

MY FATHER'S CHILDHOOD

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One day when I was washing dishes after dinner, my father called me. "Samay (*daughter), come here. Let me tell you something." "Wait, Apa, let me do the dishes". I finished the plates and ran to my papa. "You want me to tell you a story from my childhood?" he asked. "Yes, Apa, please...." I pleaded.

"Samay.." my father began. "When I was fifteen years old, we used to stay at Balong ghat, a very remote village in Wakro circle."

"Father, I think during those days, your village must have been a jungle!" I asked.

"Yes, my child. We lived deep inside a thick jungle. For drinking, there was no water nearby. We used to go far away and bring water from a river. In those days, when it rained, the river became dirty and we used to drink rain water! With just one rupee, we could buy rice and our clothes! How much we could get with ten rupees!!"

In those days, salt was not easily available in most Arunachali villages. So I asked, "Father, during those days, was there salt in your village?"

"Yes. We used to bring it from the nearest market, Chongkham"

"No shops in the village?" I was surprised.

“No, dear. To buy things, we used to go to Chongkham, which was a few kms away from our village. But it took the whole night to reach there, because we had to walk through the jungle!”

“Oh! Then where did you all sleep at night?”

“In those days, we used to sleep in the jungle under some bamboo bushes, and it was very dark.”

“You must have felt very hungry, cold and afraid, Apa?” I remarked.

“Yes! We used to carry some food-packet from home. At night, we made a fire under the bamboo bush. One night, I was lying down. Suddenly I thought that someone was standing near me. I took the bamboo torch and looked around. There was no one. I felt more afraid. I pulled my blanket over my head and slept. . In the morning, I left the place quickly and reached Chongkham.”

“Father, how was Chongkham in those days?” I asked. Today it is a little town with many huge houses, shops and Buddhist temples.

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