



TIBETAN NATIONALISM: ANALYSING THE ROLE OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC TALES

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ABSTRACT

Literature has, no doubt played a considerable part in constructing the idea of nationalism and nationality among common man. The concept of nationalism, nationality gives them the ideology of being together as a nation which has been aroused from the feeling of being together as a community. Folklore, the earliest literature, helped the man to behave in a community. It transferred orally, the moral concepts, political ideologies, concepts of government, way of life, their histories, geographical boundaries and what not. Thus the original culture of a community can be traced from particular folklore. The function of folklore continues in retaining these cultural nuances in the community and in its development to become a society. This paper is but analysing the classic folktales from Tibet where it is reconstructing the agitated political atmosphere in Tibet, so as to (re)construct the nationalistic thoughts in Tibetans staying in Tibet under the Sinicization of China and among those refugees in exile and thereby helping in the preservation of original culture. The tales that always suggest a solution which is deep rooted in their culture and religion show their keen interest in existing in this global community with their own identity.

Key Words: Nationalism, Reconstruction, Sinicization, Tibetan classic tales

An ethnic community that often shares common myths of origins and descent, a common history, distinctive cultural elements and a spirit of group solidarity, within a particular geographical limits can be called as a nation. It is more of a cultural-political community rather than an ethnic group. A nation, in conceptual terms is abstract, impersonal and political, and is more conscious of its coherence, unity and particular interests. (Smith, D. Anthony). The concept of nationalism gave rise to the ideology of being together as a nation which has been aroused from the feeling of being together as a community. There are many factors that played a key role in making this coherence among people of a nation.

Literature is one such factor that treated particular interests of common man. It helped in constructing the idea of nationalism and nationality among common man, especially among a community that has been formed through ages.

Folklore, the earliest literature, taught the man to behave in a community. Many a times, the oral literature of unknown age and author, became the best medium for a community to construct their culture. It transferred orally, the moral concepts, religious thoughts, political ideologies, concepts of government, way of life, their histories, geographical boundaries and what not, from one generation to next. Heritage of



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a nation passed on to generations played a distinct role in creating their culture. In modern era, distinct folklores of a nation traces back the original culture of a community. The folklore, when it evolved did the function of constructing a culture by storing its historical and political views. Later, the function of folklore was to retain these cultural nuances in the community and in its development to become a society. The folk tales and the folk songs that narrate the history of a nation thus gains more attention in the genre of folklore. Among folk lore, folk tales form the back bone, as it transfers all known histories, geographies, cultural aspects, religious thoughts with a fictitious note and a moral thought at the end. Most tales are connected with real life.

Tibet, a nation beyond the clouds got its distinct culture from age old times. Than the written history that stated the history from the advent of Buddhism, the folk culture of nation helped the researchers to trace the history beyond 6th century. It is a nation that has myths of primordial times. The myths of its descent and origin give evidence for its well-developed culture. Yet, its geographical structure limited the travellers to know more about this nation until recent past. Tibet became a centre of attraction globally because of the invasion of china and its modernising techniques that questioned the existence of Tibetans. Due to the political agitations and the controversies in its politics, most Tibetans went in exile. People, even the close relations became departed. While running for their life, life of its original culture and tales were also under threat. The

new generation, in Tibet and in exile culture are growing without knowing their original culture and a lot of conflicts in their unconscious. Their exile mark questioned their colour, facial traits, language and identity in foreign culture. It became the need of the hour to recover the tales, songs, and its distinct rituals or cultural marks which were at the verge of destruction. Tibetans took pain in collecting their stories and tales amidst the great political agitation.

This paper is an attempt to find the nationalistic symbols in folktales of Tibet and to read the revival of nationalism in Tibet through such symbols in anthropomorphic tales citing examples from a few tales. Folktales could easily adapt to any environment, it can easily accommodate new subjects, and its flexibility to accept any new interpretations- are the features of folktales that helped Tibetans to use them in constructing the unconscious of young minds of this era. They translated the tales of their land so that it will reach all young Tibetans in exile who doesn't their language. It is interesting to note that most of the translated Tibetan fables, especially with anthropomorphic characters have striking similarities with real world politics of their land. Major questions of their life like freedom, geographical boundaries, government and identity are dealt in their tales. Many tales, rather than addressing individually, address a community that suffer from the attack of neighbouring community. Though folktales are applicable universally, the tales from Tibet has stories with specific names for characters and state their



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geographical boundaries gives them a specific nature making the audience to feel that it is their story. It helps the audience to feel more attached and creates a national consciousness. It address directly to their issues where china questions their geographical boundaries and identity. The tales provide a solution deeply rooted in their culture rather than violence, which ultimately reconstructs their cultural unconsciousness, later the spirit of culture leads to create the cultural nationalism. Feeling of being together answers most of their questions related to identity and can preserve their original culture. Sometimes it is the diversity that brings beauty to world than uniformity.

Legend of the Birds and Monkeys is a classic tale from Tibet that has been translated by Acarya Ngawang Namgyal in 1996. The tale centres on a dispute on the geographical limits of their land between a flock of birds and a herd of monkeys. The birds dwell in the middle part of Kunzang hill and monkeys at the foot of hill. Geography of Tibet is that it lies on the top of a mountain and people over their lies in different parts of that mountain just like birds. As in the real life, the peaceful life of birds are questioned by its neighbouring community monkeys, when they unlawfully saunters onto the bird's land. Monkeys came to the land of birds in search of more food, indirectly suggesting the Tibet's invasion by China for material benefits. Throughout the tale birds never takes the path of violence, but choose to discuss the matter carefully with monkeys. As in today's government, in both communities, they sat together, discuss the

matter and send their representative. The discussions made, suggest the political thoughts of both communities. Decisions took were not of a dictator, but more of democratic. Just like Tibet sought the help of global nations, here when their own discussions failed, they took the wise responses from deer and other wise animals. Rabbit Loden's wise decision to share one portion of land between monkeys helped to solve the matter and asks monkeys not to continue the same path again. Thus the tale tries to advice a far sighted solution for peaceful life of community.

Another tale, *A Story of Antelopes: A Message of Renunciation towards Cyclic Existence*, as the title suggests, talks about the need for cyclic existence and renunciation, if not, may lead to the ultimate destruction of not an individual alone, but a community itself, clearly citing the example from the tale of an antelope that became the cause for the destruction of its community.

In the common tale of a cat and rats, the community of rats stay at the roof of a house. Cat was also the inmate of same house. Though they were neighbours, cat became a threat for the life of rats. The wisdom of younger rats Ambe and Rambe became saviours of rat community at this hour. The tale suggests the need for standing together against the political tricks of cat. It also suggests that the life of new Tibet lies in the hand of youth as in the tale *Tibet: Once Upon a Time*.

Through all these tales Tibetans are consciously trying to construct the new Tibet



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rooted in their original culture. Many such tales can be traced from the land of Tibet. Tibetans may appear weak as birds, antelopes or even rats in the eyes of many. Yet to fight against the hard weapons of hunters, claws of cats, and even monkeys, than the path of violence, the tales from Tibet always suggest the ways of wisdom. The need for reconciliation, cyclic existence and renunciation keeps recurring in the tales. The solutions were deeply rooted in their culture. It is the treatment subjects that stand close to their life that makes Tibetans to get attached and empathize with tales. Tibet is a land where political and religious ideologies that go together, and these tales take a major hand in preserving their culture. As their tales suggest, they believe in the power of youth against the mishappenings of their society. This states the need for training their youth in foreign land and in their own motherland under the rule of China so that they will stand for their culture than choosing violence. Folktales are best medium that serve the purpose, and construct the unconsciousness.

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