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FOLKLORE: A GLIMPSE INTO *THE GAIN*E TRADITION OF NEPAL AND THE FOLKTALES
OF BHUTAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to examine folklore as a genre, while taking into consideration two folk genres – the folk song and the folk tale, from across two cultures, two countries – Bhutan and Nepal; and belonging to two different linguistic groups – Dzongkha (a Sino- Tibetan language) and Nepali (Indo-Aryan language of the sub-branch of Eastern Pahari). While examining the two genres of folk tales from Bhutan and folk songs from Nepal, this paper will also take into account the socio-cultural and religious practices and beliefs of these two cultures.

What do we understand by the term folk? Folk could mean “commoners”/ *lok* in Hindi/ *Janapada*. Folk is also used to refer to the rural peasants/ simple country folks as opposed to the civilized, cultivated, and the elite of the urban cities. Folk has been known to constitute ordinary/ non- literate people such as farmers, labourers, tribal population among others (Alan Dundes, 1989, Folk Matters), defines folk as something that “refers to any group of people, whatsoever, who share at least one common factor”... be it a “common occupation, language, or religion” the important thing to be noted here was the fact that groups were formed for “whatever reasons”. Even though, folk does not necessarily refer to the rural populace, it has come to acquire the connotations associated with the rural, the countryside, with simple people, peasants. A popular opinion that, folklore is the creation of a group of people who share more or less the same, contiguous dwelling space, and culture, irrespective of where they live, be it the city, town, village or a different state, is also important.

Folklore then, may be considered to be the outcome of the creative ideas of a people, expressed through verbal art and material forms – it may originate from a community, or an individual, but it is transmitted orally or through the written process, from one generation to another and from one country to another, and it usually keeps exchanging its position between the oral narration and the written word. Folklore or the study of the folk tradition began in the 18th Century with the work of Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Stimmen der Volker in Leidern* (1778-79) where he used the term *Folk* with *Volk*. From the 18th century onwards, Folklore came to be studied as a separate discipline.

The term folklore was to be coined later by Williams Thoms in 1846, from hereon, the institutionalization of folklore studies started, beginning with England in 1878 and in the United States of America in 1888. Having said that it is also important to mention that there is a lot of disagreement/ controversies surrounding the genre folklore. Disagreements related to the definition (as scholars of Literature/ Folklore Studies/ Anthropologists and Ethnographers) look upon their subject/ object of study differently.

While scholars such as, Espinosa, Herzog, Kurath and Luomala; look at folklore in civilized society as mainly rural, others agree on the fact that the material of folklore studies could include those that belong to both “primitive tribes as well as sub cultures within civilized society” (Francis Lee Utley, 1961, p 194) . Some scholars state that folklore means, “Traditional cultural forms that are communicated between individuals through words and actions and tend to exist in variation”. Folklore has come to be defined differently by different people, while some see them as deeply connected to the nation; others suggest that folklore belongs to the lower rungs of society; some find folklore old fashioned, dated; others suggest that the folk belong to a particular social group that is deeply connected to each other through some commonality in culture, tradition or even communication.

The issues that plague folklore studies are also related to what constitutes Folklore Studies. Some scholars include the following as material of folklore studies:

- Literature and the other Arts
- Beliefs, customs, and rites
- Crafts such as weaving and the mode of hay stacking
- Language or folk speech (Francis Lee Utley, 1961, p 194)

Whatever be included or excluded from the field of folklore studies suffice it to say that folklore indicates a basic premise – that it is an orally transmitted tradition, an unwritten literature. Folklore studies and folklore scholars insist on the “inclusion of oral (verbal, unwritten), tradition (transmission), primitive culture and the subculture of civilized society both rural and urban” (Ibid). However, the agreement to include art, literature, customs and beliefs is more unanimous whereas, the crafts and language are often left out of the purview of folklore studies. American anthropology defines folklore as, “‘art and literature orally transmitted,’ excluding custom, belief, crafts, and language”. (Ibid, 9 195)

But what happens when we study folktales that are written and documented in book form? The answer is quite obvious, we would need to realize that we are in fact, studying not just folklore but the relationship between the oral and the written literature (ibid, p 201). It is therefore, but pertinent for scholars and students of folklore studies to have more exposure to the community that she/ he is studying (by way of an ethnological study of the producers/ tellers of the oral tradition/ folklore), should have access to the various exponents of culture that they believe and practice. What should also be remembered is that when one takes up folklore studies, one would need to be a whole lot more than just someone reading and writing about folklore. As Utley suggests, one would need to be, “a textual, a historical, and a configurational critic”... as a result of which he/ she “could aspire to be a literary critic” (Ibid, p 204).

Some folklore studies include oral literature, material culture, social folk custom and performing folk arts. There are various approaches to folklore studies such as, the “mythological school; diffusion/ migration theory; anthropological perspectives; historical – geographical approach; psychoanalytical school; the oral- formulistic theory; the structural school and the contextual theory” (Gouri Nilakanthan Mehta, 2009, pp 24-27).

It is essential to remember that folklore items are also largely autotelic, meaning they travel by themselves without the actual movement of populations. An important question that arises when we talk about folklore and examine folklore as a specialized study is the question of “Whose Voice?” Almost all creations of folklore, be it tales, songs, ballads, proverbs, riddles, are the creation of an individual, genius. But this does not mean that an individual’s voice becomes the voice of a folk. What happens instead is this – an individual genius creates a folk tale, a folk song, a ballad; but his/ her uniformity of experience with the other members of the community who share the same social conditions, becomes inseparable from the voice of the society/ community. When he/ she speaks, it becomes the voice of the community, when she/ he expresses it in song, the expression becomes the expression of the society/ community. It is only when the community/ society identifies and accepts the creation of an individual as its own wealth, that, the creation becomes what is known today as folklore.

An individual may create a folktale/ folksong, folk ballad, but, it is only after the acceptance of the community/ society as, the collective thoughts and expressions of the entire community/ society, that, the creation acquires the status of folklore. The act of identification and ownership by the community, the preference for the voice of the people is what distinguishes folklore from any other creation. Defining folklore is difficult, it is easier to understand it through the elements that comprise folklore. Folktales, folksongs, ballads, proverbs, and myths could be a potential source of study that comprises the vast ambit of folklore.

In examining one of the folksongs of Nepal and the folktales of Bhutan, we realize that we are also attempting a study of the folk narrative form. Folk narratives are but an expression of all the activities of a society, embracing the various aspects of traditional culture. But folk narratives cannot be dismissed as a form of amusement or taken lightly. Folk narratives are an account of the details of the different facets of life, both for the creators of the narratives and the listeners. The narratives, in this case the songs and the tales, comprise the social approvals/ disapprovals, critique and ridicule to those who deviate from the laid down social norms and mores. Though Taylor's definition of folklore is dated, (A Taylor, 1948), it comprises a whole array of features of folklore studies that is interesting in its approach and inclusion.

Folklore is the material that is handed on by tradition, either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folktales, folksongs, riddles, proverbs or other materials preserved in words. It may be traditional tools and physical objects like fences, or knots, hot cross buns, or Easter eggs; traditional ornamentation like the walls of Troy; or traditional symbols like the Swastika. It may be traditional procedures like throwing salt over one's shoulders or knocking on wood. It may be traditional beliefs like the notion that Elder is good for the ailment of the eye. All of these are folklore (Archer Taylor, 1948, p 216).

This paper looks at two forms of folklore from the SAARC region, Bhutan and Nepal. From Bhutan we explore the Bhutanese Folktales and from Nepal we examine a folksong tradition known as the Gaine tradition. These two countries though our immediate neighbours are not well known to most of us and their folklore or literature is even less known, hence, the need for a representation from this part of the world. This paper will now be divided into two parts: part I will discuss the Gaine tradition of folksongs from Nepal, while part II will examine the Folktales of Bhutan, by Ashi Kunzang Choden, and one folk tale in particular.

Who are the Nepalese? The Nepalese whether in Nepal or in various parts of India such as, North Bengal, Delhi, Bengaluru etc, consists of several races and tribes. The Gurung, Mangar, Rai, Limbo, Tamang, Newar belong to the Tibeto Burman and Kirata races, whereas, the high caste, Brahmins, and Kshatriyas, and the low caste/ Dalits of Nepalese society such as the Kamis, Damais, Sarkis belong to the Aryan stock (M M Gurung, 1997, p1). Nepal was a kingdom through most of her years and is now a Federal Republic Democracy.



Nepal has an area of 147,181 square kilometres (56,827 square miles) and a population of approximately 27 million. Nepal is the world's 93rd largest country by land mass and the 41st most populous country in the world.

Nepal is situated in the Himalayan range and is bordered to the north by the People's Republic of China, and to the south, east, and west by the Republic of India. Specifically, the Indian states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Sikkim border Nepal, whereas, across the Himalayas lies the Tibet Autonomous Region. Nepal is separated from Bangladesh by the narrow Indian Siliguri Corridor. Kathmandu is the nation's capital and largest metropolis (wikipedia.org).



Political Map of India showing her immediate neighbours – Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the Maldives.

The *Gaine* tradition of folksongs is a part of the traditional folksongs of Nepal along with the Katuwali, Dholaki, Bigul, and Jhyalee. The Gaine are believed to have fled to Nepal along with caste Hindus from the Mughal invasions in what is now called Rajasthan. They are to be found in seven districts of Nepal (Dang, Kaski,

chitwan, Puthan, Gulmi, Surkhet, and Tanahun districts of Nepal), and are classified amongst the Nepali Dalits and are the lowest caste on the social hierarchy (They are classified along with the Lohar, Sunar, Kami, Damai, Sarki, Badi, Kasai, Kusule, Kuche, Chyame, Pode, Chamar, Dhobi, Paswan (Dushad), Tatma, Dom, Batar, Khatwe, Musahar Santhal, Satar, and Halkhor). Their villages are normally close to the villages of the higher castes but the difference in the houses of the upper caste and the Gaine are obvious. The Gaine are not supposed to own land by tradition, they are required to move from one place to another composing, playing the sarangi and singing their songs, and thereby eeking out a living for themselves. Their sorrows, their economic and social plight often find expression in their songs as they move from one village to another. They are like the wandering minstrels and the bards of the European and British tradition. Their songs of their plight etc have been closely aligned to the blues tradition of America (Folkways Records). The types of songs they composed were varied ranging from the old religious songs of the Vedic origin/ shastri songs sung by Gaine such as Garbha Gaine, and ballads reminding one of the ballads of the American Old West, where often one character was immortalized, such as the Gaine Geet Chori Mareko/ the Ballad of the Murdered Daughter.



The *Gaine* usually follow set routes as they travel in search of a livelihood. According to the research cited above, the Gaine follow familiar routes as they move in the Chitwan area, Pokhara, Gorkha, and Palpa and their home districts. However, they do have records of Gaine who claim to have travelled as far as to Assam and Shillong/ Meghalaya in neighbouring India. Gothe Gaine claims that he is the only Gaine to have been invited to sign and play at the Royal palace at Kathmandu. Some of the famous Gaine singers are Garbhe Gaine, Gothe Gaine, Jhalakman Gandharbha amongst others. A Gaine begins his informal training early in life, learning how to play the Sarangi and learning the folksongs of his family/ community. He starts around the age of seven years (Ibid) and by the time he is fourteen, he is supposed to be ready to travel and earn a living. They have the tendency to travel alone or at most in pairs. They move from one house to another singing their songs and waiting for the owners/ other passersby to slip them a few notes/ coins/ a handful of rice as the case may be. Sometimes they play in the town square/ what is known as Chauthara/ sitting area, usually under the shade of a tree/ with a roof. In days of old, the *Gaine* would compose songs related to the rules and regulations of the country, any new schemes that the Monarchy/ Government initiated and that people could be unaware of. They sang of valour and bravery, love, betrayal, of the ills of society, in a satiric and extremely tongue-in-cheek manner. Earlier on the *Gaine* had royal patronage and were looked after to an extent, now with the advent of modernization, a democratic republic in power, the old way of life is rapidly dwindling and vanishing as young men of the *Gaine* families, shun their age old way of life and look at other ways of earning a living.

Every household will have a Sarangi, since it's the tradition but very few of the families play it. Chandra Bahadur (Chandan Prasad, "What are we without our stories?")

The problems that plague modern *Gaines* is the fact that the traditional wandering minstrel way of life does not offer them much by way of a living. The constant fear now is that if all Gains were to stop practicing their art, their living culture, a time will come when these popular songs will have been lost to the public and will slip away from the collective memory as well, thus, bring the end of a great tradition.

The Ballad of the Murdered Daughter/ *Chhori Mareko*, is a traditional *Gaine* song that talks about the ills of society... in this case Gambling. The ballad opens with a context, the time is fixed, 18th day of the Mangsir

month in the year BS 2033 (approximately the 3rd of December, 1976), the day is also fixed, it was a Saturday when three Tibetans came down from Manang to gamble. The gentleman in question was one Hari Prasad Brahmin, who started gambling with the Tibetans.

On the first day he won 17 000 rupees and tasted the sweet success of gambling and gaining a windfall, which was fine, till Hari Prasad's greed got the better of him and made him reckless, needless to say, he had started losing heavily. He lost what he had won the first day, then he started gambling with his savings, gradually he lost all his money, his rice fields, which used to yield a substantial amount of rice (300 muris - 1 muri is roughly equivalent to 72 Kgs/ 160 Pounds, so 300 muris = 21, 600 Kgs of rice producing lands/ 1 muri = 0.013 hectares of land; <http://sizes.com/units/murhi.htm>) and his house, another plot of land, all the vessels (made of silver, bronze and copper) in his house, livestock (24 cows, 7 buffaloes, 14 castrated goats and 11 uncastrated goats). He was a man of means so had two wives, the older one tells him that he should not throw the rice ball like he was throwing a dice/ kauri. Needless to say he does not listen to his wife's pleadings and eventually a situation arises when he has no assets left and he decides to wager his wives.

One of the wives gives him another piece of land instead of their virtue and lives, he gambles and loses the land and then bets his wives. The wives run away to the forest. He has four children, two boys and two girls, the ages of the girls are specified, the older one is 19 and married, the younger one has just finished her SLC (School Leaving Certificate) exam. His next target is his older daughter as she is married to a wealthy man. He asks her for her jewelry which she refuses to hand over. On the pretext of her mother's illness he lures her into the forest and stabs her in order to take her jewelry. He does not kill her outright, even after three hours his daughter is alive, and gasping for breath and water.

Eventually he hides her dead body under a pile of leaves and is almost escaping with the jewelry when, three soldiers pass by and seeing the blood stop to investigate. They find the body and realize that she has been killed for her jewelry, but all of a sudden they spot someone hiding and Hari Prasad, by now completely obsessed and deranged is discovered covered with blood. He admits that he killed his daughter for 100 gms of gold as he needed the money for the gamble debt/ to try and get out of the debt trap. He is sentenced for twenty years and then the Gaine informs the public that the daughter was three months pregnant and had been married less than a year, was only 19, when her father murdered her for the 100 gms of gold. He pleads to the listeners that they should never gamble and should learn a lesson from the life and ultimate downfall of one Hari Prasad Brahmin. This folk ballad is usually sung to the accompaniment of a Sarangi and a Mahdal. The Sarangi is a 4-stringed musical instrument. The bow of which is made with 15 or more horse hairs strung on a curved thin branch, about 18" long. The Sarangi is usually made from the Peepul tree and if made well can last a 100 years (Folkways Album). Through songs like this, the Gaine highlight problems that are faced by the common folk, ask them to stay away from various social ills and to refrain from deviating from the norm. This song also highlights their fear and mistrust of strangers particularly the Tibetans who are tall, well built, physically strong, mentally sharp, extremely industrious and sharp as well as business ventures are concerned. They dread particularly the Managays... or the people of the Manang district of the upper regions of Nepal.



This map shows the districts of Nepal, note the position of Mustang and Manang, to the north of Nepal and just next to the Chinese border (Tibet). You can also spot the *Gaine* districts here.

However, all is not lost yet, as we do read of reports of groups such as the '*Gandharba ka Saathiharu*' (Friends of the Gandharbhas), a Kathmandu-based community of journalists and musicians, who have come together to promote the music of the Gainses, Nepal's travelling minstrels (Naresh Kumar, 2005). In an interview with a 13-year-old Gaine - Rubin Gandharba, who is miles from his home in Gorkha, in Kathmandu with a "mission to revive the Gaine musical tradition, established by his ancestors centuries ago. Says, Rubin Gandharba, "People in the capital should know who we are and about our contribution to Nepali culture," who was in Kathmandu to participate in the three-day Gandhaba Festival in Patan, on 30 January, 2005 (ibid).

Some of the reasons why the Gaine tradition could be dying out and a whole community losing out on their treasures could be:

- Economic Reasons
- Social Status attached to modern/ contemporary songs
- Hence, a low status for traditional Gaine songs

A rapidly depleting rural population too is responsible as much as modernization and globalization. But on the other hand apart from some small pockets of people and groups trying to save such traditions, globalization has also lead to deeper interest in these folksongs and hence, more documentation, research, archives and the tradition may be preserved. But is there really a reason to preserve this group of wandering minstrels? The answer lies in the following quote from the cited document.

...And as most Nepali folk songs are inspired by the Gainses, with them lies the genesis of Nepali folklore, song and music as we know it today. The modern folk genre is commercially successful but its proponents are predominantly Brahmins, Newars, Gurungs and Limbus. While neo-gainses gain nationwide popularity and become wealthy celebrities, the original Gainses are neglected and on the verge of extinction. (<https://everestbuddha.livejournal.com/>)

Most of the contemporary musicians of Nepal, find it sad that musicians like the Gaine are now a neglected lot and do not get the publicity, nor the audience, nor the commercial success that artists deserve, instead these days they are looked upon as more of a nuisance to be shooed away by the public. There is also a school of thought that believes that merely aping the Western style of music will actually prove to be detrimental to the growing music industry in Nepal. These musicians are of the view that, the only way to ensure that their music lives on is by blending and modifying their indigenous music, one of the exponents of this view point being, Aavaas, (a contemporary singer and composer).

It needs to be remembered by all that *Gaine* s are not just singers wandering around with "four- string sarangis, but are communicators and reporters, keepers of the collective memory of our land. In the days before mass communication, their music was the medium for rural Nepal to learn of and remember battles, brave soldiers, natural disasters, joys and sorrows of everyday life" (Naresh Newar, 2005).

The *Gainses* are a very unhappy lot these days, alcoholism is a huge evil amongst them. It appears as if the very things they preached against are now infesting them. They feel that "Foreigners have done more for" them than the Nepalese. "They have more respect and value for our music," says Krishna Bahadur Gandharba from Tanahu. He speaks of several Gainses who were sponsored to travel abroad to participate in the folk music concerts. *Lal Bahadur Gandharba* went to Vienna two years ago and was surprised to get such a rousing round of applause from hundreds gathered to see him perform. "It was the happiest moment of my life," he recalls. "We should no longer be ashamed to say that we are Gainses and of low caste" (Naresh Newar, 2005).

The older generation of Gainses appear to have passed on the baton to the younger musicians as they feel that it is now up to the youngsters to keep the tradition going and to maintain the tradition. "First of all, they should not be ashamed to carry their sarangi and sing anywhere," says Krishna, who has given up trying to

motivate children from a 17-member clan to follow his footsteps. Krishna feels the only way to prevent his people's music from becoming extinct is to document the Ganes knowledge and skills (Ibid).

The *Folktales of Bhutan* take us from one erstwhile Himalayan Kingdom to another, this time a much smaller kingdom, area wise, and population wise. Bhutan is a landlocked country in South Asia located at the eastern end of the Himalayas. It is bordered to the north by China and to the south, east and west by India. To the west, it is separated from Nepal by the Indian state of Sikkim, while further south it is separated from Bangladesh by the Indian states of Assam and West Bengal. Bhutan's capital and largest city is Thimphu. Bhutan's total area is approximately 38,394 square kilometres, or (14, 824 square miles). Bhutan has a relatively small population of 742,737 people. Just as Nepal's state religion is Hinduism, Bhutan's state religion is Vajrayana Buddhism as more than three quarters of a million Bhutanese are primarily Buddhists.

The folktale under consideration is *The Ani* and the *Migoi*.

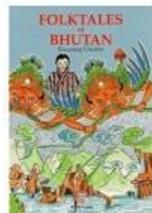


National Emblem of Bhutan;
National Flag of Bhutan



We shall be examining the Folktales of Bhutan next. Folktales and ballads all over the world, especially in India, and in Bhutan had to pass through both the written as well as the oral tradition. Like all folktales, the folktales of Bhutan too originated by word of mouth, as the author of the *Folktales of Bhutan*, Ashi Kunzang Choden says in the Preface:

... I shared one common bond with every child in the village and that was the intense love of stories, legends and fables. As I reminisce now of the story telling sessions, I see a circle of adults and children relaxing in the late afternoon sun, in the West Gate od Ugen Choling naktsang, listening in rapt attention to every word of the story teller. p. xii (Choden, Kunzang., 1994)



Over time for fear that the folktales would be lost for posterity, in modern times, many have chosen to record the folktales. This too was the case with the folktales of Bhutan. Folktales may be looked upon as fictional narratives, if we wish, that were handed down from one generation to another by word of mouth. Folktales were a record of the oral tradition of mostly older societies and cultures. As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, the oral narratives that have come down to us as folktales are the creations of an individual's genius/creativity but representative of not his/ her particular psyche but the collective consciousness of the larger community/ what came to be called the 'folk mind'. Since the folktales belonged to a community with more or less a similar ethnic identity, and hence, a similar cultural heritage and rites of passage, social norms and mores, these creative impulses began to reflect the existential concerns of the group and to try and address these concerns.

When a story teller starts narrating a tale, others listen to it for entertainment, and amusement. The teller and the listener are bound by a link of communication. A professional story teller would know at once, the techniques he/ she should apply to create a sense of mystery, suspense or even sadness and gloom. His/ her listeners too would know what would come next depending on the oratory skills of the storyteller and would anticipate/ await the next incident eagerly. The listeners would make appropriate sounds such as applause,

exclamations of pity, horror, joy, distress at the right moments. Hence, the teller and the listener cannot be isolated from each other for the communication to take place and to be effective. This in effect often causes serious issues when folktales/ folksongs are studied/ analysed without the context of the society it comes from. Malinowski in (*Myth and Primitive Psychology*), says, "The limitation of the study of the myth to a mere examination of the text has been fatal to a proper understanding of its nature. The forms of the myth which come to us from classical antiquity and from the ancient, sacred books of the East and other similar sources have come down to us without the context of the living faith, without the possibility of obtaining comments from true believers ... etc.", (Malinowski., 1926, p 11)

The author in the Preface also mentions how the story telling happens in her culture. "The storytelling sessions are not one - way communication where the storyteller simply talks and the other passively listen. There has to be constant interaction. Beyond the sad expressions of "ayi wha", and the "yaah lama", of surprise, someone from among the listeners has to respond to every sequence of the story. After every sequence a listener must say, "Aeii" or ... "Delay". These literally translate to, "and then" (Choden, Kunzang, 2006, p xiii). It is only the listeners make the appropriate noises and say the right words, will he/ she continue the narration. Ashi Kunzang Choden says that this practice is prevalent primarily to prevent from listening to these stories and stealing them for their own use, thereby, leading to the disappearance of these stories from the collective memory.

Malinowski argues for the context of the text, as he firmly believes that a text is lifeless without the context in which it was generated. He corroborates what Ashi Kunzang Choden has said about the Bhutanese Folktale by stating that, "the interest of the story is enhanced and given its proper character by the manner in which it is told, by the narration. The whole nature of the performance, the voice of the mimicry, of stimulus, and the response of the audience mean as much to them (the folk) as to the text. (Malinowski., 1926, p 11) " The other detail to be remembered when narrating a folktale or studying it in its context is that, there is a need for a certain ambience, a certain time for the narration, a certain setting. It is almost as if, the sociological context of the storyteller, the listeners, the social function the tale serves, the entertainment it provides all need to be kept in mind. In short there is a whole protocol attached to the simple act of narrating a story. Even in Nepalese Literature we come across a protocol to be followed before narrating Folktales. A short rhyme needs to be recited which essentially states that 'whoever is listening to this story will be given a gold necklace, whoever, is narrating this story will be blessed with a garland, this story will travel to baikunth/ the heavens and when it needs to be narrated it will be instantly recalled, and if any witches and evil spirits are listening in, then they will be strangles by a wreath of conch shells.

A quick look at how folklore and folktales and songs can be effective at this point is essential. Some folklorists believe that for folklore to be effective:

- i) The social status of the teller, singer or presenter and that of the listeners, audience, or observers need to be on an equal footing.
- ii) Those who belong to a group must have an equal sense of participation, thus, coming closer to each other and expressing themselves directly.

The first factor at some level is agreeable as the culture needs to be shared but as we have seen in the case of the *Gaine* singers of Nepal, they are often of a lower economic and social class as their audience. As times have changed and the manner in which folklore studies is evolving it is but pertinent that perspectives will also change.

When talking about Bhutanese Folktales there is yet another strange custom that needs to be examined. Every story must begin with an expression of the length of time... "Dango.. oo...oo", "Dingbo... oo...oo" indicating the lapsing of time, the longer the words pronounced the more time has lapsed. The ending of every storytelling session too is a strictly observed phenomenon which people from outside the community/ social group would not be privy too. Every storytelling session must end with or "should be marked by a customary story about Dango and Dingbo themselves" (Choden, Kunzang., 2006, p xiv) . Ashi Kunzang Choden's book Folktales of

Bhutan, has tales including fairy tales, fables, animal tales, household tales, humorous tales, ghost stories, witch tales, anecdotes, and short stories. In this paper we shall examine a short folktale for the purpose of analysis and we shall close the tradition with the story of Dangbo and Dingbo. The folktale being taken up for study is the one titled, "The Ani and the Migoi", pp 153-155. This short folktale is about a nun's experiences mediating alone in a hut far away from civilization and her meeting with the Migoi/ the abdominal snowman/ big foot/ yeti. A nun decides to perform the Lhosum Chosum, three years of solitude and meditation and after making the necessary preparations retreats into her retreat hut. She lives in seclusion gradually getting used to the peace, quite, the fear she feels initially lessens, and she has now been able to contemplate, meditate and live in peaceful harmony and with serenity. One evening as she is reflecting on her prayers, she is frightened by the thrusting of a huge, hairy leg through her small window. "It was a leg that looked like no other leg. It was something between a human leg and an animal leg. It was about two times the size of a yak leg and it was covered with fur. The fur was of a dark colour but because of the darkness the exact colour was difficult to tell (Ibid, pp 153-155)."

A large bamboo stake had pierced the leg and the sore was festering, stinking and causing the animal immense difficulty and pain. The nun even though frightened, decided to help the animal, pulls out the stake with great difficulty and smears some sanctified butter on the sore. Having received treatment, the animal pulls his leg out of the window and goes away. As a mark of its gratitude, it used to leave the nun, different types of game and leave it as an offering for the one who saved his foot and his life.

Since the nun was deeply troubled by the carcasses of the dead animals and having realized that the animal would never stop bringing her the carcasses as long as she lived in that hut, she leaves the hermitage and moves to another hermitage to complete her prayers. This is a very short folktale but it highlights several aspects of the Bhutanese people and their way of life, their culture.

Bhutanese are primarily Himalayan Buddhists/ if it suits, Lamaists. The need for prayers, meditation, solitary meditation etc is commonplace - the need to go to remote, secluded places. Hermitages for this purpose are built all over Bhutan and are a familiar sight for the Bhutanese. The cultural and the economic way of life is agrarian at best. The land is covered with snow and ice from the end of October till the beginning of April, snow caps do not melt through the year and the higher reaches and valleys are snow filled much longer. It is in these snowy and cold climes that the story of the Abominable Snowman, The Big Foot and The Yeti abound. Hence,



when people and the Yeti/ Migoi live so closely with nature, they are but bound to have strange encounters of such sorts. Such an explanation of this phenomenon called a folktale is possible as I am a part of the culture, it is part of my psyche, my mental makeup and part of our collective, cultural heritage. For most others, this story would be ridiculous and farfetched. But, to someone who belongs to that culture, who understands that culture it is a different interpretation, a different way of looking at life.

The text of an oral tale also includes a good deal more than spoken words. It contains gestures, facial expressions, intonations, chanted phrases, onomatopoeic sounds, bodily movements, pauses, emphases, eye contact and interplay between the audience; the use of props, noises made by banging on the table and slapping of the palms, basically all the ingredients of a theatrical performance. So, it is essential that when we examine written folktales we try and visualize the theatrical performance that should go in during the narration of the folktale.

Conclusion

Having examined both the folksong and the folktale it is essential that some issues are cleared up and negotiated. Folklore – in this case, folksongs and folktales are important for several reasons:

It tells of our collective consciousness, it is a rich source of our belief systems and a source of the collective wisdom of a people who though lived in ancient times, were wise beyond their days. They tell of indigenous knowledge and a culture that is swiftly getting eroded. Folklore needs to be documented, studied and examined as it provides a deep understanding of the psyche of a people and can even be utilized to understand their thoughts, words, actions, deeds and their harmony or disharmony with nature and the environment. While

folklorists, culture studies, anthropologist, ethnographers may argue about the best way to study folklore and debate about how, what, whom consists of the folk and what constitutes folklore, as students of Literature, with a deep understanding of societies, the literature that these societies produced, an understanding of social norms, mores and customs and an understanding of what comprises an anthropological/ ethnographical. Cultural studies, we are definitely at an advantage to better understand, document, study, analyze and appreciate the oral traditions of our country and other countries too.

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