and behaves in a careless and vulgar manner (3.4).

On the other hand, the picture of women in the Adi stories is generally friendly. Jebo-Samir, a Wiyu girl, who lived in the underworld, used to go everywhere completely naked and animals, gods and

even insects pursued her but she appears to have retained her chastity (3.7). It is possible that the institution of the Rasheng, where sex is disciplined and controlled, has contributed to this higher attitude towards women among the Adis.

In our Buddhist stories, however, as in the classic tales, the picture of women is less favourable. The story of the credulous merchant, Motik Gyelpo (5.1) describes how his wife professes to love him so much that she will not let him out of her sight. When he goes to visit a neighbouring Raja she forces him to make a clay image so that she will have him always with her, and he says : 'A woman who really loves her husband can never make love to others.' Yet within a few hours of his departure she has seduced a rather unwilling friend. A little later in the same story the Raja, who also believes in his wife's virtue, is betrayed by her with a mad man and when the merchant discovers it, he exclaims : 'How astonishing it is ! But this is the nature of women. They only pretend to be loyal to their husbands while in actual fact they betray them.' The Raja and the merchant accordingly agree to live together as brothers and never to have anything to do with women, deciding that it is because women have more desire than men that they are never satisfied and have to go to others. But in the end desire is too strong and they remarry, sharing a wife between them. Yet she too betrays them with a young and handsome servant. After this the friends leave their home and now 'their aim in life is only to worship God and do good to other people'. The Khamptis have a very similar story (6.22) where a supposedly devoted wife insists on the Raja, her

husband, making a golden image of himself to keep her company when he goes away. But he is not so simple as Motik Gyelpo and an hour or two after his departure he returns to his palace to see whether his wife is true to him or not. He hides himself inside the image and has the mortification of seeing his wife seduce a mahout. He goes away to visit another Raja and secretly observes his friend's wife also betraying him with a swineherd. This amuses him so much that he laughs and laughs until he dies.

We may note that in these stories there is a Gamekeeper motif, as we may call it, for the women are unfaithful with lovers of definitely lower social status—a mad man, a servant, a mahout and a swineherd.

In general, the Buddhist stories show women as ready to yield to anyone who approaches them. In the story of the Flying Vessel (5.6) the hero goes to visit five women in succession, each of whom insists that he should spend the night with her. Even though these relationships are ultimately regularised by marriage the moral is evident.

In the Khampti story (6.18) of the Five Wives there is a similar picture of girls who, immediately on seeing the hero, are filled with love and give themselves to him.

The Khampti story of Nang-Padungma (6.24) suggests that there are few women who are at once beautiful and faithful. Nurses, though often good dancers and singers, are particularly dangerous. They love many men and provide girls for their charges.

Singpho stories are equally severe on women. In the story of 'The Conversion of the Demons' (7.6)

there is a very pretty princess who goes to seduce boys, though in the end she is converted to religion.

Women are also witches and there is a grim Khampti tale (6.20) of a well-known and widely-respected monk living in peace and virtue, who is enchanted by a witch and nearly destroyed. Another Khampti story (6.21) of witches describes how one of them turns into a vulture and devours the children of her village.

Women, even the wives of deities, suffer from jealousy and there are Singpho stories illustrating this unpleasant trait (7.7). The Khampti Choupet's wife quarrels with her husband who is a murderer and in her temper lets out the story of his crime and thus leads to his death (6.16).

In a Sherdukpen story (8.4) the three daughters of a demon Raja each promises her father that after his death she will do everything possible to trouble mankind. One turns into a rat and spoils the harvest; the second becomes a pretty girl and makes love to the young men and their desire for her drives them to quarrel and fight each other. The youngest becomes a mouse and spoils the religious books and other precious things in the monastery.

But women who do not behave themselves face an evil fate after death. The Singpho story of 'The Monk and the Bitch' (7.10) is about a woman who used to steal her husband's food and betray him with other men. After this she goes to hell and is turned into a bitch and the God, Mathum-Matha, tells her son : 'Your mother is in hell where she has been turned into a bitch, for she used to go to other men and gave your father dirty food and

the leavings from her own plate. Those who do such things become dogs in hell.' In spite of this, her virtuous son rescues her and sends her to heaven.

The Virtue of Generosity

Among the virtues praised in the Buddhist stories perhaps the most honoured is generosity, the practical expression of non-attachment. In this collection we have the Singpho tale of the Good Old Man (7.9) who almost ruins himself and the happiness of his home by giving away the chickens that he is supposed to sell. But the most important is the tale of Dime Kundan (5.5) in which the hero gives away everything he has, including his children, his wife and his own eyes after being driven into exile on account of his liberality. In time, of course, everything is restored to him but he passes through a period of great suffering first.

This theme is popular in Buddhist fiction everywhere. The most famous story, and that which most closely resembles the story in the text, is the Vessantara Jākata¹ which describes how the Bodhisatta, like our Dime Kundan, is miraculously born and begins to speak directly after his birth. He is named Vessantara and his highest quality is generosity. When he is eight years old, after he has given priceless necklaces to his nurses, he says to himself: 'If one should ask my heart, I would cut open my breast, and tear it out, and give it; if one ask my eyes, I would pluck out my eyes and give them; if one should ask my flesh, I would cut off all the flesh of my body and give it.' He marries the princess Maddi but this does not, as in our tale,

¹Cowell, op. cit., Vol. VI, pp. 251 ff.

turn him from the path of righteousness. He does not have a magic jewel or talisman but a glorious white elephant who brings rain wherever he goes. One day there is a great famine in Kalinga and the people there ask for the elephant and the prince gives it to them. This makes him very unpopular and his own people want to slay him but in the end his father persuades them to agree to his going into exile. After distributing princely gifts he goes with his wife into the forest, gives her to a Brahmin and even gives away his own children. This version of the story, however, does not include the incident of the giving of the eyes.

The same story is given by Spence Hardy¹ and von Schiefner, who refers to the Kah-Gyur, and tells the story of Vessantara in a rather shorter and clearer form than that given in Cowell's edition of the Jataka.² In von Schiefner's version the prince's name is Visvatara and the English editor, Ralston, writes sympathetically about the sorrows of Madri, the princely ascetic's wife, who is reduced, by her husband's passion for giving everything away, first to exile and poverty, then to bitter grief on account of the loss of her dearly loved little children, and finally to slavery, but submits to all her husband's commands.

Ralston refers to other stories of this kind. One of them is the Nidanakatha³ which describes the great generosity of Mangala Buddha. 'The story is that when he was performing the duties of a Bodhi-satta, being in an existence corresponding to the

¹*Manual of Buddhism*, pp. 116-24.

²W. R. S. Ralston, *Tibetan Tales* (London) pp. 257 ff.

³Translated in C.A.F. Rhys David's *Buddhist Birth-Stories*, p. 33.

Vessantara existence,¹ he dwelt with his wife and children on a mountain.' One day a demon named 'Sharp-fang', hearing of his readiness to bestow gifts, 'approached him in the guise of a Brahmin, and asked the Bodhisatta for his two children. The Bodhisatta, exclaiming, "I give my children to the Brahmin," cheerfully and joyfully gave up both the children, thereby causing the ocean-girt earth to quake. The demon, standing by the bench at the end of the cloistered walk, while the Bodhisatta looked on, devoured the children like a bunch of roots.'

Similar is the tale of Harischandra, which has been recorded in folk-tale form in Stokes's *Indian Fairy Tales* (No. 13). In this story Harischandra promises to give an ascetic two pounds and a half of gold but his wealth is turned into charcoal and in order to keep his word he is compelled to sell his wife and child for a pound-and-a-half of gold and himself for the remaining pound, with consequences tragic to himself and his family, although in the end everything is restored to him.

The *Katha-Sarit-Sagara*² contains a story of the generous demon, Namuchi, 'who was devoted to charity and very brave and did not refuse to give anything to anybody that asked, even if he were his enemy'. By his virtue he wins the magic horse at the time of the Churning of the Ocean and when his enemies, the gods, find themselves in despair they go and ask for it and he gives it to them, although he is their enemy, rather than mar the

¹His last birth before attaining Buddhahood.

²N. M. Penzer, *The Ocean of Story* (London, 1927), Vol. IV, p. 63.

glory of open-handedness which he had been accumulating since his birth. When Indra goes to ask for his horse, Namuchi says to himself, 'If the glory of generosity, which I have long been acquiring in the worlds, were to wither, what would be the use to me of prosperity of life ?'

Then we have the generous Induprabha, the son of the King of Kurukshetra¹. There is a famine in his kingdom and his ministers do not want the King to give people relief but Induprabha tells his father that he is their 'wishing-tree' and should do so. This annoys the king and he taunts his son. When the boy hears this he makes a vow that he will attain by austerity the condition of a wishing-tree or die in the attempt. In the end he succeeds and makes his father's subjects as happy as if they were in paradise, for he grants them even the most difficult boons. Indra offers him entrance to heaven as a reward for his goodness but Induprabha refuses, asking how he can disappoint so many men by going to heaven for the sake of his own happiness.

Another story in the *Katha-Sarit-Sagara*, which resembles the Vessantara Jataka, is the story of Taravaloka². His wife is Madri and their sons are called Rama and Lakshaman. He himself possesses an elephant and is famous for his generosity; he builds alms-houses for the distribution of food and other things. His enemies ask him for his elephant, for they think that once he has given it to them—and he cannot refuse—they will be able to take his kingdom from him. As in the other stories, the

¹Penzer, op. cit., Vol. VI, p. 84.

²Penzer, op. cit., Vol. VIII, pp. 126-129.

citizens are enraged at this and they send him with his wife and two children into exile in the forest and the remainder of the story follows the plot of the Vessantara Jataka, though this version also omits the gift of the hero's own eyes.

Yet another version of this story is given by Waddell which at the beginning broadly follows our text but includes the incident of the donation (often omitted) of the generous prince's own eyes. 'He meets a blind man, who asks him for his eyes, which he immediately plucks out and bestows on the applicant, who thus receives his sight. The prince, now blind, is led onwards by his wife, and on the way meets "The Buddhas of the three Periods" who restore the prince's sight.¹

Finally, among the Sherdukpen tales recorded by Mr Rinchin Norbu there is a story of a woman with a pious son who gives alms to Lamas and the poor and feeds the pilgrims who pass by their house. One day, while the mother is away, a very old woman comes to beg and the boy gives her all the food they have. The old woman blesses him and says that the Lord Buddha will reward him and that if he will go to a neighbouring hill he will find something of great value. When the boy's mother returns home, she is very angry that all the food has been given away.

The story goes on to say that the boy goes to the hill where he finds a tattered bag and a pair of old shoes and when he comes home these divine gifts make him so rich that he is able to spend all his time giving food and money to pilgrims and to poor. The

¹L. A. Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet* (London, 1939), pp. 543-51.

king of that place offers him his daughter in marriage in order to discover the secret of his wealth. From this point onward, however, the Sherdukpen story departs entirely from that in the text.

The Magic of Laughter

Bloomfield has analysed the various kinds of laugh in Indian fiction. There are the laughs of joy, irony, malice, trickery and triumph. In some cases laughter and crying go together. Sometimes we have the sardonic laugh, the enigmatic laugh and the laugh of mystery.¹ Penzer's analysis is somewhat simpler. 'In Hindu fiction I would divide laughs into two distinct varieties : (1) those which clearly show their nature, but not the reason which prompted them; (2) curious and mysterious laughs which give no clue either to their real nature or their significance.

'Both varieties are dramatic, the second more than the first. It is, of course, the dramatic laugh that becomes such a force in the hands of the story-teller. It has been observed that, with but very few exceptions, all Biblical laughs are dramatic—usually of scorn or derision. The innocent laugh of joy would nearly always pass unheeded by the chronicler or historian, as it would lack the interest necessary to produce a dramatic situation.'²

Most of these types of laughter occur in our stories. In an Ashing story (2.3) a dead Otter gives a jeering laugh when he hears the Bat telling obvious lies, and in a Khampti story (6.12) we have another

¹M. Bloomfield, 'Psychic Motifs in Hindu Fiction', *Journal American Oriental Soc.*, Vol. XXXVI (1916), pp. 54 ff.

²Penzer op. cit., Vol. VII p. 254.

unusual laugh when a large fish, which has swallowed a Raja's son and is already dead laughs, when the fisherman prepares to cut him up. The reason, for this is apparently that the fish knows that the child is in his belly and is amused at the thought of the surprise which his captors will feel when they find it.

Neither of these mysterious laughs are as effective, for they are not quite so mysterious, as the laughs of the same kind in the *Katha-Sarit-Sagara*.

Then in an Ashing story (2.34) we have a ribald tale of a man who dies through laughing too much. In fact, there is often an element of cruelty in tribal laughter. Aimapet (6.15) chuckles to himself as he drowns the men of his own village by a clever trick. In another Khampti story (6.16), Choupet, who has murdered his friend after the latter has prayed to dark clouds overshadowing the sky, laughs while he is sitting with his wife and the sky is again darkened, thus reminding him of the dead that made him rich. This laugh leads to his destruction, for his wife insists on his telling her the reason for his amusement and finally blurts it out during a quarrel.

The fear of laughter occurs as a motif in a few stories. The Ashing tale (2.27) is of a Wiyu girl who conceives by the wind and through fear of being laughed at as the mother of an illegitimate child, goes away to the Land of the Moon and has her baby there. A very cruel Ashing story (2.31) describes how a widow murders her own son by crushing his head in a mortar because she is afraid that the Wiyus, among whom she is now living, will laugh at her if they find out that she has a human son from a human husband.

In two stories, one from the Khambas and one from the Khamptis, we have the motif of magic laughter combined with the theme of a wife's infidelity. In the first a man vomits when he laughs and brings up precious beads, so valuable that he grows very rich. But going one day to visit a Raja he is depressed by his wife's infidelity and cannot manage as much as a smile. It is only when he sees his friend's wife falling into the same error that he begins to laugh. The Khampti story is about two Rajas, both of whom have very profitable laughs. The first laughs when he is pleased and the sound of it brings rain. The second Raja laughs at anything surprising or unusual; he vomits and brings up gold and silver. As in the Khamba story he is depressed by his wife's infidelity and only laughs when he discovers that the first Raja is also deceived.

In these two stories are combined the motif of treasure falling from the mouth (D 1454.2)¹ which is known in Kashmir, the Punjab, Mysore and Madras, and the magic laugh, (D 2143.1.11) where a man laughs to bring rain. H 1194.1 is the motif of a man whose laughter brings rain but is unable to laugh until two people unknown to each other go to sleep in the same room and frighten one another.

The Power of Body-dirt

The motif of a deity or hero creating animals or human beings by rubbings from his skin is not as common as might be expected among people who

¹These, and other, reference are to Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk Literature* (latest edition, Copenhagen, 1958.)

do not often wash and who, therefore, when they sweat, produce a fair amount of dirt when the skin is rubbed. The motif is classified in the Stith Thompson Motif Index A 1211.5, 'Man made from skin rubbed from Creator's (hero's) body'; A 1263, 'Man created from rubbings of the skin'; and under the headings A 1725.2 'Animals from body-dirt of deity (hero).' In the Khampti story (6.1) the Creator rubs many little bits of dirt off his body and they turn into honey-bees and ultimately create the world. In several Singpho stories we have the same motif. In one the Creator's back begins to itch; he scratches it and under his nails he gets a little dirt which turns into a spider (7.1). In another story (7.11) the Creator's wife rubs some dirt off her body and makes a beautiful young girl with whom she proposes to test the virtue of her husband. There is also a variant in a third Singpho tale (7.3) when the creator goes away to find food during a storm. His wife grows anxious and rubs her cheek until a little black pimple grows there. She scratches it off, it bleeds a little and she sends it to call her husband home. 'It spread its wings and flew away and the drop of blood became fire and lighted it through the darkness.'

In Orissa and Central India there are many examples of this motif which is known to the Kamars, Jhorias and Konds of Orissa.¹ It is also known to the Gonds, Kamars, Agarias, Kols, Murias and Bhuiyas of Central India.² A 1725.2 is found among the Konds, Kamars, Binjhvars and Parengas of

¹See my *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, pp. 4, 445, 480.

²See my *Myths of Middle India*, pp. 29, 47, 50, 125, 138, 177 etc. and my *The Agaria*, p. 90.

Orissa.¹ Sometimes the dirt is rubbed from the Creator's body and is made directly into a human being or animal. Sometimes he makes little dolls and turns them into baby boys and girls. He creates man from the dirt of his forehead, from the dirt of his ear, the dirt under his toenails, or the dirt of the breast. Men are also created from sweat, blood, blood-clots, fingernails and spittle.

The variant, where the Creator's wife turns the body-dirt into an animal to frighten her husband home, is found in a Kamar story in which she creates a tiger, and a Parenga story where she makes little balls of dirt into mosquitoes. In my *Myths of the North-East Frontier* (p. 104), there is yet another variant where in a Bugun (Khowa) tale the first girl and the first boy are separated by a great mountain. A bee settles on the girl's naked body, takes a little scrap of her dirt and, flying to the boy, puts it on his body. Then he takes a little of the boy's dirt to the girl. Both are filled with desire and, though there is no intercourse, the girl becomes pregnant and first child is born.

In the same collection is a Digaru Mishmi story of a Khampti Raja who has the habit of rubbing his hands together. This causes a swelling which breaks open and a girl comes out.

Rare and Popular Motifs

It is interesting that some of the most popular and famous motifs known throughout the world are almost absent in this and the earlier book of NEFA tales. The step-mother does not figure in

¹See my *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, p. 254, 338, 569 and 627.

the stories, nor generally does the successful youngest son. The 'external soul' is found but seldom. The Hand of Glory is not known nor is the Act of Truth, and the theme of the Poison Damsel is rare.

There are no formulistic or cumulative tales, and there is little about sacred numbers.

On the other hand, very common motifs are those of the *primaeval* ocean (A 810); the original sun or suns being too hot (A 720.2); earthquakes caused by a great animal or fish on whose back the world is supported (A 1145); the poppy flower growing from a dead body (A2611); tobacco as a solace in time of mourning; the goat robbing the dog of its horns (A 2245); the rivalry between the pig and the dog (K 41.2); a few Trickster tales; the monkey as developed from human beings (D 118.2). There are a great many examples of magic charms, talismans and horns. The spider appears as teaching weaving to man (A 2091); there are flying elephants (A 2292.3); body-dirt turning into an animal messenger (D 444.2.3); disenchantment by the destruction of the hero's skin (D 721.3); many examples of magical conception (T 510-T 538) and many tests to which the hero is subjected (H 1010-H 1049). Surprisingly, in a very remote Ramo-Pailibo village I found a story (4.7) with the common theme of J 1191.1.1—where a clever dog arrives late at a trial with the excuse that he was delayed because the Siang River was on fire: he claims that this is no more absurd than to claim that a male mithun can have a calf.

There are a number of charming or significant motifs. The world, which grows out of a many-coloured lotus, is called 'honey-sweet'; it is so

attractive that the gods who visit it will not return to the sky, they want to smell more and more of the sweet and beautiful earth (5.1). God looks down from heaven and sees its loveliness : the women of earth are more beautiful than those of heaven.

We have a number of beautiful girls in these stories. There is Lodo, the lovely but wanton young Wiyu girl (2.22); Pedong-Sune, the water-spirit, a girl with flowing hair (2.15); the very beautiful Jebo-Samir who goes about completely naked until she puts on a girdle (3.7); Nang Padungma who is born of a flower and cradled in a lotus—she is as gracious as a temple flower (6.24).

Some of the scenes in these stories are striking. We see a Wiyu girl in the Himalayas winnowing snow in her fan and sending it to fly through the air (2.7). Earth and sky lie in constant embrace until at last they have to separate : lightning is the lamp which the sky uses when he searches for his lover (3.2). I like the picture of the Tibetan girl and the future father of mankind who meet on a great rock among the high mountains and sing to each other and dance together till love comes to them (3.16). I like too the picture of the red, blue, yellow and black elephants following their King, the white elephant, in a great valley which is seen from above (5.19). And in another mood there is the contrast between the crabs, fish and frogs in a pond and enormous elephants who disturb their peace when they come to drink water (6.13).

We have a storm like a dark mountain, a snake as high as a hill and dark clouds which are the ill-omened witnesses of a treacherous murder.

There are too notable themes of another kind.

In an Ashing story, after Kare the hero dies, his two wives turn themselves into birds and fly to the dangerous world of the dead to find and rescue him (2.20). In a Shimong story the frog's wife puts the heart of a pig, which has been killed for supper, on the top of a pole so that all can see it and realise 'her heart and her husband's are one as the heart is one' (3.3).