

THE RABBIT PAYS FOR STEALING UBOR'S RAM

(As narrated by Binkpetaab Baabayii in Chagbaan on 24/03/2022)

Introduction

The following story details one of the rare moments in Konkomba folklore when the rabbit, who is the acclaimed trickster character, suffers at the hands of other characters. In this story, his cunning nature gets him into trouble with the firefly and the leader of his community. According to the story, in the midst of famine, the firefly shares with the rabbit a secret that will enable them to feed their families. However, the rabbit tries to pull a fast one on the firefly so the latter abandons him in the bush. Wandering in the bush alone, the rabbit ends up in their community leader's house, eventually steals his goat and is punished as a result. To watch the Likpakpaln narration [click here](#).

Story

'Famine once broke out in a certain land,' Baabayii starts her story without the usual opening formality of announcing her intent to tell the story and eliciting a response from her audience.¹

Baabayii continues:

In this land lived two good friends – *sandee* and *naapilmoon's*. At night, *naapilmoon's* would usually go hunting for food. With the aid of his light, he would discover wild guinea fowl eggs and take them home to feed his family.

One day, *sandee* visited his friend and realised that *naapilmoon's* and his family had eaten eggs. *Sandee* inquired: 'My friend, where did you get these eggs to feed your household?'

In reply, *naapilmoon's* told his friend that at night, he went out in search of food for his family and that with the aid of his light, he would usually find wild guinea fowl eggs and collect them for his family's consumption. *Sandee* got interested and told his friend to call him later that night when he was going food-hunting again so that he could tag along. *Naapilmoon's* agreed.

At nightfall, *naapilmoon's* called *sandee* and the two set off for the bush. The former generously used his light to show the latter the way so it was easy for *sandee* to follow. The two went deep into the bush and finally arrived in the area *naapilmoon's* usually found the wild guinea fowl eggs. He flashed his light and they found the first collection of eggs. *Sandee* immediately called dibs on the eggs, so his friend allowed him to have them. After a while, *naapilmoon's* found another set of eggs, whereupon *sandee* called dibs on them as well. This continued throughout their food-hunting expedition that night.

At a point, *naapilmoon's* asked his friend: 'Have you had enough?' His friend responded in the affirmative. *Naapilmoon's* then told his friend that it was

time they returned home. On saying this, he took off as fast as he could and left *sandee* behind. *Sandee* yelled after his friend, begging him to stop and collect some of the eggs. However, his friend would not listen. Left without *naapilmoon's* light to guide him home, *sandee* wandered in the dark and ended up in *ubor's* house.

On entering the house, *sandee* told *ubor* that he had brought him a gift from his hunting expedition. According to him, he was aware of the toll the famine had taken on families; hence his decision to bring *ubor* those eggs to enable him to feed his children. *Ubor* happily received the eggs and gave them to his wives to cook.

When the eggs were cooked, one of *ubor's* wives served her child. *Sandee* drew closer to the child and attempted to take the egg. The child started crying. *Sandee* immediately feigned ignorance and said: 'Typical of children! You've been given an egg to eat; why are you crying?' But the reality was that he attempted to pick the child's egg; so the child was crying in protest.

Ubor soon realised what was happening, nodded his head and placed *unoon* near the child. The next time *sandee* made an attempt to pick the child's egg, he got stung by *unoon*. *Sandee* fell over, started rolling on the ground and kicking all over the place in pain while shouting: 'Even though *ubor's* mother died in the dry season, I'm mourning (for) her this rainy season.' (*The storyteller repeats this three times while simultaneously demonstrating. On the third occasion, her audience join in, and all break into laughter at the end.*)

Sandee was in trouble! But after rolling, kicking and shouting for a while, he regained his composure. He then decided to give his share of the cooked eggs to *ubor* and set off homeward. However, the mischievous *sandee* didn't go home directly. *Ubor* had a backyard maize farm where he usually tied his sheep. In retaliation for what *ubor* did to him, *sandee* decided to steal one of his rams. On reaching home, he killed the ram and feasted on it with his family to placate his anger.

The next day *ubor* couldn't find one of his rams so he announced that his ram had disappeared from his sheep-pen. No one owned up so *ubor* concluded that *sandee* must have stolen the ram. He subsequently summoned the entire community to his palace and confronted *sandee*. The latter refuted the allegation, insisting that he knew nothing about the lost animal. *Ubor* allowed the matter to rest and told the community to return the next day and help him roof one of his rooms. At that point, *ubor* noticed that *sandee* had a hat on so he instructed him to take it off as a mark of respect for his *kinakuok*.² But *sandee* refused. *Ubor* therefore asked everyone to don a hat when returning the following day.

The next day, the entire community gathered at the palace again. Everyone wore a hat, save *sandee* who had two hats on. When all had assembled, *ubor* ordered everyone to take off his or her hat. All obliged, including *sandee* - who took off only one of the two hats. All efforts to get him to take off the second hat proved futile, as *sandee* argued that since everyone took off one

hat, it was only fair that he took off only one hat as well. *Sandee* had his way again.

The roofing of *ubor*'s room eventually commenced. When the roofing was almost done, *sandee* – who happened to be the only one who could knot the *ndipinju* – was asked to climb and knot it. While *sandee* was at it, *ubor* contracted a whirlwind to blow off *sandee*'s hat. This disoriented *sandee* and he hit his head against the pot he was about to suspend over the *ndipinju*. Unfortunately, one of the broken pieces of the pot got stuck in the middle of his head. That's why to date, the rabbit has a mark in the mid-scalp region of his head.

(On hearing this, the audience variously respond, 'M-ennn! M-hm! Ooooo! Mbo mbo mbo mbo...!' to indicate that they've enjoyed and learnt something from Baabayii's tale. All laugh and clap for her.)

Notes

1.

In the Konkomba storytelling culture, one can plunge straight into his or her story without seeking permission in the form of announcing intent to tell the story and receiving permission in the form of a response from the audience. This is mostly the case when a storytelling session has been ongoing for a while, or if the storyteller has already told one or more stories and is seeking to add another one.

2.

In the Konkomba culture, and in the Ghanaian culture in general, it is rude for one to don a hat in the presence of an elder. When entering *ubor*'s palace therefore, irrespective of whom one is, he/she will have to take off the hat. This is why *ubor* orders *sandeeto* to take off his hat in this story.

A Glossary of Likpakpaln Words and Phrases (or Expressions)

kinakuok:

a round room that serves as the main entrance to a typical Konkomba house. It has two doors at both ends to serve as the passage in or out of a house. It also serves as a place for relaxing or hosting visitors/guests. In *ubor*'s palace, *kinakuok* usually has a stage or a raised platform where *ubor* sits to hold meetings and perform other functions. Thus, *kinakuok* can assume political significance rather than being a mere passage or a place for hanging out or playing host to visitors. Within this political context, *kinakuok* can be used as a synonym or a metonym (in literary speech) for *ubor* or the authority of *ubor*. It is therefore normal for a Konkomba to say that 'Kinakuok has spoken' – meaning, 'Ubor has spoken.'

naapilmoon:

Likpakpaln word for a firefly.

ndipinju:

the knotted topmost part of the roof (usually thatch) of a spherical room. The roof is typically conically shaped. The vertex of the roof is usually skillfully tied to give the roof a nice, pointed tip like that of a cone. The fine-tuning of the vertex therefore requires a lot of skill; so not everyone can do it. The skill is largely passed on from fathers to sons or through apprenticeship. After tying the vertex, a hollow metal piece, or pot, or even a calabash without a base covering may be suspended over it. In the case of this story, a clay pot without a base covering is given to *sandee* to suspend over the vertex.

sandee:

Likpakpaln word for a rabbit, bunny or hare. Sandee is the wisest and trickster character in Konkomba folklore. It is notorious for often using its cunning and witty nature to deceive other characters or wriggle its way out of difficult situations.

ubor:

the political head of a Konkomba community. Ubor is usually the eldest male member of the royal family. He inherits that position from his father after the latter's demise. Thus, Konkombas practise the patrilineal system of inheritance.

unoon:

Likpakpaln word for a scorpion. Unoon is one of several heteronyms in Likpakpaln. When pronounced with a falling intonation, it refers to a bird. But when pronounced with a rising intonation, it refers to a scorpion – as pertains in this story. The plural form is inoon.