



Narrative of Myths in Mamang Dai's Pinyar, the Widow

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Abstract:

Mamang Dai is one of the influential women writers from North-East region. Her work is a voyage to explore the dark corner of this region. Dai's home state, Arunachal Pradesh, is home to a variety of tribes, traditions and folk beliefs. Each tribe has its own rules and everyone is expected to abide by them. Dai uses myth and superstitions through the life of 'Pinyar', the protagonist in her interconnected tale Pinyar, the Widow from the novel *The Legends of Pensam* (2006). The present study is an attempt to explore the incidents which highlight the presence of myths and superstitions and their effect on human world.

Key Words: Myth, tradition, folk-belief, effect, human.

Introduction:

The literature of North East India is a melting pot of culture, tradition and beliefs. Each tribe has its own rules and everyone is expected to follow them. Mamang Dai is one of the influential women writers of NE India. Her work is a voyage of exploration of unexplored North-East region. Dai was the first women to be selected for the post for IAS from her state, Arunachal Pradesh in 1979 but left her job to pursue her career in journalism. She received Padma Shri in 2011 and for her novel *The Black Hill*, she received the Sahitya Academy award in 2017. The Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh conferred on her annual Verrier Elwin Prize in 2013 for non-fictional work *Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land* (2003). Her poetry collections included *River Poems* (2004), *The Balm of Time* (2008), *Hambreelma's Loom* (2014) and *Midsummer Survival Lyrics* (2014) followed by novels like *Stupid Cupid* (2008) and *Escaping the Land* (2021).

Discussion:

Myths has existed in every society. These provide a key to a human society as a matter of historical record. Myths are usually symbolic stories of unknown origin and related at least in part to traditional real-life events and religious beliefs. In the *Legends of Pensam*, Mamang Dai presents the culture, values and belief systems of Adi tribes. Her work **Pinyar, the Widow** is based on myths and superstitions. It is taken from her first novel *Legends of Pensam*, a series of interconnected tales which seek to assert the rich Adi tribe inhabiting the Siang Valley of Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal Pradesh is the homeland of 26 tribes with over 110 sub-clans having different dialect of its own. Like the other tribes, Adis practice an animistic faith that is woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world. (author's note) This paper is an attempt to direct **Pinyar, the Widow** as a voice to the oppressed in order to bring attention to the trauma of marginalized women. Tilottama Misra aptly recapitulates, "for a region marred by decades of violence, its literature is not just a social and historical map of events, but also a medium of retelling its story to the world. In the yarn of such a region one often finds anger, fear, and pain but also endurance, restraint and hope intricately woven". (Misra, 2011)

Hoxo tells the story of Pinyar, who is abandoned by her husband, Orka. When Orka left for his village, he took their son Kamur with him as the child was a male one. The villagers instead of availing justice to her, she is blamed for her misfortune. Pinyar was not just a wife then, she was also a mother of an infant. Pinyar believed that all these happening was caused by something supernatural. The community is thought to protect the individual, but at the same time the community also protects its own interests.

A careful reading of Dai's fiction indicates us that the women are innocent, submissive, simple and hardworking. Because of poverty and lack of opportunities, they work hard to make a living and to maintain their families. Regarding women, Dai mentions, "They have been in the forest all morning, cutting wood, cracking dry bamboo and piling stray branches seasoned by sun and rain to be carried back to their village." (Dai, 2006:27) This kind of picture also suggests us to understand the life-style of simple Adi folk and particularly the socio-economic position of women and their contribution in running their livelihood.

After a few years, Pinyar was forced to marry by Lekon. But she was so unfortunate that Lekon was shot through the head of her own village. This time also Pinyar did not hold the old man responsible for her husband's death. Rather she said, 'Every year at least three men die in hunting accidents in our parts.' (Dai, 2006:28) The Adis believe that there lived a race of supernatural beings called miti- mili. Before their disappearance from the world, they passed on the cake 'si-ye' to mankind and asked them to be cautious. It was only the women who were allowed to use them to make the rice-beer. The beer makes the men hallucinate and households had to strictly see to it that nobody took it before hunting. Sometimes people fail to observe these rules and that's why accident occurs and men die in the forest. Pinyar hold heartedly believed in this tradition of 'si-ye' and said "There is a bad spirit lurking in the si-ye that makes men go mad.' (Dai, 2006:29) Adis also used to sprinkle si-ye on the eyelids of those who die an unnatural death. It is believed that for the act of sprinkling on the eye-lids, their spirit would never be returned on some restless search. Even when her house catches fire, she is again blamed and banished from the village by the decision makers of the village. It is believed that the 'tiger spirit' that causes fires and tempting it to follow others home too. In such situation woman like Pinyar remained voiceless expressing her grief as "It seems my destiny is cursed!" (Dai, 2006:28)

Kamur, the son of Pinyar was a clerk in a government department. But in an insane situation he murdered his infant girl child and the younger son who had been cycling in the backward. He also attempted to murder his wife too but failed and dropped the rusty dao and 'fell to the ground blubbering and weeping'. He uttered "what happened? What I have done?" (Dai, 2006:30) On this incident, some people of Pigo town did not blame Kamur rather they argued, 'it is something in the blood' (Dai, 2006:31) and talked about a particular Aubergine plant grew to the height of a tree where Kamur was seen sitting under the tree during odd hours. People considered the tree as a ghostly one and 'no one dared to cut it down.' (Dai, 2006:31)

It was Pinyar, who was always meek and mild, never raised her voice against all those societal norms of her clan and accepted her destiny all the time. She was a victim of various patriarchal social structures and norms. But when police took Kamur in their custody, the same Pinyar, the mother who singly fought 'like a wild cat' to shield her son from the anger of the town and at last released Kamur from prison. She did everything to restore him back to his normal life and Pinyar proved the power of motherhood. From the very childhood Kamur was deprived of his mother's love. Little Kamur always had to wait for his mother during sickness shivering with fear. Now he wanted to disclose his mind before his mother like a frightened child, "I Know, mother, you think there is something wrong with me. But it is not true. I am only tired. I have been sitting here all these years waiting for something to happen, waiting for my wife to yield with love, waiting for my sons to smile into my face, for my daughter to rush into my arms." (Dai, 2006:33) Even he felt that his once shy wife now looked at him with hatred and nothing happened according to his will. All these effected the inner psychology of Kamur in deep and he committed murder.

But the mother Pinyar was so innocent that she never tried to understand the psychopathic situation of her son. When Kamur returned home Pinyar said, "My boy is being haunted by an evil spirit because we failed to observe certain rites in the past... All the great priests will come to exercise the bad spirit. I have called them." (Dai, 2006:33) She thought it was a mistake on her part that she failed to observe the rites and rituals in the past. If someone asked her about Kamur, she had all the words ready to absolve him of any sin. Later Kamur went to a distance town to live with his wife and again Pinyar had to live her life desolate, isolated all alone. She offered her 'silver coins strung together with the tooth of a tiger and a wild boar' to

the narrator to hand over her daughter-in-law. People believed that these auspicious things would bring success and luck to them and said, "Faith is everything". (Dai, 2006:35)

Conclusion:

Literature plays an important role in revealing the truth of society. In a patriarchal society, women have to follow the rules set by the 'centre'. Mamang Dai explains the injustices that are ingrained in society in her '**Pinyar, the Widow**'. Through the character Pinyar, Dai tries to illuminate the myths of the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, some crucial episodes that had exploited the innocent people of her region. She remarks, "It is the small world where anything can happen and everything can be lived." (Dai, 2006) The mythical narratives of Mamang Dai thus create historiography.

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