

Introduction

The following story is rendered by a child narrator. It is about a polygamous man who sets up one of his wives for failure. Fortunately for the wife, her husband fails due to the providential intervention of a bee. Centred on polygamy and the Konkomba practice of *nkpaawiin*, the story teaches all to guard against discrimination. To watch the Likpakpaln narration [click here](#).

Story

‘My story is as follows:’ N-yaajasan announces amidst audience’s chatter.

‘M-hn!’ responds one of his audience.

N-yaajasan then proceeds as follows:

There lived an *ubor*. He had two wives: one was noted for her cleanliness while the other wasn’t. One day he requested for *nkpaawiin* and gave his hygienic wife some guinea corn to brew a local drink (called pito). However, he gave the unhygienic wife roselle seeds to do the same.¹ He then told them that he was looking forward to finding out who the better brewer was.

On hearing this, the untidy wife started crying. One day a bee saw the woman weeping and asked why she was crying. In reply, the woman related that her husband had called for *nkpaawiin*, given her co-wife guinea corn and given her roselle seeds to brew drinks.

The bee then asked: ‘Is this why you’re crying?’ The woman responded in the affirmative. The bee told the woman to bring a pot. When the woman obliged, the bee filled the pot with honey and she took it home.

On the day of the *nkpaawiin*, *ubor* sent someone to go and taste his wives’ drinks to ascertain whose drink tasted better.

‘During the *nkpaawiin*,’ interjects one of N-yaajasan’s audience.

‘Enn!’ the storyteller confirms the audience’s addition and proceeds thus:

After tasting the drinks, the messenger broke into song:

(The storyteller breaks into song and his audience join in.)

Likpakpaln transcription

English translation

<i>Ubor</i> ee, <i>ubor</i> ee, saah tun mi n-tun mu	<i>Ubor</i> , <i>ubor</i> , the mission you sent me
naa,	on,
Eh!	Eh!
<i>Ubor</i> ee, <i>ubor</i> ee, saah tun mi n-tun mu	<i>Ubor</i> , <i>ubor</i> , the mission you sent me
naa,	on,
Eh!	Eh!
Maa ti fuu na, unyankaln aadaan aamɔ	On arrival, I discovered that the

ee.	hygienic wife's drink isn't delicious.
Eh!	Eh!
Maa ti fuu na, uninsun aadaan na 'e	On arrival, I discovered that the
mɔ ee.	unhygienic wife's drink is delicious.
Eh!	Eh!

Ubɔr didn't believe the report and killed the messenger. He then dispatched another person on the same mission. The second messenger returned and also broke into song:

(The storyteller breaks into song again and his audience join in.)

Likpakpaln transcription

English translation

<i>Ubɔr</i> ee, <i>ubɔr</i> ee, saah tun mi n-tun mu	<i>Ubɔr, ubɔr</i> , the mission you sent me
naa,	on,
Eh!	Eh!
<i>Ubɔr</i> ee, <i>ubɔr</i> ee, saah tun mi n-tun mu	<i>Ubɔr, ubɔr</i> , the mission you sent me
naa,	on,
Eh!	Eh!
Maa ti fuu na, unyankaln aadaan aamɔ	On arrival, I discovered that the
ee.	hygienic wife's drink isn't delicious.
Eh!	Eh!
Maa ti fuu na, uninsun aadaan na 'e	On arrival, I discovered that the
mɔ ee.	unhygienic wife's drink is delicious.
Eh!	Eh!

Ubɔr killed that person as well, after which he sent yet another person. The fellow too returned and broke into song:

(The storyteller breaks into song again and his audience join in.)

Likpakpaln transcription

English translation

<i>Ubɔr</i> ee, <i>ubɔr</i> ee, saah tun mi n-tun mu	<i>Ubɔr, ubɔr</i> , the mission you sent me
naa,	on,
Eh!	Eh!
<i>Ubɔr</i> ee, <i>ubɔr</i> ee, saah tun mi n-tun mu	<i>Ubɔr, ubɔr</i> , the mission you sent me
naa,	on,
Eh!	Eh!
Maa ti fuu na, unyankaln aadaan aamɔ	On arrival, I discovered that the
ee.	hygienic wife's drink isn't delicious.
Eh!	Eh!
Maa ti fuu na, uninsun aadaan na 'e	On arrival, I discovered that the
mɔ ee.	unhygienic wife's drink is delicious.

Eh!

Eh!

Ubor killed that messenger as well and sent the last of them. He also returned with the same report:

(The storyteller starts singing again and his audience join in again.)

Likpakpaln transcription

English translation

Ubor ee, *ubor* ee, saah tun mi n-tun mu *Ubor*, *ubor*, the mission you sent me
naa, on,

Eh! Eh!

Ubor ee, *ubor* ee, saah tun mi n-tun mu *Ubor*, *ubor*, the mission you sent me
naa, on,

Eh! Eh!

Maa ti fuu na, unyankaln aadaan aamɔ On arrival, I discovered that the
ee. hygienic wife's drink isn't delicious.

Eh! Eh!

Maa ti fuu na, uninsun aadaan na 'e On arrival, I discovered that the
mɔ ee. unhygienic wife's drink is delicious.

Eh! Eh!

Ubor killed the last messenger so he had to finally go and taste the drinks himself. He discovered that they were all right about the untidy wife's drink.

Therefore, when someone requests for *nkpaawiin* and wants his wives to do something, he should never discriminate against any of them. He should treat all of them equally.

Note

1.

In the Konkomba culture, it is customary for someone who requests for communal help to treat his/her helpers or work party to food and/or drinks during the *nkpaawiin* or at an after-party. Typically, heavy foods such as tuo zaafi (aka TZ), fufu or yam slices can be served together with pito (a local beverage/beer made from guinea corn) and/or patasii (a local gin akin to vodka). While this is used to express the *nkpaawiin* caller's gratitude, it is also a time for communal bonding in a more relaxed atmosphere outside the serious, heated work environment or time. Note that 'after-*nkpaawiin*' get-togethers are only associated with very physical farm-labour-related *ikpaawiin* – such as the clearing of farmlands, ploughing, making of yam mounds, etc. During other *ikpaawiin*, food and/or drinks are usually served but no get-together is held afterward. In the context of this story, the drink (pito) *ubor* asks his wives to brew is meant for the *nkpaawiin* work party during the *nkpaawiin* – as rightly pointed out by one of the storyteller's audience.

A Glossary of Likpakpala Words

nkpaawiin:

communal activity or labour. Among Konkombas when one is swamped with work, he or she can ask for the help of others, who would usually respond generously in their numbers provided that the 'help-seeker' has been participating in ikpaawiin (i.e., the plural form of nkpaawiin). Ikpaawiin are mostly called when one has a lot of farmwork, is building, flooring or roofing a house, shelling maize/corn, cracking groundnuts, or thrashing guinea corn among other physical activities. Such occasions are not just for working but also for communal interaction and bonding.

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.