ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
A STUDY OF MYTHS OF THE GALOS: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Abstract

The proposition of Myth has been under question right from the inception of culture and civilization: mostly about its relevance, meaning and mission. Since millennia, human beings have conceived stories about the origin of their culture and their world. This phenomenon has never been satisfactorily explained. Why do human beings universally create myths about their origin and their culture? What purpose do these myths serve? These questions usually confront the researchers of anthropology. The second question especially points to the functional aspects of myths because myths serve some societal purposes. Myths exist because they have certain functions to perform. In other words, if myth does not have any social purpose to serve, then it is discarded or modified in course of time. Modification normally incorporates elements of change and continuity. Addressing the two questions raised above is functionalist approach to study myths. There are also structural approaches to study myths as propounded by Levi-Strauss. Recently, many new approaches like folkloristic approach have been developed for the purpose. But functional approach which is still popular as social reality is rationalised in myths. In other words the function of myths to rationalise social reality still has academic interest.

The society and culture of the Galos are not static. They keep on changing. A new social order has been emerging in the process of change. In order to rationalise
contemporary social reality; myths need to change and adjust. In other words, a
myth that rationalises a phenomenon needs to change with the phenomenon so that
myth and phenomenon remain compatible. The functional role of myth to explain
social reality does not remain intact.

This proposition has been tested and supported by the data derived from field work.
Just as social structure, social organization and the roles of individuals change to be
fitted into new configurations, so also myths transfigured or newly created in order
to meet the needs of people for an understanding of their changing existence.
Evidently myths do not disappear. The exploration of myths in the areas touches
upon most of the aspects of lives of the Galo living in the villages.

Hence, the main objectives of the study are: to understand the aspects of Galo
culture through the prism of myths; to trace the origin of social practices with
reference to selected myths; to examine the dynamics of myths over space and time;
to explore the relevance of myths in changing context; and to document myths to be
selected for the purpose of this study.

From the review of available literature, studies related to the topic of present
research could not be found. Hence, the topic selected here has academic
significance.

The present work has an interdisciplinary perspective as socio-cultural lives of
Galos have been studied with reference to myths. It uses anthropological methods of
data collection. Both primary and secondary sources of data have been collected.
The primary data have been collected from the field through individual interviews and participant observation.

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. Chapter one is the introduction. The second chapter deals with review of literature related to the present study. Chapter three presents an ethnographic profile of the *Galo* tribe and their habitation. In chapter four, the theoretical consideration of myths has been explained. Chapter five discusses the four different myths of the *Galo* and chapter six examines the change and continuity of these four myths and all ritual practices originated from these myths. The concluding chapter provides the summary and major findings of the present study.

During the course of this research it was discovered that *Galo* myth of origin of universe has two divergent versions which are the cosmogony myth and creation myth. The cosmogony version states that universe evolved itself out of fog and mist which slowly formed the earth and the sky. The earth and sky, in turn formed *Jimi* or *Jimi Ane*. In contrast, creation myth states that *Jimi* is the mother creator who created *Hichi/Hisi* or *Medo*, sun, moon, humans, plants and animals, etc. However, there is unanimous acceptance of *Jimi* as the mother creator despite variation in the chronology of evolution of universe in these two versions. Change is also found in the myth of origin of human because fourteen different versions existed with the *Galos*.

Since counting of genealogy by all clans or clan groups begin from *Abo Tani* who is considered as the first human being on earth and father of humanity, no change is visible in the genealogical origin. In present age, study and documentation of
genealogy and tracing of genealogical origin have almost become a mania among
the Galos. Hence, identity formation of clan groups or formation of clan groups and
clan fraternity has become a common affair leading to formation of more than
twenty seven umbrella group of clans. Nevertheless, such enthusiasm or mania and
documentation of genealogy have other ramification too. Because it resulted into
disintegration of the age-old exo-clan fraternity maintained by many clans with
different genealogical origin. Another prominent change noticed is that many clans
or clan groups have broken their kinship and started to develop matrimonial
relations despite their same genealogical origin. It is also seen that some individuals,
clans or clan groups have started to change their own genealogical line by keeping
the name of their child not only after their brother but also after their sister.

Apart from this, a few Galo individuals resort to change their clan identity by
keeping the name of their village in their name as surname.

Influence of Christianity or Hinduism on Galo people is visible but that could not
distort the traditional genealogical link the Galos still have with Abo Tani. By virtue
of continuity of such legacy, they still keep traditional Galo names in addition to
their English or Hindi pet names in order to continue their genealogical counting.

Galo myth of origin of marriage has only one narrative but other two myths related
to marriage are also presented here. Undoubtedly, the three myths are similar among
all three sections of the Galo. But most of these practices and rituals of marriage
which have their roots in these myths have undergone remarkable changes. One of
the important factors responsible for this is the emergence of love marriage in the
Galo society in contemporary age.
Today selection and role of lampo(s) has just becomes a provisional arrangement because his position is almost reduced to a simple messenger and manager for marriage ceremony. Hob panam in marriage ceremony has also manifested change in modern age because maximum number of mithun that can be sacrificed in any marriage is ten which was again determined only through pip chikanam or ro kokkanam. But in contemporary age, rich people tend to ignore such established rules and sacrificed mithun even up to forty-fifty in numbers. Similarly, qualitative aspect of the ornaments as value of mithun has also lost its primordial grandeur and beauty because rare and valuable antiques are hardly available now. One of the most important marriage rituals i.e. nyame layap nam has also undergone changes because use of yirken during ritual is replaced with the use of an adhesive item or gum available in the markets by many people today. Different materials used and menus prepared during marriage ceremony have changed. Pette (bamboo tube) and oko/ekkam (tender leaves) have been replaced with the market accessible items like bottle and disposable plastic and steel glass, cups and plates. The special dishes of Galo like amin, eyup-adin, penam adin-ngo, eku-adin-ngo, adin-banam etc. have been supplemented and in many cases replaced with modern Indian and Western dishes. The Galo poka is replaced and supplemented in many cases with foreign liquors like whisky, brandy, beer, etc.

There are more than one narratives of the myth of origin of Mopin in extant with the Galo. Slight changes are perceptible in these available narratives which are because of differences in the plot and sequence of events particularly related to Takar-Taji’s mithun sacrifice ceremony, Abo Tani’s role in that ceremony, Abo Tani and Diyi Tami, Diyi Tami’s departure as well as incidents of seeds of corn for agriculture.
Rest of the plots is same in two narratives. But like that of practices and rituals emanating from marriage myth, practices and rituals originating from myth of *Mopin* undergone changes in many aspects. The conduct of divination of egg or hepatoscopy is must for selection of *Mopin nyibo*, date of celebration, *pingeleri/neri*, sacrificial animals etc. for celebration of *Mopin* in villages but it is not the case in urban areas. The *yidum* (sacrificial animals) of *Mopin* festival are also decided through divination of egg or hepatoscopy in the villages but in urban areas, mithun sacrifice has become the permanent sacrificial animal. The performance of *riga nam*, *tadok neenam*, *layap nam* and *litup tubnam* are still performed in most of the village celebrations but it is seldom performed in urban celebrations. Unlike in rural areas, the significant aspect of *iti* in the *Mopin* celebration has also been tempered with the use of flour available in urban markets. Ethnic dish of *Mopin* festival has been supplemented with different edible items like liquors, beers, fried fishes, fried chickens, salads, papars, snacks, dried kajus and paneers among others. In addition, the use of *pette* and *oko/ekkam* as plates and cups has also been replaced with modern glass, plates and cups as well as the most accessibly available disposal glass, plates, cups etc. The construction of *Mopin Liin* to mark the 50 years of *Mopin* celebration started on community basis in the year 1966 in 2016 by the Golden Jubilee Central *Mopin* Celebration Committee Aalo and construction of permanently cemented *Mopin Hogi* for sacrifice of mithun during *Mopin* celebration at *Mopin-Solung* Ground Itanagar by *Mopin* Celebration Committee Itanagar are also some spectacular changes in the celebration of *Mopin* festival today.

Some *Galo* intellectuals and scholars have made intellectual interpretations of the *Mopin* and related it with Goddess Lakshmi and Annapurna Devi while some
equated *Mopin* celebration with that of Holi celebration of the Hindus. Similarly, a few of them have made a scientific rendering of the *Mopin* chants and its impact on plants.

Regarding death, three different versions of myth of origin of death have been collected which may be presumed as a kind of change of this myth. The first and second versions of myth are thematically similar but differ in plots. The third version vastly differs from the other two because unlike in the other two, the plot revolves around *Donyi, Tapen* (bat), *Abo Tani* and his daughter *Niya*. Generally, it is believed that all ritual practices and funeral rites, etc. was started by *Abo Tani* who was guided by his mother’s *urom* (soul) as narrated in the second myth of death. But now these different practices and rituals of death believed to be initiated by *Abo Tani* have changes although fundamental procedures are intact and still followed continuously. It is found that white clothes and incense sticks, citronella and other perfumes are used instead of use of ashes from fireplace to dispel the fume of the corpse. The smearing of *iti* on the face of the deceased and singing of *hen-nyilen* by a *nyikok* are also discontinued in most cases. The dead body is laid straight on the cushion with pillows and the legs of the person are not folded over the chest in order to shorten the corpse. A *marap* (bier) is still used but it is a straight one with four handles on sides. Four persons carry the corpse and the handle of the right side of the head is held only by the person who performs the funeral rite. There is no hard and fast rule regarding the *hima gedene* nowadays. Any one of the sons can perform the funeral rite. No new *koba* (ladder) and *mero* (bundle of burning firewood) is used. Similarly, the tradition of *dig-mercho nam* (first digging by a member of the deceased’s family) is not maintained rather village folks jointly dig the grave.
Instead of two separate rectangular chambers in L-shaped, a single and big rectangular chamber grave is constructed. The use of mahen still continues but encircling of the grave with a sacrificed dog, cutting of one nail of right hand and putting an egg on it, and throwing away of another egg are no longer performed. The head of the deceased is still made to point towards the west. A shed for grave is still constructed but transfixing of bow and arrow over the sticks pointing towards the sky and other features like different shapes of bamboo shavings to signify the individual quality of the dead as nyikok and nyigam are not practiced. But a live cock is still kept at the perngo constructed at the grave for nyijik (nyibo). Taboo like entry to the house of the deceased for certain days is no longer observed but dune and magbo are restricted for at least five nights. Doga-onam and burning fire near the grave are followed but burning fire near the grave has undergone change as some people used to connect electric bulbs and illuminate the grave for five nights. All taboos prescribed for the hima gene, the udu-nyope and peder-hoko rituals are also still performed. But the layap ritual for the grave-diggers is not performed as per the tradition because of the fact that all village folks particularly youths jointly dig the grave and carry out all activities of the grave. Almost all practices, rituals as well as taboos such as entry restriction in the house of the deceased, restrictions on dune-magbo, doga-onam, udu-nyope, peder-hoko, layap etc. are, however, not observed by the Galo Christians today.

From the forgone analysis, it can be said that all myths of the Galo tribe studied in this thesis have various versions. Of course, some of these are only relative in nature while most of these are the direct accounts of these myths. The reasons for such
diverse versions of myths could not be established by the researcher from the field visits.

It can be said precisely that all rituals and practices emanating from these four myths have remarkably changed to accommodate and imbibe new traits but without jettisoning the essential and unique aspects inherited from time immemorial. Thus, although most of these practices, beliefs and rituals are still continuing but certain aspects of these are found to have changed with the change of time. In fact, it can be said that some of these changes are the result of natural processes like migration and settlement of the tribe in different places, influence of neighbouring tribes etc. while others may be the designs of external influences exercised by the modern education and science, and different religions particularly Christianity and Hinduism.

Galo myths remained more or less the same in that they continue to refer to unverifiable places and events but they also tend to include some aspects that are verifiable. In this way, myths continue to maintain the society by creating a deep sense of belonging within the Galo people through the kindling of sentiments. These bonds are means for maintaining society and ensuring the survival of the society as long as the myths are still accepted by the members as truth. Therefore, the continuity of the myths and its narratives do rest on internal validity as determined by the tribe. As long as the Galo people continue to believe the myth, it continues to exist and continues to play its role of keeping society intact.

It is found that Galos follow some practices and have the beliefs which are rooted in the myths. At the same time, Galos also follow some practices and beliefs which do not have a known myth or which do not form a part of the myth. For these new
practices and beliefs, the myths have not been created and modified. So it can be deduced that the new practices and beliefs have emerged so rapidly that for their rationality myths have not been created or modified. The rationality lies in areas other than the myths which need further investigation. Myths or its variants are not exclusive in justifying the way of life of Galo people. Many practices do not draw on the myths but have their justification in the changing need of day to day life because of modernisation of the traditional society. Most of the myths remain in the realm of ‘feeling for Galo identity’.

The account of myths and practices has some divergences. All practices do not have corresponding myths or legends. Why there is a gap needs further investigation. In contemporary time the same gap exist between the existing practices and the prevalent myths. It points to one supposition that practices do not have rationality only in myths. Probably, practices are the product of exigency which continued as a convention. However, they are not in opposition to the broader framework of the ideology in myths.

In conclusion, it may be stated that Galo myths have a functional role of maintaining Galo identity. But changes in social structure, ritual practices do not have corresponding realisation in myths. This gap needs theoretical explanation beyond functionalist perspective. Functional approach has its limitation of explaining ‘change’ because of its presupposition that societies are in a state of equilibrium.