FOUR FOLKTALES FROM ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Following four folktales deal with the theme of creation of the world. These stories show the belief of some tribes of Arunachal in this phenomenon. Each folktale belongs to one specific tribe. The name of the concerned tribe along with the name of the Frontier Division to which it belongs has been given in the form of the title of each story. These stories are taken from the book “MYTHS OF THE NORTH-EAST FRONTIER OF INDIA” authored by the renowned anthropologist Dr. Verrier Elwin, first published in the year 1958. It may be noted that the Frontier Divisions mentioned in the book are now known as districts.

(A) APA TANI – Reru Subansiri
At first Kujum-Chantu, the earth, was like a human being; she had a head, and arms and legs, and an enormous fat belly. The original human beings lived on the surface of her belly.

One day it occurred to Kujum-Chantu that if she ever got up and walked about, everyone would fall off and be killed, so she herself died of her own accord. Her head became the snow-covered mountains; the bones of her back turned into smaller hills. Her chest was the valley where the Apa-Tanis live. From her neck came the north country of the Tagins. Her buttocks turned into the Assam plain. For just as the buttocks are full of fat, Assam has fat rich soil. Kujum-Chantu’s eyes became the Sun and Moon. From her mouth was born Kujum-Popi, who sent the Sun and Moon to shine in the sky.

(B) DHAMMAI (MIJI) – Nakhu, Kameng
At first there was neither earth nor sky. Shuzanghu and his wife Zumiang-Nui lived above. One day Shuzanghu said to his wife, ‘How long must we live without a place to rest our feet?’ Zumiang-Nui said, ‘What can I say to you? You always live apart from me, and don’t love me. But if you truly love me and will stay with me, I will tell you what to do.’ So Shuzanghu went to his wife and she conceived.

In due time Zumiang-Nui gave birth to a baby-girl, Subbu-Khai-Thung, who is the Earth and to a baby-boy, Jongsuli-Young-Jongbu, who is the Sky. But there was no place for them. So they fell down, down to where Phangnalomang the Worm and his wife were living, and the Worm swallowed them both.

Zumiang-Nui tried to find her children and asked her husband, ‘What has happened to them? Where have they gone?’ But he could not tell her. Then she said, ‘Next time I have a child, make a clear flat place where I can keep him safely and set traps all round it.’ Shuzanghu made such a place and when his wife was delivered of her next child, there was somewhere for him to stay. And now when Phangnalomang came to devour the child he was caught in one of the traps. Shuzanghu found him there and split his body open. The two children were still in his belly and the lower part of his body became the Earth and the upper part the Sky.

Now Earth and Sky lived together. The Sky went to his wife, the Earth, and she gave birth to a son, Subjang-Gnoi-Rise and a daughter, Jubbu-Jang-Sangne. These were gods but they had the shape of mountains. After they were born Earth and Sky separated and as they were parting Earth gave birth to two other children, a boy, Lujjuphu, and a girl named Jassuju, who had the form of frogs. They mated and from them a boy and a girl in human form, Abugumpham-Bumo and Anoi-Diggan-Juje, were born. They were human but were covered with hair. They married each other and in time had three sons, Lubukhanlung, Sangso-Dungso and Kimbu-Sangtung.

(C) HRUSSO (AKA) – Buragaon, Kameng
At first there was no earth and sky; there were only two great eggs. But they were not ordinary eggs, for they were soft and shone like gold. They did not stay in one place, but were round and round. At last, as they went round, they collided and both the eggs broke open. From one came the Earth, from the other the Sky, her husband.

Now the Earth was too big for the Sky to hold in his arms and he said, ‘Though you are my wife, you are greater than I and I cannot take you. Make yourself smaller.’

The Earth accordingly made herself pliable and the mountains and valleys were formed, and she became small and the Sky was able to go to her in love.

When the Sky made love to the Earth, every kind of tree and grass and all living creatures came into being.

(D) SINGPHO – Imbu, Tirap

At first there was no earth nor sky, but only cloud and mist. From it a woman called Khupning-Kuam was born, and since she came from the mist she was a sort of cloud. In time she gave birth to a girl called Ningon-Chinun and a boy called Tung-Kam-Waisun. They had the appearance of snow. When they grew up they married each other and from them were born a girl called Inga (Earth) and a son called Mu (Sky). Inga was mud and Mu, a cloud. These two also married and had a boy called Imbung, the Wind. When he was born, he blew so strongly that he raised the cloud, his father, into the sky and dried up his mother, the mud. In this way heaven and earth were made.