

## Reviving Tagin Folktales: Teaching English in Tribal Primary School Classrooms of Arunachal Pradesh

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### ABSTRACT

Developing textbooks for students in tribal areas facing learning disadvantages requires careful attention. Primary school students from the Tagin tribe in Arunachal Pradesh can benefit significantly from comprehension, English grammar knowledge, vocabulary expansion, and dictionary skills development through engaging presentations of folktales and folksongs from their own community in English lessons. Well-designed exercises tailored to learners' needs and levels are crucial for effectively teaching English. For example, this paper presents two folktales for this purpose.

**Keywords:** *Primary school level English learners, English language lessons, Textbook development, Tagin tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, Folktales*

Arunachal Pradesh, located in Northeast India, is renowned for its twenty-six major tribes, among which the Tagins stand out for their rich cultural heritage. As one of the major tribes in the Upper Subansiri District, the Tagins trace their lineage back to ABOTANI, the legendary forefather of many Tani tribes in Arunachal Pradesh. Despite their rich culture and history, like other tribes in the state, proper documentation is lacking, and preservation skills are crucial, particularly among the Tagin people. Effective preservation often involves education, where incorporating folk literature into classroom teaching materials can not only enrich learning experiences but also aid in the preservation of Tagin cultural heritage. Developing textbooks with tribal content, such as folktales, for language teaching can enhance English learning for disadvantaged tribal students while contributing to the preservation of the Tagin people's rich cultural legacy.

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Introducing folktales of the Tagin tribe into classrooms can be engaging, especially since local Tagin students can relate to them more easily. The NEP 2020 also promotes innovative approaches in curriculum development, aiming to reduce curriculum load and enhance accessibility. This paper further explores translations and folk culture, making it relevant to the new educational policies.

### ***About Tagins***

Arunachal Pradesh boasts numerous tribes, with the Tagins being one of the major tribes residing in the Upper Subansiri district. Covering an area of over 15,000 square kilometers, the district is bordered by Tibet-China to the north, Kamle District to the south, Lower Subansiri and Kara Dadi districts to the west, and West Siang District to the east. According to the 2011 Census of Scheduled Tribes, there are 68,534 Tagin people. Tagins are also found in Tibet and other districts of Arunachal Pradesh, such as Shi Yomi District and Kara Dadi District. They trace their lineage back to Abotani, the progenitor of all Tani Tribes or Abotani tribes, including Adis, Apatani, Galo, Nyishi in Arunachal Pradesh, and Mishing in Assam. Like many other tribes in the Northeast, the Tagins possess a rich oral tradition and culture. Despite this richness, numerous folk stories remain untouched and undocumented. Limited research has been conducted on the tribe and its folk culture, leaving many folk tales, narratives, songs, and proverbs unrecorded. Among these, legends of Abutani or Abotani are particularly popular. However, with the advent of modernity and the passage of time, these folktales risk being forgotten.

### ***The Tagin ESL learners and their difficulties at the Primary school level***

With the changing times, the Tagins have undergone transformations due to education and government policies aimed at their well-being. The education system has also undergone significant changes, leading to a division between the private and public sectors. Students in the private sector tend to outperform those in government schools, especially at the primary level. Tagin ESL learners are categorized into rural and urban, as well as private and government school learners. Among these categories, rural and government schools face the most disadvantages and challenges. One reason for this is the difficulty students face in understanding NCERT books. Surveys have indicated that the level of NCERT books is too advanced for rural and government school learners, with even local teachers finding them challenging to comprehend. The current state of education in the region is not very promising, particularly with the performance of lower-level government schools falling below average. According to the prominent local newspaper, 'Arunachal Times' (January 17, 2019, and December 3, 2020), the 2018 ASER paints a grim picture of the state of school education in Arunachal Pradesh. The same newspaper reported on January 17, 2019, that the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) revealed that in Arunachal Pradesh, not even half of all children enrolled in Standard V can read a Standard II level text. This study has been developed with the disadvantaged conditions of tribal primary school ESL learners in mind, aiming to create

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student-friendly textbooks with tribal and local contents for these young learners. These model textbooks could prove effective for learners, providing all the necessary support and characteristics for acquiring English language skills.

### ***Significance***

Arunachal Pradesh is home to 26 tribes and over 100 sub-tribes, boasting rich cultural diversities. The state is steeped in myths, folklores, folktales, legends, and proverbs, which form the oral traditions of its people. Among these tribes, the Tagins of Arunachal Pradesh possess a wealth of unexplored oral traditions, often safeguarded by the Nyibus, or priests and shamans. Rituals and oral traditions play a crucial role in tribal life, although their prevalence has diminished with modernity. Folktales, once a daily occurrence, are now rare, with many rituals being discarded and folk stories forgotten. However, folktales serve multiple important functions: they entertain listeners, reflect the culture of a community, educate people in non-literate societies, and reinforce traditional values and norms. Sadly, nowadays, folktales and myths are rarely discussed in households, and younger generations are not being exposed to this diminishing oral literature. Moreover, those with traditional knowledge, such as priests and elders, are aging and passing away, with younger generations showing little interest in preserving tribal knowledge and rituals. Improving the education of disadvantaged ESL learners and integrating tribal folk cultures into the learning environment of deprived learners are crucial challenges. Developing textbooks with localized tribal content and utilizing translation to enhance learning lessons are potential solutions to these issues.

Thus, this paper aims to address the following questions:

- How can the education of disadvantaged ESL learners be improved?
- How can tribal folk cultures be integrated into the learning environment of backward and deprived learners?
- How can localized tribal content educate while preserving culture? How can translation be utilized to develop learning lessons for greater effectiveness?

### ***Objectives***

The paper explores the use of folktales in primary level textbooks tailored for tribal school students, aiming to facilitate engaging and accessible learning experiences. Following the guidelines of SCERT and NCERT, textbooks can be developed to incorporate tribal content that is suitable, relevant, and practical, aligning with tribal themes, subjects, and motifs derived from oral traditions. The primary focus is on young students at the primary level, as this stage represents a period of heightened curiosity and receptiveness to learning. Their sharp memory at this stage ensures that knowledge gained remains ingrained. Integrating these textbooks into their daily learning routine ensures exposure to rich cultural heritage, shaping their lifelong memories. These textbooks, featuring tribal culture and oral traditions through content, themes, motifs, and illustrations, can also serve as informative resources for outsiders curious about

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tribal culture, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation. Such research serves as a form of societal ventilation, addressing disbelief and disconnection in younger generations caused by modernization. It fosters positive attitudes towards customs and traditions, contributing to psychological well-being. Moreover, it entertains, educates, and instills pride in tribal heritage and English learning among future generations.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review includes analysis of various books and references relevant to the research topic. The consulted books are categorized as follows:

1. Pandey, B.B. (1996). **Folk Songs of Arunachal Pradesh**: This book presents a collection of folk songs from Arunachal Pradesh in simple and easy-to-understand English, covering ritual songs, stories of ancestors, myths, and supernatural entities.
2. Bora, D.K. (1995). **Myths and Tales of the Nishis of Arunachal Pradesh**: The author gathers myths and tales from the Nishi tribe, aiming to reproduce them accurately. The book contains short stories covering various themes such as morality, tricksters, love, and supernatural beings.
3. Pandey, B.B. (1999). **Myths and Beliefs on Creation of Universe Among the Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh**: This book comprises eleven essays discussing myths and beliefs related to the creation of the universe among different tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, with a focus on oral traditions and ritualistic practices.
4. Laloo, Betty. (2010). **Folk Tales of Northeast India**: A collection of folk tales from all eight states of Northeast India, highlighting important cultural aspects and functional aspects of folktales.
5. Elwin, Verrier. (1957). **A Philosophy of NEFA**: This book explores tribal affairs in NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh), discussing policies and approaches applicable to tribal communities.
6. Begi, Joram. (2007). **Education in Arunachal Pradesh since 1947**: The author provides a historical overview of the education system in Arunachal Pradesh, discussing constraints, opportunities, initiatives, and people's attitudes toward education.
7. Riddi, Ashan. (2006). **The Tagins of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study of Continuity and Change**: This detailed study covers various aspects of Tagin tribe life, including their traditional, social, economic, political, cultural, and religious institutions, as well as government policies and measures.
8. Sarker, N. (1999). **The Tagins**: An anthropological study of the Tagin tribe of Upper Subansiri, providing insights into their unique culture, customs, traditions, social structure, and religion.
9. Huda, Nurul. (1992). **Teaching English to Indian Pupils**: This book offers helpful approaches and methods for teaching English to Indian students, addressing common problems faced by both students and teachers.

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10. Vyas, Manish A., & Patel, Yogesh L. (2009). **Teaching English as a Second Language: A New Pedagogy for a New Century:** A practical handbook discussing communicative language teaching in ESL contexts, modern trends, innovations, challenges, and examples.
11. Mitkong, N., Megu, A., Paul, B., & Borah, B.K. (2006). **Oral Literature of The Tagins on Creation of Universe Arunachal Pradesh:** This book presents primary data collected from Tagin verses chanted by prominent Nyibus or Shamans of the Tagin area, recorded and translated by the authors.

### *Data collection for Tagin folktales*

Data collection methods for Tagin folktales included observation, survey, contact, and interview methods. Primary sources were prioritized, supplemented by secondary sources for content development.

Samples of Tagin verses and translated versions of two folktales are provided, originating from shamanic chants by Mada Lingdam, assisted by Talo Rakyum, prominent priests of the Giba circle,

#### **a) Tagin Shamanic Verses:**

KELU KEBENG BENGNI BENGTE GE  
NINIG NI BENGLA  
NIRJA NI BENGLA  
NIMA NI BENGLA  
TANI BEHENG BENGLA  
NIKUNG NI BENGLA  
KENERA MORA  
NILONG NI BENGLA LENGBU NAKU  
NIPE NI BENGLA PANE MANE  
BEHENG BEGJI PENG  
NIDU BENLA LA  
DODUM DOLU  
TANI HEBENG BENGLA  
NITA NI BENGLA  
TANING KADU NIJI NI BENGLA  
JANU JABIU  
KELU NIJA NI BENGLA PODER  
DORSI DARI HA  
KELU NIMA NENGA MASI MANU  
KELU NIKMIGAM NI BENGLA MOSING  
RISI ZIMA NGA BENGLLEN GIJI KE.

.....  
KELU KEBENG BENGNI BENGTE GE  
JIKU SIKU NGA SUKU  
BENGNI BENGTE NIAGE TOKSI  
RAI GE CHABA EBA SUKU LE  
NENNGNI GE TEKZI ENAM RAI CHANAM DEM  
NAM LE GELA NINGKU GA DEGE TELA  
BENGTE GE TEKSI  
RAI CHANAM DEM GAM LE LELAK DO BE  
BELAK SUBU DETA LA  
BIJUM TINGSER HARUM DELI TOLA  
BENGNI BENGTE GE SEN MINPE SUPE NEYU KE  
HEBE NIZEN GE  
HEBE TARI GO  
TENJI YEI KUNE  
CJIKU SIKU NGA KAPE SUKU  
BENGNI BENGTE NIGE TOKSI  
RAI GE CHABA EBA SUKU LE,  
NENNGNI GE TEKSI ENAM RAI CHANAM  
NAM LE GELA NINGKU GA DEGE TELA  
BENGTE GE TEKSI  
HEBE NIZEN GE  
HEBE TERI GO  
TENJI YEI KUNE

**Translation:**

In ancient times, from the realm of spirits, the first man named Tani was born in human form and was also known as Niyia Tani, meaning human Tani. Niyia Tani had a son named Nibing, from whom two sons, Bengte and Bengni, were born. Bengte, being the elder brother, shared a close bond with Bengni. They often went to the forest for hunting and collecting food. While Bengni was successful in catching animals, Bengte returned empty-handed every time. One day, Bengni followed Bengte secretly and discovered that Bengte was eating the hunted animals raw instead of bringing them home for cooking. Surprised and curious, Bengni confronted Bengte about his actions, causing Bengte to feel shocked and embarrassed. Bengte confessed his embarrassment to Bengni and decided to remain hidden in the forest, refusing to return home. Despite Bengni's pleas, Bengte convinced him to return home and visit him after three, five, and seven days. Bengte instructed Bengni to hide him in a cave covered with poisonous leaves. Bengni followed his brother's instructions, visiting him as instructed and witnessing Bengte gradually transforming into a fully striped tiger. Before disappearing into the jungle, Bengte warned Bengni not to disclose his story to anyone, threatening to kill him if he did. Bengni

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promised to obey him, and both went their separate ways. Many years later, Bengni, now an elderly grandfather, babysat children during the day and told them stories. When he ran out of new stories, Bengni decided to tell the story of him and Bengte, believing that it would no longer have consequences. As he told the story, he felt a buzzing sensation in his ear, a traditional sign of remembrance from the people one talks about. Ignoring the sign, Bengni continued to tell the story, feeling content to share the truth with the next generation. One day, while peacefully combing his hair with a traditional bamboo comb called TUKSUP, Bengni accidentally dropped it. He asked the children to retrieve it from the ground, but each child returned empty-handed, frightened by an entity nearby. Bengni realized that the entity was his elder brother Bengte in the form of a tiger. Determined to retrieve the comb himself, Bengni armed himself with a sharp dagger. Descending to the ground, Bengni confirmed that it was indeed Bengte, also known as ABANG APA in the Tagin dialect. Instantly, ABANG APA attacked Bengni, grabbing his neck with its sharp teeth. In retaliation, Bengni pierced the dagger deep into ABANG APA's chest, killing each other. This act of mutual killing led to the human action of murder, invoking the spirit of GENGRI, also known as GENGRI TALING, meaning the evil spirit of murdering urge and incest. Further, TALING signifies the spirit that leads to unnatural death.

### ***Sample of a chapter for primary level textbook:***

Once upon a time, in a village, there were two brothers named Bengte and Bengni. They deeply cherished each other's company and enjoyed various activities together such as singing, dancing, playing, hunting, swimming, and climbing trees. As they grew older, they ventured into the jungle together to gather food for their family. However, Bengni began to notice that Bengte often returned home late and empty-handed, claiming that his traps yielded no catch.

Suspicious of Bengte's actions, Bengni decided to secretly follow him into the forest one day. He discovered that Bengte had indeed trapped many animals and birds but instead of bringing them home, he consumed them raw. Confronted by Bengni the next day, Bengte felt deeply ashamed and confessed his wrongdoing. He expressed his desire to remain in the forest and asked Bengni to cover him with poisonous Rengte leaves as he slept. Bengte instructed Bengni to visit him every three, five, and seven days to check on him and urged him to keep their secret.

Following Bengte's instructions, Bengni visited him regularly and witnessed his transformation. After seven days, Bengte had turned into a tiger with stripes all over his body. Bengni, shocked by the transformation, promised to keep Bengte's secret. As a tiger, Bengte continued to assist Bengni in hunting, earning the name "Abeng Appa," meaning elder brother tiger in the Tagin language.

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The story concludes with the explanation that according to Tagin tradition, man and tiger are considered blood relatives.

### *Difficult words:*

stick, hearth, traps, knowledge, suspicious, considerable, red-handed, ashamed, confessed, disclose, whereabouts, instructed, taken aback, transformation

### *Activities:*

1. Encourage students to retell the story in their mother tongue or a language they are comfortable with.
2. Assign students to write an essay about the story with the help of their elders or parents.
3. Organize a short drama based on the story of the tiger and man.

### *Exercises:*

a) Answer the following questions:

- Who were Bengni and Bengte?
- How did they spend their time?
- Why was Bengni suspicious of Bengte?
- What happened to Bengte?
- How did Bengte change into a tiger?
- What did Bengte request Bengni to do?
- Why did Bengni choose to share the secret story?
- What occurred when he shared the secret story?
- How did the story of Bengni and Bengte conclude?

b) Fill in the blanks with opposite word of the word given in the bracket of the sentences:

- i. Bengni ran (in) and Bengte ran \_\_\_\_\_.
- ii. Bengni (loved) home and Bengte \_\_\_\_\_ home.
- iii. Man was (small) and the tiger was \_\_\_\_\_.
- iv. Bengte ate (raw) meat and Bengni liked \_\_\_\_\_ meat.
- v. Forest is (silent) and the village is \_\_\_\_\_.

## **UNIT-I THE STORY OF TIGER: THE BETRAYAL**

### **b) Tagin Shamanic verses:**

MIRO GE TANI GE

MINGJING ERRING NGA

TOJI NAME LAKA HAI

NAANU HEYE NAAGO NAGE GE

ANE SURO GE SICHING NEGE



OJING NEDO NEGE  
OMI ANE HE APO AYUGE  
TANI NEGE OJING HO DILO  
ANE ABU HE TANI DE  
MELO GE TANI GUNGMIN HE  
.....  
ANE MINJING DE  
ACHI HEYE PINCHI JINNI ELA  
TE MINGJING HEYE  
TINGNE DONE MASUP HEYE  
NAP E GEJI BO  
ANE PINCHI DE BENJI  
ANE NGO UOCHING LO  
MORU HAM POULIK LO  
TOLO MINJING KARTAK EM BIANAU LINKI KE HELA  
TE TANI DE MIKSU HE PENE LEE  
HONG DE TOLO MINGJING EDI  
.....  
TANI DE ALO HINGKER HINGRIK PINGLING ALOM GO  
NALA YELA SONG JIKU MOLO OGU GO  
JIDU KUBE YULE ELA JI KAKIN HE GEJI BO  
.....  
.....

**2. Sample of translated and developed chapter for primary level textbook:**

Tani and Taru were siblings who, over time, began deceiving each other and harboring jealousy. They engaged in constant fights over trivial matters, always looking for reasons to argue.

They had a major dispute over a missing dog. Additionally, a bat became involved in their conflicts, spreading gossip about Tani to Taru. Tani eventually discovered the bat’s actions and decided to kill it, preparing a sharp knife for the task. He enlisted the help of a tortoise to capture the bat.

As Tani was about to kill the bat, it pleaded for mercy, citing their familial relation as blood brothers through their ancestors. The bat proposed that if Tani truly wished to end its life, he should lock it in a grain container to die from suffocation, thus avoiding staining his hands with its blood. Tani reluctantly complied and locked the bat in the grain basket as requested.

To Tani’s surprise, when he opened the basket days later, he found the bat alive and having consumed all the grains. Furious, Tani attempted to kill the bat again, but it pleaded for mercy

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once more, suggesting a punishment of tying burning wooden sticks (MURU) to its tail. Tani agreed, and the bat flew off with the burning sticks, inadvertently causing a fire that engulfed the jungle and Taru's house.

Taru, seeking retribution, confronted Tani, who offered compensation in the form of animals. Taru declined and accepted Tani's offer of TAPENG TAMAG (moss) for constructing his house and making clothes.

With the help of his sons, Tani gathered materials and assisted in building Taru's house. Upon completion, Taru invited Tani to see the finished structure, which pleased both brothers.

Over time, the burnt jungle rejuvenated, and a new water body named SIKIK, believed to be the source of the Subansiri River, formed. As the water overflowed, it created a river called SINIYIK, symbolizing renewal and regeneration.

### *A) Difficult words:*

deceive, conflicts, tortoise, mercy, suffocation, familial, retribution, compensation, rejuvenated, overflowed, regeneration.

### *B) Activity:*

- i) Have students read the story aloud and present it in their own language.
- ii) Divide students into groups and assign them to collect pictures of bats and create imaginary illustrations of Tani and Taru.
- iii) Assign students to gather more animal stories and present them in class.

### *C) Exercises:*

- a) Answer the following questions.
  - i) In what way did the bat involve itself in Abu Tani and Taru's conflict?
  - ii) What makes the bat appear cunning?
  - iii) What caused Abu Tani to feel surprised?
  - iv) What led to Taru feeling both sad and angry?
  - v) In what manner did Abu Tani assist Taru?

### *Make sentence with the following words:*

cunning, property, suffocation, construction, taboo, petty, dupe.

Write similar words for the following:

jealous, cunning, forest, surprised, angry, sad.

## **UNIT 2- ABU TANI, TARU AND BAT**

## DISCUSSION

The sample textbooks were tested with Class III Tagin students in government schools of Upper Subansiri, and the response was highly positive. The presentation to teachers and other community intellectuals was also encouraging. Both teachers and students found the content easier and more interesting compared to other prescribed books. They appreciated the relevance of local stories in classroom learning and expressed satisfaction with the outcome. This suggests the potential for developing more textbooks incorporating local cultural folk literature.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, folktales can enhance classroom teaching by making learning easier and more relatable to learners' own culture and daily life. The paper suggests simplifying English language learning to accommodate tribal disadvantaged learners and encourages further research on oral literature and folk culture of endangered communities and tribes. Such textbooks offer quick understanding of learning materials in English and hold promise for improving the education scenario at the community, state, and national levels.

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### *Conflict of Interest*

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

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