

## Social and Psychological Analysis of “Tapta”, A Manipuri Folktale

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### Abstract

*This paper attempts to highlight the social and psychological aspects of Manipur’s folktale, “Tapta” and its variants. This simple folktale demands attention as it unearths the deepest layers of social behaviour and psychological interests of the Manipuris. The folktale portrays the biased understandings and misunderstandings in the anthropomorphic conversations heeding to the setting of its social environment. The folktale depicts the mental communication barriers of the characters and their cognitive processes. The folk story accounts for information transmission in a particular social context. “Tapta” is a dramatic narrative with a sequence of inventive conditions and social situations. In the tale, ‘Tapta’, an unusual name in context is misunderstood by a tiger who overhears it from a mother threatening her weeping baby. It reflects fear of the unknown creature or xenophobia in the tiger’s baseless fear and accentuates the human cognitive bias for socially disseminated negative information. In this slapstick comedy, the tiger and other animals take unthoughtful hurried decisions such that gradually accumulating inaccuracies lead to the amusement of the listeners. Folklores are naturally related to the dwellers of a particular place and age in one or more ways. They could colligate religiously, historically, ethnically, occupationally, stylistically, geographically, or culturally. A series of striking images provide symbolic references to the social fabric of the local society when mapped with the tale’s narration as a psychological and social activity. Multiple interpretations of the cultural symbols in the folktale provide ambivalent meanings. However, not all interpretations are equally relevant. The social-psychological dissection of the folktale reveals three partially intersecting systems: - 1) The tale, 2) The social system, and 3) The narrator-audience or author-reader interactions. The social system described in the folk story reflects familiarity regarding character selection and the extent to which the form and content of tales originating in the Manipuri society relate to features of the personality of the “bearers” of these tales. A clear understanding of the three systems and their interplay help us to value the tale’s images in their social-psychological reality. The folktale is also analyzed for discourse structure, and information headlining.*

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*The broad object of this analysis is to understand human cognition, interdependence, and behaviour in their natural social context. Individual characters interact in a social group which forms an intimate part of the folktale. General and exceptional situations in folktales like everyday conversations, conflict, bullying, robbery, jealousy, hunger and so on offer a basic understanding of human existence in a particular region.*

**Keywords:** Tapta, Manipuri Folktale, wonder tale, Individual characters, cultural symbols.

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## Introduction

Folktales invariably celebrate the regional culture, beliefs, nature, and diversity. These narratives are society-based experiences and phenomena designed to consolidate and convey specific knowledge. “Tapta” is an ancient Manipuri folktale (Kangleipak) that has survived the era of oral culture and has found mention in the modern form of literary folktales. It shares aspects of a simple “wonder tale” (Thompson). With several motifs, “Tapta”, as a “wonder tale” has fools and absurd misunderstandings, where “...false accusations are usually tragic in their intensity but in short jests, they may be used merely to produce a humorous situation” (208).

This study compares five versions of “Tapta”. They reflect attractiveness in their simplicity, structure, richness, and thematic consistency. The transcriptions of oral folktales add layers of variations and depth to this popular lore. However, for the Social Psychological analysis, only the basic plot of the folktale is reviewed thoroughly. The narrator seems to be a “close third” with an authoritative and narrative voice. The storyteller sticks to the titular character Tapta and supplies limited information. The reader is often not inside the character’s thought bubble, and the writer steers descriptions freely.

Like in other humorous tales, Tapta’s numskull thief was consumed in an imaginary world of his own where things and animals could be endowed with any attribute to suit his caprice. Interestingly, such stories grip the listeners and turn the corner to produce remarkable results. The nameless characters mentioned in the folktale hint at the universal appeal of the tale and the only character named in the narrative is the non-existent Tapta. It is an uncomplicated “prose narrative” (Bascom) that aims to inform and warn rather than entertain the gathering beside the hearth, or Phungga wari. The characters serve the particular purpose of the teller as they hold symbolic importance overlooking the character’s development.

The tale begins with the busting of Tapta’s existence. However, the secret is guarded well until the end. With a linear narrative structure, the folktale highlights some communication barriers

like semantic barriers, mental communication barriers (like stress, negativity), and perceptual barriers (stereotyping, prejudice). The eiron tiger is a self depreciative character, and the pretentious thief is an alazon, the man who pretended that he could find the horse with the strongest-leg, in the dark. The occurrences build up comic and situational irony such that the thief's and tiger's interactions grip the listeners intimately.

### **Considered Sources**

This analysis weighs five variants of the folktale "Tapta" from online and print sources. Their disparities highlight the uniqueness of the narrators and bestow a realistic touch to the study.

### **The Folktale – Summary**

Once, a tiger was out hunting on a dark and rainy night. For an easy meal, he crept into a stable and crouched in a corner waiting, for his chance to kill a horse. A thief lurched outside the equestrian's horse barn. While each of the two planned to steal a pony, a mother prepared a meal inside the kitchen and concomitantly pacified her crying baby. After trying some typical threats, the mother mentioned "Tapta". The new name, Tapta, instantly hushed the shrieking kid. The thief and tiger resigned to the child's sudden silence. They hurriedly leapt out of the stable and raced off into the night. The thief saddled on the tiger's back and escaped. Ultimately, the tiger shared his adventure with other animals.

### **Interactions**

The narration and authorship of oral and written literature vary where the authors of literary folktale take clear credit for their intellectual variation in form of intellectual property creation; the narrators retell their variations as a part of religious or cultural legacy. Studies have remarked that text is a "verbal record of a communicative act" (Brown and Yule 6). The text resembles a product, and discourse imitates a process (24). "Tapta" can also be analyzed as a set of problem-solving tasks that the audience recalls best in parts. They are primarily interested in the protagonist's "initial state", the struggle for the goal, and the "goal state" (van Dijk and Kintsch 47).

### **Comparing Variants**

The first source of "Tapta" is acquired from the website of Manipur Animation Workshop. The folktale originally belongs to O Bhogeshwor's Meitei Folktales (1985) (TS1). The second source is a translation of "Tapta" from Fungawari Singbul by Jayanta Kumar Sharma and translated by Akham Gautam Singh published in Manipuri online news website, e-pao.net (TS2).

The third source is a personal blogspot of an anonymous contributor, pinkywari.blogspot.com, dedicated to Manipuri folktales (TS3). The fourth mention of Tapta is from journalist Kishalaya

Bhattacharjee's book, *Che in Paona Bazar* (2013) (TS4). It is a modern, rather detailed version of the folktale.

The book by MK Singh, *Folk Culture of Manipur* (1993) is the fifth source for "Tapta" in this paper (TS5). Both elaborate versions, TS4 and TS5, tie the loose ends of the folktale for the readers. Hence, these meticulous versions consolidate a particular meaning to the folktale. The unsettling features in a folktale captivate the readers and grant suppleness. The sketchiness of details hooks the minds of the percipients and impregnates them with numerous hypotheses. Readers ruminate and perceive the folk narrative as per their discernments. Listeners bridge the gaps for themselves, and the folk stories take different shapes in different minds. In this manner, with each retelling, the folktales are regenerated.

The structure of "Tapta" is plot-driven with a dramatic turn of events. All five versions of the folktale reveal that the thief reached out for the biggest and strongest horse leg in the dark stable. However, the thief mistook the tiger's leg for a horse. According to TS5 with daylight, the thief probed to comprehend that his striped horse was a tiger. Although TS4 mentioned that the thief realised while riding the tiger that he was riding a short-legged horse (implying Manipuri pony).

### **Motifs**

Narrative motifs like- numskull thief riding a tiger, petrified tiger quietly racing after being saddled, helpful fox tying himself to the tiger and many more find mention in this Manipuri folktale. In Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-literature* (1930), the motif - lies about a man riding an unrideable animal like tiger or deer (X1004.1.), appears under the section, humour of lies and exaggeration. In the indexed category of story patterns- absurd misunderstandings (J1750. – J1849.), like misunderstood words leading to comic outcomes, there are many entries in Indian folktales which reiterate mistaken identities of animals (Urban). EW Baughman's *Type and Motif-index of the Folktales of England and North America* (1966) mentions motifs of talking animals and animals with human traits (B200-299).

Chinese folktale of, "Leaking' Is Coming" (1986), or "A Tiger That Fears Leaking" (2011) bears a close resemblance to "Tapta" (Yuan et al. 164). A lurking tiger mixed up an aged woman's mention of "leaking" as a dreadful creature and ran for life. The unusual term is misconstrued by the tiger and thief. This is a variant motif of J1805.2. and in diverse folktales, it leads to various bizarre results. Probably, it signifies similar human excogitation misinterpretation resulting from apprehension, in different parts of the world or similar contemporaneous experiences across the world like setting sun at dusk mistaken for fire (Urban). Similarly, the Korean folktale of an imprudent tiger, "Tiger and Dried Persimmon",

narrates the incident where “a dried persimmon” is misinterpreted as a fearful creature by a tiger and he flees (Hyukrae). Ignorance of a foreign language, a cross-cultural or semantic barrier could have led to this misunderstanding J2496.2. The motif of an animal’s tail tied to a tiger’s tail where the tiger bunks and the animal gets killed J2132.5.1., is also mirrored in “Tapta” (Beck et al. 348).

### **Themes, Setting and Characters**

Within the Manipuri animal anecdotes, the tiger is the leading character as in the rural areas with woody surroundings, people frequently encountered tigers in the past. Tiger is revered for its unmatched strength and ferocity. Ubiquitously, the tiger is proverbial for its cunningness and stealthy manners. However, in most Manipuri folktales the tiger is assumed to be imprudent and dull. The folktale mentions a humble cottage with a horse shed and three family members. The stable refers to the dignity of the natives in the transcendence and pride of owning a horse. According to the International Museum of the Horse, the Manipuri pony (Meitei Sagol) “...almost every household in Manipur maintained ponies lovingly, like polo and ritual animals” (‘Manipuri Pony’). All but one variation mentions the absentee father on a dark and rainy night. It hints about Meitei culture, where the menfolk were ordinarily away for a nighttime chore, war or adventure. This folktale reflects Manipur's traditional social milieu. It is an informative folk narrative. It employs a multitude of interesting themes such as survival, courage, vulnerabilities (fear of death), dominance (man over the beast), nonverbal communication (like kinesics, haptics- the thief rode the tiger by pulling its ears, the thief pulling the bear’s tail), trust, and cognitive dissonance (misunderstandings of the thief and Tapta). The origin of the Chinese proverb, “He who rides a tiger is afraid to dismount” seems to be rooted in “‘Leaking’ is Coming”, the folktale equivalent to “Tapta.” Interpretively, it means once an unsafe enterprise has sprung, and then the most secure course is to carry it through till the end. The threat posed by the fictional character Tapta suggested fear as the dominant theme of this folktale with underlying socio-political tensions, borderland invasions and internal unrests, arousing resonant mood.

### **Narrative Structure**

Vladimir Propp defined “function” in his book *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) as a dramatic personae’s act, described as the core component from the standpoint of its noteworthiness in the development of the folktale (Propp 21). In her journal article, “Indian Numskull Tales Form and Meaning” (1983), Lalita Handoo has delineated a general structural framework of numskull tales with particular attention to the “function” of its characters in which the hero

behaves atypically and hurts self. The three “core functions” of the thief (numskull hero) in this folktale are as follows:

Trouble or job - While stealing a horse, the thief accidentally confronts the perplexity of eluding away from Tapta, the imaginary creature.

The reaction of the numskull hero - He reacts to the crisis by hastily fleeing away on a tiger.

Contrary result - He snarls the situation and barely manages his release.

The two “peripheral functions” are as follows:

Intercession – according to the variations of the folktale, the bear and elephant (or the fox) help the tiger to solve the problem.

Favourable outcome – the thief finally escapes unhurt (Handoo 255).

Strangely, this tale establishes the pervasive aspect of nature with role reversals, embrangling the dichotomies of the wise and foolish, powerful and weak, village (haven, co intelligence) and forest (boundless obscure peril) with their equation. As in the normal anthropomorphic world, the thief has a high status of an intelligent human, whereas the tiger occupies the low status of an animal with low intelligence. In the folktale, this cogitation is reversed as “When both societies are juxtaposed in the meeting of numskull leader [thief] and the stranger [tiger] each is symbolized by its representative” (Jason 25). In oral literature, the thief denotes the fake pretensions of wisdom in his society and the tiger symbolizes the “wise deeds” of the creature belonging to “low social status” that is basically “common sense” of the traditional human world (Jason 25).

### **Social Context- Environment and Situations**

In Manipur, the local ponies or Meiti Sagol have commendable survival abilities.

These traditionally bred short and energetic ponies are descendants of Asiatic Wild Horse or Tibetan horse. They are widely distributed in the regions (hills and plains) and cater to the socio-cultural-economic needs of the Meiteis (Devi). In the past, the neighbouring kingdoms dreaded Manipur Royal Cavalry and were the ‘pride of Manipur’ (Laithangbam). These warhorses were also responsible for guarding the owners and cattle herding. Culturally, they were the symbol of prosperity, prestige and safety.

A social message of the folklore is disclosed through the symbolism of tiger (chaos) and robber (manipulation and corruption) as these are “behavioural consequence of power and greed” (Lewis). These destructive forces are components of “quiet violence” and individual capacities should be developed to induce societal changes. Like the mother, the natives, society and their culture should be resilient and compassionate to gestate and formulate strategies to be self-

reliant to survive. Rain or water is the divine life force in animistic faiths. Water is a creative and transformational force in social and ecological processes. The physical manifestation of the spirit of water provided god's intervention or the ancestral aid that safeguarded the family during adversities with their presence in Tapta's mysterious form (Redmond). Ultimately, the family and the horses were unhurt; miscreants engaged with each other and eloped.

### **Historical Background**

Nongda or Nongta Lailen Pakhangpa (33 – 154 AD) was supposedly the founder ruler of Manipur's Ningthouja dynasty as per the Royal Chronicles of Manipur (Cheitharol Kumbaba). "Nongta" means "someone/ something which has descended from the sky/ heaven". It is formed by the conflation of two words- Nongmaton meaning "Sky/ Heaven", "ta" from "tarakpa" meaning descend or "fall off" ('Fall Off' 170). He claimed the throne by ruling a confederacy of seven clans or Salais and was revered more as a "God-King" for his mysterious parentage and identity by the Meiteis.

Their belief revolves around, Taibang Mapu Sidaba, a Supreme Being who is a formless deity with numerous power representations. His final creation represents the origin of human beings with Nongta or Iputhou Pakhangpa (Mangang). "Tapta", the amorphous, scary, and mysterious character supposedly belongs to an archaic folktale of Manipur and echoes in sound and characteristics with the mighty ruler who ruled for 121 incredible years with superhuman strength. Similarly, Nongta's mysticism has reverberated in Tapta as the creature moated the family by spontaneously creating a spooky fear.

Two historical events that affected the socio-politico-cultural ideologies of Manipuri are the adoption of Hinduism by the Meithei in the eighteenth century and the full integration of Manipur as a state in the Indian Union in 1972. It strained the local politico-cultural, linguistic, ethnic scenario and geographic-religious identity (S. L. Chelliah). From around the 2nd century AD, there are numismatic pieces of evidence of trade and exchanges between the Meiteis and north-eastern Indo-Aryans (Glimpses). Approximately, from the 15th century, the proselytizing Hindu missionaries got into Manipur from adjacent locations like Bengal, Orissa, Assam and western India. Manipuri king Garibniwaj's conversion to Hinduism in 1750 AD was a momentous event in Meithei history. He converted to Vaishnavism and emphasized the veneration of the Hindu deity Shiva. He compelled mass conversions of Meithei to Vaishnavism, then on.

Earlier, the Meithei observed Sanamahism where the native animistic worshipping practices were prevalent besides customary ancestral worship, which included the reverence of the clan rulers (S. Chelliah). With the inpouring throngs of Brahmins into Manipur, the Varna system

followed. King Garibniwaj asserted Kshatriya status, and Meithi-Brahmin sprung as a distinct racial minority. With intermarriages of the incurring Indo-Aryans and the Meitei women, the local community was classified into various strata. Nevertheless, along with Sanamahism, Hinduism, and Christianity have been significant in the region's social framework. With this advent, the literature and language of the Meiteis also altered irreversibly.

With the religious transformation in the region, many ancient Meithei spiritual, religious, and literary works (Puyas) were incinerated. Ethnic diversity, the origins and beliefs of the highlanders belonging to hilly regions and the plainsmen of the fertile central valley of Manipur were closely associated with the ethnic pluralism of the social framework of Manipur. The British actualized substantial disparity amidst the highlanders and plainsman with the varied set of rules and administration of the same region. They managed the hills admin, and the native king oversaw the valley governance. The British widened the pre-existing social, political, geographical, cultural, religious, and economic severance between the tribes to rule Manipuris handily.

Centuries of upheavals in political history have also altered the social fabric of the Meitei society. The inter-clan wars loomed in the region from 1700 to 1800. Each dictated the other and fought for supremacy. Intermittent battles with Myanmar from 1758 to 1826 also pushed the region to a state-of-war. The British manipulated the differences between clans. With the end of the Anglo-Burmese war in 1829, the British crutched Manipur as a bulwark to continue exploitative activities in India and Myanmar. In 1891, the British promulgated Manipur, a feudatory state under their overlordship. Post-independence, since 1950, the Indian government nominated and elected officials to administer Manipur.

However, since the 1990s, the paramilitary forces had been deployed to combat, local and Marxist revolutionary groups, anti-Indian insurgent entities from Myanmar, arms dealer mafia, and religious extremist parties among others, have kept the region as an aggressive combat zone (S. Chelliah).

### **Social System**

In his essay "Folktales" published in *The Study of American Folklore* (1968) Jan Brunvand has defined folktales as "traditional prose narratives that are strictly fictional and told primarily for entertainment, although they may also illustrate a truth or point a moral" (Brunvand 103). The political, social, financial frailties and turmoil in Manipur enormously influenced the folktale "Tapta". The humorous aspects of the tale describe the insensibility of the natives and the hegemonic political pleasures of the central government that caused grisly rebellions in the past (Oinam and Sadokpam).



The ethnic (like Mon-Khmer, Siammee, Funan-Maring) and migrant groups (like TibetoBurman speakers and Myanmarese Chin) enriched the social roots of Manipur. The unity of the various clans was already hanging loosely by a thread when the British eyed the land. They ruled with divide et impera policies and gained political supremacy of the region. Resultantly, xenophobia could have developed in this social group because of their turbulent history. Xenophobia is a strongly prejudiced or belligerent manner towards people of other nationalities or regions ('Xenophobia'). Personal prejudice is frequently grounded in ethnocentrism based on cultural beliefs, whereas group animosity is targeted against religion, ethnicity, and gender identity (Dentice).

In animals, aggressive bias is manifested in form of territoriality. While foraging for food, mate or other resources, intruders might approach another animal's territory, but the owners defend their boundaries generally by attacking. In "Tapta", the tiger trespassed into human territory and presumed a ritual fight. At the earliest possible signal, he retreated and ran ceaselessly back to his "home ground" with the thief on his back. When the thief quit riding the tiger, anxiously the tiger disseminated the fear of Tapta in his region to other animals in form of social learning. It reflected the "negative transmission bias" (Fay et al.) based on cognitive predilections. On the premise of threat aversion, theorists have argued for a fundamental bias for negative elements like "a predator" or a trap (Rozin and Royzman). It proposes that from an evolutionary standpoint negative information is more instructive and valuable than positive content (Heath et al.). Similarly, in "Tapta" and other folktales value of information has been invoked to explain the persistence of urban legends and rumours.

### **Social Psychology Aspects - Coding and Decoding**

Tapta's imagined and implied presence in the folktale gives rise to many social psychological influences on the thief and the animals. Apparently, the function of animals in folklore is significant. Man's relationship with animals is intimate, and the animals used in the folk stories are prudently chosen. "Tapta" is a highly charged socio-political satire that serves as a warning to the Meiteis. It arouses their socio-historical consciousness. The thief (foreign invaders or the British- putrid, betrayer, stealer, imperialist) and tiger (traditionally, a prominent Chinese or Korean cultural symbol; religiously significant in Hinduism (proselytisers)) attacked a house to steal a horse. Horse symbolism refers to happiness, power, livelihood, spirituality, nobility or Kisaya Tngri- the protector of souls; deity's gift).

The miscreants wanted to control the nobility, religion, resources, and spirit of the region. The thief's and tiger's intrusion in the villager's property could appertain to the ruler's weak

administration where deceit and corruption prevailed such that the law-and-order installation was cachectic.

The Mother (could refer to Thareima, the goddess of moon and night sky from Sanamahi faith or Emoinu, the local deity of the hearth, family wealth and resources), an adult who plays the role of guardian and pacifier. She soothes the innocent and distressed child (dependency, vulnerability, and naivety in the folks or the powerless population). The folktale could echo the historical oppression of the Meiteis at the hands of the oppressors.

Practically, the rainy night adds to the confusion of the tiger and thief. However, rains also symbolize- life, return of fertility, spiritual cleansing, melancholy, and impregnation. The folktale might refer to the Sino-Burmese war of the mid-eighteenth century. Copious platoons of the Chinese army lost to the Burmese forces due to unacquainted terrain, tropical weather, and loss of supplies. The Burmese rebellion began at Manipur. In 1770, in a battle against Burmese soldiers near Langthabal, the Manipuri army was crushed and their ruler fled to Assam (Harvey).

Predominantly, in many cultures mothers are believed to pacify their weeping children by intimidating them with abandonment, melancholy, and ghosts. The language of many nursery rhymes and lullabies possess themes of tenderness, care, and love assorted with dire warnings of being dropped from a tree's bough or repeated fear of being fed to hyenas, tigers, or other wild animals. Spanish poet, Federico Lorca in his lecture, *On Lullabies* (1928) mentioned that berceuses are filled with dark undertones and laments selectively worded by women desperate to lull their kids to slumber. Lorca's theory states that a big part of the lullaby's function is to assist a mother in articulating her concerns and apprehensions (Perry). In a nutshell, cradle songs are therapeutic for the mother as well as the baby. In those cosy moments, a mother or nanny shares her weariness and concerns with the infant, and this sharing plasters their bonding.

In "Tapta" the child could have experienced a brief psychological disorder - stranger's anxiety or separation distress with the utterance of an unfamiliar name, "Tapta" and intimidating dialogue, "Tapta is coming to get you", by the parent ('TS3'). Stranger's anxiety is wariness towards strangers and usually starts around the age of 8 or 9 months and lasts until the second year ('Babies'). It is normal for babies as old as nine months to distinguish caretakers from other individuals. They develop a strong preference for familiar faces, names and voices, which is a natural component of their intellectual growth (Stranger). Separation distress is felt when a child experiences discomfort and worry when the contact or link with a caregiver or a parent

is lost (Separation). As a result, toddlers may wail, cuddle, and cover their faces, or they may just become silent and watchful.

The tiger's hindsight bias or "knew-it-all-along" phenomenon was instrumental in his decision about Tapta holding his leg and discussion with other animals about Tapta (TS5).

Hindsight bias is a socio-psychological preconception anchored in memory distortion based on prior experiences and retrospective perceptions of impending doom and anticipation. Probably, in the folktale, this "cognitive illusion" (Bernstein et al.), of prejudging "Tapta" as an atrocious creature highlighted the inherent fears of the thief and tiger (or the folks) based on the region's tumultuous past of internal discords and foreign incursions. Simon J Bonner's *The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes* (2007) observed that folklore is the mirror of essential human experience and information as it is "autobiographical ethnography" means individuals' self-description that is streamed rather than from the outside in (Dundes).

Survival threat, sickness, pain, constant mortal fear, and hypervigilance are some primal fears experienced by humans. On experiencing primal or core fear our mind embarks on a quest to restore original mental balance by dodging fright. This pursuit is prompted by fear and is followed by its avoidance, extermination, or dismissal. Subsequently, our mind gets diverted with all the possible threats that might disrupt our search. As a technique to protect us from threats, our mind externalizes our fears into reality so that we may be well equipped for threats (Pressman). According to Pressman, clashes in the projection and reality give rise to "a three-dimensional, multisensory hologram" (Pressman). It is a perceptually twisted and alive 3d image based on our anxious premises. The blind spot of human suffering is that we disregard the phenomenon of projection. It is just a holographic image that appears to be "real." Anxiety is a fundamental human sensation that is experienced when primal fears gear up humans to activate their defence mechanism in form of "reality anxiety" (Pressman).

The fretful numskull thief behaves abnormally and is hurt by his folly rather than any external force. Deconstructing the tiger's anxiety to its elemental component leads us to the child's recognition of the fearful creature. The tiger relies on the child's wisdom and introjects when the baby suddenly stops crying. The anxiety sets its roots in the tiger's mind when the child is dumbfounded at Tapta's mention. Tiger intuitively alters its perception of Tapta. Its mind is painted with a distorted picture of painful experiences at the imagination of a creature more powerful than him.

Initially, the thieves and the tiger react similarly. They proceed by employing avoidance as their defence mechanism against their unconscious anxiety. They flee away from the unknown creature, Tapta, and abandon the dangerous situation. The tiger gives a

more stressful presentation of his nervousness. In this “numskull talei” the thief acts first and gropes the tiger. The thief’s anxiety is temporarily released, and the tiger overuses his defence mechanism leading to increased trouble and irrational fear of Tapta.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, “Tapta” still has some social-psychological unexplored aspects like attribution and cognitive dissonance. Due to the word limit of the paper, I will restrict my analysis to the above-mentioned panorama. For further study, more variants of “Tapta” could be compared. Their verbal and non-verbal communications could be dissected and scrutinized.

The folktale, motifs, and expressions are like creative art expressions in crystallized form formed from mental images of experiences or narrations. This Schwank or simple jocular folktale touches many aspects of human life with its insouciance and spontaneity. According to Jan Brunvand, “more often these tales [narrative jokes] attribute absurd ignorance or other unfavorable qualities to some specific ethnic or regional group”(Brunvand 865). According to the recent review of Ebenpokki Wari (2013), the folktales book by Thokchom Singh, in folk stories like “Tapta” the characters constantly experience clashes that require them to make unsettling choices and take decisions to resolve strife. It illustrates the significance of making challenging decisions under formidable circumstances. The right judgements usher to definitive and positive results.

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