

The Role and Significance of A·chik Goddesses in Mythology and Their Impact on A·chik Women in Society

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Abstract

Every goddess has something special to offer society, whether it is something positive or something negative, through her contributions to society. It is no wonder that countless goddesses in mythology display powerful representations of gender roles. All female goddesses have a profound impact on mythology, regardless of whether they are demigods, immortals, or monsters. In A·chik mythology, goddesses play an important role. Female goddesses are represented in stories as having a role in creating the earth, providing crops, and building societies. In A·chik mythology, goddesses do not have any form of human beings. As unseen beings, they are powerful, though they are not visible to humans. Among the A·chik goddesses, there are a number of them. One of them is Kiri Rokime, the goddess of crops, who is believed to rule over farming. She is the goddess of rice and millet. She is known as the 'mother of rice'. Susimema Sangkildoma, who is the mother of Susime, is another female goddess. She is regarded as the originator of fire and sacrificed her life for the betterment of all humanity. In A·chik mythology, there is a goddess called Nostu Nopantu who was sent by Tatara Rabuga, the supreme deity, to help in the creation of the earth. The purpose of my paper is to describe the roles, significance, and contributions of these female gods to nurture a bright future for society through their work. Lastly, I would like to make a note that despite the relative status of women in society, they still strive to find a place for themselves in society.

Keywords: Mythology, goddesses, mother, provider, protector

Introduction

There is a high regard for goddesses in every tradition. Goddesses can also be found in religious traditions worldwide. Throughout all of history, goddesses have played a significant role in mythology, both in ancient times and now. In A·chik mythology, goddesses are depicted as the female counterparts to all living and non-living forms of life. They are described as a provider, a protector, a giver, a lover, and a healer. Among them, there are several that stand out for their roles, significance, and contributions, among them Rokime, Susimema Sangkildoma, and Nostu Nopantu. Though goddesses have had a tremendous impact on society, women throughout history have been overlooked. As seen in the society of A·chik, the status of women in some way, good, but on the other hand still some women were still struggling. This analysis highlights the vital contributions of divine figures in empowering A·chik women and shaping their societal status. By linking mythical narratives to contemporary relevance, it emphasizes the importance of preserving these stories to inspire future generations of A·chik women.

The Study of Feminism and Mythology in Understanding the A'chik Goddess's Influence on A'chik Women's Society

Feminism: Feminism is a collection of social theories, political movements and moral philosophies, motivated by or concerning the experiences of women, especially socially, politically and economically. In the book *A Handbook of Literary and Critical Terms*, I. H. Shiha (2019) shows when and how the feminist school emerges. Thus, it rose during 1970 with well-defined, self-regulating discourse, although the French, the British and the American counterparts of the movement varied widely in terms of the interests and assumptions associated with the doctrine (98). The main purpose of this movement is to challenge the ideas and stereotypes both in literature and society. The benefits are for all humankind. Oxford Learner's Dictionaries online dictionary defines Feminism as *the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim*. Webster's Dictionary defines feminism as *the belief in and advocacy of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes, expressed especially through organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests*.

Myth and mythology: Myths are stories of a particular group or community. Although the meaning of the myth differs depending on different people. One of the Mythologists, Devdutt Pattanaik, in his book called *Myth=Mithya Decoding Hindu Mythology* (2006) says the *myth is the truth which is subjective, intuitive, cultural and grounded in faith*(xv). He gives his statement on myth and mythology as *if myth is an idea, mythology is the vehicle of that idea* (xvi). In a simple and understandable he uses it to depict the importance of myth in every tradition. We see that beliefs produce myths, and customs are an outcome of mythology.

In A'chik, they preserved the stories, customs, and beliefs by telling them through word of mouth. They believe in gods and goddesses, and they have different gods who created the world, and people, and provide what is needed for them. Even though the woman is portrayed as a goddess, they are not the supreme creator according to the A'chik mythology. Only they are subordinates. The Supreme being is Tatar Rabuga or Bisikrom Bidatare Tatar Rabuga created the earth first (*Apasong Agana*, 4); he ordered them and they obeyed his command. In the book *Atchu Ambini Ku-bisring*(2004), Julius L. R. Marak states,

A-gilsak chigilbooko dakani ja-mano, an-tangni sagre Nostu Nopantuko, me-chikni bimangko ra-e an-tangni ong-atgimin A-gilsak chigilboko mangrakatchina ba-rik rodilchina watataha. (44)

After the creation of the earth, Nostu Nopantu, His subordinate, deity, was asked to take the form of a woman to look after the earth and season it. (44)

Myths pass on the ethics and values of a society and give guidelines for behaviour. Sometimes they contain hope for human beings, and other times they contain terror. Betty Bonham Lies in the book *Earth's Daughters Stories of Women in Classical Mythology* (1999) states that *Myth always starts with the Earth, always female, always Mother Earth, life-giving and fertile*(vii).

The Roles of Goddesses Portrayed in A'chik Mythology

In A'chik, goddesses played an important role; they believe in them, praise them and do the rituals for them. They are always kept in the form of oral traditions, folksongs, incantations, rites and rituals, myths, etc. Subsequently, these goddesses were involved in the creation of the earth, providers of crops, and good harvests, and sacrificed their own lives for people's good. They tell stories and are unknowingly preserved from one generation to another generation whether in the form of myths and legends. They are God-fearing people. Every year at the beginning of the year, when they grow crops in the hilly mountains, they perform

rituals in the belief to get blessings from their gods and goddesses. They preserved their beliefs from their ancestors in the form of stories, songs, proverbs, and ritual practices.

Rokime, the Provider: Rokime is the goddess who is the mother of rice and millet. In Mihir N. Sangma's book *Maniani Bidik* (unknown publication year), she is known as 'Minima, Misima'. During the agricultural cycle, there is a ritual for Rokime to invoke her spirit to bless and stay with the cultivator. Rama Krita or a·ba A·a bachata or den·bilsia or wa·cheng balrroa is the agricultural ceremony where they clean the junction to the villages and 'chiga rama' a way to the watering place. They believe bad spirits reside in villages, so they must purify the unclean spirits from their places. Only then will 'Rokimema' come to bless and reside with them during cultivation and go back to her place. Goddess Rokime blesses their crops; without her blessings, A·chik believe their crops will not bear fruit. So, they diligently and with submission invoke the spirit of the deity to provide them with a good harvest. Not only in this ceremony they invoke Rokimema's spirit, but in other ceremonies like A·galmaka, and Me·gap Ra·ona or Ja·pang Ra·a or Ja·megapa also(4-6). They need the presence of their goddess to be with them during agricultural activities. Rituals are performed for goddesses, they regarded them as their provider, protector and giver.

Females are given an important place in A·chik mythology. They have power and freedom, whereas many of the common A·chik women did not. They act as providers, above all, mothers of all living and non-living. As told in A·chik mythology, Kiri Rokime, goddess of crops, provided humanity with the ability to cultivate crops and was responsible for bearing the fruits of the grains in the firm. She motivates women to nurture others and to be generous and giving.

Susimema Sangkildoma, the Life-giver and Mother: Susimema Sangkildoma, mother of Susime, is the goddess in A·chik mythology. She gave birth to all the living organisms, and she was known by many names while giving birth. She gave birth to the moon and the sun. At last, she gave birth to fire, and she died. She sacrifices her life for human beings as well and she fulfilled what the Supreme Being told her to do. In *Apasong Agana* (1997) Susime Sangkildomani Siani Salo (5).

Supreme god Tatara Rabuga appointed her as a mother to give birth to many living organisms. Her role in A·chik mythology is always remembered as a mother to all, and she gives her own life to bring everyone into this world. She was portrayed as the mother of all; for that reason, at her funeral, everyone was invited. Not a single one remained at home; everyone went to pay their respect to her at the funeral. Her daughter Susime(moon) arranged every need at the funeral. In the book, *The Garos*(2011) written by A. Playfair, Susime's(moon) mother Susimema is known as Asima-Dingsima. The other name was Norekbak-Norekdim, Sonakale-Kaburanche, and Mikrongitok -Kisangsitok(90). In the same book, it is mentioned that each star is made to figure in some way in the funeral ceremony(94). There are fourteen stars and constellations in A·chik myth. Which is placed in the universe by Susime, the daughter of Susimema Sangkildoma.

It is believed these deities of A·chik sun, moon and stars have tremendous power. They have the power to give good or bad to people. They can make a year a good one or a bad one. A·chik believes in them and does rituals to get their blessings. That is why they sacrifice pigs, goats, chickens, cows and ducks to please them(13). Goddesses to them are everything. Her role cannot be unmarked in A·chik mythology. If the creation story is mentioned, her sacrifice cannot be overlooked.

Nostu Nopantu, the Co-creator: Nostu Nopantu is another goddess, as told and sung in A·chik mythology. It is mentioned in the book *Apasong Agana* (1997), written by Dewansing Rongmuthu Nostu Nopantu gave birth to the earth(4). Nostu Nopantu is known as Brara Dogni in another region of Garo

Hills. Tatara Rabuga, as mentioned in *Apasong Agana* (1997), appointed Nostu Nopantu to give birth to Earth. Then she commands two brothers, Gorang adasa and Patrang mamasa, to plant the seed of rocks. They do as she told them to do. Nostu Nopantu played an important role in the creation of Earth. At the request of Tatara Rabuga Nostu Nopantu gave birth to the earth, but she did it with her full heart.

Nostu Nopantu, when asked by Bisikrom Bidatare to season the earth, came down and saw that the earth was in a state of darkness. Void nothing was there, Earth was the size of a mushroom, water was the size of a pumpkin (*Atchu Ambini Ku-bisring*2004, 44). The goddess, Nostu Nopantu, is the goddess who took part in the creation process; she is like the mother. She tells the crab to bring earth from the bottom of the water. When the crab could not bring the earth from the bottom of the water, she sent a beetle to bring the earth. Beetle was brought mud for Nostu Nopantu, where she gave birth. Here we can see how Nostu Nopantu take the task as a leader, even though she is not the Supreme god, she gets the power to give orders to others. In the A·chik myth, it is told that Nostu Nopantu, when sent by Tatara Rabuga to give birth to the earth, saw nothing to put her feet on the earth. At that time, everything was unstable, like a wetland mixture of soil and water. But she did not give up the task. Here, her commitment to work is seen. She fulfilled the work which is bestowed upon her(*Atchu Ambini Ku-bisring*2004, 44-46).

The goddesses in A·chik mythology play a foundational and multifaceted role, embodying key aspects of life and nature. Figures such as Rokime, Susimema Sangkildoma, and Nostu Nopantu illustrate the A·chik people's reverence for female deities who serve as providers, protectors, and life-givers. Their influence on agriculture, creation, and nurturing reveals the connection between divinity and daily life in A·chik culture.

Through traditions, these goddesses were honored to ensure blessings for harvests and community well-being. This belief system underscores the importance of women in both mythology and society, reflecting a respect for feminine power and life's cyclical nature. The stories of these goddesses serve as spiritual guides and highlight the enduring bond between humanity and the forces of nature.

The Significance of Goddesses in A·chik Mythology

In A·chik mythology, goddesses embody vital qualities such as fertility, wisdom, love, and motherhood, serving as powerful symbols of life, nature, and experiential knowledge. These deities represent essential archetypes, convey important moral lessons, and reflect cultural values while helping to define societal roles. The narratives surrounding these goddesses illuminate natural phenomena, justify social hierarchies, and foster a sense of devotion and reverence among their followers.

The Impact of A·chik Goddesses on A·chik Women in society

In every culture, there is a mythology where the male is treated as superior to the female. Females are always presented as subordinate to males in every story. Greek mythology is not an exception; it represents women as powerful but not superior to male gods. We find images and symbols in all countries and societies. These feminine deities were role models for ordinary women. They can relate their lives to them. Naomi Ozaniec states in her book *Daughter of the Goddess: Sacred Priestess*(1993) that

They are inspirations to women. In many cultures and societies goddesses appeared as mothers, lovers, bearers of wisdom, workers of magic, saviours and initiators. The rediscovery of these timeless images has served as a source of inspiration and brought about a restoration of lost dignity through the renewal of pride in exalted womanhood.(193)

In the past, women in A·chik society were not allowed to enter Nokpante, where those who were bachelors

learned life skills. It is taboo for women to enter the *Nokpante*, the “Boys’ Dormitory”. Which is written in the book *Maniani Bidik*(1982) by Mihir N. Sangma. Where the author said, if the woman were caught entering the *Nokpante*, she would have to pay the dues according to the rules of *Nokpante*. Even though A·chik goddesses are integral to creation and serve as providers and protectors, they have historically been perceived as inferior to men, restricting women to domestic household tasks. This observation highlights the long-standing underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. However, the contemporary landscape for A·chik women has undergone significant transformation. Today, they occupy diverse roles as not only dedicated mothers but also as influential professionals and leaders within their communities. This shift exemplifies their resilience and capabilities, reflecting a growing acknowledgement of women's contributions across social, economic, and political spheres.

In olden days, there was a saying which is popular among A·chik, “Malamgipa do·kime, Ruragipa Susime”, which means, do·kime the creeper, Susime the enticer. They refer to these idioms to refer to a woman's character. These words show how woman was seen in the olden days. In the A·chik myth, Susime is the daughter of Norekbal Norekdim. A·chik believes that Susime, the goddess, has the power to heal and curse disease on humans. According to the book written by Dhoronsing K. Sangma, *A·chik Golporang Bak-III*(1984), she is the one who can bless good and evil to humans (12-13). A·chik, believes she is also a goddess who has the power to heal any sickness like crippled, handicapped, blind, mute, deaf and other illnesses. As they strongly believed, they performed some rituals to heal the sick, by sacrificing a pig, a hen, ducks, and wine and chants praising thanksgiving to her. *A·chik Golporang (Garo Folklore) Bak III*, it is said, Susime has the power to bless people in good situations and bad situations(13). In today's society, A·chik women are vital forces within their communities, consistently stepping up to support those in need and offering powerful prayers that resonate throughout the spiritual landscape. Their ability to bestow blessings and facilitate healing exemplifies their spiritual strength and deep connection to cultural traditions. Each contribution they make is woven into the very fabric of the community, emphasizing their indispensable role as pillars of support and nurturing figures. This situation illustrates how A·chik women significantly impact both social and cultural areas, proving their importance in promoting the well-being of their community.

In the *Metongbolni Gittim*(1987) written by Llewellyn R. Marak where Walidi, one of the matgrik from *Nokpante* states, *Na·song angko chonnknakama? Me·chik surimangmang!*(22). The word “Me·chik surimangmang” tells everything about how men think about women. There is a prevailing belief that women are unfit to lead men, often characterized as lacking intelligence. However, today, society—along with various institutions and communities—are increasingly recognizing the profound influence and intelligence of well-educated women who are rising to prominent positions within organizations and social structures.

The importance of A·chik goddesses like Susime highlights their strength and resilience. As societal perceptions change, the role of women in community well-being and leadership continues to grow, emphasizing their significance in social and cultural spheres

Conclusion

In some cultures, it is indeed enchanting to see women as goddesses. They give a superior place in mythology while in reality, woman is treated as inferior in every aspect of their life. It's feminism that brings women to a new world, through which women can see themselves in every field. Now woman brings their status into the eyes of people. It does not require somebody to acknowledge them. The

stereotype thinking of men still exists, however, this generation focuses on women as equals. The goddesses, as mothers, daughters, nurturers, caregivers, and givers, play an important role in A·chik mythology, which can also be seen in A·chik women to a certain extent. This study of goddesses and the dissemination of this information not only empowerment women but also all of humankind. I believe this will contribute to women, particularly in those cultures, being accorded respect and honour within their societies.

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