

Mountain as Living Oracles of the Past and the Future in Mamang Dai's Poem "The Voices of Mountains"

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Abstract:

Northeast poetry refers to the rich and diverse literary tradition of poetry originating from the northern eastern region of India. Known for its cultural diversity, natural beauty, and vibrant traditions, the northeast is a home to a multitude of indigenous communities, each with its own unique language, customs, and folklore. Poetry from this region often reflects the cultural heritage, socio-political realities, and environmental concerns of the communities living in the region.

Another characteristic of Northeast poetry is the breathtaking landscapes and natural beauty of the northeast serve as a recurring theme in its poetry. Poets often draw inspiration from the lush forests, rivers, mountains, and valleys of the region, using vivid imagery and descriptive languages to evoke the sights, sounds, and sensations of the natural world.

The North-eastern poets stand as representatives of their entire community, and their poems are not singular, but they are voices of the inhabitants of the region. They explore themes of identity, belonging, and cultural heritage, reflecting the complex socio-political realities of the region. Poets address issues such as ethnicity, migration, displacement, and cultural assimilation, giving voice to the experiences and struggles of marginalized communities.

Overall, Northeast poetry offers a unique and richly textured literary landscape, showcasing the voices and perspectives of the diverse communities that call the region home. It serves as a testament to the resilience, creativity, and cultural richness of the North-eastern states of India.

Keywords: cultural Heritage, Socio-political realities, ethnicity, migration, marginalized communities, resilience.

Introduction:

Northeast poetry encapsulates the diverse literary expression emerging from the north-eastern region of India, characterized by its cultural vibrancy, socio-political complexities, and rich natural landscapes. The poetry reflect the myriad voices and experiences of the indigenous communities inhabiting the region, often drawing inspiration from their unique cultural traditions, folklore and oral stories.

The lush forests, majestic mountains, and meandering rivers of the northeast serve as prominent motif in its poetry. Poets often use vivid imagery and metaphors to depict the beauty and bounty of the natural world, as well as to express concerns about environmental degradation and the impact of development on the region's ecosystem.

Mamang Dai was born in Pashighat, East Siang District, in 1957. She belongs to the Adi Community of Arunachal Pradesh. She is a renowned Indian writer from Arunachal Pradesh, known for her contributions to literature, especially in English and Assamese. Her works often explore themes of identity, culture, and the environment, drawing from her North-eastern roots. Dai's writing reflects a deep connection to the region's landscapes and traditions, offering insights into diverse culture. She has received numerous accolades, including the Sahitya Akademi Award, for her impactful literary contributions.

Mamang Dai, in an interview, states the following regarding how the oral Tradition of Arunachal Pradesh has influenced her as a writer. She expressed that oral tradition is a way of life that nurtured them through the centuries. All their beliefs, rituals and customary practices have come to them via Oral Tradition. About literature, very briefly, the classical literature of the Adi people consists of epic narratives originally transmitted in ritual language by a Miri, the shaman well versed in the different branches of evolutionary history. Collectively this literature is called Aabang meaning a story or an act of story-telling for an audience.(Sarangi, 2017). She voices her emotions and feelings through the images and metaphors chosen chiefly from nature. Her search for identity has exposed her to being a nature-loving humanist. She reveals her beliefs in the tribal pantheon of God and the mystery of environmental ecology. (Das 96)

The Poem "Voice of Mountains" is of mountains, the very spirit of the poet's existence. In this political atmosphere, the only way out is to make oneself fit in the atmosphere in the changing time. Trees, mountains, and rivers only can provide the food for human love as well as mental peace.

From Where I sit on the high platform
I can see the ferry lights crossing
criss-crossing the big river.

'The Voice of the Mountain' by Mamang Dai talks about the mountain in the first stanza. Here the mountains who themselves are expressing their feelings. According to the mountain, he is still at one place from thousands of years ago and being at a higher platform visualizes everything like God. The mountains say that all day long he sits quietly watching all the activities The mountain says that he can see the ferry lights that cross the big river below. As it is at a distance, the movement of the ferry appears as the "criss-crossing" light works on the river creating a dynamic and visually engaging scene. This imagery captures the interconnectedness of human activity and nature, as well as the passage of time and life's journey. The criss-crossing of the ferry light symbolises the constant movement and flow of existence, perhaps reflecting themes of transition, change and the cyclic nature of life The poet uses synecdoche in the "ferry lights" and the variety used here is "part for the whole".

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.

'The Voice of the Mountain' by Mamang Dai suggest a deep connection between the narrator and the estuary. His omniscient view of the landscape makes him appear like the Almighty The familiarity with

the town and its estuary implies a profound understanding of their surroundings. By mentioning the "last bank," the poem alludes to a boundary or threshold beyond which lies a broader perspective. The estuary, as a meeting point of land and sea, becomes a symbol of transition and exploration. The narrator's ability to "outline the chapters of the world" at this juncture implies a sense of enlightenment or revelation, where they can perceive the interconnectedness and diversity of life's experiences. It suggests that within this natural landscape, one can gain insights into the complexities of existence and the unfolding narratives of the world

The other day a young man arrived from the village.
Because he could not speak
he brought a gift of fish
from the land of rivers.
It seems such acts are repeated:
We live in territories forever ancient and new,
and as we speak in changing languages.
I, also, leave my spear leaning by the tree
and try to make a sign.

In Mamang Dai's poem "Voice of the Mountain," these lines depict a poignant exchange between the narrator and a young man from a village. The young man, unable to communicate verbally, expresses himself through the universal language of gestures and actions. By bringing a gift of fish from the land of rivers, he bridges the gap between their worlds and establishes a connection through the shared experience of sustenance from the natural environment.

The repetition of such acts suggests a timeless cycle of human interaction, where gestures of goodwill and understanding transcend linguistic barriers. The statement "We live in territories forever ancient and new" reflects the coexistence of tradition and innovation, highlighting the enduring essence of human existence amidst changing landscapes and cultures.

Leaving the spear leaning against the trees signifies a departure from aggression or defensiveness, opting instead for peaceful gestures. By attempting to communicate through signs, the narrator acknowledges the power of nonverbal communication and the importance of understanding beyond words. Overall, these lines convey themes of empathy, adaptation, and the universality of human experience across diverse cultures and landscapes.

I am an old man sipping the breeze
that is forever young.
In my life I have lived many lives.
My voice is sea waves and mountain peaks,
In the transfer of symbols
I am the chance syllable that orders the world
Instructed with history and miracles.

In Mamang Dai's poem "Voice of the Mountain," these lines depict the profound wisdom and interconnectedness of the narrator with the natural world. The image of being an old man "shipping the

breeze" suggests a sense of timelessness and continuity, where the breeze, though constantly renewed, carries echoes of past experiences and knowledge.

The juxtaposition of the eternal youthfulness of the breeze with the narrator's many lived lives underscores the cyclical nature of existence. Through their experiences, they have become attuned to the voices of the sea waves and mountain peaks, symbolizing a deep connection to the elements and the rhythms of nature. As "the chance syllable that orders the world," the narrator embodies the power of language and symbolism to shape reality. They are a conduit for the transfer of knowledge, history, and miracles, reflecting the transformative potential of words and stories to influence the course of human events. Through this reference, the poet associates the concept of the "universal language" about which Paulo Coelho has talked about in *'The Alchemist'*.

I am the desert and the rain.
The wild bird that sits in the west.
The past that recreates itself
and particles of life that clutch and cling
For thousands of years-
I know, i know these things
as rocks know, burning in the sun's embrace,
about clouds, and sudden rain;
as I know a cloud is a cloud is a cloud,
A cloud is this uncertain pulse
that sits over my heart.

In the sixth stanza, the speaker merges contrasting element of nature identifying both the arid vastness of the desert and the nourishing abundance of rain. This juxtaposition suggests a duality within the speaker's own being, encompassing both harshness and nurturing qualities. The image of the wild bird evokes a sense of freedom and untamed spirit, while its location in the west may symbolise the setting sun and the end of the day. This imagery could imply a sense of rest or contemplation after the day's journey, as well as connection to the natural world. Again, the line "The past that recreates itself" hints at the cyclic nature of time and history, suggesting that the past is not static but rather constantly reshaping and influencing the present. It reflects on the ways in which our personal and collective histories continue to reverberate and shape our identities and experiences. Dai delves into the enduring resilience of life, portraying it as comprised of particle that endures over millennia, emphasizing the persistence and tenacity of existence itself. In the final line she introduces an image of a cloud hovering over the speaker's heart, metaphorically representing an uncertain and fluctuating emotional state. This cloud could symbolize feelings of ambiguity, doubt, or vulnerability, contrasting with the stability and permanence suggested by the preceding imagery of nature and history.

In the end the universe yields nothing
except a dream of permanence.
Peace is a falsity
A moment of rest comes after long combat:

The opening line sets a tone of existential inquiry, suggesting a sense of futility or emptiness in the face of the vastness of the universe. It reflects on the inherent limitations of the human endeavours and the ultimate insignificance of the individual pursuits in the grand scheme of the cosmos. Amidst the sense of futility, there exists a longing or dream for something enduring or permanent. This could be interpreted as a desire for lasting significance or meaning in a world where everything is transient. Dai again challenges conventional notions of peace as a stable or achieve state. Instead, peace is portrayed as elusive or deceptive, perhaps suggesting that true harmony is ephemeral and subject to disruption by the tumultuous forces of the world. Despite the scepticism about the enduring nature of peace, Dai acknowledges the possibility of temporary respite or tranquillity. This line speaks to the cyclic nature of life, where periods of rest or calm often follows periods of turmoil or strife.

From the east the warrior returns
with the blood of peonies.
I am the child who died at the edge of the world.
the distance between end and hope.
The star diagram that fell from the sky,
The summer that makes men weep.
I am the woman lost in translation
who survives, with happiness to carry on.

In the eighth stanza of *'The Voice of the Mountain'* by Mamang Dai, the first two lines are connected using enjambment with the idea of the last stanza. Here, the poet refers to the warrior who returns with the "blood of peonies". Such a contrasting image refers to the coexistence of struggle and beauty. Thereafter, the mountain says that his child-like spirit died at that edge of the world where he stands firmly. Moreover, the poet creates another contrast in the following lines. Here, she highlights the vast emotional and spiritual distance between reaching the end of one's journey or aspiration and finding hope and adversity. She refers starlit sky as a lost guide or a shattered sense of order and direction and the scorching summer heat intensifies human suffering or introspection. In the final lines the speaker embodies resilience and the power of the human spirit to endure despite adversity. The woman "lost in transition" suggests a sense of displacement or disconnect, yet she finds strength to survive and carry on with happiness. It speaks to the capacity for resilience and adaptation in the face of life's challenges, emphasizing the importance of finding joy and meaning even in the midst of struggle.

I am the breath that opens the mouth of the canyon,
the sunlight on the tips of trees;
There, where the narrow gorge hastens the wind
I am the place where memory escapes
the myth of time,
I am the sleep in the mind of the mountain.

In the last stanza of *'The Voice of the Mountain'*, the mountain refers to its magnanimity. The speaker personifies nature, claiming to be the very essence that animates the landscape. The breath that opens the canyon suggests a powerful, life-giving force, with the sunlight on the tips of trees symbolizes

illumination and vitality. Again, the poet continues the personification by identifying themselves as the locus of memory and timeless with nature. The narrow gorge and hastening wind evoke a sense of movement and urgency, perhaps reflecting the fleeting nature of time. However, in this place, memory escapes the constraints of time, suggesting a transcendence of temporal boundaries. The final line encapsulates the overarching theme of the poem- the mountain's consciousness. The speaker embodies the state of rest within the mountain's mind, implying a deep connection between the speaker and the mountain's inner thoughts and rhythms. This imagery evokes a sense of tranquillity and timelessness, suggesting that within the mountain's vastness lies a profound sense of peace and stillness.

The Voice of the Mountain' by Mamang Dai consists of nine stanzas. The line-count of each stanza isn't regular. It moves how nature moves without predictability or precision. There is an organic environment just like one can find in nature. The first person persona present in the poem gives it the quality of a spontaneous lyric poem. Moreover, like an ode, the poet meditates on a single theme. It is the voice of the poem and how it expresses itself through the words of humans. However, there isn't any specific rhyme scheme in the poem. The poet creates an internal rhythm in the text for maintaining the flow of the poem. The metrical composition of the poem is also irregular. One can find the use of spondee, pyrrhic, iambic feet, and anapaestic feet in this poem.

'The Voice of the Mountain' by Mamang Dai contains several literary devices. Likewise, in the first stanza, there is a personification and epanaphora. In the second stanza, there is a metaphor in "the colour drains from heaven". Here, the poet compares reflection to draining water or colour. Moreover, in "chapters of the world" there is a metaphor for rivers.

In the following stanza, "land of rivers" is a metonym for the plains of India. Along with that, there is an antithesis in "We live in territories forever ancient and new". Moreover, in the fifth stanza, there are several metaphors. Apart from that, the poet uses alliteration in "clutch and cling" and "these things". And, she uses palilogy in "I know, I know these things" and "I know a cloud is a cloud is a cloud". Such repetition is meant for the sake of emphasising the ideas present in the lines.

In the following stanzas, there is an epigram in "Peace is falsity". The lines, "In the end the universe yields nothing/ except a dream of permanence" contain a paradox. Moreover, "dream of permanence" is a metaphor. However, the poet uses irony in the phrase, "the myth of time". It is a metaphor too.

Mountain play an important role in the quest for understanding interactions between nature and society. In Mamang Dai's poems the mystique and grandeur of mountains along with myth and folklore surrounding them weave an ethereal story around these land masses. Mamang Dai is a celebrated writer of Arunachal Pradesh whose works are steeped in tribal folklore. She has written many poems which deal with myths of her land. She writes of elements of nature like cloud, river and mountain in her works can felt. Coming from Arunachal Pradesh, she has seen the scourge of insurgency from close quarters and has been surrounded over this long battle. She dreams of a peaceful vine and bamboo paradise where the cloud, the bat and the rain are in absolute harmony.

Mountains play an important role in the quest for understanding interactions between nature and society. In Mamang Dais' poems the mystique and grandeur of mountains along with myth and folk lore surrounding them weave an ethereal story around these land masses. Mamang Dai is a celebrated writer of Arunachal Pradesh whose works are steeped in tribal folklore. A former bureaucrat, Mamang Dai has the prestige of being awarded the PadmaShri for her contribution to literature. She has written many poems and two novels, one of which deal with myths of her land.

She writes of elements of nature like clouds, rivers and mountains and in her works can be felt that primordial search for a “homeland” in the spiritual sense of the term. Coming from Arunachal Pradesh, she has seen the scourge of insurgency from close quarters and has been sorrowed over this long battle. She dreams of a peaceful vine and bamboo paradise where the cloud, the bat and the rain are in absolute harmony.

In fact, recently, Arunachal Pradesh was reeling under an economic blockade and Mamang Dai’s hometown was badly affected by such blockades (Naga). The people of Arunachal Pradesh were put to great inconvenience with prices of domestic commodities sky rocketing. Blockades such as these are common and accepted as the destiny of the people in this part of the world. While being awarded the Padma Shri, YD Thongchi, President Arunachal Pradesh Literary Society said that Mamang Dai ‘is firmly rooted with the soil of her birth place’. He also remarked that her heart was always in consonance with the rivers, mountains, trees, jungles, rituals, legends, mythology, dances, villages, prayer flags of her ‘dear abode, Arunachal Pradesh’ (Padmashree). The hills also form a common theme of several writers of the North-eastern states. Temsula Ao, Mona Zote, Robin Ngangom and YD Thongchi find it natural to write about mountains with their glory and pristine sublimity.

The mountain is not merely another memory of childhood and youth but forms part of a continuing relationship with the environment. The insularity of the northeastern states are also related to the terrain in which hills and mountains constitute a formidable barrier. The ‘mainland versus hinterland’ debate follows also from the ‘so called distance’ in terms of miles and milestones. The North East has been unique in the way it has administered itself over the years. Sujata Miri says that none of the communities in the North East conceived of a law of peace which would apply to any other community but themselves. If there was a war it was always fought within the parameters of certain rules. In such a conflict, the main consideration was the preservation of one’s own territory rather than “extension of it”. Thus traditionally accepted actions were in consonance with the goal of peaceful co-existence (Miri). The name Arunachal Pradesh itself represents the Sanskrit meaning of “The Land of the Dawn Lit Mountains’ as this state receives the first rays of the sun in the country. Hence, little surprise that the mountains form the story lines of many a narrative here. Arunachal is a land of great beauty with soft snow covered peaks, which on melting tumble into rowdy streams and rivers. In fact, the state has the honour of being one of the greenest parts of the country. In an article on Arunachal Pradesh, Dai says that Arunachal is still one of the ‘last frontiers of the world’ where indigenous faith and practices still survive in an almost original form as handed down by ancestors.

It is, however, equally true that, because of the remoteness and historical isolation of this ‘forgotten land’, there is little dissemination of information about the goings on in the state (Dai, Arunachal Pradesh). There are several tribes in Arunachal Pradesh and they follow an indigenous lifestyle. Their beliefs in nature are very strong and by that corollary they become champions of the environment. Sacred forests, birds and beasts form part of their collective consciousness. The highest mountain peak in the Aka (one of the tribes of AP) inhabited area called Wojophu is considered a sacred mountain and removal of any resources from there and even hunting is strictly prohibited. Akas believe that breaking of such taboos will lead to bleeding from nose and mouth finally leading to death. So, even today this mountain is covered with dense forest cover.

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