

“Superstitions in the works of Mamang Dai”

Lavina Keswani
(Research Scholar)
(M.A English, NET)
R.S Mundle Dharpeth Arts
and commerce college

Dr. Manjushree Sar Deshpande
Head of Department, English
R.S Mundle Dharpeth Arts
and commerce college.

TITLE: “Superstitions in the works of Mamang Dai”:

ABSTRACT: Tribal people believe in superstitions. This paper focuses on superstitious elements in the fictional works of Mamang Dai. Superstitious belief forms a major part of the Adi culture. The researcher has applied cultural studies theory in the following paper. The study of superstition is based on the semiotic study. Correlating sign with the ritual attached. Adi people have a profound faith in natural healing techniques. They share a close relationship with the environment. In fictional works of Mamang Dai, Adi people are often shown practicing traditional healing practices and belief which involve superstition. As the author says in ‘The Legends of Pensam’, “the Adis practice an animistic faith that is woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world.” Superstition and their faith in natural healing are a major part of the Northeastern culture.

KEYWORDS: Mamang dai, Adi tribe, Superstition, spirits, Ecospiruality, faith, Animism.

Paper

“The Black Hill”, a 2017 work by Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh-based author Mamang Dai, earned the Sahitya Academy Award. She is a journalist who has cleared her UPSC exam and loves to write. The deep flavor of the Adi culture of Arunachal Pradesh, their folklore, oral history, and vibrant tribal cultures can be experienced by her readers.

She was hired as a program officer at World-Wide Fund for Nature, where she worked on the program for the Eastern Himalayas Biodiversity Hotspots. She once served as the Itanagar Press Club's secretary. She is at present in charge of the Arunachal Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUW). She was chosen to serve on the Arunachal Pradesh state public service commission in 2011. Mamang Dai was also awarded the Padma Shri award in 2011.

In Mamang Dai’s fictional works, it’s fairly understood that the Adi tribe believes in nature, with immense faith in superstitions.

In the section, ‘Diary of the World’ in Dai’s book The Legend of Pensam, we have Pinyar the widow saying:

“Once upon a time, there lived a race of supernatural beings called the miti-mili.” (28)

These beings used to prepare a mysterious si-ye and they gave this powder to mankind before their disappearance.

Pinyar says only women were permitted to handle it and she herself used to make the best si-ye cakes. Adi tribe also has a custom of sprinkling Si-ye on the eyes of people who die unnaturally, As Pinyar says,

“There is a bad spirit lurking in the si-ye that makes men go mad. That is why we sprinkle si-ye on the eyelids of those who die an unnatural death so that their spirits will not return on some restless search.” (29)

Pinyar told Mona and Hoxo, **“My boy is being haunted by an evil spirit because we failed to observe certain rites in the past. It was a mistake on the part of our parents and our parent’s parents. It was my mistake too. All the great priests will come to exorcise the bad spirit. I have called them.” (33)**

When people came to know the tribe that Kamur, Pinyar’s son, had attacked his wife and daughter, it is believed that somebody has cast a spell on him.

The people said **“He must have been under a spell. An evil spirit must have traded his soul for that terrible hour when he picked up a rusty Dao and went hunting for his children and for his wife, whose loose hair appeared to have deflected the blow that would have finished her.” (31)**

Like Pinyar, People also said, **“He is not to blame. It is something in the blood. There are men and women, guardians of history, who can identify this fault in the blood.” (31)**

Explaining and discussing such a fit of action, they said that,

“Some bloodlines are almost taboo to mention. They see visions. They have visited by spirits, like the miti-mili they are seized by bouts of madness.” (32)

People in the Adi tribe believed that ancestors and elders have divine knowledge and thus can discern the lurking spirits and faults.

Like Pinyar, People also said that **“He is not to blame. It is something in the blood. There are men and women, guardians of history, who can identify this fault in the blood.” (31)**

Explaining and discussing such a fit of action, they said that,

“Some bloodlines are almost taboo to mention. They see visions. They are visited by spirits, like the miti-mili they are seized by bouts of madness.” (32)

In the story, the heart of the insect, Dai narrates about **“Dimi tayang, the lonely spirit who stirs up the lake waters and clutches trespassing men in an embrace of ice.” (59)**

Adi people also believed that there are jealous spirits, who want to swallow mankind. People prayed for the travelers who visit the hills or mountains pray for their safe journey as they believed that,

“There were rivers hungry for lives, they knew, and mountains waiting to tear the breath out of their lungs. The piercing wind whistled and jeered around them, trying to steal their sense. The cooked rice that they carried turned to hard grain.” (59) For their safe return also, they have to convince the “jealous spirits” (59) to allow them to reach their destination safely. They promise that,

“We will travel again to your beautiful land. Let us leave in peace now. Do not pine for us. Do not call us back. We will travel this way again bearing more gifts next time.” (59)

The story of a homecoming narrates the offerings that people of the tribe or clan used to make to maintain peace between the two worlds. The writer narrates that,

“A shaman was called and the ceremony began with ritual chanting, calling the spirits to speak and disclose what they wanted. It was a bargain; a dialogue of exchange. ‘We will slaughter chickens and prepare you delicious food. We will pour wine over the stones and scent the wind with the blood and ginger. We will observe taboos and maintain our peace.’ (85)

People used to carry ginger for their protection during their travel as it was considered a “potent medicine against evil spirits” (94)

Any situation that occurred which was not ordinary was considered the result of something done by the spirits as revenge for not fulfilling any ritual by the people of the clan or tribe.

These instances from the story told by Hoxo speaks of the core belief of the Adi tribe. Adis have primitive beliefs and cultures. They form a major part of the Adi culture and tradition. Lotmon’s cultural semiotic principle is applied throughout the paper. Every sign has a ritual attached to it which became culture later. A subfield of semiotics called semiotics of culture seeks to characterize culture from a semiotic point of view as a kind of human symbolic activity, the creation of signals, and a way of giving everything around us meaning. Therefore, culture is viewed in this context as a system of symbols or significant signs. The term "semiotics of culture and language" is commonly used to describe the topic because the linguistic system is the primary sign system.

References:

Singh, Akanksha. “Between change and stillness of time,” Mamang Dai *tells the Legends of Pensam* 2015.

Gupta, Ramanika “Indigenous Writers of India: North-East India”, *New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company*. pp 23-24, 24th February 2018.

Borah, T. "Resisting the outsiders: A Historical Study of Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*", *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, 29 March 2020.

Rao, Radhakrishna. "India's plans for an Indigenous launch vehicle still on target", *Nature*. January 1987.

Basaumatary, Jeetumoni." Mamang Dai's *The Legend of Pensam and Temsula Ao's these hills called home: Stories from a war zone*" *Indian Genre Fiction*,2019

Sharma, Kanika. "A story retold by Mamang Dai", *Hambreelmai's loom*. 2017

Sarang, Jaydeep. "In conversation with Mamang Dai" in *writers in conversation* Vol.4 no. 2, 2017

Chakraborty, Dhiman. ". Depiction of Ethnic Identity in the North-East Indian novel in English" 2015

Lakshmi, Natarajan. "Retelling history" Mamang Dai's *the Black Hill as a novel of native spirit* 2017

Guha, Ananya. "The Phenomenal Woman- An interview of Mamang Dai" *ReadLeafPoetry-India*, *rlpoetry.org*. 26 May 2018.