

**‘Kherengbar’
A Kokborok Folktale**

Rashmi Debbarma
Lecturer, ICFAI University
Ph.D. Scholar
Department of English
Tripura University

Abstract

Folktales are basically oral stories that were passed down from one generation to another. In the primitive days, people used to express their happiness, sorrows by means of story-telling, songs, elegies. The folk tradition in Tripura mainly started with ‘Jadu Koliya’ which basically means praising the beloved one. Tripuri folktales reveal one’s animistic beliefs, origins, myths, legends, social practices, simple technology, compact village life, rivers, wild animals, birds, hills, dense forests providing an ideal background for the survival of many myths and tales. ‘Kherengbar’ (orchid plant) also known as the ‘flower of heaven’ is known to be a popular folktale amongst the Tripuri tribe. This tale tells us how a newly wedded couple met with a miserable plight because of the temptation caused by the beautiful flower ‘Kherengbar’ and why today we do not find any fragrance in the flower.

Keywords: Folk-tale, Kokborok Folktale, Tripuri community, Kherengbar, Flower of Heaven.

The word ‘Folk’ basically refers to a group of people, believed to be the carriers of a culture representing their common social norms, customs, regulations, traditions of a community whereas ‘Tale’ means a short story, often recounted as fiction or based on a true narrative in such a way that it becomes sometimes impossible to believe. Therefore, the word ‘Folktales’ when combined together are basically the stories that were passed down from one generation to another, which without a doubt, stemmed from the very practice of ‘Oral Tradition’.

‘Kherengbar’ is one of the most common and popular folk-tales amongst the Tripuri (Kokborok speaking) community. According to the tale that has been passed through generation to generation ‘Kherengbar’ portrays the mishap of a newly married couple brought to them by the fragrance and temptation of a beautiful flower named ‘Kherengbar’, a flower of Heaven.

Once upon a time in a small village of Tripura there lived a young man who was returning home with his wife after a customary apprenticeship at his in-law's house. As the road ran through a dense forest, the couple started their journey early so that they could reach their home before sunset. The road was deserted and the wind was blowing gently. It was almost sunset when the couple reached the forest. The wind brought with it a mesmerising smell of an unknown flower to which the bride was unaware of. She enquired to her husband about the name of the flower.

Oh! What a nice fragrance, may I know what is the name of the flower?

Husband: This is 'Kherengbar Bubar' (a kind of orchid plant)

Wife: What kind of flower is that? I have never heard and smelt one like it before.

The wife could not resist herself from the temptation of the flower and wanted to decorate some of them on her hair. So, she asked her husband to pluck some of them for her.

Can you please pluck those flowers for me? I want to put it in my bun.

Husband: Oh, my dear! You cannot decorate your hair with this flower as it is known as the flower of heaven and it blooms only for the Gods. 'If any man dares to touch, he is bound to face his doom.'

Now the wife became more curious and asked her husband why this is called the flower of heaven and who brought this beautiful flower on earth then. To this the husband replied:

Well, my dear, it happened so, quite a long time ago an apsara was cursed and sent to earth to live for some time. She brought with her the seedling of one of her favourite flowers and planted it in a special arrangement. It clings and blooms only on the branches of other trees as it has no roots and cannot grow on its own.

The wife becomes upset as she cannot put such a beautiful flower on her hair. Seeing this sight, he tries to console her and tells her not to be upset. He will pluck some flowers but asks her not to put this on her bun because he might turn into a hoolock. Saying this, he climbs up the tree and throws some bunch of flowers towards her. The wife now having those flower, could not resist her temptation and wore them on her bun. The husband who was still on the

branch of the tree suddenly notices some changes in him. He started to change his shape, seeing this he shouted at his wife:

My dear! I have warned you not to wear those flowers have you worn them? I have started to change my human form.

The wife after hearing this turns her head upward and notices this strange sight where her husband was losing his human form and gradually turning into a hoolock. She was scared and shocked by seeing this sight and quickly realises her mistake and throws the flowers on the ground. She started to cry.

What have I done to you? Now where will I go? How will I live without you?

By that time the man has almost turned into a hoolock and with much difficulty by using some signs and gestures he told her to live this place and go to home as soon as possible and tell at home whatever has happened here and they would definitely meet in their next life.

Hearing these the wife became more upset and began to cry. She started blaming herself for everything that has happened.

'I am the only one responsible for whatever has happened to you. I cannot live without you and I shall die here'

Saying this his wife started to bang her head on the tree. The husband was watching all this from above the tree but could not do anything to save her as by that time he has already transformed into a hoolock. After sometime there was no sound coming from her wife. Her body was lying still with bloods on the ground. She died there and her husband unable to do anything just uttered the sound 'hoo-hoo-hoo.'

As the wife died there in utmost grief of not being able to live with her beloved, she took her next birth as a lizard in the same forest. She did not take birth as hoolock as a punishment.

Even today in the month of March and April (Baisakh) when the Kherengbar blooms the hoolock remembers its previous life and chatters hoo-hoo-hoo and the lizard too beats its tail on the ground to express the unfilled desire of the previous life.

Such a miserable story even moved the Gods. Therefore, the Gods took all the fragrance from the flower so that no such incident happen with anyone anymore. Today, there is no fragrance in the flower 'Kherengbar.'

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