

Moral Virtues & the Good Life as reflected in the Borok folktales

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Abstract: Moral virtues are the behavior which is deemed to be morally good; doing what is good and avoiding what is wrong. It is the soul of both individual and social development. In addition, human development is impossible without moral behavior. It is believed that moral virtues are the means to achieve a good life, i.e. happy life. Morality can differ from one society to another depending on the philosophical ideals, worldview, cultural habits and religious beliefs of that society or community. However there are some universally accepted virtues: these are goodness, courage, temperance, peace, freedom, love, sympathy, truthfulness, non-violence, social well-being, equal rights, self-discipline, obeying elders, respect, caring for other living things and environment. The development of virtues depends upon the social environment and education. Geo-physical surrounding too influences greatly to one's development of virtue. The end of life is realization of the world and through moral virtues we can realize the self as well as the world. And we can achieve a good life or realize the self and world by possessing moral virtues or qualities. That is why it is said moral virtues are the means of a good life.

Key Words: Virtue, Morality, Borok, Folktale, Good life etc.

1. INTRODUCTION:

In ethical perspective, folktales also educate us with what we need in the walk of life. This paper is an attempt to search for the moral virtues, which are inherent in the Borok folktales and other intangible cultural heritage. Subsequently, moral virtues leading to achieve a good life is the primary concern of this paper. The Boroks – indigenous people of Tripura, passed down their oral traditions and expressions in the verbal form from one generation to the other generation as there is neither written doctrine nor sacred texts. They also designate themselves as “Tipra, Tiprasa” and speak in their own mother tongue i.e., *Kokborok*. Man as a rational being has the power of deliberation and because of this he is different from other animals. Morality is something which is the standard of an effect of community and education, which is useful for the society or one's judgment of good and evil, right and wrong in his life. The term morality is inseparably connected with the objectives of man's life. The moral virtues are the bearer and carrier of culture and custom of a given society. And it also keeps the permanence and liveliness of the society. Moreover one of the important sources of unfolding culture, social values and morality of the indigenous people is folktales/folklore owing to absence of any written literary work.

2. Moral values as reflected in some selected Borok folktales:

The folktales as an important aspect of oral traditions and expressions have its own power to satisfy one's curiosity to know their surroundings and relationship with both human and non-human entities. Also it gives us moral knowledge sometimes in the form of dialogue, metaphor and story. We also achieve knowledge about what is right and wrong, which character is good and what is not for living a healthy and good life. The Borok folktales is not an exceptional one, rather impart value education, morality, ideal, wisdom and strategy which we need in daily life. Some of the selected Borok folktales imparting moral values are: *Nuwai*, *Chethuang*, *Bwrwichwk tei muphuk*, & *Bayap ni kothoma*, etc.

Nuwai:

This is the story of two step sisters named Kosomti and Kormati who care for each other. On daily basis both of them work at the *huk* (Jhum/ shifting cultivation) to help the family. But due to some misunderstanding in the family affair the elder sister Kosomti was captured in the bamboo-made cage and remained starving. But after few days she escaped from the bamboo cage with the help of *Nuwai* bird (Pelicans). In this folktale the following moral traits may be observed...

Love and Togetherness: The two sisters had a hearty love for each other. They worked together in the house and in the jhum fields.

Help & Hard work in household activities: Both of them worked in house and outside the house i.e. in the *huk* (Jhum/ shifting cultivation) together to help their parents and family. Here one can perceive the helping attitude as well as hard work which can be a very powerful force to equilibrium of mental and physical health. From this story one also learn the sense of responsibility and interest at work of the family.

Sharing with the family members: One day two sisters went to a *huk* with *Langa* (a kind of basket made of bamboo or cane). The younger sister began to gather vegetables and fruits, thinking that the fruits will be shared with all the family members together. While the elder sister Kosomti, without keeping anything in her *Langa*, she gets either green or ripen everything she has swallowed. Not only had she asked Kormati to give what she had gathered in her *Langa*. But Kormati replied that she wanted to eat all the fruits which she collected with all family members of the house. The ethics which we observe is the attitude of sharing with others which is essential in life. We can see in this story that we can live a good life by sharing with family, friends and society.

Habit of hard work: The character of Kormati is presented here as a symbol of hard work. The habit of working hard does not happen overnight. It has to be practiced every day. And in this story we see that those who work hard never fail in life. Kormati said ‘‘I am always in the habit of carrying such a load; I will carry it today too...’’.

The wage of vices & justice: The elder one was inflicted punishment being captured in the bamboo cage by her father as she has intended to kill her younger sister. Her father cursed her uttering the words..... ‘Vagabond, the devil, you conspired to kill Kormati. Now you have to get the punishment.’ The consequences of evil deeds can never be good. In order to enjoy a good life, he must go through good deeds. The main purpose of punishment is to give justice to the victim. Whatever the type of punishment, the main aim of justice should be to establish equality. Hurting others cannot be the basis of self happiness.

Courage to confess: Courage to confess is also considered as one of the moral virtues. People can make mistakes but they have to have the courage to correct them. A person’s moral character is strengthened only if he can make mistakes but has the courage to correct him. And only a person with a healthy and strong moral character deserves to live a good life.

Sympathy and Kindness: This also reveals the picture of being broad minded, merciful and tolerant. Kormati, the younger one, shows sympathy and kindness towards her elder sister Kosomti. Although Kosomti pushed her into the mouth of death, she has enough sympathy and kindness for her elder sister. She requested her father to free Kosomti from the cage. Moreover by responding to the request she provides water and food to Kosomti secretly.

Freedom, self-supporting: For so long period Kormati was inside the cage. Now she wanted to be free, when all the family members didn’t listen to her, she started to request *Nuwai* birds, those who were flying in the sky to give some feathers, beaks and nails. Notable point is that she did not ask the birds to pick her up. She requested birds to give her some feathers, beaks and nails so that she could make wings and fly like them. Finally she gets everything that she wants and likes birds; she flies with *Nuwai* birds in the sky. Here it is metaphorically described that if you desire something from the inner core of your heart certainly you will reach that desired object. Even the birds, animals and nature will surely help to achieve your desired things.

‘I shall now rise up in the blue sky and breathe in a horizon of freedom and safety’ said Kosomti because she has been able to get rid of this society, where she has to listen to the harsh words of the people for her dark physical complexion. She is happy to be free from the cage but she is happier because she is now free from harsh society.

Equal treatment: Another thing which we have from this story is that, since Kormoti the younger sister is beautiful with fair complexion so she received more attention from her family members and community than Kosomti with dark complexion. We should behave equally to all people irrespective of caste, creed and color. As Andreja Pejic said, all human beings deserve equal treatment, no matter their gender, identity or sexuality. Otherwise we will lose our near ones, dear ones or daughters like the father of Kosomti and Kormoti. This story that the knowledge about the importance of equal treatment, maintaining healthy relationships, being protective, merciful etc. are some moral virtues which are necessary for living a good life.

Chethuang:

Summary: *Chethuang* is the story of a maiden's struggle against the immoral decision of the family. She was provoked to marry her brother but then she refused on the ground that marriage between a man and a woman within a same family is forbidden. Subsequently, she disappeared in the clouds of the sky with the help of a *Chethuang* tree.

The Concept of Right & Wrong: Maiden's grandmother was surprised to learn about his grandson's desire to marry her own sister and said, 'it will be a sinful act and unsocial... this has never happened in our generations.' Marriage between brothers and sisters was considered a sin and unjust action. We see in this story that marriage between brothers and sisters is an inappropriate and wrong act and practicing it is considered a sin. Moreover in this story we see the moral virtue of courage to abjure evil as evil.

Love and trust towards nature: As the maiden learnt that her marriage was arranged with her brother, she became very upset and decided that she would never marry her brother. That very night she dreamed that if she wanted to get rid of this pain and agonies then she has to plant a *Chethuang* tree and nurture it. The next day she did as she was told in her dream. This folktale reveals that whenever someone is in trouble, help is being sought even from plants kingdom. This also depicts a deep sense of respect and close association with Mother Nature.

Bwrwichwk tei muphuk (The old lady and iguana):

Summary: This is the folktale of the old lady and iguana. The old lady lived in a small hut on the hillock of a village. Beside her hut one big iguana also lived in a hole. She used to go begging in the village door to door for her livelihood. Her day goes through whatever she gets by begging. She loves that iguana very much; she would not take any food before giving something to eat to the iguana. But one day she came to learn that the iguana was killed by some villager. As a result of killing that animal the whole village has drowned into the water that very night when everyone was sleeping. Alike all other villagers she was also in deep sleep, but she heard someone saying repeatedly that 'if you want to live, run away at this moment'. She was bitterly afraid and in turn asked 'Who are you and why do you frighten me in this way? Are you a man or a ghost or a god, who are you? Then the iguana replied that I am your iguana, whom you never forget to feed, I am here to let you know that you that if you want to survive please leave this village as soon as possible. Immediately she woke up and ran and saved her life. Next day the people of the adjacent village saw that all the houses were drowned into the deep water except one house, the tiny house of the old lady.

Love for animals/non-human entities: In this folktale we have found that sympathy and love for animals constitute an integral virtue of human life. Even a beggar whose only source of living is begging hardly forgets to feed iguana.

Attitude to help and protect others: Another cardinal virtue is if you help and protect someone, you will also be protected. As you sow, so shall you reap, Things will occur to you good or bad according action. Since the old lady takes care and gives food to the iguana, the iguana also in turn saved her life. The law of karma invokes that, by free righteous actions man gain merits and by unrighteous actions they acquire demerits.

Bayap ni kothoma (The story of friendship):

Summary: This is the folktale of two friends, frog and bat. In due course of time, due to some misunderstanding there was quarrel between them and turned into enemies. The frog said, "If you enter into bamboo, I shall eat you by tearing; If you enter into hole, I shall eat you by digging,

If you fly away, I shall eat you by bringing down,
Where will you go? I must eat you.”

Further this folktale depicts that the enmity of the two friends (frog and bat) destroyed peace and harmony of all the living creatures. A hornbill, a monkey, a deer, a wild hen, red ants, a pig, and, a widow were all affected by the enmity of frog and bat. In the end, the real culprit was punished by the then king.

Friendship and Justice: When one member of the society creates chaos, it affects all the members of the society. The balance of peace and order in society is disturbed if there is no friendship with each other. Besides this also conveys the message that punishment is required for establishing justice and if anyone violates peace and order in the society must be punished. Though this we see the significance of friendship and justice for a good and peaceful life.

3. CONCLUSION:

To sum up, world view of the Borok community has been shaped by their oral traditions and expression. Since antiquity their folktales which is an important component of intangible cultural heritage has been transmitted orally from one generation to the next generation. To some extent, one may not be wrong in asserting that these tradition of orality should not merely be cherished as the relics of the past rather serves in the cultivation of cardinal virtues in the human life for a harmonious living with all the creatures of the globe.

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