Puluga's Flood

The Andamanese · the Andaman Islands, Bay of Bengal

Where It Comes From

The Andaman Islanders have lived on their islands in the Bay of Bengal for tens of thousands of years, one of the oldest continuous cultures on earth. Their stories were written down by outsiders: E. H. Man, a British officer, in 1883, and the anthropologist A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, who lived among them in 1906–08 and published *The Andaman Islanders* in 1922.

What Happens

Puluga, the maker of the world, gave the first people rules for living. Over time they grew careless and stopped keeping them.

Puluga was angry, and sent a great flood. The water covered the land, and nearly everyone drowned.

Two men and two women were in a canoe when the water came, and they survived. When the flood went down, they found that every fire in the world had gone out, and they were cold and could not cook.

Then a kingfisher flew down, the ghost of one of their drowned friends, and stole a burning brand from Puluga's own fire to bring to them. (In another telling, animals carry the fire to a hill.) With fire again, the survivors could live and start over.

What Stands Out

Why the flood came. The first people disobeyed Puluga.

Who was saved, and how. Two men and two women, who happened to be in a canoe.

The boat or the refuge. A canoe.

What came after. The fire was lost and had to be brought back. In this story, the gift of fire matters as much as the escape from the water.

Radcliffe-Brown found that by his time the islanders told the flood and the return of fire as one story. Man's earlier account came through a colonial officer's eyes, and both men were outsiders.

THINK IT THROUGH

The survivors lived through the flood, but still needed someone to bring them fire. Who has brought you "fire" after a hard time?

Sources

E. H. Man, *On the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands* (1883), as given in James George Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1918), pp. 233–235.

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders* (Cambridge, 1922), chapter 4, full text at archive.org.

Everything here is a summary in our own words. Where a story has many tellings, we follow the source named above and say so.