



Reimagining the anthropocene: Insights from naga folktales

Sanjeeb Kalita¹, Dr. Dipen Basumatary²

¹ Assistant Professor and Head, Department of English, PNGB Govt. Model College, Kakopather, Assam, India

² Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Sociology, PNGB Govt. Model College, Kakopather, Assam, India

Abstract

Folktales, being a main part of oral literature, can greatly help us face the issues related to the Anthropocene. Because of their cultural roots, they bring ecological knowledge and guide people to care for nature properly. Latest studies of lake sediments in Canada prove that the Anthropocene is something that scientists can observe. Its effects are irrevocable, demanding thoughtful negotiation. Because its heroes are easy to relate to and its stories are common to all, Naga folklore in particular explains the ways people and nature influence each other.

Keywords: Anthropocene, naga folktales, natural environment, indigenous people

Introduction

Geologists have discovered that the Anthropocene is present in the history of Earth's environment. Crawford Lake in Ontario is a natural archive that gives us useful information. Thanks to the layers, scientists can see the changes in the environment over the years. While typical holomictic lakes mix their deep and surface waters every year, Crawford Lake does not mix and always maintains a permanent layering. Local Canadian folklore illustrates this exceptional condition. The legend claims that horses that fell into the lake are resting peacefully at the bottom without being disturbed by the water above. People living near the lake sometimes say they can see the glowing red eyes of the monster when the waters are calm in the evening. The story illustrates how the lake is physically different from others. Scientists have studied Crawford Lake's sediments and found a significant change in them that corresponds to the 1950s. This layer marks the geological birth of the Anthropocene. Even though the ocean looks calm, industrial pollution, extinct species, and nuclear fallout reveal the big changes people have caused since World War II.

Anthropocene and Folktales

Folktales are not only for bedtime stories; they also preserve the values and beliefs of a culture as they are passed from one generation to another. They help preserve culture by linking what has come before with what is happening now. Grandparents, who usually know these stories, share their experience and wisdom with the young ones. Anthropologist Verrier Elwin pointed out that the Northeast of India is rich in nature and is well known for its dance, music, and stories from local people. Its folktales reflect a deep connection with the environment. With lots of symbolism and images of nature, they usually show the landscape as being alive and important in the lives of the community. Because the characters face various trials, the stories touch on topics such as balance, reciprocity, respect, and guardianship.

Naga folktales, which come from the northeastern Indian indigenous communities, are very touching. These works usually show people interacting with animals, plants, rivers, and mountains, sometimes smoothly and at other times in

disputes. Stories in these tales point out the danger of not knowing about the environment and praise actions to fix and heal it. These themes resonate strongly with contemporary environmental concerns.

Bridging Science and Story

At first glance, the scientific view and the oral history of Crawford Lake may not seem to relate to each other. However, both show us something about our relationship with the environment and what we need to do for it. The presence of fossilised pollen, pollutants, and traces of nuclear elements in the sediment layers proves humans have had an effect on the Earth. The golden spike symbolises when people's activities began to affect the entire Earth. These results are based on facts, but it is stories that give them meaning. The sleeping horses found at Crawford Lake are a perfect example of how the lake's layers are formed and can surprise others. They admire the beauty of nature and urge people to avoid the unknown risks caused by their actions. Naga folktales also include ecological ethics in the way they are told. By making a forest spirit the rescuer or a spirit the punisher, the story can be used to guide people. They include traditional information about nature: the seasons, methods to care for the environment, and forbidden things—all taught from grandparents to grandchildren.

When we study sediment science and folklore together, the Anthropocene appears as both a science-based trend and a serious cultural and ethical issue. Folktales add meaning, pictures, and ethical importance to the boring mud and microfossil data. Researchers' findings also confirm what was passed down in indigenous people's oral traditions. As a result, we see that humans play a key role in Earth's future, and narratives are important in helping us make decisions. The facts found in the sediment at Crawford Lake prove that the Anthropocene started in the middle of the 20th century, due to worldwide disturbances to nature. At the same time, the local legends about its waters show that even geological records can spark stories, amazement, and thought. All over the world, indigenous folktales, such as those of the Naga people, show that Earth is both a storehouse and an active part of people's lives.

Together, sediment science and folklore form a powerful alliance. Scientific data offers clarity; folklore offers meaning. They both point out that we are connected to the environment and should take care of it. Because the Anthropocene brings environmental problems such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity, these stories will help us. They pass along ecological knowledge by acting as humans, guided by tradition and relevant to what we face now. They show us that taking care of the environment is important and belongs to all of us.

Naga Folktales and Environmental Consciousness

Western environmental discourse usually focuses on issues such as pollution, running out of resources, and climate change, especially when these issues threaten important interests of the nation. Such an approach, centred on technology, personal gains, and fast industrialisation, usually ignores environmental problems facing indigenous people, including eroding riverbanks, flooding, loss of various species, and air pollution. So, many Western environmental stories are out of touch with the realities of these communities, which separates them from the main discussions. Unlike the others, the folktales of Nagaland are inclusive and take a different approach. Rather than just stories, these folktales save and pass on important knowledge about the environment and indigenous culture, which is very important now that the Naga people face threats such as climate change, deforestation, and the loss of their land. These stories strengthen the community's sense of who they are and teach everyone how to live sustainably based on old ways of caring for nature. When ecological ethics are included in Naga folktales, they help people notice the importance of caring for all living creatures.

An Angami folktale provides a thoughtful example of the struggle between humans and animals caused by people's actions. Everything is peaceful in the farmer's home until wild boars cause destruction in their paddy fields. Anger and sorrow make the boy pick up a dao and go after the boars, not knowing that he is now on the path of spirits. At that point, he meets a young spirit maiden and tells her what happened. They talk and fall in love, and before her parents come back, she conceals him in a stone. After meeting again, they decide to marry. Each of them receives a box from their parents, and they are told not to open it until they come back to the human world. While returning home, the boy's curiosity wins over, and he opens the box, causing the wild animals to escape and hide in the forest. The girl, though, doesn't open her eggs until she reaches the village, which keeps the animals as her pets. This allegory demonstrates how both wild and domesticated species came to be by showing the importance of respecting nature's freedom.

Various Naga folktales highlight a strong connection to the environment and urge people to coexist peacefully with other living beings, since all creatures are important. Many times, these characters protect nature, demonstrating a connection between all living things. In these tales, the characters Humanity, Spirit, and Tiger are born miraculously to a woman who got pregnant from clouds, a symbol of nature's ability to create. The siblings live peacefully until conflicts over land arise. Seeing that the disagreement could be dangerous, the mother plans a contest to share the land fairly. Even though the story concludes with a conflict, it points out a key idea: land and all-natural

resources are not things to be taken, but something to be respected as a gift from the past. By creating memorable characters and bringing up moral dilemmas, the folktale gently opposes people's exploitative attitude and urges us to treat land and living things with respect.

Whether the stories include wild boars, spirit maidens, or animal ancestors, they mean more than just being entertaining. Their beliefs show that each component of nature is valuable and that humans are obligated to ensure ecological balance. They increase our awareness of how nature works, encourage kindness to wildlife, and give us traditions for caring for the land and animals. Since Western environmentalism is mostly technocratic and does not include indigenous ideas, Naga folktales bring in a different approach based on people's lives and their spiritual ties to nature. They teach us that environmentalism is more than an idea and is a human bond with nature. Analytic studies have shown that such folktales teach the importance of caring for the environment and its health. The stories of Naga people challenge us to pay attention, think deeply, and act respectfully together, so the web of life is not destroyed.

A mother assigned her sons to make a grass ball and said that the person who touched it first would get her land. All three animals came up with ideas, but Humankind's plan of making a bow and arrow to shoot the ball from afar won the battle. Happy, the mother, told Tiger to leave the forest, spirit to leave the world of humans, and her children to live peacefully together. Still, during the Anthropocene epoch, humans have upset the balance of nature. Humans destroy where animals live and eat too much animal meat, which results in unfairness to them. If this behaviour is not controlled, it will increase the rate of biodiversity loss and eventually damage people. Because all the brothers in this story are born of the same mother, it shows that both humans and animals share the same Earth. This story has a similar feeling to Temsula Ao's tale in "How Man and Animals Lived Together and Spoke Each Other's Language", in which people talked with animals and birds in harmony.

Stories from the Naga tradition often show people and nature coming together, for example, by girls marrying tigers or trees, or people's souls becoming birds and insects when they die. It appears from these stories that killing animals and birds is wrong for two reasons: it hurts nature and also the people we love who appear in these shapes. In these folktales, the idea of living together with nature is stressed, which stands out sharply from the way things are in the Anthropocene.

Conclusion

Besides cultural stories, Naga folktales also express deep ideas about environmental justice based on traditional knowledge of nature. They ask people to appreciate and care for humans, spirits, and animals on an equal level. For the people in Nagaland, the environment is closely linked to their identity and the ability to live. Folktales reflect this intimate relationship. These values are shared with children by being told, so they learn to respect nature and live in a way that is eco-friendly. Because of this, they promote environmental awareness among people and set up a base for future protection of the land guided by traditional beliefs. The Naga tradition of myth-making teaches that sustainability is possible only when all life is regarded as sacred.

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