

The Peri as One of the Dominant Images in World Mythology

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Abstract. *In the mythologies of many peoples of the world, the image of a supernatural female being—commonly known as the peri or its variants—occupies an important place. In European, including English, literary traditions, this figure is referred to as the fairy. The phonetic similarity between the words peri and fairy suggests the existence of ancient cultural contacts between the peoples of the East and the West, which may have influenced both the naming and the characteristics of this mythological image. This article examines the artistic interpretations and distinctive features of the peri as one of the dominant images in world mythology.*

Key words: *East and West, mythology, peri, fairy, invisible world, literary contacts.*

Introduction. The peak of the evolution of primitive religious beliefs was demonism: the totemic spirit gradually entered the external world and transformed into figures such as alvasti (cin), peri, or spirit. Such imaginary beings include household and bathhouse spirits, water fairies, forest fairies (dryads in Greek mythology), deities of water bodies (naiads in Greek mythology), guardians of specific places (nymphs in Greek mythology), demons protecting treasures (trolls in Scandinavian mythology), forest spirits (elves in Scandinavian mythology), and other mythological characters [1].

The image of the peri is widely represented in Uzbek folk epics, particularly in the romantic epics of the “Go’ro’g’li” cycle, as well as in magic fairy tales and legends. There are various interpretations of the characteristics of this image. According to “The Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language”, the word peri is defined as follows:

Myth. A legendary image widespread in the folklore of Eastern peoples, depicted as an extremely beautiful girl created from light, who protects people from evil spirits and demons; a symbol of beauty [2].

Literature review and research methodology. According to information presented in the Uzbek-language Wikipedia based on scholarly sources (Afzalov M.I., On Uzbek Folk Tales, Tashkent, 1964; Razzoqov H. et al., Uzbek Folk Oral Poetic Creativity, Tashkent, 1980), the peri is described as a mythological image widely spread in Eastern folklore, representing an idealized form of the beloved and symbolizing beauty [3]. The image initially appears in the Avesta in the form of pairika. According to legends, peris lived in the Garden of Eram near Mount Qof, possessed their own kingdom and ruler, and were guarded by supernatural beings—*devs*. In fairy tales, peris are described as extraordinarily beautiful, intelligent, wise, graceful, and delicate. They possess magical abilities and can assume various forms when necessary.

In Uzbek folklore studies, various aspects of the peri image have been the subject of scholarly research. In particular, folklorist O. Qayumov conducted a special study on the genesis and poetics of the peri image in Uzbek folklore, classifying its mythological interpretations [4; 4]. Building on this classification, we propose an expanded version as follows:

1. Names derived from historical and legendary figures (anthroponyms): *Sulaymon Pari*, *Luqmon Pari*, *Abdurahmon Pari*, *Dovud Pari*, *Hasan Pari*, *Husayn Pari*, *Yunus Pari*, *Misqol Pari*, *Gulnor Pari*, *Gavhar Pari*, *Zulayho Pari*;
2. Names associated with mythical places of residence: *Guliston Pari*, *Simiyon Pari*, *Behisht Pari*, *the Marble Fairy of Bukhara*, *Fop Fairy*, *Mountain Fairy*;
3. Names derived from plant names: *Gulkhon Pari*, *Gul Pari*, *Guljamol Pari*, *Bug‘doy Pari*;
4. Names based on geographical terms: *Marg‘ilon Pari*, *Qarnoq Pari*, *Sayram Pari*, *Qoshg‘ar Pari*;
5. Names derived from celestial bodies: *Zuhra Pari*, *Yulduz Pari*, *Oy Pari*, *Kun Pari*;
6. Names reflecting social status, rank, or title in the invisible world: *Okhun Pari*, *Sulton Pari*, *Hur Pari*, *To‘qmomo Pari*, *Oqsoq Pari*, *Oqsoch Pari*, *Xunxo‘r Pari*, *Sarvar Pari*, *Farmon Pari*;
7. Names based on animals: *Yo‘lbars Pari*, *Ilon Pari*, *Kaptar Pari*, *Lochin Pari*, *Ajdar Pari*;
8. Names derived from objects and natural phenomena: *Water Fairy*, *Fire Fairy*, *Rain Fairy*, *Bread Fairy*, *Dutor Fairy*, *Salt Fairy*, *Whip Fairy*, *Mirror Fairy*;
9. Names indicating ethnic affiliation: *Jewish Fairy*, *Hindu Fairy*, *Gypsy Fairy*, *Kashmiri Fairy*, *Turkmen Fairy*.

Another folklorist, G. P. Snesev, studied beliefs related to peris among the Uzbek population of the Khorezm oasis [5], while O. A. Sukhareva, in her work *Demonology and Remnants of Shamanism among the Lowland Tajiks*, provided information about peris in Tajik folklore [6].

These data indicate that peri names in the Uzbek language are closely connected with people’s perceptions of the invisible world, the regions they inhabit, their social life, occupations, as well as geographical names, flora, and fauna. Special attention is paid to the ability of peris to transform into different forms, most commonly into doves. For this reason, eating dove meat has traditionally been considered sinful among the people.

In epics, fairy tales, and legends associated with peris, they often appear in human form, perform benevolent deeds, but may also become fiercely vengeful if offended. In this respect, peris resemble household spirits in English mythology, whose attitudes toward homeowners can change. Their supernatural power is believed to be connected with specific objects such as books, hair, combs, or rings; losing these objects deprives them of their magical abilities and forces them to submit to humans.

One of the wall paintings preserved in Tuproqqal’a—one of the most ancient cultural monuments of Khorezm—depicts a half-human, half-bird figure. This image supports the ancient belief that peris could transform between human and bird forms or combine features of both. Information about peris assuming the form of snakes is also found in the Avesta.

According to V. Gerter, the payrika mentioned in the Avesta refers to a woman of supernatural beauty, an evil sorceress—essentially a fairy. In English mythology, fairies are metaphysical beings endowed with supernatural powers, living in secrecy, intervening in human life with good intentions, but sometimes causing harm. The prominent British scholar G. Gunter notes that in ancient Iranian beliefs, the payrika was associated with fertility and the idea of rebirth, embodying emotional incarnation. As a result, the peri image encapsulates the beauty and charm of the female body. According to A. Ye. Bertels, the root of the word peri derives from the Indo-European proto-lexeme *pery*, which in pre-Zoroastrian mythology denoted the goddess of beauty and love [7].

Results and discussion. In Uzbek mythology and epics, peris are considered relatives of *devs*, as both are believed to be created from fire. They may be siblings or form families through marriage. *Devs* often guard peris from humans. In the “*Go‘ro‘g‘li*” epic cycle, the hero chooses a peri rather than a human woman as his beloved. *Go‘ro‘g‘li*’s wives, Yunus Pari and Misqol Pari, reside in mythical lands—the Garden of Eram and Mount Qof respectively. His son Avaz rescues Anqos Pari, the daughter of the king of Sham, from captivity among *devs*. In the epic *Nurali*, sung by the poet Shomurod, Nurali falls in love with Khiromon Pari after seeing her in a dream [8; 208]. To obtain a

peri, the hero must defeat the *devs* guarding her. In the *Go'ro'g'li* epic, *devs* appear in connection with the hero's journey in search of his beloved. Yunus Pari anticipates *Go'ro'g'li's* arrival and appoints the seven-year-old Samandar Dev as a guard. Despite the passage of epic time, Samandar Dev's age remains unchanged [10, 24].

Yunus Pari and Misqol Pari are portrayed as devoted lovers who love *Go'ro'g'li* with all their hearts—faithful beloveds willing to renounce the entire world of spirits, the happiness of motherhood, and even wealth and possessions for the sake of their husband, and to sacrifice their own lives for their beloved. However, alongside *Go'ro'g'li*, they are also capable of placing the children they have raised above everyone else—even above *Go'ro'g'li* himself. This is evident when, believing Ahmad Sardar's slander, *Go'ro'g'li* swears to punish his son Avaz severely, even to the point of killing him. For instance, in the epic “Avaz the Hero's Escape to Rome,” when *Go'ro'g'li*, driven by anger and intent on punishing Avaz, approaches his son's home, Yunus Pari confronts her husband and threatens him in defense of her child:

Qoshima kelsang otaman,
Zo'rligim izhor etaman,
Orqaga qaytib ketmasang,
Ko'p ishlarni ko'rsataman...
Adolatsiz shahringni
Yer bilan yakson etaman.
Iram yo'lini tutaman,
Elatingni tark etaman,
Qaytib kelib devlar bilan
Chambilni vayron etaman [11; 143].

(a literal, line-by-line English translation:

If you come near me, I will strike,
I will show my power,
If you do not turn back,
I will show you many things...
Your unjust city
I will raze to the ground.
I will take the road to Iram,
I will abandon your people,
And returning together with the *devs*,
I will destroy Chambil.)

This episode shows that although the peris belong to the world of spirits, they are not devoid of human feelings, especially maternal love.

In the works of Alisher Navoi, the beloved is compared to a peri, while the poet likens himself to a mad *dev* consumed by love:

Ul pariy ishqida men devona erman, devmen,
Ishq vodiysinda har ohim erur bir devbod. [12; 88]
(Lit. translation: For love of that peri I am a mad *dev*,
Every sigh of mine in the valley of love is a storm.)

S. O. Zotov, who studied fairy and witch images in Shakespeare's plays, provides valuable insights into the etymology of the word fairy. The term entered English in the early fourteenth century to denote any supernatural being and was borrowed from Old French *faierie*, initially meaning an enchanted state, and later referring to magical beings themselves [13].

Conclusion. world mythologies contain characters that are similar in appearance, behavior, and function, despite being known by different names. Their comparable roles within mythological systems highlight the need for a comparative study of mythological images across cultures. The *peri* is one such dominant image.

As demonstrated above, the Uzbek *peri* and the English fairy are phonetically similar and share comparable functions and social significance. While the *peri* appears in Turkic epics, fairy tales, and legends, the fairy in English mythology is rooted in Celtic mythology and English folklore. In Uzbek sources, *peris* are described as luminous beings who help people in distress and possess extraordinary beauty. English folklore portrays fairies as ambivalent figures capable of both benevolence and mischief. In both traditions, they are commonly depicted in female form and are closely associated with magic.

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