



MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT

ENTITLED

**FORMATION OF THE CREATION
MYTH OF THE GAROS**

SUBMITTED

TO

SHILLONG COLLEGE

BY

**LORINDA .D. MARAK
LECTURER, DEPARTMENT OF GARO
SHILLONG COLLEGE**

ABSTRACT

Certain myths are amongst mankind's earliest attempts to explain some of the most profound questions about the nature and origin of the universe. The aim of this project work is this urge to provide a justification, to explain for the workings of nature and history which have been experienced in all human civilizations. Every culture has a creation myth and so the attempts have been made to satisfy our need to understand the universe and our place in it. Themes common to many include a birth original chaos or a previous world, a divine edict when disobeyed brings sufferings to mankind (floods) and the action of the supreme beings. Attempts have also been made through this project work to update and refresh the experiences of people and most importantly to learn from their vast store of invaluable experiences.

The project work begins with the formation of the earth — how people, rocks and plants, animals and all living beings first came to be, including the birth of fire and the death of the mother goddess following the delivery of the fire. Using the normative survey method it has been attempted to discover the idea that myth teaches us about the past in order to build on and move forward to the future. In this regard myth becomes the essence of all morality. However, in doing so it has been found that some barriers arise in giving the significance of myth. At the same time, through discussions and interactions with the people from various fields of Garo Hills, it has been discovered that there are ways and means to overcome these barriers.

In the end, it is important to stress on the fact that the objectives of this entire project will only be attained if we help the society to realize that "Tribal traditions need not be devoted to, or perceived solely as something of the past, but instead be the catalysts for the creative instincts of a people that identify their culture." (Mamang Dai)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

At the very outset, I express my sincere gratitude to Dr. M.P.R. Lyngdoh, Principal, Shillong College, Dr. Malay Dey, Vice Principal, Shillong College and Prof K.D. Roy, Vice Principal of Professional Courses, Shillong College for providing all the facilities and encouragement to conduct the project work smoothly.

The worker of this project work, wish to extend a gratefulness to Madam Ruby Dkhar and entire team of the Research Committee, Miss. B. Lyngdoh, Librarian, Shillong College and the entire staff of the Library and the entire staff of Shillong College without whose cooperation this project work would not have seen the light of the day.

Last, but not the least, I express my particular thanks to Dr. C.R. Marak, Dr. Milton S. Sangma, Mr. Llewellyn R. Marak and Mr. Wilber K. Sangma at large who have directly or indirectly helped me throughout the project work.

***Mrs. Lorinda. D. Marak
Lecturer Dept. of Garo
Shillong College,
Shillong***

CONTENTS

1. Introduction.
2. Objectives of the Project Work.
3. Limitations of the Study.
4. Methodology.
5. Explanation.
6. Significance of Fire.
7. Origin of Broom.
8. Significance of Myth.
9. Conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

In very ancient times people have told stories to explain the mystery of the universe, of creation and destruction, of how people, rocks and plants, animals and all living beings first came to be and the way they grew to understand these mysteries was through stories called myths. Myths are a record of how past people saw the world.

According to Bullfinch 'Myth' does not mean something that is not real or true, but a kind of truth and a kind of reality not communicable by any means other than the symbolic story. For Stith Thompson, myths are intimately connected with religious beliefs and practices of the people. They may be essentially hero, legends or etiological stories, but they are systematized and given religious significance.

Again Thompson's submission on myth undermines the operational value of myth as a timeless tool for interpreting even secular matters of the past present as well of the future. Myth is a sequence of past happenings as a historian and a timeless pattern which can be detected in the present social structure and which provides a clue for its interpretation a lead from which to infer future development.

The word 'Myth' carries various associations, ranging from false concepts to the ultimate truth. It is an elusive term to explain, nevertheless Myth informs so much of our literature and we need to understand what it is and how it functions. In the simplest sense myth is a story, the term in which the Greeks understand as a tale or a narrative, interrelated cluster of stories dealing with the activities of gods & goddesses and god like beings. Myth is set in the remote past which deals with the origin of the universe, gods &

human beings. Myths do not exist as unique phenomena but rather are a part of a fully developed elaborate construction of a myth or mythologies.

In every culture from Asia to the Americas creation myths exist to explain how the world began and how the first people came to being. Likewise there are many kinds of narratives in Garo culture that use the same general form and tell a story, history, biography, fable, legend, epic & myth. Most of them contain an explanation that describes the beginning of humanity, earth, life and universe often as a deliberate act by one or more deities.

Myth, no doubt is a representation of the past, the understanding that the past affects the present. It has been an inspiration for artistic endeavour; painting sculpture, poetry, music, novels. This shows the power and importance of myths and the potent force they have on people both past and present indeed, They are our mirror that shows our hearts' desire to look into the core of existence and this paper posits that myth will always be important and significant in our lives.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT WORK

The Present Work Aimed at :

- (a) Finding out how the world has been formed, its creation and how all its creatures came into being.
- (b) Discovering the renovation of the fire and how men control fire since ancient times.
- (c) To examine whether the myth acts as a connection between our past, present and future.
- (d) Studying the significance of myth in our lives and whether this significance of myth still exists today.

Limitations of the Study :

- (a) There was a paucity of time in conducting the survey which was one of the chief limitations.
- (b) The survey was conducted during Puja Vacation and Winter Vacation, so unavailability of the local people is also one of the limitations, as most of the people are on vacation.
- (c) Since the project work is based on orality it is not possible to do literal translation and many thoughts, ideas, concepts, Garo idioms, I am afraid may not be possible to put into translation and still carry their original meaning.

Methodology :

The whole project was carried out by normative survey method. Both primary and secondary data sources were used in the study.

Primary Data Sources :

The primary data was collected through questionnaires and interviews.

1) Questionnaires : The questionnaires were prepared keeping the objectives in mind and were distributed to the different people from Garo Hills to get an idea how some new reality came into existence and what is their significance ?

Some questions incorporated in the questionnaires are as follows:

Questionnaire

1. Name:
2. Designation :
3. What is a myth?
4. How does the world its creation and all its creatures came into being?
5. Where do we begin?
6. What is the most important thing to start with?
7. How did the first cotton plant grow out of the white feather of a kite?
8. How did the man obtain a grain?
9. Who invented the rice beer?
10. How did the early humans first discover that they could harness and use the fire?
11. What were some of the main uses to which early humans put fire?
12. Why did the groom has been kept in a corner?
13. Is there any importance or significance of myth in our lives?

II) **Interview** : The responses filled up by the respondents in the questionnaires were at times vague and to get a proper understanding of the suggestions and ideas given by them I have adopted the technique of interviews. In this context person-to-person discussions were made with some university professors and educationists in addition to the interviews of the people of Garo Hills that were provided questionnaires.

SECONDARY DATA SOURCES :

The secondary data sources such as books, journals, newspapers, articles, internet etc. were used in the study.

EXPLANATION :

CREATION:

In many ancient cultures and religions, there are some stories of the creation myth, these myths that normally tell of how the gods created the world and mankind.

BEGINNING :

In the beginning, there was just water and all is covered in darkness with no separation between the earth and the sky. The creator, Tatare Rabuga bears the earth through the goddess, Nostu Nopantu. The earth bore was named Mane Pilte. After all this had happened, one of the goddesses named Ajina Bijina attached this new land to the sky with four strings and she looked after the four corners of the earth. This land was still so wet and tender and so Gorang and Patrang, uncle and brother sowed the seeds of cliffs and eyeballs of boulders upto Donare Wakchelchik, after getting

the command from Nostu Nopantu. Even then the earth looked so bare and barren, so the creator ordered two sisters Tikre Tikse and Gatre Gatse to sow the seeds of variety of plants and trees and so the world became a pleasant place for all living beings giving shade to them. Then she bore the sun, moon and all living beings. Lastly Sre Tonggitchak Gitok Warikkat was born in such a way that caused the death of mother goddess, Susimema Sangkildoma. The funeral of Susimema Sangkildoma ultimately results in the formation of stars and constellations, which can now be seen as the Milky Way. The creator, Dakgipa Rabuga or Ba'bra created humans out of dust beneath the earth and blew life into them. The general aspect of creation myth as shown in Garo myth is that they always involve the creation of human beings at some stage by god or supernatural entities. By doing this, a connection is established between the everyday world of human beings and the Supernatural world of gods who created the universe. It also establishes the place of human beings in the hierarchy of life inhabiting the universe. Man is placed below god and other supernatural beings but above animals and plants. This aspect shows us the etiological or explanatory function of creation myths.

The myth goes on to narrate the cause and effect of death of the ancient tree Siram Racha Bolking Gitel which was born with the earth. The do'mas (large bird) lost their shelter and pressurized other trees to allow them to perch on them. In order to meet the needs of do'mas, a girl named 'GITING' (banyan tree) was born who got transformed into a tree. She was given a choice by her mother Naori Timbori to marry one of the gods, Jarume'a Jabal Pante Okkuangsi Japang Cholsi (God of Cyclone) or Sre Tonggitchak Gitok Wa'rikkat (God of Fire), Banggri Ajimpa Chonggri Kajimpa (God of Earthquake), or Bil Goera Jakbalnisi Chela Rong'dot Jaktongmanggot (God of Thunder and Lightning) or Airokrak Wachitoktak (God of Rainstorm). She eventually married the Rainstorm god to acquire increase production and fertility.

Garo Hills is a place full of stories. The stories explain observed behaviour and natural phenomena and imbue them with sense and order. They also remind the community that it is important to keep our obligations the reasons for which are contained in the stories. These obligations apply to every aspect of daily life from social behaviour, ceremonies, worship and environment to the preparation of food with its associated taboos. In Garo Mythology, rice is of divine origin, there are various versions of obtaining paddy. Misi Saljong made his sojourn in the destitute widow Ae Segri Doti Pagri. They burnt incense for him as they are too poor and as they have nothing to offer him. The god was pleased and blessed them with grains. This is one of the many stories how grain came to man. Rice, especially sticky rice, is also the chief ingredient for the local rice beer that is believed to be a gift from the gods. Along with the gift, special rice preparations are required for many occasions. A preparation of rice wrapped in banana leaf packets is an essential item of offering in weddings.

One quest story is the search of Gonga for the cotton tree. Gonga and his dog Tonggro Manggisim Irijatongrak searched for the cotton tree and finally they found the cotton tree growing by Kakkija Suanggi Redingsi Lake. A blacksmith called Badak and Jaru Me'a Jabal Pante (Cyclone) helped Gonga to fell the tree, from which seeds were obtained for cultivation. Subsequently bartering of cotton for gold also started. Yarns and clothes were made of this cotton. Prior to this human beings covered themselves with leaves and the bark of Pakkram (Coral) tree. Furthermore, Gonga separated the wild beasts which were hunted in the forest from those that could easily be domesticated. He also brought Ruram-Sureng Do'aning (a fowl) from beneath the earth from which some have escaped and have turned out to become the jungle fowls. He also introduced prosperity, plenty and happiness.



DISCOVERY OF FIRE :

Human beings have known how to generate, control and use fire since very ancient times. The creation of fire could have been a chance of discovery — Prehistoric man could have acquired fire when a tree was struck by lightning, when a volcano erupted, when a powerful lightning could have set a tree or forest ablaze, or fire making could have been invented by mere coincidence. On a hot summer day a leaf or a twig may have caught fire in the open or may have been aimlessly rubbing against stones, a human being may have generated sparks quite accidentally. It would be interesting to know how this momentous discovery was made.

All the legends and lore of humanity speak of fire and sparks the same way as the myths and pristine poetry of the Greeks or the Hindus do. The one in which Prometheus stole fire from heaven hiding the fire within a hollow fennel – stalks and gave it to man is one of the best known fire myths. The Garos express in their myth the conviction that they received the art of generating and using fire from the Supreme God or from their tribal ancestors. Susimema Sangkildoma got entangled and stumbled on the funeral pyre of Rabugama Ranangama (the spirit who tasted death for the first time) and conceived a baby. She delivered Sre Tonggitchak Gitok Warikkat (Fire) and died. So, fire was born in such a way that caused the death of mother goddess. Out of rage, Katchi Beari Rangsi Tokkni banished the fire to Bre Nalsa Rado Chichang (the other side of Rado Island). That is why fire dwells beneath the earth and sea. With the fire banished, it becomes inaccessible to cremate the dead body of Susime Sanglildoma. They made him a petition to come back to earth but he refused to appear in any tangible form and hence fire must have seemed very mysterious to early humans. But he employed a method of fire making, that is, by striking flints, (Wal'tot Tote Wal'e Ra'aibo). Kindling fire by striking flints or rubbing sticks was not an easy job. It was much easier to keep it burning. So, the humans soon learned to control the

fire by keeping it under ashes and blazing it into flames by feeding it with wood and dry grass or bamboos, and this probably led to their transition from nomads to settlers.

Fire was undoubtedly one of our earliest conquests of nature. The greatest discovery made by man alone on this earth is the art of making and maintaining fire.

SIGNIFICANT OF FIRE IN GARO MYTHOLOGY:

Fire is significant in the mythology of all cultures because it is universally accepted that without fire humanity would not have survived or evolved hence it is always considered the 'gifts of gods'. If Susimema Sangkildoma would not have delivered the fire humanity would not have survived.

The significance of fire in Garo mythology occurs in migration and farming. The Garos have a very distinct traditional belief of having migrated from Tibet. They settled down in Koch Behar about four hundred years ago and they moved to Dhubri and they came into conflict with the local chief who seemed to have enslaved them. Hence while moving from one place to another they were ill treated by the ruler of the region and have to flight with them many a time. The continuous head hunting raids into the surrounding plain areas is one of the recorded history of the Garos and it became their way of life. This lifestyle required a well equipped armory with a well equipped crew and fighting force and therefore the trade of blacksmiths became a very prestigious position within their community, for it was these men who build and made weapons for the warriors.

Fire was very precious as it required constant attention and was affectionately kept in a special place — the hearth. With the ability to produce and control fire, humans could not only create heat and light but cook food that were difficult to eat in their raw state. The cooked meat becomes easier to digest and prevented the spread of many diseases. Fire also served as a source of protection against predators; heat in cold times, which allowed humans to migrate over a much larger percentage of the earth's surface. It keeps dangerous animals away from home; firewood could be worked into strong sharp pointed weapons, clay pots could be baked to a stone like hardness and land could be cleared for planting – Bonepa Janepa was the first man who cleared the land for farming. He cut the ancient tree and set it on fire before the monsoons which brought the death of Nambak Me'a Namsang Pante, a servant of Misipa Arajengpa. Out of his bones sprung up randu or mendu (arhaldal) which is a source nutrient to the people and also a medicinal plant. Eventually, the use of fire brought about the birth of civilization based on the smelting and forming of metals.

In Garo Mythology, Goera was the god of thunder and lightning. Goera's adges sword, known as Mil'am made thunder bolts when god threw it. He snatched away the sword from his uncle Matchuri, a civet cat and went to heaven. Ajepa, a blacksmith, made the sword for the civet cat for giving him a fragrant smell of wind-breaking (KI.SI SIMILA). He showed it to his uncle by throwing the sword, which is a symbol of lighting. Here, a fire plays an important part in making the sword.

Fire, the provider of heat, light and the source of life and growth was the centre of all religious rituals of the ancient Garos. Since fire played a very important part in the social and domestic life of the early settlers it was fed with animal fat and flesh, grains and incense which rose in smoke to reach the gods in the sky. As we have seen how the fire was discovered, those who first mastered the technique of setting dry sticks on fire must have felt both

fear and a sense of power. It served the people's needs in winter, with its glow; it helped them to see things in pitch dark nights. Fire thus enabled humans to conquer darkness which even in our times, children and adults continue to dread.

In the eighteenth century, Boswell suggested that fire led to cooking and this led to human civilization. But some modern environmentalists were of the opinion that the discovery of fire led to the destruction of rich forests into a vast savannah.

Ovid Writes : "By wind is a fire fostered and by wind extinguished, and by wind extinguished; a gentle breeze forms the flame, a strong breeze kills it, like many significant things in life and nature, there is this irony with fire too."

ORIGIN OF BROOM

A broom is a cleaning device. Since its origin, various types of brooms have come up. A smaller version is called a duster, and it is always made out of the feathers of poultry and other birds like peacock. Flat brooms were invented in the 19th Century made of corn stalks and commonly made with synthetic bustles today. Originally, these were made from natural fibers and are still very much used in India and other Asia Countries. In the developed world, vacuum cleaners have been used in place of traditional brooms, which is just another adaptation for the same purpose, that is, cleaning and sweeping. Brooms have also been long associated with witchcraft and are portrayed as medieval style round brooms. It would be interesting to know the information on the origin of broom according to Garo culture and why it has been kept in a corner of Garo houses.



Broom Plants



The story has thus been told that Misi Saljong impregnates the foam of Witre Me'chik Witse Chera Nono Nokang and from this foam a broom was born. Feeling humiliated that she bore the baby broom from her uncle she prefers to stay in the corner. This serves to state the symbolic reason for a wife's commitment to the household chores and also a reminder of her docile nature.

The brooms were home and hand made in Garo Hills. Fibrous materials such as grass, straw or hay, fine twigs of leaves, leaves of coconut & betel nut tress were also used to make refined brooms for sweeping the floor and cleaning the ashes from the fireplace. Bamboo strips were used to tie the broom.

Cooking at that time was different from what it is of today. It was done over a large open fire or a huge fireplace in the kitchen, and dust and ashes were part of kitchen life. As wood was carried inside the kitchen for heat and cooking, dust and ashes were often left behind as residue on the kitchen floor. The home made brooms swept clean the hearth and kept the home a more pleasant place to live in.

The people of the Garo Hills use the broom not only to keep the households spotlessly clean but it was also seen as a tool for driving away the evil spirits. This is why it was waved over heads of sick person symbolizing the importance of cleanliness to ward off illnesses. Thus brooms should always be in use but not in the evening after sunset because then it is believed that gods will lose their way in their process of blessing people. It is also believed that a little sprinkle of water over a broom can be used over the sleeping person, who can temporarily be transformed ~~the person~~ into a tiger (Matchapil'a). The sleeping person thought it to be a firefly and try to grab it. One should be careful while trying out this task.

SIGNIFICATION OF MYTH :

Myth is a story that has significance to all cultures and civilization since the dawn of time. All creation myths answer to deeply meaningful questions held by the society and shares revealing insights of their central world view and the framework for self identity of the culture and individual in a universal context. It is the answers to these questions that are collectively called mythology. The word myth comes from the Greek word 'mythos' which translates a story with a meaning behind it. The term 'meaning' is used in many different senses. Meaning is often defined as the practical outcome of the thing in our future incidents. Thus, to understand a myth is to understand its purpose, its significance. Now, we can grasp the significance of it only when we understand its relation to other things, or its place in the system as a whole. The myths that have been re-told throughout the centuries have always had a moral behind them. The story of Asi and Malja is a powerful tale with a moral, the Nokma or the headman had to collect a crab from the stream for sacrificial rites for Rokkime, a goddess during 'Rugala' or thanks giving ceremony. At that time nobody can go out of the village or do any work. But Asi and Malja went to the jungle to collect firewood. This was an act of irreverence to Misi Saljong, the god of blessing. The profanation resulted in Asi being killed by a tigress and Malja being taken by a mermaid. This story played an important role in the society as a deterrent to bad behaviour.

One of the many functions of mythology was to provide a cosmology, to explain how the world came into being. When we read myth one can find the same basis in a number of different variations.

Another theme is the great flood, the Garo myth accounts for how a great flood had been caused by the feud between Dura Hill and the Songdu River. It is said that the daughter of Dura, Simera was married to Singra River, son of Songdu River (Brahmaputra). The ill match brought the death of Singra

and that resulted in a flood which lasted for seven days and seven nights. In order to save Durama Imbama from destruction, Salgra the sun god became very hot and Balgira, the wind god blew with great force. These myths reflect the constant anxieties of farming communities whose income and livelihoods depended on the flow of the rivers to irrigate their crops and also signifies the necessity of water, air and sun for farming.

The ability to gain immortality through drinking the nectar of god is another recurring theme in world mythology. The Garos also use this basis theme. The creator Dakgipa Rabuga gave the humans nectar to drink (Trop Janggi or Chijanggi Chichri) freely and it depends on the person who consumed it. More quantity of nectar consumed implied that the person survived longer. The ability for humans in mythology to shake off the shackles of their mortal bodies and become immortal shows our quest to become something better than what we are. Our ancestors believed that we could become immortal by taking the nectar of gods and this has allowed the chemists to pursue this resulting not in immortality, but inventions and to discover medicines that have helped humanity to survive for a longer period.

Myth helps us to understand the depths of a society and its people both past and present. In modern society, we can use myth to explore ancient culture. That we still refer to certain myths as examples of how we as individuals and communities should strive to be like, we may be an economically and culturally enlightened society. However, we have the same needs as ever — protection, warmth, food, sex, love, children, happiness, peace and prosperity.

John Campbell writes that “any good story would enchant us and teach us something, but myths are distance that they are potent, timeless tales which inspire and have the power to shape and control our lives”.

Conclusion : The stories that we share in myth provides us values, morals and traditions. The tales we tell to children describe our characters. All myths are from a distant past, but what gives the myth an operational value is that specific pattern described is timeless; it explains and allows the past and the subject itself to present interpretation. Thus myths act as a connection, a bridge between our past, present and future creating a constant eternity. With this eternity we are called to learn, understand history, so that we might improve upon it. We can also use myth as a norm to view the culture in detail.

One might consider this inconsequential, but what we are looking at is the idea that myth teaches about the past in order to build on and move forward to the future. In this regard myth becomes the essential code of conduct. It is the driving force behind our cultures and ideals. Myths reflect what has been, what is and what came to be. It is like a mirror that shows our hearts' desire to look into it and that is why it has become so significant in our lives.

J.F. Bierlein elaborates on the fact that idea in his book "Parallel Myths" 1994 by stating 'the primitives' and the 'modern' are not at all that different as we might think the gaps between cultures narrow to reveal what is constant and universal in human experience.

Lastly, we can conclude that with the rapid change in the region, 'these ancient tales need not be perceived solely as something of the past as 'dead' literature, that in the process of documentation all the words are frozen in print and will have reached a dead end.' Those of us who see high moral standards as hope in our society can use the influence of myths of the past on their societies as a basis which will be suitable to our times and to build a better future.

REFERENCES :-

1. Dr. Caroline R. Marak : Garo Literature : Sahitya Academy, New Delhi – 2002
2. Dewansing S. Rongmuthu : Apasong Agana : Sharona N. Marak, Tura – 1997 (Reprinted)
3. Keneth. M. Momin : A'chikni Chanchibewale Seanirang : Tura Book Room, Tura, 2007 (2nd Edition)
4. Dr. Caroline R. Marak : Influence of English on Garo Poetry, Scholar Publishing House (P) Ltd., New Delhi – 1985.
5. Dhoronsing K. Sangma : A'chik Golporang, (Garo Folklore) III.
6. Stephen Fuchs : Origin of man and his culture : Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1982.
7. Veronica Ions : The worlds Mythology.
8. William Carey : The Garo Jungle Book : Tura Book Room, 1966.
9. P.C. Kar : The Garos in Transition : Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1982.
