Mongolia is known for its rich folklore tradition. Genres of folklore, such as ancient myths, proverbs, sayings, good wishes, blessings, children’s tales, and epics depicting happiness, yearning and wisdom of the people have been inherited and passed down orally, from generation to generation, since time immemorial. Mongolian folktales survived and thrived thanks to the tradition of storytelling. Only in the 20th century did Mongolian academics begin to collect them to write them down. As academician P. Khorloo and other scholars point out, ... Even in the primitive stage of development during the struggle with nature and the domestication of wild animals, labor songs, and verses and melodies on livestock breeding emerged and came down to our day, evolving in accordance with our cultural development.

It is a millennia-long history of herdsman’s song, drawn-out songs, verses and melodies related to herding horses, fencing sheep and other national peculiarities, melodious and eloquent verses, proverbs, tales and epics that has passed down to the present generation.

As storytellers added a few details, the tales themselves evolved during the centuries. And - as the Mongolian people say - there are as many different versions of a story as there are people telling it.

Mongolian folktales can be classified into four main groups:

- Zoomorphic and anthropomorphic tales featuring animals acting like humans.
- Tales that tell of a hero who defeats his enemy and wins the beautiful, young woman. There is a difference to the European stories: in the Mongolian tales this young man is often not a prince but a simple hunter or the son of a poor shepherd.
- Tales about magic beings such as magic horses, fairies and - instead of the dragon in European tales - the Mongolians have the “Bangus,” a truly horrible beast.
- Tales discussing the problems of everyday life. Into this group fit the tales about one special figure within the Mongolian tales: The Badarzin, a traveling monk, who resembles Robin Hood or, even more, Till Eulenspiegel. He helps the poor against the rich, fighting with humor and intelligence.

Perhaps the most significant feature of Mongolian folktales is its temporal and spatial perceptions, often reflected in the mentality of the Mongolians even at present. As nomadic people, the Mongolians do not like boundaries or limits. The mentality and lifestyle determined by animal husbandry cannot recognize any limits in any dimensions, including time and space. Liberty means, for Mongolians, “no limits.”

There are many Mongolian folk tales and myths in which space and time become meaningless. For example:

... A giant was escaping from a courageous knight. He saw a little old man herding his sheep and begged him to help. Old man said ‘Go into my nostrils.’ The giant went into nostrils of the old man’s nose. Then the courageous knight came and asked, ‘Have you seen a giant escaping?’ The old man answered: ‘Yes, he is in my nostrils.’ The knight also entered the old man’s nose. He found the giant there and they fought. The old man’s nose began to irritate him and he coughed, and both the giant and the knight fell out of his nose.

The tale continues in this way. We see that space is flexible and changeable in the story. A giant goes inside the little hole of an old man’s nose. And a knight, too. I want to emphasize that in this tale both of them where riding horses. There are no limits to space!

This is not the only tale, which telescopes time and space. There are lot of such stories; for example, another which says that “a battalion of ten thousand troops landed in the single bone of a dead sheep by the order of the Khan, to punish a foxy old woman living in the bone,” and so forth.

Unlike in modern society the concepts of private ownership of land was meaningless in the nomadic mentality. Land was something like air or the ocean, impossible to divide and possess. It was not even public property, but simply a limitless expanse where people live and more. Nomads wanted to travel everywhere and across everything, without any limits. Can you imagine their thoughts, if a stranger appeared before them, saying, “This piece of land is mine” and prohibiting them from
going across it? To own a little piece of landmass of the universe, saying, “It is mine,” sounds to them like “this cubic meter of air is mine, so you cannot breathe it!” It is impossible to imagine. It is said that the Native Americans have a quite similar view.

Hence, from the Mongolian nomadic lifestyle and its influence on the folktales we can trace some unique traits in Mongolian mentality: abstract notions of time and space, further reflected in a rather reluctant acceptance of the modern capitalist concept of private ownership of land.

Endnotes
2 *Mongolian Folktales*, See http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/alabaster/A577992
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The theme of July 2006 issue of *Indian Folklife* is

“Globalization and Tribes of Northeast India”

Guest Editor: Kailash C. Baral
Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), Shillong
Email: cieflemegha@ciefl.ac.in

Thematic Introduction

Loosely considered globalization is a process of integration of people and cultures through free trade resulting in an increased interdependence among countries of the world. It is not a natural process, as the rich countries of the world under regimes such as WTO have initiated it. The metaphoric allusion to such a process that “the world is a village” or “we live in a global village” sounds good as it underlines a sense of bonhomie and felicity but the mechanism of globalization is not that sweet as it raises question of political sovereignty of countries, unethical trade practices and marginalizing the already marginalized by reducing their purchasing power, ironically, in a market flooded with commodities increasing a consumer’s options for making choices. However, in many countries and informed quarters globalization is viewed with anxiety. There are aggressive advocates in both camps for and against globalization. The common charge against globalization is that it is an extension of western capitalism; empowered by free market economy it perpetuates neo-colonialism. Under its sway, the powerful force it unleashes, it is argued, preservation of cultures and identities in their pristine/undiluted state becomes impossible resulting, on the one hand, in alienation of identities and, on the other, in cultural chaos.

Beyond the economic and political debates, it is presumed that globalization is a challenge to cultures, in particular, to marginalized communities and their identities. Interestingly, when we look around us today we find what is specific and local acquires the object of global desire while the so-called global circulates freely, unhindered in the local market. In such a scenario where the local and the global seem to overlap, the discursive articulation of the difference of identities and social and cultural practices become more crucial. In the context of the tribes of Northeast, it is feared that globalization may bring in large-scale commodification of their cultures and would erase their unique identities that are so far consolidated mostly on the premise of ethnic difference. We need to examine how far these anxieties and fears are genuine while keeping in mind the fact that culture is a productive space and it undergoes mutations.

One serious critique of globalization is that under its regime identities are dehistoricized. Although globalization dehistoricizes, it cannot certainly erase an identity totally except creating hybrid identities. For identities are under a period of rapid evolution today in matters of rights, articulations and solidarity movements and so on in our country is it then feasible to preserve a pure, uncontaminated identity with a romantic notion of its uniqueness? As “Northeast” and “tribe”(s) are inescapable given, any discussion on/about identity or culture in the context of the tribes of Northeast, in the wake of globalization, has to be negotiated through the trope of in-betweenness. The in-betweenness as a frame of reference has to take into account general assumptions often invoked around constructs such as “Northeast” and “tribe”(s) and specific examples of particularity in the context of a particular identity and culture.

As identity is a construct can it be essentialised when all other contributing conditions to its constitution change? Beyond and beside identity, we need to examine what happens to cultural products such as indigenous music, textile designs, handicrafts, herbal medicines, dance forms and so on under globalization? In its wake as globalization unleashes the market forces can indigenous cultural products remain what they are or will they respond to the market forces and bring in economic prosperity to the people? These are some of the issues we need to ponder over when we write about globalization and its impact on tribes of Northeast and their cultures.