

Mamang Dai's "Pensam Stories" : Window into the North-Eastern Legends

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Abstract

The human appetite for storytelling is great and has never waned. The genesis of literary fictions which provide a medium for sharing of stories goes back to myths, legends and oral stories. North-Eastern literature has gained much importance and momentum due to the increased translations of the works not only into English but also into other regional languages of India. It has provided broader horizons to the writings of this region. Writings from the North-East are one of those many fabrics which act as engaging points where the periphery endeavours to make relation with the mainland carrying the weight of time, space and culture. This paper attempts to comprehend the role of myths and legends in Mamang Dai's fictions.

Keyword : Myths, Legends, Fiction, Culture, North – Eastern literature.

Introduction

To put it another way, Myths allow the human mind to create a variety of alternative worlds and to explore the locations and conditions of life. They express a fundamental human search for meaning, salvation, perfection, etc. even though they range greatly in matter and presentation among civilizations. 'Primitive Mythology : The Masks of God', a book by Joseph Campbell, asserts the value of myths. "It is clear that a resolution of the shared inheritance of myth is necessary for man to express himself in the universe..." (1) the author adds. His existence does indeed seem to be as rich and varied as the depth and scope of local mythology rather than his rational intellect. David Herman contends that "stories aren't just facts," drawing from Roland Barthes' assertion. Myths and legends are basically stories that have been passed down and evolved from generation to generation over the centuries. As part of a particular community, they form the important cognitive framework through which the community explains and comprehends many of life's mysteries. Most of the myths and legends are present in languages which are not mainstream. Translation plays a vital role in such conditions. Myths die cultural and historical deaths when they are left untold and translated to generations.

Legends and Myths from the North-East

North Eastern books and literatures are laden with the folk-tales of the region and the legends and myths which the people of that land believe in. The main focus of 'The Stories of Pensam' is a narrative about the folktales of the Adi tribe, its people thwarting and uniting. Arunachal Pradesh, the region to which the writer hails, has a kind of literary enlightenment if gone through its local legends. There are around 26 tribes in the state, each having a sizeable number of sub-clans. Here, various Tibeto-Burman hill tribes co-exist peacefully. In spite of the harsh circumstances, residents in the "Hidden Land" persevere in daily life. Their culture is firmly founded in this co-existence of reciprocal ties. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, according to Mamang Dai's "Oral Narratives and Myth" ... "have traditionally relied on the forest without damaging the ecosystem. Traditional practices' guiding ideas have a strong connection to environmental ethics." (3)

It is challenging since everyone has a complicated past that is buried in the communal memory. Tribal myths : How do we recognize ourselves as part of a group that belongs to a specific time period in history? Several indicators of this can be found in our tales. Due to our prior faith in the "Word" as a source of truth, we have come together as a community of belief systems today. Here we can locate that unique, elusive quality that defines who we are as a group, culture, or nation inside a specific geographical boundary and cultural limitation.

Myth-making as part of narratives

This narrative, in the form of fiction, is a form of mythmaking and underscores our primal need given the propensity for demythologizing and the quick shifts in our worldview and viewpoint on life brought on by

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interesting new technologies, there is a need for storytelling in the face of these challenges, scientific and technological developments. Human science and technology have improved significantly, and all of our accomplishments reflect significant improvements in our knowledge and expertise. Among all of these accomplishments, all the conquests and all the joys, man searches for myths. It is often pointed out that our world is a post-human world, where human capabilities are augmented by technological innovations. In other words, man must be defined as a technical being. But the monstrosities of modernity, coupled with its advantages, often lead people into a kind of emptiness, into a kind of nonsense. It basically makes him go back and reconsider his roots, oracle, clan and tribal roots. In this retrograde journey, myth and tale become the cusp of tremendous understanding and progressing knowledge, where humans grow and find significance through commonplace and unimportant actions.

Mamang Dai's 'in-betweenness' of Stories

The setting of the stories is rural Arunachal Pradesh. The Legends of Pensam introduces us to the narrator, who accompanied by her pal Mona is an outsider and the owner of magazine, The Diary of the World. The speaker recalls also some of the incidents and characters (not necessarily human characters) from his accumulated memory. Each tale connected to Adi community belong to Pensam. In the Adis language, the word Pensam literally means "in-between". Mamang Dai elucidates what Pensam means in his narratives. It's a compact landscape where unexpected happenings occur and navigates beyond the realms of common cognitive reasonings of human minds.

where a song's length can be used to quantify a man's existence. GSP Rao writes in his criticism of the book : "In storytelling, Pensam is actually the mediating world between fantasy and truth regulating the life of Adis, as well as a shifting period between old and new lifestyles." wrote GPS Rao in his assessment of the book. Members of Adis identify her quite intuitively, as she is part of Pensam .

The creation myth of Adis is similar to other cosmogonic nature myths from the Nihilo. There is also no allusion to Brahma or Prajapati, which are associated with the beginning of the cosmos in Hindu mythology. In other words, the creation myths of the Adi tribe have no connection with mainstream Indian Vedic mythologies. The same shaman in the novel says that everyone here in the world has a goal to fulfil their destiny. To put it another way, there is no connection between the genesis tales of the Adi tribe and other Indian Vedic mythology. The same Shaman asserts that everyone in the world has a goal to realise their destiny and strive to accomplish it.

The term "DONYI – POLO", a part of their cultural vocabulary denotes to a light which illuminates the human Spirit. Dominate the Supreme by living an ideal life. It is indestructible and indivisible. It's an absolute in its own right. Therefore, DONYI-POLO is an ever-radiant aestheticism that lures Adis for life. The Adis have myriad concepts but among them what is most significant is their belief in evil and benevolent spirits, as well as the rites and rituals used to appease them. The tribal members are awed and terrified by the spirits' appearance, which makes them believe in anything horrible like murder or death. The spirits can manifest themselves in a variety of ways. This is the tale of Birbik the aquatic snake. It was Lutor, Hoxo 's father, who believed he had an odd appearance. He couldn't tell if it was a fish or a serpent. They realized something was wrong, and in early, Hoxo's father died in a hunting accident. The narrator tells everyone that knows the legend of Birbik, the aquatic snake as it is recorded in their mutual remembrance. After several months in bed, he passed away of the disease. They were not well aware of the ghost's other manifestation, as they could not deduce the role of the fish behind Lutor's death, they found in Lutor's bag when he was brought back dead.

The wrath of the spirit is a bad omen because it can bring bad luck to the neighbourhood. Evil spirits are also cited in the tale of the unfortunate outcome of the bedridden Kepi. This was linked to Kepi's father's past deeds. The unusual behaviour of the elephant he had hired to move the logs prevented him from recognizing the python spirit's warning portent. Frustrated by Elephant's constant attempts to launch it, he begins to sift through the logs. He was brave enough to find a curved python among the tree trunks and kill it. When her son fell ill, she recalled encountering the snake in, during the moments of her adversity. They were supposed to carry out the snake ritual by hymning and dealing with the spirits to summon them to heal a sick child, but the spirits moved to a place no one can remember.

Although she was a widow, she was living alone when her husband left her. Once while she was busy

with her farming activities, her house caught fire. It was Adi's custom that when a house burst into flames its owner is exiled to observe a kind of taboo. During this time no one is allowed to eat with her for fear of provoking the spirit of the tiger, for it is the spirit of the tiger that causes the fire. Because she leads such a difficult life, she believes in all sorts of ghosts and is the one who tells about them "there is an evil spirit lurking in the si-ye that makes men go lunatics". The exact faith leads him to believe that his son Kamura is haunted by the spirits of the year since he killed his son and daughter in a sudden and unknown bout of thirst. Although people lead a life close to nature, they are afraid of nature due to their belief in envy and jealousy towards spirits. They, too, dread their annual journey into the snowy mountains to collect the precious root, the deadly aconite, which is harvested to make the poisoned arrow.

When under the influence of evil spirits, they must summon a shaman who will perform the necessary rituals to save people from spirits. The shamans sing a song and perform the rituals. It is Miri, the shamanic guardian of the word and myths of and the rites of Adis. They protect the legends and various stories of the tribe. It is they who come to save people from the realm of evil spirits. Miri has the powers to have conversations with spirits. Villagers summon shamans and perform prescribed rituals to ward off impending dangers. Every age old myth is related to rituals. This book contains such examples when shamans perform rituals. People still hold to the myths and stories that they have been passed down from generation to generation, despite the changes the area has undergone due to the migration of people, the advent of missionaries, schools, and numerous governments after Indian Independence. Even while roads and other transit options raise people's quality of living, people remain deeply ingrained in their customary beliefs and practices. In the Adi community, myths and legends are narrated and performed through songs, rituals, and celebrations. According to Joseph Campbell, every group has its own unique set of myths. Since all myths have been proven true through many years or even centuries, they serve as examples for people to follow. Myth offers a space where one can place himself/herself. Myths guide us the transcendent from the phenomenal world. He claims that myths serve four fundamental purposes in a community.

The tribe's norms of acceptable behavior are established by these stories and legends. It provides members with standards for proper social behavior and interpersonal interactions. The psychological purpose of mythology is the final one. From birth to maturity to senility to death, the myth must accompany the individual through all of his life's stages. In the narrative, various characters use local mythology at various points in their lives. To live a happy life, they try to appease spirits by performing ceremonies, rituals, and worship. These rites are equivalent to religious practices in their eyes. According to Mamang Dai, the Adi tribe uses mythology for all of these purposes.

The importance of songs and stories is that they show the intricate structure of human religion, which is based on memory and the power of words in the oral tradition. Life gave rise to it (myths) in us. The collection of tales eventually evolved into parables and a code of conduct that served as the foundation for the tribes' daily customs. Everyone is familiar with the stories in some way, and it is this familiarity that binds a person to a group, a particular area, and a community. However, most frequently, the stories are so ingrained in daily life that they are no longer even recognized as tales.

People look for modern life and order. The assertions of myths are frequently challenged by fundamental science. Still, people look for metaphysical and spiritual explanations for their existence that can frequently assist them cope with various life events. It is fundamental to human nature to cling to something solid. They turn to many myths and stories. According to Mamang Dai, "May be the hunt for faith is the destiny of man, and may be the storyteller's craft can revive our connections to the spirits of the river and the ancient myths by renewing them...." (5)

Conclusion

It's pretty creative of Mamang Dai to present her tribal stories as a novel. Myths and legends require readers to have trust in them at a time when modern society is looking for explanations for every phenomena. A community's myths, tales, beliefs, and rituals are what link people together and persist in their collective unconscious. A novel's creation is akin to restoring the tribe's ancient myths and customs. Since "the entirety of the truth is really a matter of words that each person's perception alters," she explains why this is the case in the book. Myth is a form of communication, according to Roland Barthes in his book *Mythologies*. It is a form of

speech and a way of expressing meaning. Despite the fantasy and imaginative worlds, it is a confrontation with reality rather than a wild escape from it.

Mamang Dai does a masterful job of presenting the myths, tales, beliefs, rites, and ceremonies of the Adis as their unique method of signifying in 'The tales of Pensam.' She is if not a pioneer than a master of this new form of presenting the regional folktales to the world.

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