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## **Caliginous Folktales of Chang Naga**

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### **Abstract:**

What is a Folktale? A traditional story of a legend, passed down through numerous generations by word of mouth is referred to as folktales. These folktales are often rooted in various cultures, traditions, certain sets of beliefs, community, race, religion, etc. The rich culture and traditions of our vast and glorious country is alive because of the folktales, which differ from region to region and tribe to tribe. These folktales have kept the people entertained and enlightened for several centuries. Chang Naga is an ethnic group in Nagaland, India, mainly settled in the Tuensang district. Chang Naga folktales still continue to live in an oral society where folktales are passed down orally, which has kept the community's values and concord together. Stories of Eldritch nature like Momola, Shimbili, and Easterine Kire's 'Spirit Nights' will take us through the folktales of Chang Naga, with each tale providing valuable insight.

**Keywords: Folktales, Stories, Chang Naga, Dark, Suffering.**

Chang Naga is a tribe located in the gigantic hills of Nagaland. Their folktales are nature based featuring ancestral spirits and guides who play a pivotal role in directing the tribal people. Their folktales are often of eldritch nature, dealing with dark stories revolving around nature, importance of rivers and forests, etc. The harsh living environment, natural disasters, and the struggle to survive are reflected in most of their folktales. Chang Nagas believe in ancestral spirits, which can be both benevolent and malevolent. These spirits often feature in tales, sometimes punishing or seeking revenge, adding a dark tone. The continuous conflicts and cultural suppression have influenced their storytelling, while incorporating themes of struggle, loss and resilience. They aim to teach moral values, and the stories often use fear and consequences to drive home a point. This can result in darker themes and endings. Revenge, punishment, death, afterlife, suffering, supernatural eldritch spirits are some of the common dark themes we find in the Chang Naga folktales. These components add depth and complexity to the stories, reflecting the rich cultural heritage and resilience of the Chang Naga people.



Origin of the Chang Clan- This folktale unfolds the story of origin of the Chang clan and how they came on this earth. This story of origin has been passed down orally through many centuries to preserve their culture and tradition. When the world was created, it was dark and empty. Tingwang, the great spirit god created humans from clay and wood. He made the first Chang man and woman, placing them in a cave. He gave them a basket of seeds and told them to plant and harvest, but warned them not to look inside the basket. Curious, the woman peeked inside and saw the seeds were actually small stones. She cried, and her tears turned the stones into different grains. The couple planted and harvested, and their crops grew abundantly. Tingwang saw their disobedience and divided the humans into clans, scattering them across the land. He gave the Chang couple a 'daan' (a type of basket) and said,

"You will be the Chang clan, and your name will be known for your skills in weaving and basket-making."

The couple roamed, teaching their children the skills. They reached a river, where they met a spirit who asked for their daan. The spirit filled it with fish, and the couple ate. In return, they offered the spirit their weaving skills, and the spirit taught them agriculture. The Chang couple settled, built a village, and became the ancestors of the Chang Naga tribe. Their story teaches the importance of respecting tradition, honoring ancestors, and valuing skills passed down through generations.

**Momola-** "Momola" is a well-known folktale among the Chang Naga community. According to the tribal people, this particular incident caused a flood in their village. The story revolves around a mother and her beautiful daughter Momola.

The flood is called as 'Momola Flood'. The story unfolds, when a mother named Sungmo took her daughter Thontimola for fishing with her. While fishing, Sungmo was not able to catch any. Worried, she cried saying, "Come to my Jesok (Net) the biggest of fishes. I will give you my daughter Momola to you in return". After saying that, Sungmo started fishing again. In this attempt, she caught many fishes. However, she was now not willing to keep the promise. She was reluctant to give away her only daughter to the river as promised. Also being mindful about what she said earlier, she started her journey back home along with her daughter. Suddenly, the river began to rise calling out the name of her daughter. With lightning and thunderstorm, rain started pouring heavily resulting in the flood rising to the top of the hills and tress, so Sungmo could no longer run away with her daughter. People started blaming Sungmo for not keeping her promise to the river saying,



“Give away what you’ve promised”.

Later Sungmo apologized to her daughter and pushed her daughter into the river as she had promised earlier. Only after that the river began to subside with a resounding sound of “Mo.....Mo....”

After the water subsided, Sungmo went back to the river with great grief and sorrow in search of her daughter. She asked the river to give her daughter back and thus continued her search for her daughter. Deeply mourned and in search for her daughter, she saw Momola sleeping between two big fishes. However, she was unable to get her back, Sungmo went home weeping and mourning again.

This tale explores themes of love, transformation, and redemption, offering insights into the Chang Naga worldview and their connection with nature with caliginous effect.

**Shambili-** This another bleak folktale deals with love and death. It showcases love between a human and spirit in a very eldritch manner. Once upon a time, there was a man who couldn’t find a girl to marry. To find a suitable girl, he planted a garden of flowers hoping that some girl would be tempted by the beauty of the garden, and would agree to marry him. He soon noticed that someone came every night and picked the flowers from his garden, but he never saw someone coming and plucking the flowers and neither did he saw his village girls wearing those flowers in their ears. To solve this mystery, he kept watch in his garden. At midnight, a woman of exquisite beauty came and began to pluck the flowers, singing in a melodious voice. He ran and caught her. She said that he must let her go as she belongs to the spirit world and her name was Shambili. He was not ready to let her go, and insisted that she should marry him. Thus they became husband and wife. Everything was going well until one day Shambili insisted that must return back to her own world. He agreed that he would let her go for a few days as the spring festival was coming. On the day Shambili was to return, her husband saw her coming from far distance carrying a basket. To his horror, he saw a deformed leg of a lame man. When he peeked again, the human leg had turned into a buffalo leg. Shambili cooked that meat for her husband. As he was horrified, Shambili ate all the meat. This incident showcase the horrors and eldritch nature of the Chang Nagas. As the story progresses, Shambili’s hunger for human flesh increases and she can be seen devouring on her husband’s flesh, eventually killing him. The dark themes associated with these folktales reveals that how these tribal people often had to rely on animals flesh for their survival due to the scarcity of food.



Spirit Nights- "Spirit Nights" by Easterine Kire is a captivating novel that delves into the rich cultural heritage of Nagaland, India. This fantasy novel draws inspiration from ancient tribal tales, particularly from the Chang Naga tribe, and reimagines them for modern audiences. The story revolves around a prophecy fulfilled when darkness engulfs several villages, and a wise elder must find a way to restore the light. With its unique blend of fable, allegory, folklore, and family dynamics, "Spirit Nights" offers a beautiful and immersive reading experience. Easterine Kire's writing style has been praised for its easeful, velvety, and pitch-perfect storytelling. As the first Naga poet to publish poetry in English, Kire brings a wealth of cultural knowledge and sensitivity to her work. The novel "Spirit Nights" is drawn from the folktales of the Chang Naga tribe with the theme of darkness and prophecy. The story not only entertains the reader, but it also offers a critical exploration of the Chang Naga culture and the various roles men and women play in the tribe. The story revolves around two main protagonists, Tola, a dream receiver who is descended from a long line of seers and her grandson Namu, who is destined to a warrior hero. The story covers the myths and legends of Chang Naga, particularly of a time when an all-encompassing darkness has covered the earth and is leading to an end. Along with the main storyline, it also involves fireside tales about doomed lovers, cautionary tales of mighty warriors intertwined with the story of two brothers who set out to right the wrong doings done to their mother. Each tale in the novel articulates valuable lessons and morals along with adding layers of colors to the story. Easterine Kire illuminates that how indigenous identities are informed by gender and life stage, and how each individual has to fulfill his/her role and responsibilities for the proper functioning of the society.

Kire has also displayed the "matrifocal" society, which is present till date in the tribes of Nagaland, displayed through the character of Tola and her mother. It precisely tells a woman's role in the community to maintain the cultural and moral order. In many incidents, Tola's voice is dominating, as she is striving to raise her grandson, Namu by understanding and participating in the rituals which reinforces his bond with the tribe. Here Kire has purposely set up a matriarchal community in a patriarchal set up, in which the female ancestor becomes a source of vitality which in the end permits her progeny to prevail. The future Kire imagines for us and the stories of the past that she reconstructs. Kire has masterfully woven together the elements of Naga folklore, mythology, and cultural traditions, creating a captivating narrative that explores the human condition.



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