

# THE STUDY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC SUBSTANTIATION OF TRIBAL ECO-SPIRITUALISM IN MAMANG DAI'S THE LEGENDS OF PENSAM

## Abstract

Ecology is the study of how all living things interact with their natural surroundings. It is the discipline that studies the harmony between nature and humans. It is based on a relationship with God because He created the Universe. The rhythm of nature has been a major source of inspiration for tribal culture and spiritual traditions in North East India for a very long time. Tribal ecological spirituality appears on some of the tenets of nature's behaviour. All of the resources they need for their livelihood are provided by nature. Because of their reliance on nature, they are able to live a life. It focuses on the metaphysical relationship between the universe and One Transcendent Reality. This research paper entitled "The Study of Ethnographic Substantiation of Tribal Eco Spiritualism in Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*" demonstrates the Adi people's attitude toward environmentally friendly living and their reliance on the supreme and the spiritual potential of humanity and its surroundings. It is mostly from the viewpoint of the Adi tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. Mamang Dai is a well-known tribal voice from North East India. Her fictional world is made up of the region's alluring scenery, magical experiences, colourful ethnography, mythology, folklore, and myths. Mamang Dai's decision to write about her tribal tales in the form of a novel is quite original. In a time when modern culture seeks explanations for every phenomenon, myths and tales demand readers' confidence. The myths, stories, beliefs, and rituals of a community remain in their collective unconscious and serve as a unifying force. In *The Legends of Pensam*, Mamang Dai does a wonderful job of conveying the myths, tales,

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beliefs, rites, and ceremonies of the Adis as their distinctive means of indicating. In recent years, the study of "Earth and nature-based spirituality" has spread across continents. Ecospirituality is linked to a variety of activities, including "mountaineering, new shamanic ritualizing, and states of consciousness." ( Taylor, 2001). Although there is a lot of difference, all proponents of eco spirituality have a sense of connection and belonging to nature. The research work examines how ecospiritual themes as well as tribal spiritualism is supported ethnographically in *The Legends of Pensam*. The fiction is filled with shamanic and mountain ceremonies. It highlights how tribal communities strongly believe in the power of rituals. It also includes pahari pratha, or mountain rites and spiritual practices connected to North Eastern tribes as well as folklore and myths. Nowadays, people seek modernity. With all the amenities and technical advancements, man is frequently driven to seek for a specific order. Meanwhile myths and beliefs are frequently avoided in the midst of the hectic lifestyle. Humans are still in search of metaphysical and spiritual explanations for their existence. It can frequently assist them in coping with various life events. Human nature requires adhere to substantial spiritualism because they are dependent upon their own ethnography in the modern world. Spirituality is inner peace and it transfers from the outside to the inner self. The people of Adi face a lot of struggles and they are colonized by Western people. After encountering struggles, challenges, and colonialism, they retain their rituals, beliefs, myths and spiritual consciousness in their own inhabitants' land.

**Keywords:** Spiritualism, Mythology, Ethnography, Beliefs, Ecology

The stereotypes of Northeast India in English literature are as prevalent as those associated with the nation. A significant number of writers and poets from the North East of India have achieved renown and critical acclaim over the past few decades. They are demonstrating how well the region has been able to translate the grandeur and beauty of its terrain onto its literary canvas. One of these writers is Mamang Dai. She is a versatile author of four poetical works, two non-fiction volumes, and five works of fiction in addition to her countless newspaper pieces. The North East region, which is endowed with an alluring topography. It has generated literary works in which nature and its importance to human life have organically negotiated their ways. The region's spiritual environment is made up of the land and its inhabitants inseparably. The goal of all traditional faiths is to achieve "inner truth," "peace," "beauty," and "purity," which is meant by spirituality. It rises "above the essentially religious" and serves as "a ladder to human perfection." (Nandakumar, 2017). There is ethnographic evidence for tribal spiritualism in *The Legends of Pensam*.

Mamang Dai highlights the majesty of her clan by saying, "I was born in the mountains, in a village where boys kicked rocks around pretending to play football" (LP). She considers the Adis' environmental and spiritual awareness

Like the majority of tribes inhabiting the central belt of Arunachal, the Adis practice an animistic that is woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world (LP 01).

In the book's prologue, there is a mention of a myth about a woman who competed with the gods to weave a tapestry. In a brief passage, the book describes the Adi people's traditional religious beliefs:

In these small clearings in the middle of the forest, people have premonitions. Women dream. Babies are born who grow up unnaturally fast, like deer or lion cubs. Infant mortality is high. Old women still braid threads of vine and pray for safe passage. (LP 10)

*The Legends of Pensam* is a collection of nineteen interwoven tales that describe the Adi tribe's way of life and religious system. The stories show how a group of Adi people transform from a primitive society into one that is evolving towards a modern set up, living, dreaming, and experiencing life at a certain point in time. The stories are divided into four sections with the sub-titles "A Diary of the World," "Songs of the Rhapsodist," "Daughters of the Village," and "A Matter of Time". The Stories of Pensam's plot involves a lot of the factors that go into creating the Adis mythologies, legends, taboos, etc. Since they are an animist civilization, a big part of their belief system is centered on what appears to be supernatural. It is interesting to remark that these ostensibly supernatural ideas contribute to the development of a special environment where people and nonhuman animals can coexist together. The Adi society has thus been portrayed in *The Legends of Pensam*. According to their worldview, the story progresses to show how outside forces changed the Adi society's trajectory.

*The Legends of Pensam*' begins with the tale "A Diary of the World," introduces the reader to the Adi homeland known as "Pensam," which literally translates to "in-between" in the Adi language. The setting of the stories "in-between" the mountain which is located in Arunachal Pradesh. The word "pensam" can also be used figuratively to describe the stories

that are interspersed throughout the book's main narrative. These mountain dwellers, who were surrounded by superstitions on the one hand and ancient rituals on the other, struggled against repression and homogenization were occasionally turning to violence and related crimes but primarily relying on their unique rituals, practises, stories and legends, memories of the past, and current revelry for their sustenance.

The novel began with the story of Hoxo, the mysterious child who was dropped from the sky. The boy who had fallen from the sky was brought home in a basket by Lutor whose wife warmly embraced him.

She lifted out of the basket. Even today Hoxo could not remember any happiness greater than the moment of that touch he had known more than half a century ago. Hoxo immediately sensed there were no other children in the house. He had no idea how old he was, no one said anything...(LP 08)

*The Legends of Pensam* was laden with mountain rituals and shamanic rites. It was demonstrating the tribal people's unwavering faith in the lasting effects of those events. One of their strong beliefs was the vision of Biribik, the water serpent. The serpent was a symbol of all spirits, thus everyone in the Adi tribe still held the belief that anything unpleasant would occur in the village if an unexpected sight was seen in the river. Then an old Serpent ritual was performed to treat and put an end to the suffering.

The tribe's beliefs were strengthened by the fact that the small fish was found in Lutor's pocket after his death. It was also seen as a manifestation of the spirit. When Lutor first encountered Biribik, a water serpent with old eyes and a horned head, he had a premonition that he would die. The small fish was also thought to be a manifestation of the spirit. However, he was forbidden from eating certain foods while he was in exile. Food could be given to an exile or banished person by the family. Shamans used rituals to treat the sick, and Kepi's parents were told to hold a particular ceremony just in case a snake spirit had wrapped itself around their son's body. Even though a serpent ritual was performed when they bargained with the spirits, it was said that the spirits had dispersed because Kepi was thought to have never recovered from the ailment after his father killed a snake.

The owners of burned-out homes were exiled. Because they got fear of inciting the tiger spirit that started fires. They were required to observe a period of taboo during which no one was allowed to visit or dine with them. A narrative about a race of supernatural beings known as the miti-mili, who produce the enigmatic yeast known as si-ye, was related by Pinyar. Pinyar was a widow whose home burned down. Before a hunt or expedition, the si-ye was prohibited because it caused men to have hallucinations and is said to have mystical powers. The si-ye was sprinkled on the eyelids of individuals who died an unnatural death to ensure that their spirits would not return on a restless hunt. According to Pinyar, some houses occasionally failed to follow the regulations, which resulted in men dying in the woodlands. A priest was called to exorcise the evil spirits after Kamur, who killed his own daughter. It was thought to have been possessed by a wicked spirit as a result of his parents' and grandparents' failure to execute specific rites in the past.

The aubergine plant, which grew to be the size of a tree. It was avoided by the population because nobody dared to remove it and nobody could remember planting it.

Because it was thought to be the cause for Kamur's unusual behaviour. The unusual behaviour of Kamur was also ascribed to the taboo on bloodlines that were associated with seeing visions, being visited by ghosts, and experiencing fits of insanity. The Adis believed that something in one's blood might determine whether one had the appropriate marriage or life. The story also showed how particular dances, which conveyed folklore and mythology, were strongly tied to certain beliefs.

The addressing of mountains and air turned in every direction was done to appease the envious spirits to ensure safe return with the promise: Humans believe in spirits and their territories such as the territory of Dimitayang, a lonely spirit who stirred up the lake waters and clutches trespassing men in ice. The Adi tribe's superstitions, myths, and taboos were intertwined with elements of the traditional religious beliefs in the novel *The Legend of Pensam*.

The pristine country of the Adis had been affected by the onslaught of globalisation. The social infrastructure had been greatly impacted and it had undergone significant change. It was the result of political upheaval in locations far from their home. The Second World War, in which numerous significant battles were fought in the area, and subsequent events like the arrival of the "Bereetes" (the British) or "Migluns," as the Adis termed them, were the political and historical factors. It should be noted that Dai emphasised the Second World War as the catalyst for change. There was also mention of the Adis' initial run-in with the Bereetes sometime in the early 1800s, as evidenced by the characters' constant references to a road that runed through the centre of the earth, which was clearly a reference to the fabled "Stilwell Road."

The Adi people came into close touch with the "Migluns" while the Stilwell Road was being built. It was the significant amount of change that occurred. During this time, the untarnished Adi emerged from their disguise as labourers on building sites, bringing with them rifles, English alphabets, and a certain disenchantment. While the opening section was filled with evocative descriptions of the landscape's lushness, the final section, titled "a matter of time," dealt with the changes of Adi. This change took many different forms and was rooted in concepts like "progress" and "development," which were crucial in an area. It had recently been freed from foreign occupation. It was significant to remember that the end of the Second World War also signalled the end of British occupation in India. With a sense of newly discovered duty, the independent India's newly established government embarked on a full-scale effort to ensure developmental activities throughout the nation, and Arunachal Pradesh joined this trend.

The Adi had previously gone through many alterations because they had already been exposed to a foreign influence during the war. Because they were a significant component of the center of construction activity at the time. To reside in and oversee construction of the Stilwell Road, the builders needed good housing and buildings. The British arranged for building supplies like iron rods and bricks to be transported there through motor vehicles, which signalled the start of the construction of foreign constructions on Adis territory. More roads were constructed for a consistent supply of building supplies as one demand led to the next. The independent government's renewed interest sped up the procedure even more. Businesses developed on and around their land, and some locations developed into towns.

The Adi developed a taste for the brick and rod buildings, and over time, dust and other detritus began to appear throughout the once-green environment. Schools and offices were expanded. The two new towns of Pigo and Gurdum were created throughout time. Dai provided a clear account of Gurdum. The town was always covered in trash. Plastic was scattered along the slopes, adhered to the banks of rivers, and sat atop trees. The bare slopes that were closest to the town were damaged by broken glass and discarded packaging. The slope was being chipped away by workers while they sucked on wet bidis. Their women watched from a distance, their gaze black and nasty. They lived, loved, bathed in the open on the side of the road, quarrelled vehemently, and occasionally murdered one another here in a row of labour sheded that hung on the mountainside.

The Adis were an 'in-between', the old tradition and a new winds of change. The story of the novel focussed the conflict between tradition and modernization. The original inhabitants lost their traditional values under colonialism, and it led to the natural destruction of the land. According to Joy L.K. Pachuau (2014), the colonial governance politics have had long-lasting political effects that include militancy, insurgency, and the continuation of friction between these states and mainland India.

If orientalism was a mode of representation which helped to create notions of the 'other' and, consequently, binaries of 'us' and 'them', if it was epistemology that was essentially created to dominated the 'other', then it is my hypothesis that similar forms of representation and assertions of cultural hegemony are exhibited in India's own engagements with its Northeastern margins. In other, 'Orientalist'-type-construction persists within India itself, despite its own subjection to them in the colonial period( Pachuau 2014)

*The Legends of Pensam* promoted the revival of the long-lost connection between man and nature. It was a means of preserving the cultural uniqueness of tribal communities in the modern, globalised world. The Adi people have distinctive rituals, convictions, and traditions. because they felt closer to their land. They did not regularly distinguish between the living and the dead. They revered the environment as their God. They respected the land, the river, the trees, and all of nature as their God. It was for this reason that Mamang Dai emphasised the uniqueness of the tradition, rituals, beliefs and the spirit. She would picturised how closely tied the spirits of Biribik, the river snake, the tiger spirit, and the aubergine plant were to their surroundings. The ecosystem of the Adi region saw significant changes during the colonial and postwar periods, which prompted the adoption of new culture and traditions. The Adi people continued to practise their old traditional beliefs and rituals well into the twentieth century. Through their writings, Northeast Indian authors seek to convey to the world the significance and uniqueness of their rites and traditions. In the book *The Legends of Pensam*, Mamang Dai concentrated on the eco-spiritual consciousness. Eco-spirituality was often known as green spirituality, honours the cyclical rhythm of life, the dance of light and dark, work and rest, and growth and contraction. It gave a framework for the natural ups and downs of a day, a year, or a lifetime in a culture that required perpetual output and upward mobility. Nowadays Literature is charged with a lot of responsibility. In the first place, it must rekindle human morality toward nature and bring it closer to Green Spirituality in order to allow it to exist and thereby to sustain life.

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