

# Sande Wins Ubor's Marriage Contest

(as told by Kupil Maadoondang in Chagbaan on 24/03/2022)

## Introduction

In the following story, a rabbit employs wit to win the hands of his community leader's daughters in marriage. The story celebrates ingenuity as the clever rabbit pulls a fast one on the girls, finds out their names, and eventually unmasks their identities to the entire community at a durbar.

To watch the Likpakpaln narration [click here](#).

## Story

'My story is as follows,' Maadoondang announces to his audience.

'*Naba*,' responds the audience.

There was once a certain *ubor* who had many daughters – in fact, all his children were female. He married off many of them but there were still a lot of them to be given in marriage. He therefore came up with a plan that would enable him to marry off some others: he would call for *nkpaawiin*, two days after which he would parade three of his daughters at a durbar, and whoever was able to tell him the names of these daughters would get to marry them. Having made this plan, *ubor* sent word to his subjects about the contest. In attendance would be *Uwumbor* and *bitikpiib* among other dignitaries, he told them.

On the day after the *nkpaawiin*, *ubor*'s daughters went to the riverside to wash their clothes and the basket they had used in brewing the drink for the previous day's *nkpaawiin*.<sup>1</sup> At the river, one of the daughters finished washing some of her clothes, dried them at a distance, and returned to the others. Unbeknownst to them, *sande* had clandestinely followed them to the riverside. When the first girl dried the things and returned to the others, *sande* emerged from the bush and defecated on the girl's cloth.

After a while, the second girl also finished washing some clothes and decided to dry them. When she got to the spot her sister had dried hers, she discovered *sande*'s fecal matter and told her sister: 'Dankulasi, something has defecated on your cloth.' The first sister replied: 'Tiborbortibor, please wipe it off the cloth.' *Sande* heard the two girls' names, nodded, and memorized them.

Then came Dandarwee's turn: she finished washing and went to dry her clothes as well. On reaching the spot the other two sisters had dried their clothes, she discovered something and told her sister: 'Tiborbortibor, did you say you found fecal matter on Dankulasi's cloth? Well, come and see; there's fecal matter on yours as well.' In reply, Tiborbortibor told her sister: 'Dandarwee, please wipe it off.' *Sande* memorized the third girl's name and

went home.

The next day was the day of the contest. All the animals, including *nachiin*, gathered at the palace grounds. *Ubor* presented his daughters to the guests and told them that the first to tell him their names would have the privilege of marrying them. On hearing this, *nachiin* immediately sprang to his feet, demanding that he be allowed to make the first attempt. *Ubor* gave him the go ahead, whereupon he mentioned each one's name. But none of the names was correct.

After him, *sande* stepped forward and said he knew the girls' names. *Nachiin* then retorted: '*Kinaatuuk ke, i mu ŋma?*' (The storyteller attempts to mimic *nachiin*'s voice and facial expression as he says this.) But *sande* insisted and told *ubor* that since he was small in size, many would be unable to see him when he spoke. He therefore requested for a mortar. When the mortar was provided, *sande* climbed atop and told the gathering that if he merely mentioned the names using his mouth, not all would hear him. He subsequently brought out a musical instrument from his pocket and started playing:

*(The storyteller intones the song and his audience join in.)*

Dandarwee Dankulasi'e Dandarwee

Tiborbortibor

Dandarwee Dankulasi'e Dandarwee

Tiborbortibor ...

*(The song is repeated several times. After a few repetitions, the storyteller sings only 'Tiborbortibor' while the audience respond, 'Dandarwee Dankulasi'e Dandarwee'.)*

The whole gathering became dead silent; the three daughters and *ubor* became dumbfounded. *Ubor* then asked *sande* to play the instrument again. The latter obliged:

*(The storyteller intones the song again and his audience join in again.)*

Dandarwee Dankulasi'e Dandarwee

Tiborbortibor

Dandarwee Dankulasi'e Dandarwee

Tiborbortibor ... (*The song is repeated several times again.*)

After listening to the tune again, *ubor* told *sande* to mention the names verbally. In response, *sande* told him: 'The plump, dark one is called Tiborbortibor; the slim one is called Dandarwee; while the one with a fair complexion is called Dankulasi.'

'So *sande* got them right,' interjects one of the audience. But Maadoondang ignores him and proceeds as follows:

On hearing the names of his three daughters, *ubor* burst into laughter in excitement. He laughed hard and loud and accidentally hit *sande*'s forehead. That's why to date, when you see a bunny, it has a mark on the forehead. (The storyteller relates this amid gestures.)

'Is that the end of your story?' quizzes another of his audience who is probably eager to tell his story and so wants the storyteller to sign off properly to pave way for his story.

Maadoondang responds in the affirmative and concludes as follows:

*'Nka m-mi m tiin ki muun ke chaa.'*

## Note

### 1.

In Konkomba culture, it is customary to host one's work party to a get-together after nkpaawiin. 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 get-together is used to express the nkpaawiin caller's gratitude, it is also a platform for communal bonding in a more relaxed atmosphere outside the serious, heated work environment on the farm. Note that 'after-nkpaawiin' get-togethers are only associated with very physical farm-labor-related ikpaawiin – such as clearing of farmlands, plowing, making of yam mounds, etc. During most ikpaawiin, however, food is usually served but no get-together is held afterward, except in cases of physical farming activities such as those mentioned above among others. In the context of this story, therefore, it is important to note that the drink that is brewed for the nkpaawiin is meant for the guests at the 'after-nkpaawiin' get-together ubor hosted.

## A Glossary of Likpakpaln Words and Phrases

### **bitikpiib:**

Likpakpaln word for ancestors. Konkombas believe that there is an ancestral world where the dead live and watch over the living – and sometimes even visit (to interact with) them. In the context of this story, for instance, the ancestors of the community are set to grace ubor's contest with their presence.

### **kinaatuuk ke, i mu ŋma:**

translated as, 'You idiot, who do you think you are?'

### **naba:**

translated variously as 'Let it be so,' or 'Go ahead,' or 'Let it be done as expressed,' etc. It is basically a response of consent to a storyteller's intention to tell a story. This response is one of many ways audience at a Konkomba storytelling session can inform a storyteller that they are listening or are willing to hear his/her story.

### **nachiin (aka tɔko):**

Likpakpaln word for a wolf. In Konkomba folklore, nachiin is the most unintelligent animal character. It almost always falls prey to the antics of others, especially sande.

### **nka m-mi m tiin ki muun ke chaa:**

translated as, 'May I tell my story and grow very tall.' This is a variant of the standard conclusion, '*Maa tiin gur, ki gur, ki gur ki m muun, ki muun ke n-yaaja agbenja na*' (transliterated as 'May my story diminish and diminish and diminish while I grow and grow as tall as my grandfather's male Kapok tree'). This is one of the numerous ways in which a Konkomba storyteller can end his/her story. This ending and its variants suggest that Konkombas believe that storytelling (or entertainment in general) has health benefits, especially healthy physical growth. The association of storytelling with physical growth is so entrenched in Konkomba belief system that it is even believed that when a child engages in storytelling at daytime – for Konkomba storytelling sessions are held normally in the evenings after supper – he or she will have stunted growth.

### **nkpaawiin:**

communal labor or activity. 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 the "help-seeker" has been participating in ikpaawiin (the plural form of nkpaawiin). Ikpaawiin are mostly called when one has a lot of farm work, 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.

### **sande:**

Likpakpaln word for a rabbit, bunny, or hare. Sande 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 practice the patrilineal system of inheritance.

**Uwumbor:**

Likpakpaln word for God.