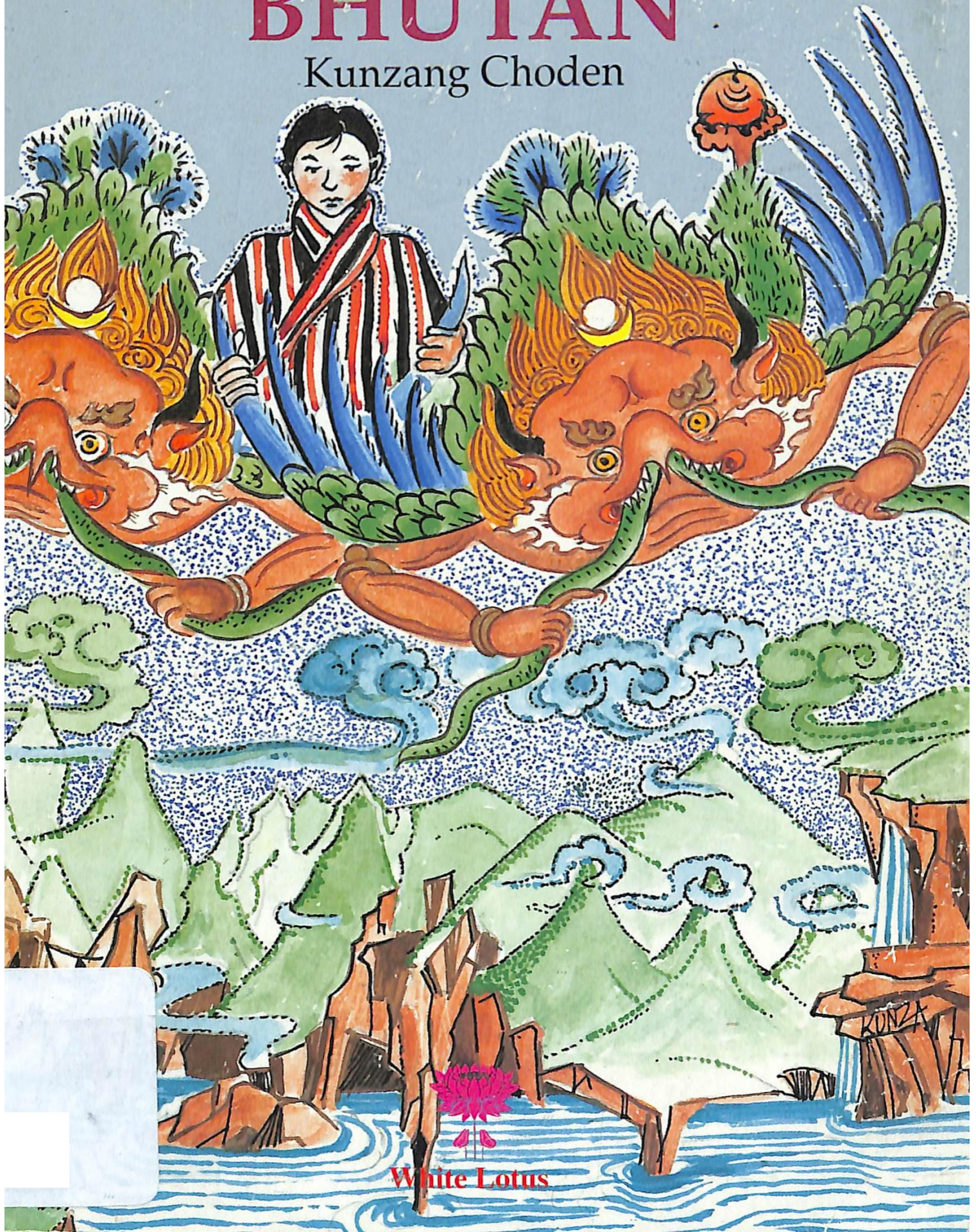


FOLKTALES of BHUTAN

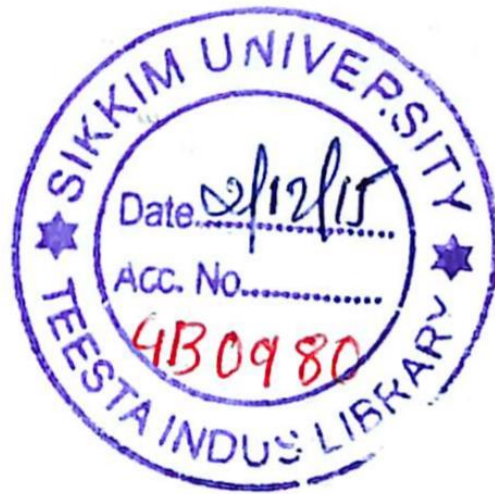
Kunzang Choden



White Lotus

Folktales of Bhutan

Kunzang Choden



White Lotus
Bangkok Cheney



Foreword
by
Her Royal Highness Princess Sonam Chhoden
Wangchuck

The world at large is quite familiar with the wealth of religious and other literature that exists in Bhutan. What is, however, not equally known or accessible is the rich oral tradition as a source of knowledge. Among ordinary Bhutanese, for whom the transition from oracy to literacy is not yet complete, the oral tradition is a powerful living medium of communication between one generation and the next. It ensures the survival of undocumented knowledge. By relying on the oral tradition, or "Khaju" in Dzongkhka, the "illiterate" Bhutanese have been able to benefit from folktales. In the villages of Bhutan, folktales are still told and people, mostly children, learn from this living tradition.

The art of listening to folktales and retelling them has, in my opinion been an important tool for the development of native eloquence and articulateness which we find in abundance among ordinary Bhutanese. It also enables people to find moral, philosophical, religious, mythical and romantic meaning in the stories.

Since the progress of modernization began some three decades ago there has been rapid change in many aspects of Bhutanese society. Inevitably the crucial role that the oral tradition has played

in transmitting knowledge is also likely to decline. There is an apparent danger that the folktales and fables whose deep significance and origins we do not yet fully understand could disappear. It is already apparent that children are reared on folktales from distant places at the expense of local ones, which could begin a process of alienation from the local culture.

Therefore Kunzang Choden's book is a laudable step towards preservation of a rich and vibrant heritage contained in the little known and hitherto undocumented folktales of Bhutan. Her book should stimulate interest in the young and revive the memories of older generations so that the work of a comprehensive compilation of Bhutanese oral tradition becomes conceivable. It is my great pleasure to compliment the author who is the first Bhutanese person to have written such a book. I strongly recommend this pioneering book to all readers.

S. C. WANGCHUCK

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Preface

In the Bhutanese tradition, stories, fables, and legends are not told but are unraveled (*shigai* in Bumthangkha) and released (*tangshi* in Dzongkha). To me these concepts of releasing and unraveling are invested with much significance. It means that storytelling is a continuous process (unraveling) and to be released stories must be alive and vibrant. Stories are, therefore, alive and continuous, not only in the minds of those who unravel and those who release them, but also in the minds of those who listen to them being unraveled and released. This oral tradition, transmitted by one generation to another, is thus the continuing and living thread that links one generation to another.

The nine years of childhood spent in Tang Ugen Choling was very short, especially in terms of how much time I could spend with my parents. The duties of feudal lords were by no means simple and a certain amount of dedication and sacrifice was necessary to live through the many intricacies and sensibilities of dealing with human beings, the most important of which was trying to keep everybody contented and the village in harmony. This took up much of my parents' time. I may have been better off than many of my friends from the village in many ways. But I was certainly deprived of much valuable time with my parents. This was made worse by their untimely deaths. I could be with my parents only at specified times of the day. I had to fill in the rest of the time on my own. So I did what the other children of the village did, and played games rich in fantasy and filled with imagination. Above all I shared one common bond with every child in the village and that was the intense love of stories, legends and fables.

As I reminisce now of the storytelling sessions, I see a circle of adults and children relaxing in the late afternoon sun, in the West Gate field of Ugen Choling *naktsang*, listening in rapt attention to every word of the storyteller. At other times it was in the evenings, sitting around a charcoal brazier in the flickering light of the *lawang*. As the flickering light cast remarkable arrays of shadows, the images from the stories came to life and became real. Our imaginations and fantasies knew no bounds. We could listen to the same stories again and again, enthralled, as if we were listening to them for the first time. The stories touched our lives so deeply that a good storyteller could evoke every kind of emotion from the listeners. There was tears in silence for the tragedies, peels of laughter at the comical episodes, anger at the injustice, and feelings of triumph at the victories of the heroes. There were also times when the younger children would lie down and rest their heads on the knees of the adults and drift off into easy sleep. Overall, these sessions were accessible, enjoyable, and meaningful. Only at that time I did not realize their importance in my life.

The stories enriched the world we lived in. Although we did not physically travel beyond the mountains that enclosed the Tang valley, in our minds, our worlds extended far beyond: like the characters in the stories we climbed many mountains and crossed many valleys where everything became possible. Spirits, ghosts, and *sinpos* lived and competed in wit and strength with the human beings. Animals spoke and interacted with the human beings, sometimes as their enemies but other times as helpful friends. There was life in the other worlds, which human beings could momentarily enter and obtain a glimpse of the world of gods, spirits, and subterranean beings. Magic and myth abounded and became almost inseparable from our realities. There were stories that extolled the universal virtues of compassion, humility, kindness, and integrity. Yet there were other stories that spoke of senseless cruelty and crude and deceitful acts. But it was the fairly consistent themes (especially in the *namthars* or religious stories, not included here) of

the stories that impressed us the most. Good triumphed over evil, quiet humility won over loud braggadocio and the rich generally conceded to the poor.

Some of the stories stayed alive in my mind even during the fourteen years of my cultural exile in India (at boarding school), often providing me with a safe refuge and solace in times of loneliness and depression, in trying to adjust and later on to understand other cultures. Memories of the stories helped to keep the link to my roots and, therefore, gave me my identity. I knew who I really was even when I was trying to conform to being somebody else! Years later I made efforts to trace the storytellers of the village to familiarize myself again with some of the stories of which I was no longer so sure. During this time I came to the realization that the art of the oral tradition is definitely on the decline; worse still, the story sessions are rapidly being replaced by video sessions which screen popular films from Hollywood, Bombay, and Hong Kong. The flickering *lawang* is now being replaced by the flashing blue-white light of the television set. I was immensely saddened when an old man who had told me many stories in childhood said, "I have forgotten all those stories. But everybody these days watches videos. Why do you want me to tell old stories?"

As I realize the importance of the stories as a link to who I am and where I come from, I also realize how important they will be to my children. It is for them and others of their generation that I write these stories with the hope that they will be of some value in their lives to link up with their cultural base so that in knowing their base they may better understand and appreciate their own lives.

The storytelling sessions are not a one-way communication where the storyteller simply talks and the others passively listen. There has to be constant interaction. Beyond the sad expressions of "*ayi wha*" and the "*yaah lama*" of surprise, someone from among the listeners has to respond to every sequence of the story. After every sequence a listener must say, "*Aeii*" or "*tse ni*" in Bumthangkha, "*delay*" in Dzongkha. These literally translate to, "and then". Only

when there is a response from the listeners will the storyteller continue the story with an exaggerated "Tse n.i.i.i" in Bumthangkha or "dela..a..a..y" in Dzongkha. This custom is to prevent the spirits from listening to the stories and stealing them. As long as a human being responds and indicates that the story is being listened to, the spirits cannot steal them.

Every Bhutanese story begins with *Dangbo* and *Dingbo*. These two terms are used either as nouns, as in "*Dangbo thik naki key whenda*" which would be equivalent to saying "there once was a *Dangbo* and a *Dingbo*", or as indications of time, as in "*Dangbo Dingbo*" which would equate to "long long ago". The length of time is made more specific by sounding the words *Dangbo* and *Dingbo* long or short. So, "*Dangbo Dingbo*" said with a short sound indicates a shorter time than if said "*Dangbo..o..o Dingbo..o..o*", which would mean a long, long, long time ago. The close of a storytelling session is usually marked by a customary story about *Dangbo* and *Dingbo* themselves, and I have followed this practice in this book.

It is more than likely that many of the stories bear similarities to stories from around the world. In fact in some cases the likeness is striking as in the story of the "Lame Monkey" and the world-famous fairy tale "Puss in Boots". Considering the similarities that exist between two such vastly different countries/cultures as Bhutan and Germany, it is not surprising to hear similar stories told around the region, especially in Tibet, India, and Nepal. In fact it is difficult to tell where each story may have actually originated, because so many local characteristics have been attributed to the stories in every place where they are told that they become drastically or subtly different but definitely unique to the particular region. But my intention here is not to trace the origin of each story or seek out similarities and differences. I wish to simply release and unravel the stories I heard in my childhood and now remember.

The reader will notice how freely Dzongkha, Bumthangkha, Kurtoipkha and Tibetan phrases are interspersed in the stories. This is the actual case and, therefore, I have not restrained myself to

using one language. I use the phrases as they appear in the original stories. The glossary provides explanations of such terms and phrases (indicated by bold italic in the text). As far as possible, I have given a brief translation of these words when they occur in the stories for the convenience of the reader.

Finally I wish to make only one request to the readers—do pause long enough to say "*tse ni*" or "*delay*" every now and then so that these stories may not be stolen and they may remain ours to keep and pass on.

Introduction

Drukyul is the name by which the Bhutanese refer to their country. Located in the eastern Himalayan zone, it covers an area of approximately 46,000 square kilometers. This landlocked kingdom is bounded to the north and northwest by the Tibetan regions of China and to the south by the Indian states of West Bengal and Assam. The spectacular mountainous terrain of Bhutan is easily one of the most rugged in the world, rising in altitude from a few hundred meters in the south to the permanently snow capped peaks in the north. These extremes of topography result in a diversity of temperatures and rainfall. Consequently the variety in flora and fauna, ranging from the subtropical to the alpine, is sensational.

This country of 600,000 people can be broadly divided into three ecological zones. The northern zone, bordering Tibet, where the peaks rise above 7,000 meters, is the most sparsely populated part of the country. This alpine region is inhabited by pastoralists, the Brokpas, who graze their sheep, cattle and yak up to elevations of 5,000 meters in the summer and migrate to lower areas in the winter. The Drukpas, who are of Mongoloid origin, live in the western part of the central zone. They are followers of the Drukpa Kagyu school of Buddhism from which the name of the country, Drukyul or land of the Drukpas is derived. Drukyul is also taken to mean land of the dragons (Druk means dragon). The eastern part of the central zone is home to the Sharchokpas (easterners). The Lhostampas or people of Nepali origin, who came to the country towards the end of the nineteenth century, live in the southern foothills which rise from the Indian plains. Over 90 per-

cent of the population are engaged in subsistence farming, combining crops, livestock and forestry.

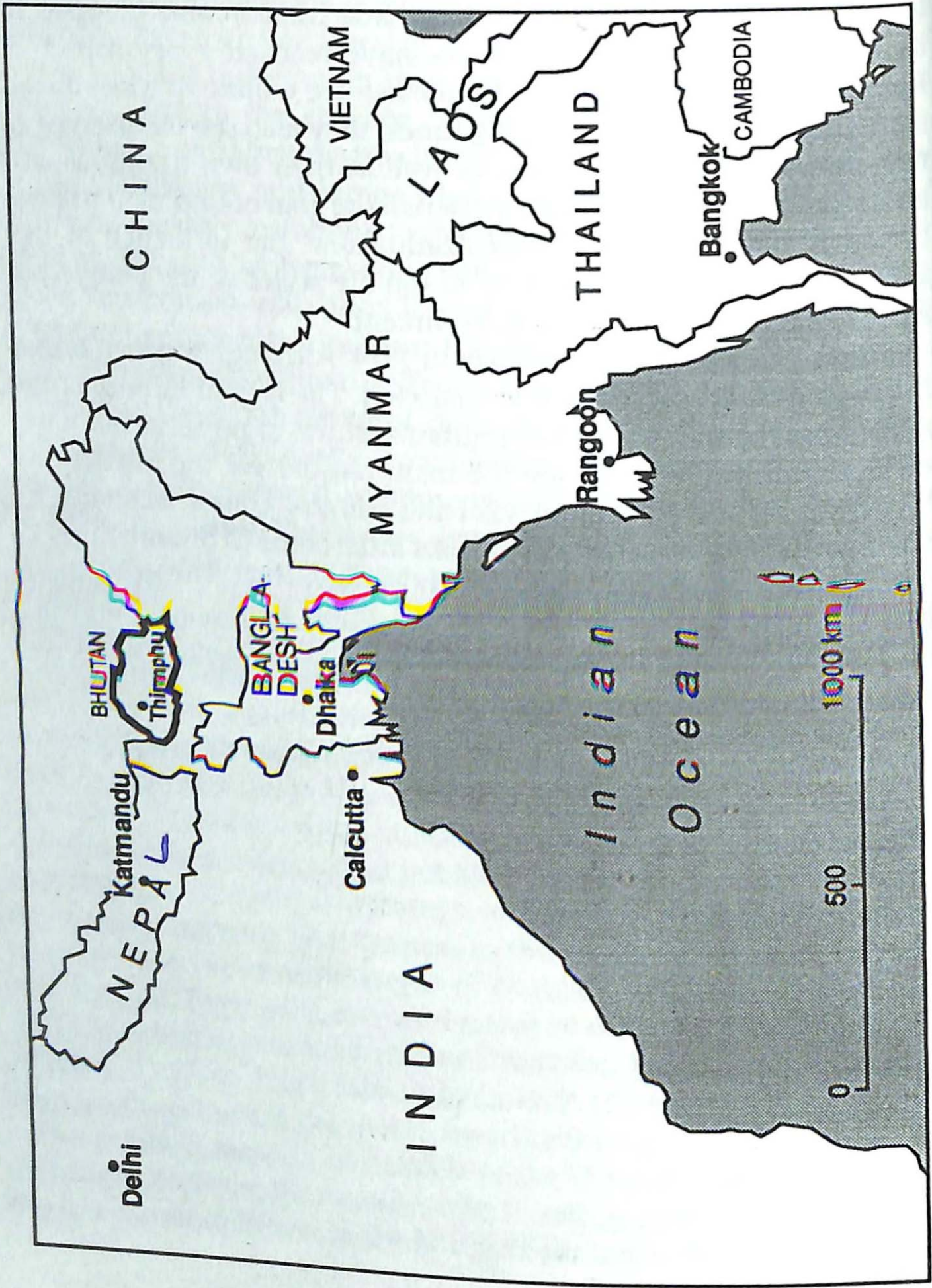
It is thought that Bhutan may have been inhabited as early as 2,000 BC. But in the absence of any archeological studies it is generally accepted that the two Buddhist temples, Kyichu Lhakhang in the Paro Valley and Jampa Lhakhang in the Bumthang Valley represent the only testimony to the country's earliest history. These temples are said to have been constructed by the Tibetan King Srongtsan Gompo, who ruled Tibet from about 627 to 649. The most important religio-historical event in Bhutan's history was the arrival of Padmasambhava, a Tantrist from Swat (in present-day Pakistan) in the eighth century. Commonly known as Guru Rinpoche or Precious Teacher, he introduced Tantric Buddhism and is considered by the Nyingmapa religious school as the second Buddha. Prior to his arrival the people seem to have been animists. The subsequent period, up to the seventeenth century, was marked by the activities of many saints and scholars who left their influence upon the country in various ways.

Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (1595–1651) unified the country and introduced a sophisticated administrative and legal system. He established the dual system of government consisting of a state clergy headed by the Je Khenpo (chief abbot) and the desi (temporal leader). He initiated the building of dzongs or fortresses which not only housed monasteries but also were the seat of the regional governments. The majestic dzongs, which may still be seen all over the country, not only bear witness to the architectural skills of that time but also are treasure troves of exquisite sculpture, paintings, and frescoes. They still serve as the seat of the local administration under the district administrator or *Dzongdha*. The dual system was replaced by a hereditary monarchy in 1907. His Majesty King Jigme Singhe Wangchuck is the fourth hereditary king.

For political reasons and also because of its almost inaccessible and rugged terrain, Bhutan survived in self-imposed isolation until the late nineteen fifties. In the few decades since Bhutan has opted

to emerge from its isolation, it has made considerable progress in its efforts to modernize. Changes have reached every aspect of Bhutanese society. While the Bhutanese are willing to forge ahead and keep up with the changing times, they also see themselves as upholders of Buddhist values as well as their own traditions and ancestral customs. They dearly cherish the goal of finding a balance between tradition and modernization and the influence of this aspiration is apparent not only in the life styles of the people but also in all the policies of the government.

Bhutan was opened to tourism in 1974. Although tourism brings in much needed currency, it is restricted. The lack of infrastructure and tourist facilities as well as Bhutan's efforts to preserve her natural and cultural heritage are the main reasons for the restrictions. Individual travelers cannot visit the country unless officially invited by the government. All tourists must come to Bhutan through one of the government approved travel agencies. The guide book *Bhutan the Himalayan Kingdom* by Françoise Pommaret published by Passport Books is highly recommended for accurate and detailed information on the country.



CHINA

VIETNAM

LAOS

THAILAND

Bangkok
CAMBODIA

MYANMAR

Rangoon

BHUTAN

Thimphu

BANGLA
DESH

Dhaka

Calcutta

Katmandu

NEPAL

Delhi

INDIA

Indian
Ocean

1000 km

500

0

Note: International Boundaries are derived from the available sources and should not

Part 1

Folktales

Mimi Heylay Heylay

Dangbo..o..o Dingbo..o..o.. Mimi Heylay Heylay was out in the hot sun digging in a field. Mimi Heylay Heylay or grandfather Heylay Helay, as he was affectionately known to all the villagers, was a man of no outstanding physical stature but an impressive personality. His frail body was balanced delicately on his bowed legs with calves that bulged boldly. He could be seen at all the village gatherings stroking his goatee made up of a few strands of hair. This jolly old man was not given to hard work and he had lived for many years on the good will of his fellow villagers. The slow half-hearted movement of his hoe was a clear indication that he did not enjoy the tedious and backbreaking job of preparing the buckwheat field. Therefore he was visibly annoyed when he was suddenly faced with a huge tree stump which stood menacingly in the middle of the field. He stood there looking at it pensively, all the while stroking his goatee. He decided that it had to go. So he began to attack it. Little by little he dug out the roots and then began to pull and tug at it until sweat poured down his brow and his palms were blistered and aching. Just as the sun was descending behind the western mountain ranges he gave it one final tug and the whole stump came out with a terrific crash.

In the now gaping hole where the tree root had once been, he at once saw a large flat circular turquoise which looked like a *golang* or a flat pan for making the famous *Bumthangpa khuli*. He could hardly believe his eyes. With his eyes wide open he stood there staring at it in awe for a long time. Finally he up picked this heavy turquoise piece and scrutinized it. It was truly the most beautiful thing he had ever seen!



The owner of the rooster was rather astonished but this was an offer he could not refuse.

Mimi Heylay Heylay said aloud to himself, "Now that I have this turquoise, I don't have to work any more. I'll sell it to get rich." With his newly acquired wealth and confidence, Mimi Heylay Heylay swaggered to the market. On the way to the market he met a man who was leading a horse on a rope.

The man asked, "Where are you going, Mimi Heylay Heylay?"

Mimi Heylay Heylay sang, "Don't say Mimi Heylay Heylay; instead listen to what I have to tell you. I dug a field where I came across a tree stump, I pulled out the stump and I found a turquoise, so now I am going to sell it in the market. Would you like to exchange your horse for my turquoise?"

The man was completely taken aback. Had this old man gone mad? The turquoise was priceless. This was an opportunity not to be missed, so he quickly agreed and the exchange was made. The man with the turquoise walked away rapidly, afraid that Mimi Heylay Heylay would change his mind. But Mimi Heylay Heylay, who was perfectly happy with the deal, continued his journey, leading the horse by the rope. He had not walked very far when he met a man with a bull who asked, "Where are you going, Mimi Heylay Heylay?"

Mimi Heylay Heylay once again sang, "Don't say Mimi Heylay Heylay; instead listen to what I have to tell you. I dug a field where I came across a tree stump. I pulled out the stump and I found a turquoise, which I exchanged for this horse, now would you like to exchange your bull for the horse?"

The man gaped in total disbelief, for his old bull was a poor bargain compared with the handsome young stallion. But he quickly got over the initial shock and hastily made the exchange. After the exchange was made, Mimi Heylay Heylay led the bull by the rope which was tied around its horns and continued on his way to the market. Soon he met a man with a ram who asked him where he was going. This time Mimi Heylay Heylay sang, "Don't say Mimi Heylay Heylay; instead listen to what I have to tell you. I dug a field where I came across a tree stump. When I pulled out the stump I found a

turquoise. I have exchanged the turquoise for a horse. I exchanged the horse for a bull. Now would you like to exchange your ram for my bull? The owner of the ram was surprised but happily agreed and quickly led the bull away. Mimi Heylay Heylay walked on with the gait of a successful trader, pleased that he had been able to make such quick and smooth barter within a short time. The ram followed his new master reluctantly, bleating loudly.

By and by he met a man with a rooster under his arm. When the owner of the rooster asked him where he was going Mimi Heylay Heylay as usual sang, "Don't say Mimi Heylay Heylay; instead listen to what I have to tell you. I was digging a field where I came across a tree stump. When I removed the stump I found a turquoise. I exchanged the turquoise for a horse which was exchanged for a bull and the bull for a ram, now would you like to exchange your rooster for my ram?"

The owner of the rooster was rather astonished but this was an offer he could not refuse. He gladly took the ram and gave his bird to Mimi Heylay Heylay. Mimi Heylay Heylay tucked the rooster under his arm with a flourish and walked on until he met a man who was singing to his heart's content as he walked along. When he saw Mimi Heylay Heylay he stopped singing to ask him where he was going and once again Mimi Heylay Heylay sang, "Don't say Mimi Heylay Heylay; instead listen to what I have to tell you. I was digging a field where I came across a tree stump. When I removed the stump I found a turquoise. I exchanged it for a horse, the horse for a bull, the bull for a ram, the ram for a rooster. Now would you like to exchange your song for the rooster? Thoroughly surprised the singer stood there quite dumbfounded. Mimi Heylay Heylay¹ happily thrust the bird into the arms of the lucky singer and walked away singing to his heart's content, "Shom a lay laymo, ow lay pey owlay pey.....ow lay pey...."

¹ A person is often compared to Mimi Heylay Heylay when he/she makes obviously silly deals.

Tsongpon Dawa Zangpo

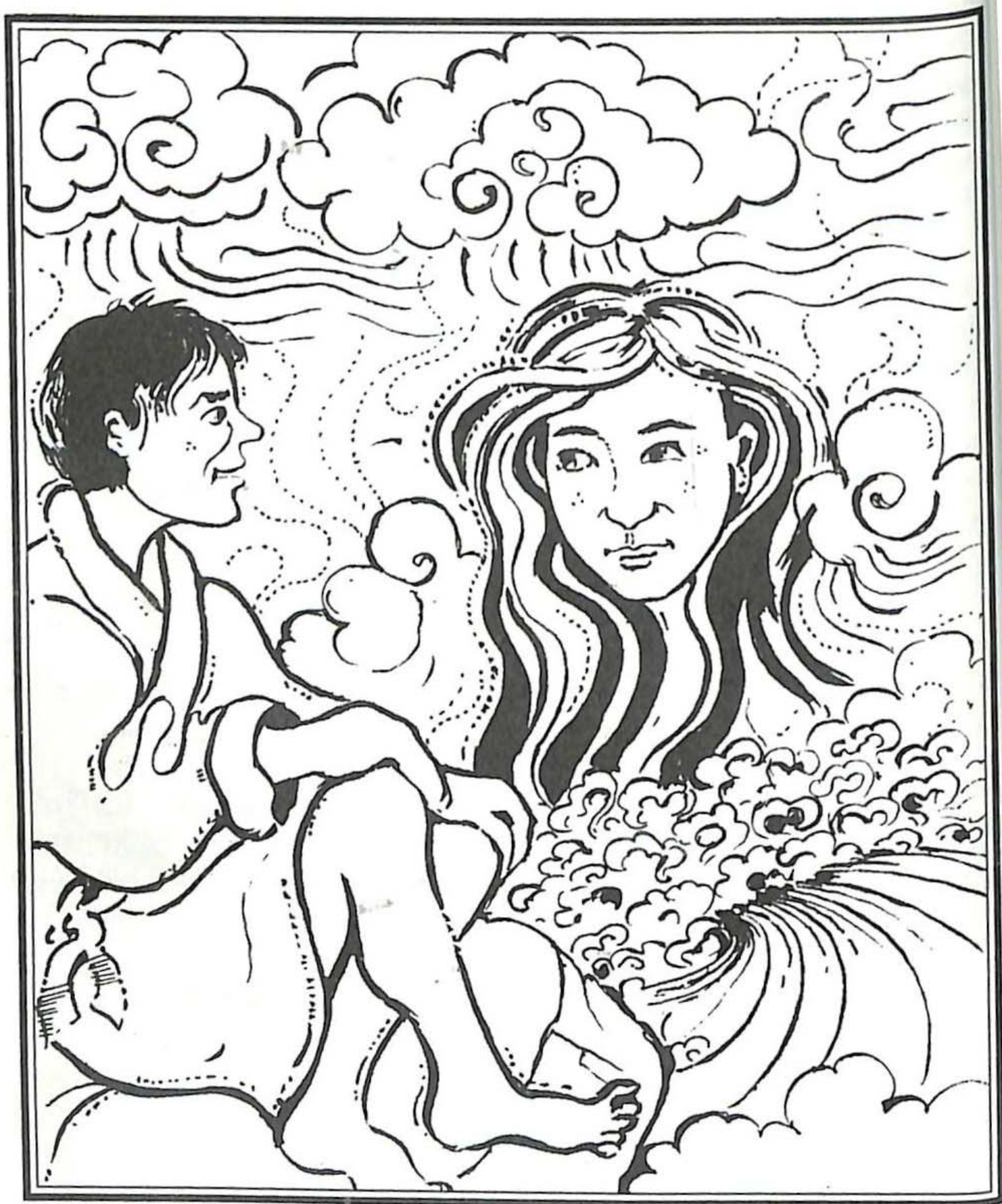
Dangbo..o..o Dingbo..o..o.. there was a widow who lived with her three sons. Their father had been a prosperous merchant. But after his death the family had fallen on hard times. So when the sons grew up the mother wanted them to become traders, hoping that they could have at least some of their former prosperity.

One day she called them together and said, "Your father was a very successful merchant and I am sure that you too can become like him. Go into the world and become merchants."

To help them start off their business she gave each of them something that she had saved over the years. Even in times of dire need she had held onto these things for her sons. She gave a gold coin to her oldest son, a silver coin to her middle son, and three rolls of woolen fabric to her youngest.

The three sons decided to go in different directions and start their trades. So they bade farewell to their mother and each other and went their different ways. The youngest son whose name was Dawa Zangpo had not gone very far when he chanced to come across some boys tormenting a cat. They pulled and poked at it and the cat staggered and meowed pathetically. At once he was very sorry for the cat. "*Aye di chi*, poor thing, please stop tormenting this poor animal," he said to the boys, but they would not pay any heed to his pleas. Finally he offered them a roll of the woolen fabric in exchange for the life of the cat. At this the boys agreed and let the cat go. He picked up the cat and stroked it gently and the cat feebly licked his hand in response.

In the same way he saved a dog with the second roll of fabric and a monkey with the third. Now he had nothing to trade with. So he



As he looked on, the waters of the lake swished about and a circle of ripples appeared in the center of the lake as a beautiful woman came out.

traveled around aimlessly with the three animals until one day he reached the shores of a great lake. There was a group of fishermen who were wildly excited because they had caught a big fish. The fish was still alive and wriggling in the sand. Full of loud enthusiasm they were about to cut it up and divide the meat among themselves. Dawa Zangpo was overcome with compassion for the fish, so he begged them to spare its life. The fishermen were quite amused. "What will you give us if we let this fish go?" they ridiculed.

All he had to offer were the clothes on his back and he at once readily took these off to give them. When they realized how serious he was they sheepishly took the fish and released it into the water and walked away with his clothes. The fish floated for a while then slowly steadied itself and swam away, quite unsure of itself.

As soon as the fishermen were gone there was a strange sound from the lake. As he looked on, the waters of the lake swirled and swished about and a circle of ripples appeared in the center of the lake as a beautiful woman came out. "I have been sent to call you by the *luyi gyalpo*, the king of the subterranean world. He would like to reward you for saving his daughter."

For a while this spartan man stood on the banks of the lake speechless with wonder. Finally he fed his animals and said, "All right, now I am ready to come."

He closed his eyes as he was bidden to do and held onto the sleeves of the woman as she plunged back into the water. "The king will offer you everything that you could wish for but you must ask only for the ring on the finger of his right hand," whispered the woman as they reached the turquoise gate of the *luyi gyalpo's* palace. Strains of a plaintive and melancholic music from a lone flute greeted his ears as he walked carefully on the turquoise floors that shone in the pale, shimmering light that filtered in through the water.

He soon found himself in the presence of the subterranean king. He had the upper body of a human being but his lower body was a

massive snake that slithered and swayed gently. He was the *lu shiwa* or the peaceful *lu*. He smiled benignly under a halo of serpents. He had another serpent around his neck that crawled sluggishly. Dawa Zangpo was given milk and puffed buckwheat as a welcome offering.

After three days in the underworld Dawa Zangpo began to worry about his friends on earth and so he asked the *lu*, "Please let me go back to my world. I have been away from my friends for too long and they must be hungry."

The *lu* at once offered him gold, silver, and all sorts of gems but he declined all offers, saying, "If you really wish to give me something I would like to have the ring from the finger of your right hand."

The *lu* gave him the ring very reluctantly as the ring was a wish-fulfilling ring, and yet this man had saved the life of his only daughter.

Back on earth Dawa Zangpo was very happy to see that all three animals were well. After having fed them he decided to try out the ring and wished for a house on the island in the middle of an immense lake. No sooner had he made the wish than he found himself on the island in a beautiful palace surrounded by servants who waited to serve his every need.

Now the king of the West who up to now had been the most powerful and most wealthy man in all the land at once felt threatened by somebody who seemed to possess supernatural powers. He was jealous and curious to find out how a *dzong* (palace) had been built overnight on the island. He asked for a volunteer to go across the lake and find out how everything had happened. Nobody would volunteer as the way was fraught with perils and it was said to be an endless journey of no return. Finally a *gomchen* who had mastered some tantric powers came forward. The king was of course very pleased and rewarded him generously.

The *gomchen* finally reached the island but it had taken him a long time. Once on the island he pretended to be a beggar and went

to beg at the gate of Dawa Zangpo's *dzong*. The latter who was rather surprised but pleased to see a visitor asked him to stay on. The *gomchen* stayed on and soon found out the secret of the ring. Every day for three years, the *gomchen* trailed Dawa Zangpo, waiting for an opportunity to steal the ring but he never took it off his finger. The *gomchen* would have failed, had not a stroke of good fortune come to his aid. It happened while Dawa Zangpo was having his bath and the hot water swelled his fingers and he took off the ring till the swelling went down. It was at this moment that the *gomchen* snatched up the ring and wished to be taken across the lake to the palace of the king of the West. The wish-fulfilling ring at once granted his wish and before he could blink his eyes he was in the presence of the powerful king of the West. The king of the West was once again the most powerful person, but with the magical ring now in his possession his powers had multiplied many times. The *gomchen* was rewarded handsomely and made the prime minister to the king.

The instant the ring was taken the palace vanished and Dawa Zangpo had nothing except the three animals. The cat, being the most intelligent of the three, called the other animals together and pointed out, "Now is our chance to show our gratitude to this gentle compassionate man. We must think of a way to get back the ring." The three animals sat together and after a long discussion they agreed upon a plan. The dog being a good swimmer agreed to carry the other two and swim across the lake. Once they reached the western kingdom each animal immediately proceeded to carry out his assignment. So the dog crouched behind a bush and kept watch. The monkey went into the king's maize field and began to destroy the entire crop, pulling down the stalks and breaking off the cobs. The gardener, seeing the ravage, immediately reported the incident to the king, who was a keen hunter. He summoned all his men together and went after the monkey. While the palace was thus unattended the cat crept into the palace, lay down near the securely locked door of the *gyalpoi bangzoi* or royal treasure trove

and pretended to be dead. The mice in the palace were greatly excited and mystified over the death of a cat they had never seen before and they reported the matter to their king and sought counsel from him. The mouse king immediately came to look at the strange dead cat. He peered at it. The cat stayed very still. All the mice watched and held their breaths as their brave king went closer to the cat. Seeing that all his subjects were watching him he ventured even closer and actually began to poke and pull at it. The cat suddenly sprang up, caught the king and declared, "Your king is my prisoner, I will not release him until you bring me the new ring that the king of the West has recently acquired."

The mice scurried about in the palace looking everywhere for the ring. Soon the ring was found and brought to the cat who promptly released the mouse king. The cat then went off with the ring to join his two friends in the forest. The monkey held the ring in his hand and the three animals set out across the lake on their return journey. As they were about to reach the shore, a sudden wave splashed over them and the ring was swept out of the monkey's hand into the lake. Just then a fish came swimming by and swallowed the ring. No sooner had it swallowed it than a waterfowl swooped down and caught the fish. The dog had seen all this and knew exactly what to do, while his two friends bemoaned their ill luck. The dog ran after the startled bird who dropped the fish from its beak and flew into the sky. The dog quickly recovered the ring from the fish and instantly took it to Dawa Zangpo, who was so overcome with joy and gratitude that he fainted.

From then onwards the four friends lived in peace and prosperity for the rest of their lives and Dawa Zangpo decided never to take the ring off his finger at all.

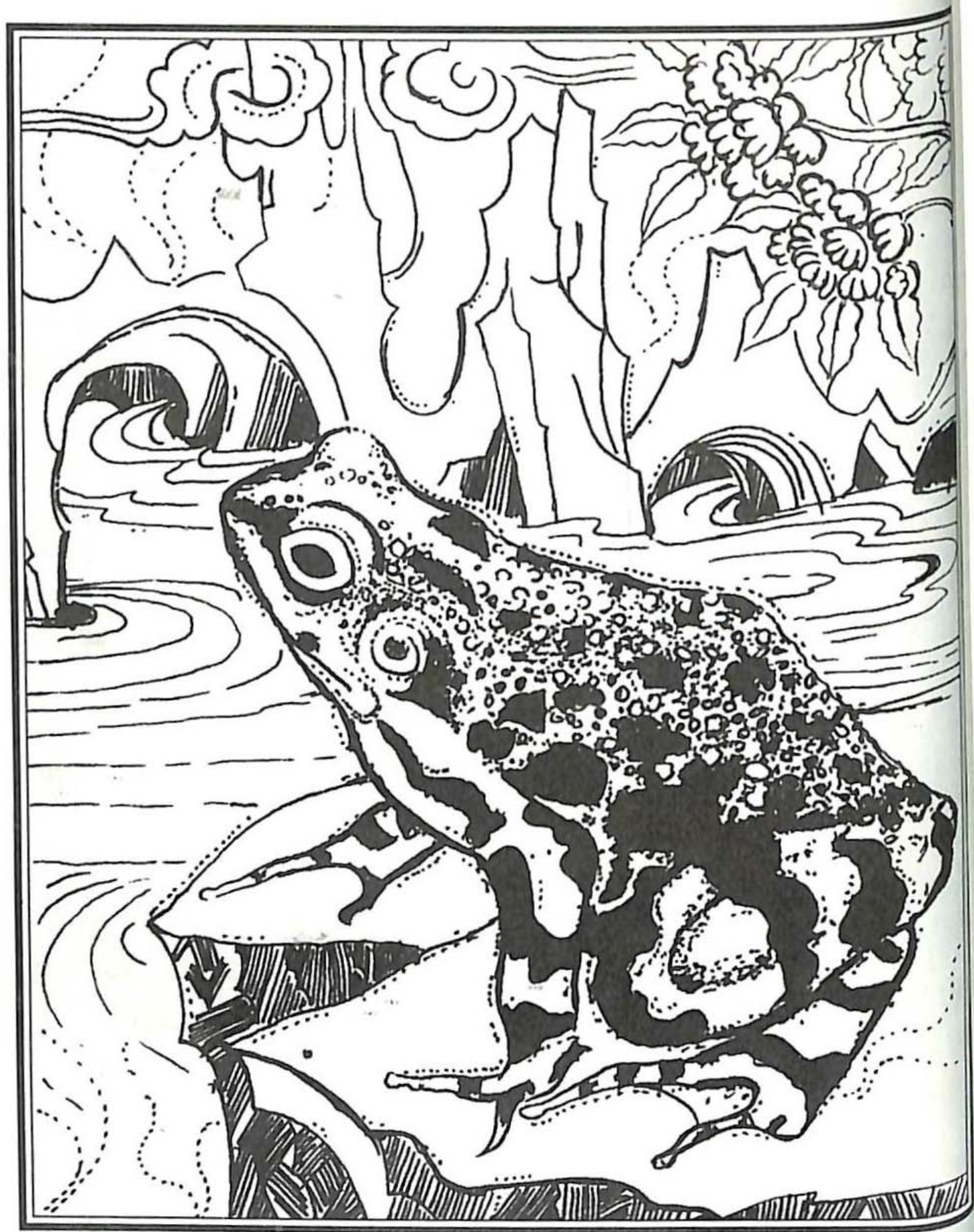
The Cuckoo and the Frog

Dangbo..o..o Dingbo..o..o.. there was a big, fat ugly frog who was married to a cuckoo. The cuckoo could never fathom the frog's feelings for her. He was always strange and often quite suspicious. She longed to find out what he actually thought about her. So one day she cheerfully said, "I want to go and visit my relatives in Tibet." The frog nodded his big unsightly head impassively and belched out a barely comprehensible, "Go".

She said good-bye to the frog and presently flew off in the direction of the high mountain ranges to the north of Bhutan. She fluttered in the air for a while and when she was sure the frog could no longer see her she swooped down and flew back on to a tree near the pond. Carefully hidden among the thick foliage of the tree, the cuckoo kept a close watch on the frog. It was a warm sunny day and it was not long before the frog jumped up upon a large lily pad. He stretched out his limbs in all directions and gave a loud yawn and after he had made himself comfortable he basked at his leisure in the sun. While he lay there he scornfully mumbled to himself, but loud enough for the other creatures in the pond to hear:

Cuckoo, Cuckoo, my Cuckoo,
She must now be climbing over the *Monla karchung*
Her front must be soaked in *chabsang*,
And her back must be rotting with her sweat.

The pond soon resounded with the loud laughter and snide giggles of the other inhabitants of the pond. The frog seemed to



There was a big, fat and ugly frog who was married to a cuckoo.

enjoy this immensely and kept repeating the same derogatory remarks over and over again. Seeing and hearing all this the cuckoo shook her head in shame and humiliation as her eyes welled up with tears. So, this is what he thought of her! Suddenly, she flew out from her hiding place and confronted him, quivering with emotion.

"It's not been a whole day since we parted and this is how you ridicule and disgrace me. From now on I shall have nothing to do with you." The frog was taken by surprise and lay there staring at her with his bulging eyes that bulged even further. How repulsive and disgusting he looked! How could she have endured him so long? He was so ashamed of himself that he leapt into the water with a big splash and never came out again.

"The water has been defiled with your lowly presence. I shall not drink it even if I have to die of thirst,"¹ continued the cuckoo.

And the peculiar marriage between the frog and the cuckoo was thus terminated.

¹ Many Bhutanese believe that the cuckoo does not drink water from ponds. Early in the mornings one can often see the cuckoo drinking the dewdrops on the grasses and the leaves.



For the third time he carried his wife's body until he reached the banks of a huge river.

The Hoopoe

Dangbo..o..o Dingbo..o..o... somewhere in the wilderness of the Bhutanese forests, signs of winter were everywhere. Many trees stood bleak and leafless and a chilling wind blew relentlessly. Like the other birds and beasts in the forest a hoopoe couple was busily preparing for the lean and cold months. They made their nest warmer and began to stock up grains and whatever else they could find so that they would not starve during the harsh winter months.

While the male hoopoe flew around and collected whatever he could, the task of arranging the stores in their nest fell on the female hoopoe. Now one day while she was piling up the grains, a precious pea which her husband had so proudly brought home just the day before fell from her beak into a deep crevice of the stone wall in which they had built their nest. She tried to get it out but the pea was too deep down for her even to see it. By the end of the day, although her beak was raw and scarred, the pea was still deep inside the crevice.

At dusk when birds come home to roost, the male hoopoe came with his collection for the day. He proudly surveyed their stock. "One pea is missing. You must have eaten it, you ungrateful *moringmo*," he accused her. He was tired, and easily worked himself into a fury. He ruffled up his feathers and scolded her, and as if that was not enough he began to peck at her and push her around until she was dead. Instantly the male hoopoe regretted what he had done.

He looked at the still body of his dear wife for a long time in utter disbelief. "I will take her body to a safe and clean place," he decided. At last he sighed to himself and then lifted the dead body

onto his back and began the long and arduous journey. After flying for a long time he perched on the top of a tree on a high mountain. He thought, "This may be a good place for my wife." Just then he saw some vultures circling the skies so he sang,

The mountains are the home of the gods,
They are sacred and clean,
Yet the vultures hover above,
This will not be a good resting place for my wife.

He once again took up his precious burden and flew over great distances. His wings ached and his body grew heavy so he rested on a great boulder in a huge plain. He looked around and considered the place. Alas, a family of mice were scurrying about so he sang,

The plain is vast,
It's where the paths of thousands of travelers meet
And dangers abound.
The mice are waiting eagerly to devour my wife
I will not leave her here.

For the third time he carried his wife's body until he reached the banks of a huge river. He perched on a large log of wood on the bank of the river and looked around. He saw the fish swishing about as they swam in the water and he sang,

The river flows swiftly
Carrying down everything with it.
It would carry my wife down too
But the fish would eat her before that.
I will not leave her body here.

"No place is good enough for my wife," he sighed sadly as he lifted up the beloved remains of his wife and continued his journey

again, flying over high mountains and swooping into deep valleys. But his search proved to be futile and he decided to return to his nest. He had spent the whole winter carrying his wife's dead body around so that when he reached home it was already early spring. Worn out from his long unsuccessful journey, he feebly laid his wife's body down on the rock in front of the entrance to their nest and looked in. He could not believe what he saw. The single pea that had fallen into the crevice had grown and was now flowering. It filled up their whole nest. This was far too much for someone who had already suffered so intensely. He was overcome with remorse and exhaustion, and fell down dead beside the body of his wife.