



# THE MYTH OF PARA MWTAI AND THE RITUALS OF PARA MWTAI FESTIVAL: A STUDY OF CULTURES OF THE TRIPURI TRIBE COMMUNITY OF TRIPURA.

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Article history:		Abstract:
<b>Received</b>	November 28 <sup>th</sup> 2020	Myths have been existing in every nation of the world since the antiquity. They are the reflection of one's own perception regarding the world. The primary function of a myth is to generate a truth which perpetuates from one generation to another in the primordial values of their cultures. This paper deals with the myth of the Para Mwtai of the Tripuri tribe community of Tripura and the rituals behind this Para Mwtai festival. The myth of Para Mwtai unfolds a narrative of the origination of the God 'Para' and how the veneration of the God 'Para' begun to be celebrated among people of the said community. The rituals of this festival are very unique. During this religious festival, a total of fourteen (14) Gods and Goddesses are worshipped over two days and in three parts; in the evening of the first day, at noon of the second day and at the evening of the same day. Animal sacrifices, drinking wine, the bamboo decorations, ritualistic dances among devotees etc. are some patterns of rituals of the great festival. The myth and the rituals of the festival mirror the belief system and the ways of life of the Tripuri tribe community.
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Myth is a story or narrative moulded by a particular nation or cultural group or social group to expound the world consistent with a people's apperception and introspection regarding the world they dwell upon. Myth is an apparatus of one's personalized worldviews and culture is always deeply embedded in it. It is an integral part of one's cultural consciousness. It comprises of a cluster of symbols, colours, characters, situations etc. of a particular community. Archetypal critics say that there is a commonality and universality in pattern and structure of every myth irrespective of the fact that they are of different nations, cultures and societies. Myths have been a Simulacrum of lifestyle, nature, attitude and behavioural outlook of a section of people that is, how that ethnic/non-ethnic community earn their livelihood, how they celebrate their religious occasions, what rituals they have in those occasions and ultimately how they live their life. As regards the myths, Carl Jung (1981), a psychologist says "myths are the first and foremost psychic phenomena that reveals the nature of the soul". He further mentions that there must be the recurring primordial images of human beings which through the "collective unconscious," or racial memory subsist as a "psychic residue" of our ancestors' recurrent patterns of experiences of the world. Later on, Northrop Fyre (1971), leads forward this theorization of myth, culture and archetypes in his book "The Critical Path". He says that myths are always the "centripetal structure of meaning". "A myth being a centripetal structure of meaning, it can be made to mean an infinite number of things and it is more fruitful to study what in fact myths have been made to mean" (Fyre, 1971). The world is full of mythic stories. Every nation or every community has numerous mythical stories about the cosmology of the world, the organic cycle of human life and death, the religious celebration, the ritualistically adoration of any God or Goddess etc. As regards the Indian myths, India has two ancient mythologies of the world – "Ramayana" and "Mahabharata". Apart from these great ancient myths, India has ample of Tribal myths which represent their respective ethnicity and cultural consciousness. The present paper aims at exploring the myth of the Para Mwtai of an Indian tribe community called Tripuri residing in a small North-eastern Indian state called Tripura and the rituals behind the festival of Para Mwtai. Tripura is a land of nineteen Tribe communities. The Tribe communities of the state celebrate many religious festivals of their Gods and Goddesses like katar Mwtai (The supreme deity), katarama Mwtai (The consort of Katar Mwtai), Saltal mwtai (A God of crops), Burasa Mwtai (A male deity stand for diseases.), Mailukma Khuluma Mwtai (A Goddess of Jum grain and harvest), Suklak Mwtai (A God of health.) Noksuma Mwtai (A household deity who is worshipped at one's courtyard.), Lairang

Mwtai (An evil God who lives in deep forest or near rivulet), Hwk Mwtai (A Good God of Jum cultivations), Twi Swkal Twi Mwtai (A female deity of water lives near stream), Bonirock Mwtai (A demonic God who lives near any water reservoir or near the junction of three roads) etc. They have some unique rituals of each religious festival they celebrate. Para Mwtai is one of the most popular religious celebrations among the Tribe communities of Tripura, especially of the two prominent Tribe communities—Tripuri and Reang community. It represents the unique rituals and culture of the Tripuri and Reang communities of Tripura. The word "para" means an area or locality and "mwtai" means God; Para Mwtai is appeasing the reigning deity of a para to protect the local people from any disease, evil spirit, to solicit communal peace and welfare or for seeking the blessings for a child. It is not a festival with a fixed date, but can be arranged on necessity on a collective level as well as for an individual requirement. Both men and women contribute an equal participate in the worship of the Para Mwtai represented by a structure made with different kinds of bamboo decorations. These bamboo decorations consist of bamboo-canes, bamboo-poles, bamboo-flowers, bamboo-garlands etc. Animal sacrifices, like pig, goat or cock are offered to propitiate the deity and seek its blessings.

### 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher has used here the Qualitative Research Method. The research work has been done in a para (area) called Amalaya para of the village Gardhang in Santir Bazar subdivision of South Tripura district, some hundreds (100) kms far away from Agartala. The data is collected through an interview with an old man, Ramachandra Tripura who had ages of experience as a priest in Para Mwtai puja. The old man narrated in his mother tongue-Kokborok (The most popular Tribal language of Tripura which belongs to the Bodo group of the Assamese-Burmese group of the Tibeto-Burman Sub-family of Sino- Tibetan language family), which was translated in Bengali by a young student, Subrata Tripura. The researcher has tried his best to translate all that he could gather into English and present in this study.

#### What is the Myth Behind the Para Mwtai ?

There used to be two kings Atukarai and Satukarai in a kingdom. The kingdom was named Atukaraisatukarai after both of them. There was a priest in this kingdom who had a very beautiful daughter. One day these kings decided to travel across the length and breadth of their country in order to know about the state affairs. These kings, who were quite young themselves, were very excited with the tour. Accidentally, they came across the beautiful daughter of the priest, playing with some pet animals. They were struck by her beauty, her innocence, and her gaiety. Both of them were fascinated and wondered who this could be. Finally, they could not resist any more and came closer and asked her: "Who are you, looking like an angel? Are you from this kingdom?" The girl answered giving the name of her father. The two kings also introduced themselves. They requested her to accompany them for some part of their travel through the forest. As they entered deep inside the forest, they found a golden pig running speedily. The girl, amazed at the sight, commented that she had never seen such a big and beautiful pig in her life. After sometime the girl told the kings about her intention to return home. As they made for their way home, they saw a red coloured deer and a wild cock crossing their path in great speed. Anyway, the kings left her at her home and returned to the palace. During the next few days, the girl started feeling an attraction for the elder king Atukarai. On the other hand, in the palace, both the kings started missing the girl badly and gradually fell in love with her. But they did not share their feelings with each other. The girl meanwhile was always engrossed in the thoughts of Atukarai, so much so that she started neglecting her food and sleep. The priest noticed the change, asked her about the reasons, but she remained mum. Finally, he found out from others about her recent expedition with the kings of the kingdom. Helpless, he decided to visit the palace and enquire about it from the kings. The kings assured him of their innocence in that matter and informed him that they had just wandered around the forest together for a while. The priest realized that his daughter had fallen in love, but he was not sure about who it was. So, after coming back he kept pestering her to tell him the truth, and finally she revealed that it was Atukarai, the elder brother that she had fallen in love with. Understanding everything, he didn't waste any time. He brought her a dishful of flowers, a comb and a bit of hair oil and asked her to adorn herself with those things. The priest met the elder king, Atukarai in the palace with the marriage proposal for his daughter. Atukarai readily accepted the proposal confessing that he was also pondering about sending a proposal to the priest himself. The younger king Satukarai felt wretched at these developments, though he didn't express his inner feelings to anyone. He nursed his broken heart secretly and kept the pretence of joy at his brother's marriage. King Atukarai came along with the priest to his house and tied the knot of wedlock. King Atukarai and his wife lived happily for some years, but in the intervening period they couldn't have any child. Dejected at the futility of their marriage, Atukarai decided to leave his wife. The queen, shocked at his decision, asked him for the reason, to which the king replied: "The reason is nothing special, but your barrenness, which is depriving me of having any progeny for my kingdom". The queen implored him not to desert her, rather consult an Ochai (one who possesses some divine powers or one who is expert in Necromancy). At her suggestion, he goes to an Ochai and consults him about any possible remedy. The Ochai recommends him to worship all the deities like Twi, Bikhitra, Akhatra, Chandi, Kasham, Morthi, Raksha, Minagor, Khoyama etc., only with whose blessings his wife can bear a child. Accordingly, they started the veneration of these Gods and Goddesses. At the end of the second day's worship, the queen started feeling a terrible stomach pain and intended to defecate. When she sat for relieving herself, she found two eggs coming out along with her stool. She dug up two holes in the ground and buried the eggs beneath. She also informed the king about all these happenings. Just after seven days one of the eggs burst

open and a handsome young man emerged from that. Just after seven more days another egg burst open and another man emerged out of that. These two young men were known as King Bangla and Sugriv, who were supposed to be Gods of the Earth. Their births anyway remained unknown to the king and the queen. These two young men soon fell into a quarrel among themselves about who was the elder between them. They couldn't agree to each other over this and their quarrel soon reached a peak. Their continuous quarrel attracted the attention of the passers-by and eventually was brought to the notice of the king. The king then came there to settle their dispute. At that moment the king came to know that these two young men were his sons. He was so happy to see them and he took them back to his palace.

#### **What are the Rituals of the Para Mwtai Festival?**

This section describes how the Tribe communities especially Tripuri in their hamlet, celebrate Para Mwtai. During this pup a total of fourteen (14) Gods and Goddesses are worshipped over two days and in three parts; in the evening of the first day, at noon of the second day and at the evening of the same day. The first adoration of the first day takes place near a small stream where nine Gods and Goddesses are worshipped. They are Twi, Bikhitra, Akhatra, Chandi, Kasham, Morthi, Raksha, Binagar and Khoyama. Different kinds of structures with bamboos and bamboo sticks are formed to represent all the deities. A total of eight (8) cocks and one (1) male goat are slaughtered as offering to these deities in this fragment. The next two fragments are undertaken in a courtyard. A structure of the God Para is made at the middle of the courtyard with different sizes of decorated bamboo sticks and a thick bamboo trunk. At first these bamboo sticks are tied to a long bamboo trunk of approximately five (5) feet and then put vertically inside the hole of a short sized truncated bamboo tablet. At the bottom of this bamboo structure, a small bamboo mattress is made around it. Thus, they constitute the structure of the God Para. In front of this structure, the next two fragments of the ritual are done. At the noon of the next day, veneration of two gods Para and Burasa together take place. During this stage, they sacrifice one female goat and one female pig. The third stage is performed in the evening, where each of three Gods, namely Sarikebeg, Hochapili and Chalchapili is worshipped in front of the structure. This time, one male goat, one male pig and one cock tied to the tail of the pig are sacrificed. After the end of the festival, the worshippers drink wine and dance together. During the three days of this festival, women bake different kinds of confectionery pies 'Onangguri' and 'Onathai' and offer numerous kinds of oblations for the worshipping of God Para. Thus, the celebration ends. The locals believe that Para Mwtai adoration was introduced by the king of their community, which gradually became popular among the commoners.

#### **Why do People Celebrate the Para-Mwtai Festival?**

Para Mwtai is believed to be the God of a particular 'para' or area where a group of people of Tripuri community live together. The Para Mwtai festival can be celebrated at a collective level or at one's own house for any personal requirement. Every 'para' celebrates this Para Mwtai festival separately. People of this community believe that the Para God must protect them or their area from all kinds of evil, if they adore the God together. No evil spirit or power can enter any village or area, once the adoration of Para Mwtai is taken place at that village or area. They also believe that the Para God must bestow upon them all kinds of blessings and save their village or area from all kinds of deadly diseases or epidemics, if they can propitiate the God. They will always live in peace and happiness, if the God is appeased with their devoutness. The family of a barren woman of their community individually organise and celebrate the Para Mwtai festival to seek the blessings for a baby in their family.

### **3.CONCLUSION**

Myth-making is a significant exercise of human creativity and imagination. Myth being originated in the previous era, is an account concerning the cosmological and metaphysical beliefs of human beings, their religious reflections, cultural implications, Gods and Goddesses, ideal heroes and villains etc. It is like a "panacea" to explain every phenomenon of the world occurred at the cosmological and supernatural level. So, it is the "science of the pre-scientific age". Almost all the nations have more or less myths since antiquity. For example--The ancient Greece myth of the Goddess Demeter (It describes the changes of the seasons in the world.), the Chinese myth of the Goddess Nuwa (It explains how the human beings were created in the world.), the ancient Greek myth of Pandora's Box (It expounds how evil and suffering were released into the world.) the ancient Indian myth of Mahabharata (It interprets the true meaning and purpose of human life.), the Greek myth of Prometheus (It deals with the theme of origin of fire and of humanity in the world.) the Egyptian myth of Osiris (It is related with the Egyptian notions of kingship and the reinvigoration of life of a deceased king through his descendants on Earth. ), the Greek stories of Dionysus etc. (Joshua J. Mark). The "mythos" or myths are the most prolific astrigent of the cultural insignias of a group. Roland Barthes (1972) in his book "Mythologies" emphasizes on the codes of narrative or story of a myth. These codes subsisted in myths reflect a clandestine cultural meaning of life. The myth of Para Mwtai is an expression of cultural semiotics of the Tripuri tribe community. The entire narrative constructed on the myth of Para Mwtai revolves around the belief-system of the origin of God Para of this tribe community and why this particular tribe community worships this God. This story represents the creeds, necromantic traditions, superstitions and the reliance on metaphysical or transcendental presences of this ethnic group under study. It provides the people with a truth which is to be persisted in the value system of their culture. Every myth is a body of some unique imageries. Almost all the tribal myths of India are identical in terms of the different imageries used in them. Northrop Fyre in his book "The Anatomy of Criticism" phrases of the imageries like--- romantic imageries, high mimetic imageries and low mimetic imageries. The mythic story on the provenance of the Para Mwtai consists of both romantic imageries and high mimetic imageries. As

regards the Para Mwtai festival, the rituals of this festival are to some extent very similar with those of religious celebrations of other Indian Tribe community living on the hilly areas of the Himalaya mountain. In general, the rituals of a religious occasion vary from one community to another. The rituals like drinking hooch and animal sacrifice of the Tripuri tribe community in the Para Mwtai festival were or are still seen in some communities of the world. For example—The rituals of drinking wine in the Dionysiac festivals of the barbarous mixed tribe community of ancient Greek and those of animal sacrifice in the reverence of Gods and Goddesses like Zeus (The sky God and father of the Gods), Kithara (The God of music and prophecy), Athena (The patron Goddess of Athens) etc. of the ancient Greece. To conclude, the myth of Para Mwtai and the rituals of Para Mwtai festival exhibit all the rich heritages and cultures of the Tripuri tribe community of Tripura.

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