

FOLKTALE OF NAGALAND

Kongliang Otsü: An Ao Naga Folk Tale FROM NAGAJOURNAL

A long time ago, in the age of dreams and magical times, when the gods and humans resided side by side, there lived a family with two daughters. One day, the parents went to their jhum field, leaving the two girls at home. The time of year is understood to be around end July to early August. "Tenü (younger sister), today mother and father have gone to the fields, so today I will clean the rice and prepare the pigs' feed. You go to fetch the water and firewood," the older sister told her younger sister. The younger sister readily agreed and went to collect firewood. She came laden with the wood and dumping the load on the ground said to her sister, "Oya (elder sister), I am hungry, give me something to eat!" But the older sister, ignoring her plea, sent her to fetch water three more times. When the younger sister filled all the pots and containers with water, it was time to cook food for the evening meal and the older sister set the pot of rice on the fire. By now, the younger sister was famished and cried out to her elder sister, "Oya! I am so hungry, please give me some food!" The older sister, instead of feeding her starving sibling, told her to open her palm and proceeded to hit her palm with the hot rice ladle. This was too much for the younger sister who was hungry and tired after so much hard work. Crying loudly, she ran out and huddled in a corner of the 'sünglang' (bamboo balcony) at the back of the house. Meanwhile, her parents were on their way home, laden with fresh produce from their field. Their jhum field had yielded a bumper crop and the parents were overjoyed that their hard work had been blessed with such abundance. They were eager to meet their daughters and to see their surprise and joy at the food stuff they had brought for them. However, when they reached home, they found only the older daughter. "Where is your younger sister?" the mother asked. "Oh, she is too much; I had to do all the hard work while she has been just loitering around all day. She must be somewhere sitting outside!" the older daughter replied, pretending to be very busy. The parents rushed out to look for the younger daughter. They knew very well the characters of both their daughters and concluded that the older sister must have done something

bad to hurt the younger sister. They called out to their younger daughter, telling her that they had brought fresh cucumbers, maize and other foodstuff and that she would be given the first choice to eat whatever she wanted. But the younger sister had heard the lies her older sister had told about her and could not bear the injustice of it all. So she climbed the nearest tree and transformed herself into a small bird (“kongliang”). The parents looked for her everywhere but she was nowhere to be seen. Finally, when they came near the tall tree, they saw a small bird perched there. It was singing the following song mournfully.

(Add your own tune)

Older sister sent me to fetch firewood

Older sister sent me to fetch water

Not once was I giving rice and meat

Better to live in the trees

Where am I supposed to stay

Where am I supposed to stay)

Repeating this song, the small bird darted from tree to tree and eventually flew off into the thick forests, leaving the parents heartbroken.