

Nature As A Being And Provider: A Study Of Select Poems Of Mamang Dai

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Abstract: Mamang Dai is a famous poet from Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh. Her works present nature as not just a background, but a living entity deeply connected to human life. Beauty of Arunachal Pradesh is clearly reflected in Dai's poetry. The two poems which would be discussed in the paper are *The Voice of the Mountain* and *Small Towns and the River*. Dai keeps the natural elements like mountains and rivers at the centre of her works, portraying these as breathing entities and integral to human beings. She makes use of myths, folklores, and indigenous beliefs to investigate how nature and its elements are permanent and deeply connected to human life. She opines through her poetry that life is temporary as well as the death too, but nature stands tall in its place. Often, she uses the imagery of mountains, rivers, and forests to awaken the sense of gratitude and respect among people towards nature. She combines spirituality and ecology shaped by environmental as well as cultural awareness. Her poetry is a great manifestation of the fact that how nature is deeply related to memory and wisdom. She portrays the rivers and the mountains as witnesses to human history, cultures, traditions, identity etc. One of her unique features in her works is that she presents nature as an active participant, not a passive one. Purpose of the study is to inspect how Mamang Dai depicts nature as a cultural, spiritual, and a living force and how her poetry raises consciousness, admiration, and respect towards nature. Along with that, the immense importance of natural elements in the life of human beings would also be studied.

Key words: Nature, Ecology, Mountains, Rivers, Mamang Dai.

INTRODUCTION

Among the many eminent literary figures from Northeast India, Mamang Dai stands out as one of the most influential poets. Her poetry does more than just describe the beauty of nature. Rather, she presents nature and its elements such as the rivers, the mountains etc. as something having life that are deeply linked to peoples' traditions, cultures, memories, and identities. In her works, nature is not shown as separate from human life. Instead, it is portrayed as integral to human beings.

Mamang Dai uses her poetry to highlight the essence of her native land's mysticism and environmental beauty. Her verses are deeply reflective of the natural surroundings that presents her homeland. She depicts nature as a witness to human history and cultural transformations. Her works exemplify nature as a repository of memory and experience. Dai brings the natural landscapes to life through her poetry, which reverberates with ecological consciousness and an innate understanding of the interrelatedness between human beings and the environment. The two poems which have been selected, *The Voice of the Mountain* and *Small Towns and the River* are great examples of the fact that Dai's narrative gives much weight to the natural world, presenting it as an active participant. She also shows the connection between nature, memory, and indigenous wisdom.

Mamang Dai's works highlight how the mountains and rivers carry tales from the past, record the pain of past struggles, and render strength to people facing drastic changes. Nature, in her works is like a guardian, a silent witness to survival and sadness, and a symbol of the courage of indigenous cultures. Her poetry not only narrates individual or community stories but also offers ideas about life, death, loss, identity, and healing through the natural world. She uses poetry very efficiently to analyze the sense of life in nature and its various elements.

OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY:

The objective of this study is to highlight how the poetry of Mamang Dai contributes to ecological understanding and awareness through literary expression. The relevance lies in how her works help us to reconnect with nature considering it as a vital part of our life.

METHODOLOGY:

The methodology adopted is mainly literary, thematic, and textual analysis. Qualitative research methodology will be used in the study.

Understanding Ecological Bonding through Mamang Dai's "The Voice of the Mountain"

The Voice of the Mountain is a beautiful poem by Mamang Dai in her poetry collection *River poems*, published in 2004. In this poem, Dai has given voice to the mountain and it plays the role of a speaker. The poem presents the mountain's immense and eternal spirit, investigating depth of life through ecological lens. It gives voice to the unheard words of the mountain, the guardian of the land of the indigenous tribes. The mountain has been used as a symbol of the living spirit that gives guidance to humanity, narrates stories and stands tall as a guardian. Mamang Dai renders the mountains the qualities almost similar to God, residing at a much higher platform, visualizing everything on earth. The mountain is portrayed as very knowledgeable, knowing everything about the towns and estuary of the rivers. The most important fact is that the local tribes believe in mountain's God like guidance. In that case, the authority of the mountain gets more dominant. The tribes see it as their protector, guardian, and lifesaver. The mountain acts as a barrier for the tribes, protecting them from outside forces.

Mamang Dai, through this poem, says that the mountain holds a very high value in the life of the tribes. They do not consider it as a non-living element of nature. Instead, it is considered as a family member in their life. The mountain has been a great witness to human history. It has been watching people taking birth, struggling, succeeding, and eventually dying. It holds so many stories in its quiver. People's struggles and sorrows are recorded in the spirit of the mountain. Generations have come and gone, but the mountain is standing tall in its place and guiding humanity.

Few lines from the poem *The Voice of the Mountain* clarify this:

"I know the towns, the estuary mouth

There, beyond the last bank,

Where the colour drains from heaven

I can outline the chapters of the world." (Lines 4-7)

Through Mamang Dai's verses, the mountain has been given a voice, and the mountain renders its voice to the marginalized and oppressed sections of people. The mountain has been watching the tribal community as if it is a senior member of their family. People have great admiration and respect for the mountain. It is a symbol of collective memory of the tribes. Some of the lines from the poem illustrate the points:

"In my life I have lived many lives." (Line 19)

"I am the desert and the rain." (Line 24)

"My voice is sea waves and mountain peaks." (Line 20)

The indigenous tribes are also benefited in terms of the natural resources that they get from the foothills of the mountain in the form of medicinal herbs, fruits, fuels, water etc. Mamang Dai seems to be stating that nature needs to be respected by treating it as an inseparable part of our life. One book by the renowned Indian author Amitav Ghosh, titled *The Living Mountain* comes to mind in the context. In the book, a local community, comprised of several villages, has huge amount of respect and admiration for a mountain which they called 'Mahaparbat' adding the word 'Living' to it, they consider it as a living entity and the mountain

also pays back by giving them necessary items to lead a proper life. But, because of some outsiders' influence, the villagers start losing the respect for their Mahaparbat and look upon it as something to be exploited. Out of greed, they start causing harm to it and as a result, natural calamities such as avalanches, landslides etc. occur and the whole area suffers. The message which Amitav Ghosh tries to deliver is that nature is human responsibility and it needs to be conserved and respected. If not, upheavals may follow.

Likewise, Mamang Dai is of the opinion that nature should not be taken as something secondary. It is not only for exploiting. Through her poem *The Voice of the Mountain*, she explains that nature should be at the very centre of life. In simple words, human beings are the slaves in the hands of nature and whenever they try to be the master of it, nature gets lethal.

“Small Towns and the River”: Examining fleeting nature of human life and the permanence of nature

Small Towns and the River is a poem composed by Mamang Dai and is included in her poetry collection *River Poems*, published in 2004. In this poem Dai portrays towns as places full of sorrow and constant deaths, while the river is shown as ever alive and permanent. The poet depicts the essence of life in small towns along the river, where time seems to flow as smoothly and gently as the water. The river is used as a symbol of continuity, connecting generations of people to nature and their historical past. The poem uses the river as a symbol of eternity and the town as a symbol of mortality. By town, Dai here refers to the human construction as well as human life.

On the one hand, Dai presents the picture of small towns as places of dust, strong wind and symbol of death. She highlights the transient nature of human life. The poet attempts to make the readers understand that the towns which are man-made or the constructions, which are built by human beings, are temporary. The buildings collapse one day and the builders also meet death for sure. Their existence is short-lived on this earth. On the other hand, Dai depicts the river as a symbol of permanence. It shows the continuous flow of time no matter what is happening around it. River is presented as something possessing soul and it totally unaffected by the passage of human lives. As we saw in the earlier poem, the mountain acts as a witness to human lives, similarly, in this poem, Dai presents river as a living soul witnessing life and death, and highlighting the mortality of human life and permanence of nature.

The poet personifies the river to invest it with the ideas of holding the breath. She opines that the river is an explorer who seeks the land of fish and stars. River is depicted as an expert, just like an intelligent person, who keeps knowledge about so many aspects of life. For instance, the river knows the first drop of rain that refreshes the dry earth and the mist on the mountaintops that covers the mountain like a scarf. So, the river has been shown as a human being with soul, life, and knowledge as presented in these lines by Dai.

“The river has a soul.

It knows, stretching past the town,
from the first drop of rain to dry earth
and mist on the mountaintops,
the river knows
the immortality of water.” (Lines 17-22)

The poem shows us the reality of life with a deep message implicit in it. The poet seems to express that people tend to fight among themselves for artificial elements of nature which are fleeting in character, while forget to care and admire nature, which is permanent in every respects. Nature is neglected and ignored just for the materialistic greed. Human beings tend to forget the fact that life is very short and death is the ultimate destination. In that case, not much hustle and bustle should be practiced for temporary things. Nature is evergreen and permanent, no matter what the situation is. It is our real abode. This is a very strong reason why we should work towards ecological understanding and preservation, creating awareness towards nature and ecology.

CONCLUSION:

Mountains and rivers are recurrent themes in Dai's poetry and the two poems discussed in the paper are great illustrations of that. Through these images, she captures the permanency of natural world and the temporariness of the human world. *The Voice of the Mountain* exemplifies that the mountain is deeply connected to the identity, collective memory, history of the tribes and how they treat the mountain as their family member. Dai's works reflect a deep, almost spiritual connection to nature. Through the poems discussed above, Mamang Dai puts emphasis on the need for accepting nature and ecology as integral part of human life. She depicts nature as an active participant, not a passive one. Her poem *Small Towns and the River* beautifully illustrates the continuous flow of time and the short-lived nature of human life.

She states further that interrelationship between humans and nature is very deep. She focuses on the fact that no matter how modern our life becomes, if we are not connected to nature, it is futile. Her poems manifest that landscapes and the natural elements on land play the role of a being as well as provider. Nature is closely linked to the collective memory, identity, indigenous wisdom, culture, traditions, history etc. of the local tribes. As Dai highlights in her works, human existence is intertwined with nature, and by neglecting it, we risk losing not just our environment but our sense of peace and identity as well. Her poems offer contemporary readers a pathway to reconnect with nature, including it as a vital part of human life. Mamang Dai urges the readers to treat nature as a primary part of human life.

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