

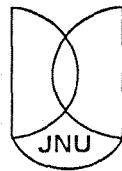
**ORALITY, FOLKTALE AND FICTION: AN
INTERTEXTUAL STUDY OF MAMANG DAI'S
FICTIONS AND ADI FOLKTALES**

*Dissertation Submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in the partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of*

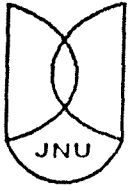
Master of Philosophy

By

BANANI CHOUDHURY



**School of Languages, Literature and Cultural Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi -110067
INDIA
July, 2011**



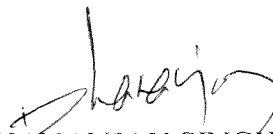
Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067, India

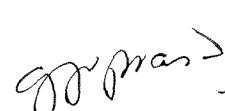
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CERTIFICATE

This dissertation titled "**Orality, Folktale and Fiction: An Intertextual Study of Mamang Dai's Fictions and Adi Folktales**" submitted by **Ms. Banani Choudhury**, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.


(DHANANJAY SINGH)
SUPERVISOR
Dr. DHANANJAY SINGH
Assistant Professor
Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067


(GJV PRASAD)
CHAIRPERSON
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Centre for English Studies
Chairperson
Prof. GJV Prasad
Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067

Date: 13.7.11

DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This dissertation titled "**Orality, Folktale and Fiction: An Intertextual Study of Mamang Dai's Fictions and Adi Folktales**" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.



(BANANI CHOUDHURY)
M.Phil student
CES/SLL&CS
JNU

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Jai – Guru – Xankar

Ma – Papa, thank you for who you are, for what you are ... and for making me who I am....

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INTRODUCTION

My research area is Mamang Dai's fiction and the folktales of the Adi community in Arunachal Pradesh. I propose to investigate and analyse the intertextual relations between Mamang Dai's fiction and the Adi folktales. The study is contingent on the hypothesis that Mamang Dai's works of fiction are modern representation of the age old myths, stories, motifs and legends that has characterised the Adi consciousness for generations, and hence the texture of her novels and narratives overlap with the texture of the Adi folktales. Mamang Dai is from the ethnic community Adi in Arunachal Pradesh. In my research, I would situate her novel, *The Legends of Pensam* (pub, Penguin 2006) and *The Sky Queen* (pub, Katha 2005), a short narrative in her locale, both physically and metaphorically. The folktales are the literary backdrop is the oral literature of the Adi community handed down from generation to generation. Obang Tayeng in his book, *The Folktales of the Adis* (pub, Mittal Publication 2003) makes an attempt to document these tales, and I would take that as source of my primary texts, which are predicated upon reality.

The main objective of my research is to conduct an intertextual study in order to investigate Mamang Dai's fiction embedded in cultural consciousness of the Adis. One of the central objectives of inquiry of my research would be how the fiction of Mamang Dai works under the impress of oral folktales. In what way this exchange and seamless intermingling of fiction and folktales impact the form of the novel itself would be an area of research. To what extent does the narrator in the novel attempt to narrate the story and in the act of narration he/she negotiates with oral culture would be an area of interest. In other words, to what extent does orality, by virtue of intertextuality impinge on the narrative points of view would be an important question to investigate.

Mamang Dai, a major contemporary poet from Arunachal Pradesh, eschews the expression of political concerns, not believing in identity politics. As a writer, Mamang Dai wears many hats: a historian, a poet, a novelist and a journalist. On April 1, 2011 Dai was honoured with Padma Shri Award for Literature and Education. She became third (and first for literature and education) from Arunachal Pradesh to be decorated with the fourth highest civilian award. Educated in Shillong, Dai resigned from administrative service, and founded the 'Arunachal Heritage Society'. She has always tried to make the readers familiar with the atmosphere and people of the Northeast through her works. Myth, landscape, and nature, the particular

predicament of people here and tribal folklore provides her with the core subject matter. Now let me introduce my primary texts, *The Legends of Pensam* and *The Sky Queen*.

The Legends of Pensam is a collection of interconnected stories about the Adi tribe who live in the Siang Valley, the valley of the Siang River, known as the Tsangpo in Tibet. Combining a dash of realism and history, Dai has tried to bring the region into focus through this book. Pensam is the territory of the Adi tribe in the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh, Mamang's home state. A cursory reading shows she has tried to reach a larger number of people through her cleverly written fiction. In Chapter 2 of my dissertation, I have shown how she has targeted a global audience for *The Legends of Pensam*. Appreciating Dai's work, Mark Tully¹ said, "It is one of the most readable books and is welcome because it comes from the Northeast and is about real people."

Dai is a member of the Northeast Writers' Forum. She has many short stories and poems to her credit. She has written about the culture and history of Arunachal Pradesh, too. Her previous books include *Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land* and *River Poems*. It took her nearly a year to pen this book. Somebody who is against using exoticism as commodity, Dai said she has tried to combine small pieces of history and tried to trace the roots of migration.

According to Dai, Pensam is a place where anything can happen and everything can live! The lovely cover illustration is based on a painting by Ozing Dai, which in turn is based on an illustration by Shiavax Chavda (reproduced in Verrier Elwin's² *A Philosophy* for NEFA). The first story is about a "boy who fell from the sky"; at the end of the book, grown old, he sits with his granddaughter, peering through a pair of ancient binoculars. The intervening pages tell us what happened during these years and before them harking back all the way to the Adi creation myths.

In the early part of the twentieth century, the first encounter between the British "migluns" and the Adis ended in a tragic massacre and a stone memorial; years later a love affair between a young Adi woman and a British officer was also fated to end in sadness, but with happier memories. Meanwhile the years go by like a river rushing through the landscape. *The*

¹ Mark Tully is a veteran journalist and writer. *The Legends of Pensam* was released by him at New Delhi's India Habitat Centre.

² Verrier Elwin (1902 – 1964) was a self trained anthropologist, ethnologist and a tribal activist who began his career in India as a Christian missionary. He is best known for his early work with the *Baigas* and *Gonds* of central India, and he famously married a member of one of the communities he studied there, though he also worked on the tribals of several North East Indian state, especially North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and settled in Shillong later in life, apart from Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.

Legends of Pensam is not only the story of a people but of their natural world, the world that we share. An intricate web of stories, images and the history of a tribe, the book is a lyrical and moving tribute to the human spirit. With a poet's sense for incident and language, Mamang Dai paints a memorable portrait of a land that is at once particular and universal.

The battle over the world(s) that we witness today has its roots in the way so many worlds were silenced at the altar of progress, silenced for reasons of sheer human ignorance among the more powerful and scientific lot. Though rather late, literature can undo this damage and bring back the magic of the lost worlds in some measure, North East being one such world. This book is a valiant attempt to discover the secrets of one such lost place i.e. North East India. The arrogance of the 'modern man' decreed himself as the only repository of 'truth', forgetting that truth is constantly being produced in various measures all over the world. How else does one explain the Rig Vedic equivalent being chanted by Adis in Arunachal Pradesh since time immemorial? In page 56 of *Pensam*, reminiscent of the Rig Veda's Creation Hymn, Mamang's *Shaman*³ chants the secret of *Keyum*, the universal nothingness. Though some efforts have been made to rectify this erroneous view, one can imagine the colossal loss this bias and ignorance has resulted in. How much more interesting Indian culture would be if it were told that there were more Rig Vedas in this land than one has been instructed to believe. How much more colourful would the idea of India be if it were known that the country need not depend on the Aryan thesis at all and that the people in this land produced knowledge and 'truth' as frequently as they produced rice beer and Vedic tribes fermented Soma rasa!!

Literature has many functions. One of them is illumination of hidden facts of life. Dai's work of fiction is set in the life-world of the Adis. Her arrival on the literary scene of India is also important in the context of the early twentieth century struggle in Assam for asserting its independent cultural voice. Bhupen Hazarika⁴ among others has often said that Guwahati desires to make the world realise that there is another centre of culture to the east of Kolkata. Mamang Dai, with her story of the evolution of Pasighat or Pigo as the riverine port that has done much more to change the fate of Southeast Asia than is ever acknowledged, has gently reminded us that such days of monopoly are over. Maps often elide the intricacies on the ground. So also, the maps of South and Southeast Asia have subsumed the smaller and

³ Mediator between God and man.

⁴ A multifaceted artist from Assam. He is a good poet, music composer, singer, actor, journalist, author and film-maker. He is an extremely prolific person.

peripheral history of Northeast India. Dai has lifted Pasighat from the abstractions of this map-making and imbued the region with a greater historicity, while revealing its close connections to the world outside. **The region of the Northeast marks the beginning of the domain of the hornbill bird that extends till Southeast Asia.** Mamang Dai has cleared the flight-path of the hornbill and exposed through literature the dilemmas of the Northeast. The book gives its 'peripheral people' access to greater history and grants them a voice by clearing away the undergrowth of ignorance and amnesia. With her work it is not just a metaphorical history of Dai's region – like the hornbill's flight – that has taken flight – her work marks the beginning of a second and more complex episode in the literature that will now emerge from the East, from centres other than Kolkata.

Whenever I read *The Legends of Pensam*, I always felt that the four parts of the book – “a diary of the world”, “songs of the rhapsodist”, “daughters of the village” and “a matter of time” - reflects the four stages of a man's life – infancy, adolescent, adulthood and old age. This is because the author describes the four parts in a language that is in accordance with the seasons that symbolises the four stages of our lives – summer, spring, autumn and winter respectively. For example, the first chapter (“the boy who fell from the sky”) of the first part (a diary of the world) begins as,

When Hoxo first opened his eyes to the world, he saw green. A green wall of trees and bamboo, and a green waterfall that sprayed his cheek and washed the giant fern that seemed to be waving to him. (8)

It is as if everything is new and fresh. As if along with the birth of the baby boy, Hoxo, the land has also born with him.

The second part (“the song of the rhapsodist”) presents the adolescent period, i.e., the growing up years which is full of restlessness and dilemmas. Accordingly, the language that Dai uses to describe the landscape also carries the anxiety of that period. For instance,

We passed Pigo town, through a terrific din of hard rain on tin roofs. We crossed rivers and streams. We crossed mountains of mud and slid across purple slush that made the car slip and slide frighteningly. When we reach the long bridge, Rakut signalled for us to alight. From here we would have to walk. We looked across at the dense canopy of trees and wondered where the path was that would lead us to the village. (49)

In the third part (“daughters of the village”) everything is “ripe and mellow” like Nenem’s oranges. In this part love blooms between Nenem and David and the landscape also matures like the autumn season. For example,

The years slipped away. The sunlight became different The landscape changed.

The summers when they could move shadows and placed them out of sight were gone. (83)

Again in page 88,

The earth was soft and porous. I saw that pushing everything aside the lilies were thrusting up with folded hands as if it would be a crime not to bloom when the earth was so fertile.

Then comes the fourth and the final part (“a matter of time”) that symbolises the old age and the winter season. The first chapter of this part (“the old man fires”) begins as,

In the season of growing cabbages the ground is cold and hard. The tender leaves stoop under the wind and spring towards the light when the sun appears. The old man tended them with single minded devotion. He looked up at the trees and wondered if they were closing out the light. He checked the hard bark for insects that might devour the growing leaves. He peered around for worms and bugs. In one corner the small patch of garden was fenced in with sugarcane. A wild bougainvillea crept over the wall of the house at the other end, and spurted glowing purple flowers every summer. Now it was thick, bare coil that appeared dusty brown and dead. Everything was dry and bony, and ragged. (137)

Thus, the language of the book is in accordance with the cycle of a person’s life, which lends to the gravity of the text. *The Legends of Pensam* has a framed narrative technique, where the author acts as a character. There is a strong sense of belonging, a rootedness, that is very distinct of Mamang Dai. In page 120, for instance, Nenem thinks,

Nothing was complete. But there was comfort in looking at the green hills and the river that she had crossed to become Kao’s wife. Together they would raise their family, guard their land and live among their people observing the ancient customs of their clan. Surely these were enough gifts for one lifetime.

Like a true Indian English fiction, *The Legends of Pensam* takes pride in what the Adis are – in who the Adis are! Here, Dai presents the stereotypical life of Arunachal Pradesh with all the customs, superstition, tradition, myths, folksongs, with a sense of pride and indebtedness. She questions, “What is marginalised?” According to her, there is no margin, no periphery. Here she tries to immortalise her existence through memory.

Now I will try to assert this text as a regional text. A regional novel is the record of the life of the people of a certain region in relation to their society and to the temper of the age, and the other area from which it springs. It seeks to project the physical details and present a graphic picture of the soil from which the story-line and the characters emerge. It explores a locale, a habitation, the geographical, socio-economic factors, the customs, habits, manners, language etc. of that particular place. In the hands of the able novelist, the region itself becomes a vital part of the story, emerging as a dominant character in the process of consistent development. The regional novelist emphasizes the unique features of a particular locality and also the various ways in which it differs from other localities. Through the proper selection and ordering of his material, the novelist stresses the distinctive spirit of his chosen region, and very often there is a rise from the particular and the local to the universal and the general. A regional novel may open up vistas of wider importance and thus become a miniature picture of the massive and a microcosm of widely prevalent issues.

The Legends of Pensam is a regional novel in its form of narration. The novel is based on the history of the locals in Northeast India remember the trepidation in which the forest dwellers treated the advancement of black-tarred Macademised roads into the crown of green hills that surround the floodplains of the Brahmaputra in early and mid-twentieth century. The tribes would hide in the forest and watch with awe the hacking of the jungles, the constant movement of road-rollers flattening the red soil of Northeast India to give way to broad black ribbons. The road builders acquired a formidable reputation as the tribes created stories of their mythical power; the road builders in turn gathered stories of shy people who disappeared into the forests at the sight of the ‘sahebs’. There was little dialogue as the modern era rolled in.....

The Sky Queen is a short narrative, designed more like a children’s tale. It is about the lost civilisation of the *Kojum Koj* and the celestial beauty, *Nyangi Myete*, who was born out of the wreckage of the *Kojum Koj* family as a beacon of hope and faith for the devastated

people around. This is actually a folktale of the Adis, which Mamang Dai interpreted in her own way.

I chose these two particular texts because Ms. Dai's entire oeuvre consisted of the collection of poem, couple of non-fiction texts, and in the category of fictions, she only had *The Legends of Pensam* and *The Sky Queen* in her kitty! Though she had also published *The Stupid Cupid* in 2009, I thought that this novel will not fit into the category of my area of interest in the sense that *The Stupid Cupid* basically centres around the 'mainland India', i.e. Delhi, for that matter, with characters from the Northeast, whether it is from Nagaland or Arunachal Pradesh. Whereas my domain of interest is in homeland, where people go back to their roots; *The Stupid Cupid* is about people coming out of their places of origin and how they adjust and settle in an alien land. So, I focussed on her previous fictions to pursue my research.

My dissertation conducts an in-depth analysis of the primary texts and the cultural codes, images, language and the rhythm of the folktales. I have also devised a comparative framework of the Adi folklore and Dai's fictions and the inherent intertextuality. My research studies the texts as well as interrogates the contexts.. In addition, I have also studied how the folk as well as Dai's narratives situate a reader vis-à-vis the cultural expression of the Adis.

My dissertation has a five-tiered structure. Its organisation is as – 1) Introduction; 2) The Adi Narrative Tradition and Mamang Dai's Fictions; 3) Intertextuality in the Folktale and Mamang Dai's Fictions; 4) The Adi Identity and its Representation: Philosophy, Folklore and Literature 5) Conclusion.

In the first chapter, I begin by giving a brief note on the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh. I then investigate Mamang Dai's contribution to the Adi narrative tradition and how she has placed herself in this genre though she writes a modern form of representation like the novel. The way in which folktales influence her writing, has also been critically explored. The second chapter investigates how the cultural forms like the voices, customs, traditions, themes, images, motifs overlap in Mamang Dai's fictions and the Adi folktales. Chapter three explores the Adi philosophy in details and then I try to establish that the Adi philosophy is a part of the Eastern philosophy of self, because here, tradition and modernity co-exist unlike in the West. I prove this hypothesis by charting out the differences between the Western and the Eastern philosophy and then relating the Adi philosophy and the mainstream Indian

philosophy of self. Thereafter, I try to trace the genealogy of the Adi society by interpreting three of their folktales in the anthropological method and the historic-geographic method.

I have also made certain hypotheses along with my chapters, which I have tried to prove it as we proceed along.

THE ADI NARRATIVE TRADITION AND MAMANG DAI'S FICTIONS

Arunachal Pradesh, the Land of the Dawn-lit Mountains, has a very rich oral culture and Mamang Dai's fictions are interspersed with this oral legacy, handed down from generation to generation, which is still strongly prevalent. Mamang Dai belongs to the ethnic community Adi of Arunachal Pradesh. The 1981 census listed the total population of the Adis at 1,21,052, grouped into 35 sub-tribes. The Adi tribe lives in the valley of the Siang River, known as the Tsangpo in Tibet. The Linguistic Survey of India includes the Adi language in the North Assam group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. It does not have a script of its own. Linguistically, they are closely linked with the Hill Miris, Tagins and the Apatanis⁵.

Adi means 'hill men'. Earlier, they were known as the *Abors*, meaning 'unruly' or 'savage' in Assamese, and it was applied to all the hill tribes around the Assam valley. Adis are recognised as the scheduled tribe of the state. It has been speculated that they have migrated from the north due to some great natural upheavals in their homeland or by large-scale racial movements due to some political happenings in those regions. A majority of their settlements are uni-ethnic. The houses are made of bamboo, thatch and strengthened with wood and cane strings. The dress of the Adi men consists of a loincloth and a jacket. The women wear two clothes, blue and red in broad stripes, round the waist up to the knee. They also wear heavy yellow bead necklaces, iron copper bracelets and earrings made of silver and bamboo tubes. The men also wear necklaces. The people are experts in cane and bamboo work. Their gales and shoulder-bags reflect their artistic sense and weaving talents. They practice both shifting and terrace cultivation. The land belongs to the village and everybody has equal right over it. The main crops grown are rice, millet and maize. The Adis are non-vegetarian and take both beef and pork. *Apong* is their favourite local drink.

Community or tribal endogamy and clan exogamy are the general rules of marriage, and so is monogamy. Post-marital residence is patrilocal in the beginning and later neolocal. Bride-price is prevalent in the community and is generally paid in cash and kind. The villages have dormitories for boys (*moshup*) and girls (*rasheng*). But being defunct, these institutions are serving as training centres and guard houses for other socio-cultural activities. The village is

⁵ *Arunachal Pradesh: People of India*. Eds. Parul Dutta and Syed Ishteaque Ahmed. XIV vols. Seagull Books: Calcutta, 1995, p.53.

administered by the *gaon bura* (village headman) and controlled through the *kebang*, which has political and judicial control over the villagers. The Adis bury their dead.

The communities believe in malevolent and benevolent deities. The supreme deity in their religion is *Donyi-Polo* (the sun and moon god). They have sacred specialists who perform different kinds of rituals to propitiate the deities. A few of them have adopted Christianity. They celebrate a number of festivals related to the different phases of agricultural activity. *Mopin* and *Solung* are the most popular and colourful festivals.

The Adi tribe includes a number of specific sub-groups. The main 15 sub-groups are: Ashing, Bokar, Bori, Gallong, Karko, Komkar, Milang, Minyong, Padam, Pailibo, Pangi, Pasi, Ramo, Shimong and Tangam. There is no social hierarchy among the various sub-tribes. They are further divided into a number of clans, but clan hierarchy does not exist. Although economic differences are there, the members of a sub-group have the same social status. Mamang Dai belongs to the Pasi sub-tribe. The community derives its name from its ancestor Pasi. It is also the name of a place. The Pasi people trace their origin to Sigong, a place in the north. Now they are settled in and around Pasighat town. They use the Roman and Devanagari script for writing. In their book, *Arunachal Pradesh: People of India*, Dutta and Ahmed says that the community is divided into a number of exogamous clans (locally called *opin*), all equal in status. Some of the clans are Dai, Moyong, Rukbo, Mengu, Yomso, Apum, Teknyo, Yom pang, Yomain, Mekir, and Jamo. The members of a clan help each other in constructing houses and in agricultural activities. Traditionally, an endogamous community, the Pasis follow clan exogamy as the basic rule of marriage. Though monogamy is the norm, polygamy also exists. The age of marriage (for both the sexes) is 17 to 18 years. The modes of acquiring mates are *rot kamnam* (capture), *nyodong* (elopement), *ape* (exchange), and *nga meng tato* (negotiations). The last is the most common mode. Post marital residence is patrilocal. The *nigoni* (bride price) is an essential part of marriage, and is in kind and service. Divorce is permissible through the approval of the *kebang* (village council) on the grounds of adultery and maladjustment.

Traditionally, the Pasis have worshipped nature. Now they worship *Donyi-Polo*. They believe in both malevolent and benevolent spirits. The sacred specialists conduct different kinds of religious activities. There are three categories of the specialists --- the *miri ponung*, who leads the singing and dancing during festivals; the *miri*, who performs the rituals and acts as an exorcist; and the *eating miri*, who acts as the medicine man and confirms thefts and guilt.

These specialists may be men or women. The festivals observed by the Pasis are *Solung*, *Aran* and *Pine*. *Solung* is celebrated after the harvest in the month of September. *Aran* is celebrated in February before jhum cultivation and *Pine* is observed for one day in November in every house. Snakes are observed on this occasion. Some of the Pasis have adopted Christianity, particularly those in the plain areas. The converts still practice old customs and festivals besides Christian rituals. Socio-religious movements are operative in the community. For the last ten years the Adi Cultural Society has been working to maintain the traditional culture. The traditional crafts include spinning, weaving, embroidery on cloth and basketry. Blacksmithy was once at its zenith. Folk songs, lores and tales exist in the society as a part of their cultural life.

As mentioned above, most of the cultures of the societies of Arunachal Pradesh are still rich in oral art forms. Their myths, folktales, maxims, even life-words are still strong enough with the potential to retain the vigour very high. This can be seen in the poem, "The Man and The Tiger", where the poet Yumlan Tana (1976 -) tries to connect to his roots through legends and folklore. He writes,

In spite of all those talks about rationales
and scientific temper
a primordial sentiment lurk
somewhere in us begotten in the days of chaos.
The Nyibu (his tribe) had read the entrails
of the chickens
and presaged that six **dead monkeys**
shall lie beside a stranger in the house.

Due to absence of script in Adi culture, **oral literature is a salient feature in their life**. Thus, the only possible way to apply the **historical method of explanation** is by making, on the basis of whatever evidence of an indirect kind we can find, a hypothetical reconstruction of the past history of these tribes. The mythological stories are popularly found in society as

folklores, folktales, and even found in the form of folksongs. Generally, the folksongs may be classified into the following 8 categories:

1. *Soman Miri* (Recreational Song)

2. *Yoga Gage* (lullaby)
3. *Dobi Dom Miri* (Love Song)
4. *Kumsinam Miri* (Prayer Song)
5. *Minyam Miri* (Marriage Song)
6. *Giidi Miri* (Festival Song)
7. *Penge* (Funeral Song)
8. *Ayit Miri* (Song of invocation of Soul)

Perhaps these myths and folklores are as old as mankind. These narrate the creation of the universe and mother earth, origin of man and the beast, plants and water, guidance for orderly social living, migration and settlement, war etc. In the essay, "Oral literature ---- Methodological Appraisal and Its Importance in Anthropological Research in Arunachal Pradesh," Bikash Bannerjee defined folklore as, "a body of traditions which is normally transmitted orally from generation to generation, from one individual to another. In some advanced literate society, traditions are also used to be preserved in black and white. But among the people who are not having any script, such traditions and cultural prescriptions are transmitted exclusively orally, which is called 'Oral Literature'. Such oral literature reflects the culture of a community and brings its people in solidarity, continuity, and consistency."⁶ He also informed that among the major sub-forms, oral poetry, and proverbs and riddles are important part of oral literature. Again as mentioned above, the oral poetry has its several related forms, like ballads, folksongs, lullabies etc. In Arunachal Pradesh, the children are trained in traditional songs and dances from very childhood and they practice singing and dancing constantly. This shows how folklore is very integral to the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh. But with the spread of the state sponsored education, people have shown a strong preference for literacy in their cultures. As Walter J.Ong says,

There is hardly an oral culture or predominantly oral culture left in the world today. How aware of the vast complex of powers forever inaccessible without literacy. The awareness is agony for persons rooted in primary orality who want literacy passionately but who also know very well that moving into the exciting world of literacy means leaving behind much that is exciting

⁶ *Folk Culture and Oral Literature from Northeast India*. Eds. Tamo Mibang and Sarit K. Chaudhuri. Mittal Publications: New Delhi, 2004, p.186-87.

and deeply loved in the earlier oral world.⁷

Thus, in the age of fast approaching secondary orality, there is a new phenomenon in the contemporary Indian English literature, the practice of oral tradition being adapted in the modern fiction written in English. It is new and fresh and exotic but it does not necessarily mean that the writer is insincere because a lot also depends on the writer's own response to his or her own culture and that is what makes the writing more authentic. Mamang Dai does this in her novels. Folklorists have likewise contributed to this re-interpretation of tradition and to the emphasis on the inventiveness of culture by developing the concept of 'second-hand folklore' to describe conscious manipulation of tradition. Oral traditions are now understood less as representations of collective authenticity and more as products of individual creativity. Temsula Ao,⁸ whose own writings display a sensitive blending of the oral and the written, claims that the 'new literature, rich with indigenous flavour' that is being created by the modern storytellers and poets from the Northeast, does not seem to have a political agenda like the postcolonial literature that is emerging in Africa and amongst the Native Americans in recent times. Drawing a dividing line between African and Native American literatures and that of Northeast India, she says:

..... the people of Northeast India seem to have attained a new 'maturity' in their perceptions about themselves, that the 'other' of their position vis-à-vis mainland India was not 'them' elsewhere but very much within their own sense of isolation in an oral culture. Once articulated through the written text, similarities of worldviews with other cultures have helped forge new affinities, and at the same time enabled them to accept the differences as only uniqueness of any given culture rather than as denominators of any deficiency or inferiority.⁹

This is the feature of oral literature that Mamang Dai writes. She herself says in her conversation with GSP Rao that, "the remembrance of a society is quite different from the data in survey records and research books. I hope I can convey this while trying to place on record what I understand of the state's history, the old way of life, oral traditions, and their value. People today are knowledgeable about the politics, territories and conflict issues of a

⁷ ---, p.142.

⁸ Temsula Ao is an Indian English poet, scholar and novelist from Nagaland. She is currently Dean of the School of Humanities and Education at North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. She is a Padma Shree Awardee.

⁹ Ao, Temsula. "Writing Orality." *Orality and Beyond*. Eds. Soumen Sen and Desmond Kharmawphlang. Sahitya Academy: New Delhi, 2007, p.109.

place --- even at a still obscure corner like Arunachal --- but miss out the bit about life and society's effort and imagination."

In *The Legends of Pensam* (2006), for instance, she attempts to record a disappearing tradition in the face of modernity. Here, she refers to Pensam as the "in-between" land. Dai says that her novel covers three aspects: "It uses the oral literature, a piece of real history of Arunachal Pradesh and talks about the changes taking place in the region." During her interview with Subash N. Jeyam, she says,

Ours is an oral tradition you know, I was trying to meet people and collect and record these oral narratives. You know the small histories which were getting lost and when you talk to people, even small things can trigger these memories off. I had no idea how the book (*The Legends of Pensam*) would turn out, because it was very difficult to project these stories in English. To negotiate that (difficulty of cultural translation), I conceived of Pensam as a kind of secret garden where there are no rules and where one can do whatever one wants.....¹⁰

That is why she says in the beginning of the novel:

In our language, the language of the Adis, the word "Pensam" means "in-between". It suggests the middle, or middle-ground, but it may also be interpreted as the hidden spaces of the heart where a secret garden grows. It is the small world where anything can happen and everything can be lived; where the narrow boat that we call life sails along somehow in calm or stormy weather; where the life of a man can be measured in the span of a song.¹¹

This attachment to the land is also very significant. Because Arunachal Pradesh opened so late to the outside world, a lot of it is still very intact --- the culture, the people's beliefs, the way of life etc. It is still a bastion of indigenous culture. This is due to historical and geographical reasons of the past. The British policy of non-intervention and the Inner Line Regulation Act of 1873¹², etc., followed by the Nehruvian policy of keeping the region safe

¹⁰ The Hindu: Literary Review/Interview: Negotiating change with memory.

¹¹ Dai, Mamang. *The Legends of Pensam*. Penguin: New Delhi, 2007.

from the influence of more dominant societies until they had more time to adapt. Today non-locals coming from abroad and from the other parts of the country require Inner Line Permits and Restricted Area Permits (RAP). This has come into focus recently --- whether it is still relevant, especially as the state wants to project itself as a tourist destination. That is why, the people of this region has been quite insular. Outsiders are outsiders --- sort of thing. Therefore, the literature produced from this region is also based on the culture and tradition of the people. For example, Obang Tayeng (b.1961), another major writer from this region, has for long been associated with Adi cultural and literary activities of different capacities. Besides editing two anthologies of Adi poetry and co-editing two other books, he has also written *The Folktales of the Adis* (2003) and *Mishmi Folktales of Lohit Valley* (2007). Mamang Dai herself says that her community is very egalitarian and there is little gender bias, but problems arise when “you try to change customs in a tribal state, such as those governing mixed marriages.” Her newspaper column had to be withdrawn and “journalists are often threatened or beaten up” in the region. This proves how zealously the natives guard their culture and traditions. Due to such attitude of the people, she was very apprehensive when *The Legends of Pensam* was released. In her conversation with GSP Rao, she says,

.... a book in English dealing with village life and history from British times has never been done before. Even during the writing of the book I worried a lot wondering if I was portraying things truthfully or not. Then I decided it was pointless to weigh and measure so much. I would just have to go ahead and put it down as the weigh I saw it --- the place of indescribable feeling, and yes, the reception was good.¹³

From here we gather that Mamang Dai has tried to do something new and interesting with her novel *The Legends of Pensam*. Firstly, the prologue of the novel is unique. Wikipedia defines prologue as an opening to a story that establishes the setting and gives background details, often some earlier story that ties into the main one, and other miscellaneous information. The prologue is usually the part of the front matter which is in the voice of one

¹² The Inner Line Regulation Act was applicable to the districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Garo Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Naga Hills, Cachar and Chittagong Hills. By this “Inner Line” policy, the local government may prohibit all British subjects, or any class of British subject, or any person residing in or passing through such districts, from going beyond such line without a pass under the hand and seal of executive officer as he may authorized to grant such pass, and the local government may from time to time cancel or vary such prohibit.

¹³ Muse India – Current Issue – Mamang Dai: In Conversation with GSP Rao.

of the book's characters rather than in that of the author. But in the prologue of *The Legends of Pensam*, the narrator is Ms. Dai herself, and she beautifully describes the landscape of Arunachal Pradesh. In a stereotypical novel, the prologue is an opening to a story that establishes the setting and gives background details, but she instead chose to give the background detail of the landscape. I feel that there can be two reasons for this:

1. In *The Legends of Pensam*, the landscape itself has an identity of its own.
2. Mamang Dai wrote the prologue as a contention that this is not a conventional novel.

Secondly, it being a novel itself is a pioneering work, because as of yet, the Adi culture had books which talked only about fables and folktales, like Obang Tayeng's works. Novel is a recent contribution to Adi culture. Though technically, there were earlier well-known writers of Arunachal Pradesh, like late Lummer Dai¹⁴ and Yeshe Dorje Thongchi¹⁵, who wrote novels, but they used to write in Assamese language, because of Assam's "internal colonization" in the literary history of Arunachal Pradesh. The eighty-two Arunachali tribes have languages so different from each other that the Arunachali tribes mostly use *Nefamese*, which is a pidgin of Assamese.¹⁶ Just as one kind of sub-imperialism that lasted well into the twentieth century (the Bengali sub-imperialism) dominated the Assamese (not to speak of the rest) people of the undivided Bengal, so the undivided Assam perpetrated the kind of Assamese hegemony that *Nefamese* is a legacy of. Because of this intervention of the

Assamese language, the works of Thongchi and Lummer Dai are in Assamese language. In fact, Thongchi even won a Sahitya Academy Award in 2005 for his novel *Mouna Outh*

¹⁴ Lummer Dai (1941-2002), was born in Pasighat in the Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh. After completing his school education at Pasighat, he graduated from Cotton College, Guwahati and served as an officer in the Arunachal Pradesh Government. He has authored several novels in Assamese.

¹⁵ Y.D.Thongchi (1952) belongs to the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. Educated at Bomdilla H.E. School. He holds a postgraduate degree in Assamese Literature from the Guwahati University. At present a senior IAS officer in Arunachal Pradesh, he is the author of several novels and short stories in Assamese.

¹⁶ Linguists have offered different definitions of 'pidgins' and 'Creole' languages. Though many believe that creoles developed out of pidgins in some parts of the world, others hold that each has an independent existence. Pidgin languages are simple modes of communication without complex grammatical rules, between two groups of people who speak different languages but who need to communicate with each other for trade and other reasons. Pidgins do not attain the status of the mother tongue and it is usually learnt as a second language by the people who use them. According to some linguists, pidgins are generally created out of three different languages of which one is the superstrate or the dominant tongue. Creoles also are mixed languages; but they are used as vernaculars by the speakers. Creole languages, like the race denoted by the term, have strong colonial connotations because they usually developed in the European colonies where the speech of the native speakers of the European language (usually the indentured workers) would be heavily influenced by the language of the local people.

Mukhor Hriday, written in Assamese. But there is a guilt consciousness among poets who writes in English. For example, Yumlan Tana from Arunachal Pradesh says,

I write in English
 which is not my language.
 You see, I am a Nyishi
 a tribal claiming to be a man.....
 (The Man and the Tiger)

Then comes the expansive gesture, typically oriental:

I am all humanity
 with no geographical boundary.

In *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India: Poetry and Essays*, the editor Tillotoma Misra wrote an essay, "Crossing Linguistic Boundaries: Two Arunachali Writers in Search of Readers," which is about Thongchi and Dai and how they created a new tradition in Arunachali writing as well as in Assamese writing. But their writings are in search of the ideal reader. Who should read their books? Their own people whom they love and with whom they would have liked to communicate best? Or, by the Assamese speaking people who would be unable to accept the books as a part of their own literature? Or, by the ideal reader of today who crosses all national and international boundaries? Here, Misra has quoted the popular Turkish writer, Orhan Pamuk, who in a recent interview in *The Telegraph*, has stated that since his novels are today read by readers the world over in forty different languages, so he has in mind an ideal reader who belongs to an international community of 'literary readers.' He says,

Writers write for their ideal readers, for their loved ones, for themselves,
 or for no one. All this is true. But, it is also true that today's literary writers
 also write for those who read them. For this we might infer that today's
 literary writers are gradually writing less for their own national majorities
 (who do not read them) than for the small minority of literary readers
 in the world who do.¹⁷

¹⁷ Pamuk, Orhan. 'Name the Reader: Cultural Disquiet and the Inevitable Question.' *The Telegraph*. Guwahati, 13 August, 2006.

Similarly, Mamang Dai's decision to write in English raises the issue of the writer's identity. Does Dai, an Indian, who writes in English, dilute her Adi identity on that account? Does her choice of English, not her own language or the language of her own people --- her native language that has for generations and centuries carried down a tradition and an ideology --- sever her roots/her origin, or make it impossible for her to identify her with the native speakers of the chosen language, and thus envelope her whole creative activity in a maze of unreality? Or worse still, can Mamang Dai be termed as a traitor for taking recourse in a dominant language (English) to revive her own language (Adi)?

Well, according to me, Mamang Dai writes in English, not out of choice but out of necessity. During an interview with Dr. Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal, a Senior Lecturer in English at Feroze Gandhi College, Rae Bareilly, U.P., the interviewer pointed out that in some of her poems she has given notes. These notes explicate certain North-Eastern cultural aspects. The poems like "Tapu," "Let No Tear," "Song of the Dancers", "Man and Brother" and "The Missing Link" use these explanatory notes. Dr. Agarwal wanted to know about the necessity of these notes in her poetry? He asks, "Are these notes not because you are writing about your own culture in an alien language? Will it not be better to write about our own native languages? what should be the language of poetic expression --- our native regional language or an alien one?" To which Mamang Dai replied:

The notes are there because some of the references are to special customary belief and practice. If I write in Adi, I will still have to use Roman script since we are a non-script language. Currently there is a move to devise a new script for the Tani group of tribes of Arunachal, i.e. the tribes practising Donyi-Polo and who claim common ancestry from a legendary forefather called Tani but we have 26 tribes in Arunachal and more than 100 sub-clans, so the consensus is more for English and Hindi as the lingua-franca and for writing. At the moment we have launched an Arunachal Pradesh Literary Society to promote writing in local languages/dialects which may be translated into English or Hindi or other major Indian languages. We are encouraging local people to write by using the Romanised script, though an attempt is being made by someone to work out a local script. About the language

of poetic expression,.....I think poetry in any language will have meaning depending on the honesty of feeling.¹⁸

Thus, Mamang Dai's use of English in her writing is not a conscious decision. It is not like that of other North Eastern writers from the other parts of Northeast, like Meghalaya¹⁹ and Manipur.²⁰ Misra says that when Mamang Dai records the ancient legends of the Adis preserved in the collective memory of the people, she uses the English language with the lyrical softness of an Adi rhapsodist chanting his songs amidst the hidden mountains. Her rich and vibrant language may not be her mother tongue, but she has made it her own in the most convincing manner. The following passage from *The Legends of Pensam*, describing the haunting melodies of the rhapsodist and the rhythmic movements of the *ponung* dancers, convey an idea of a new literary tradition that has been born in Arunachali literature as well as in Indian English fiction:

They have not slept for many nights. If they close their eyes for a minute, if their souls stray, if they miss a step, then the journey will be over before its time and they will return to the present overwhelmed with a sorrow that will haunt them to a early death. The man who leads them is dressed in a woman's gale and wears the dumling, an intricate hair ornament that swings with the rhythm of his chanting. He is the miri , the shaman and the rhapsodist. Tonight the dancers have arrived at the crucial point , in the narration of their history where they will 'travel the road.'²¹

According to Misra, the writers from Arunachal Pradesh have crossed the linguistic barriers decisively in order to create a literature of their own. Their fictional works can claim a double

¹⁸ Thanal Online – Volume2. Issue 4. May 2008.

¹⁹ Though the Khasis are grateful to the Welsh for handing down the Khasi alphabets to them, they can neither forget nor forgive their erstwhile mentors for their near decimation of their indigenous culture. In any case the Khasi written culture is barely a century old; and the current scenario of ethnic and non-ethnic intermixture seems to have been seeded much earlier – in the 1880s. If in their poetic infancy the threat to their indigenous culture came from the whites and the local non-Khasi insiders, the contemporary fear of the native, fear of the native culture being swamped by other alien cultures is no less justified. Even so, their contemporary resistance to non-native cultures is not unmixed with admiration and gratitude. The consequent tension and ambivalence has made their poetry more sinewy and the best that is being written by the Khasis themselves shows a healthy avoidance of raw anger and rhetoric.

²⁰ In Manipur, there was infiltration of Hinduism-Vaishnavism in the late 18th century as well as Christianity and British in the 19th century. Buddhists in the region claim that their religion preceded the Hindu influence. The mutations and adaptations of Hindu mythology are well-known. After India became independent, this princely state merged with the Indian state in 1949. These religious and linguistic factors – 29 dialects out of which only 5 are recognized by the Manipur Government – further complicate the Manipuri culture.

²¹ Dai, Mamang. *The Legends of Pensam*. Penguin: New Delhi, 2006, p.50.

parentage and are 'twice-born' (to borrow a term from Meenakshi Mukherjee)²² in the true sense of the term because they belong both to the tradition of Arunachali literature as well as to the literatures of the native speakers of the languages which they have chosen to make the vehicles of their own thoughts. To quote Misra, "a writer's work does not cease to be defined by the region with which he/she is identified and which has shaped his/her sensibilities in the first place only because his/her chosen medium is not the mother tongue but the acquired language. At the same time the acquired languages may create a distance between the writer and her world because there would always be the native speakers of those languages who would claim that the languages were theirs before they were acquired by the others. For the writers too, the distant lands from where the languages came would always remain the ultimate 'repository of the world' with which they would continue to struggle to express their ideas or feelings. For many writers the decision to write in an acquired language is also based on the desire to target a readership which is wider than the limited one available in one's own native tongue."²³ She however believes that the writers from many of the smaller ethnic communities of Northeastern India whose native languages do not have a script of their own or are spoken by only handful of people (like the Adis) have, however, adopted English as their acquired speech not merely out of choice but because the policy decisions of the state governments in these regions have favoured English above other languages as the medium of instruction in schools. In Arunachal Pradesh, Hindi, which once eased out Assamese from the schools, has now been replaced by English and this decision was not propelled by any imperialistic design of a foreign power but as a measure taken by the postcolonial state to set the wheels of 'progress' rolling. Whatever be the reason, Mamang Dai should not be apologetic about using the English language for her writing. Commenting on the status of the Indian writers 'working in English', Salman Rushdie says in *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing (1947-1997)*: "English is the most powerful medium of communication in the world; should we not then rejoice at the artists' mastery of it, and at their growing influence? To criticise writers for their success at "breaking out" is no more than parochialism (and parochialism is perhaps the main vice of the vernacular literatures)"²⁴

²² Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English*. Heinemann, 1971.

²³ *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India: Poetry and Essays*. Ed. Tilottoma Misra. OUP: New Delhi, 2011, p.216-17.

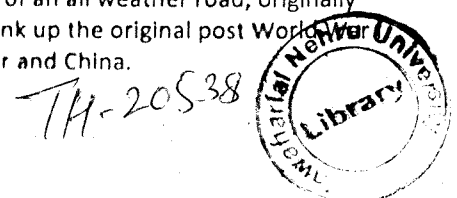
²⁴ Rushdie, Salman. 'Introduction'. *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing (1947-1997)*. Eds. Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West. Vintage, 1997.

The Adi narrative tradition has a strong influence on Mamang Dai and her writing. She has always tried to make the readers familiar with the atmosphere and the people of the Northeast through her works. Myth, landscape and nature, the particular predicament of people here and tribal folklore provides her with the core subject matter. Her works, especially, the two texts that form my primary source, *The Legends of Pensam* and *The Sky Queen* comes out of the Adi culture. The former is an affecting work that intertwines myth, legend, history and memoir. The stories are loosely structured around a family of Adis across several generations. It is written in the style of a grandmother narrating a tale. There are meandering sentences, similes and metaphors from regional life abounding through the images, proverbs, invocations and literal translations, which are so evocative of Northeastern rustic life. Dai's sensitive layered narration record the myriad details of life in the rain drenched terrain: "green shoots", "wild insects", "red clay", "narrow footbridges across torrential streams", "hard rain on tin roofs", "green plantain-leaf umbrellas". The land comforts her: "This is your land. Whatever happens, there is nothing to fear." (68)

The novel explores the locale of Pasighat or Pigo town, the habitation, geographical and socio-economic factors, the customs, habits and manners, language etc. of Arunachal Pradesh. In the hands of the writer the region becomes the vital part of the story, emerging as a dominant character in a process of consistent development. "What happens to the people and the places we forget? Where do they go?" wonders Dai as she reflects on her project of recording the Adi life story. The forest contain generations of secret grief even before they have been torn into by the implacable onslaught of modernity. With the building of the roads came sorrow. A road is built for the war --- "a-man-a-mile road" the Stilwell road²⁵ "that wound through Asia like a giant serpent" for over a thousand miles across three countries. This rapacious enterprise swallows up the leaves of trees, forest life, even elephants --- "many of the poor animals lost their footing and hurtled off the mountainside bellowing like mythical beasts with their eyes rolled up skywards."(32)

But this is also a harsh, unforgiving terrain where women ache with physical the strain of walking up and down steep hillsides bearing baskets of wood on their backs. While the men

²⁵ Historically, the road was named after General Joseph Warren Stilwell who was Deputy Supreme Commander of Allied Forces South East Asia (SEAC) during World War II. Vital support links for Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist Kuomintang Army who were fighting the Japanese in Western China were cut off. It became imperative to devise an alternative route and the plan for the construction of an all weather road, originally christened the Ledo Road was hatched in February 1942. The plan was to link up the original post World War I Burma Road from Kunming to Lashio. Basically it linked India with Myanmar and China.



go out on long and dangerous hunting expeditions, the women dream of speaking English, of creating a flower garden on rocky slope, of finding love. An old man tends his cabbages, a bitter woman yearns for life in town choked plastic, and young boys tear around on motorbikes in their yearning for the secrets of modernity.

Dai's narrative braids many stories, like the strands of a shaman's hair, to create a magnificent tale of loss and relief that fills one's heart with both despair and hope. In its mournful tenor, almost like a tribal song, *The Legends of Pensam* tells the story of disparate characters. There is the non-tribal --- possibly a white boy --- survivor of an air crash from World War II, Hoxo. Hoxo is not alone. Before Hoxo was the Abor expedition of 1912, a punishment inflicted upon the Adis for killing Noel Williamson, the British officer who set out to find the real source of the Brahmaputra. In Dai's work the white men are all "migluns", a term employed by the Adis for the Europeans; but here in the novel "migluns" are mythical creatures. Strangers have often been mythologised in literature as the *dasyus* of ancient literature but unlike the creator of *dasyus*, Dai desists from demonizing her "migluns". Around this concept of "migluns" she creates the tragic love story of David and Nenem, a British man posted in the area. There are no simple individuals; they are the remnants of the Empire as it extended the famous Stilwell road deep into Southeast Asia from the Indian mainland.

Thus, as we can see the essence of Mamang Dai's language is the region from which she writes, for which she writes, i.e. Arunachal Pradesh. Her language is very lyrical and almost reverberate her poems. For instance, she says:

In dreams, my people say they see the rain mother sitting on the tree
tops, laughing in the mist.
Her silver ornaments clink as she rides the wind, brandishing her sword.
Everytime she twirls her skirt, the storm clouds edged with black rush
up to cover.(36)

In Dai's other novel, *The Sky Queen*, she talks about the lost civilization of the *Kojum Koj*. The *Kojum Koj* civilization was destroyed by a devastating flood and how out of this wreckage a lady emerged like a ray of hope. This was the popular beauty known as *Nyanyi Myete*, a celestial bride of the *Kojum* Family who drifted down to humanity to tell the tale of destruction, and to generate new hope for another civilization on earth. The land and people of *Kojum Koj* may be buried in the deluge, but because of this celestial lady, the memory of

that civilized society remains immortal. Thus, mythological belief is projected into present reality through natural surroundings and the interpretation of human imagination.

However this novel, *The Sky Queen*, is Mamang Dai's interpretation of the folktales, "Kojum Koje" and "Nyanyi Myete", because if we compare *The Sky Queen* with Obang Tayeng's recording of these stories in *The Folktales of the Adis*, we can clearly decipher the difference in details and Dai's creative touch on these age-old tales, which projects *Nyanyi Myete* as a celestial lady who "came gliding from the skies like a heavenly queen, in her beautiful silken white skirt with its emerald green border. And she floated into the *Doni-Dongor* family." (Chp.2). Whereas, in Tayeng's recording of the tale, *Nyanyi Myete* is a "kind, graceful, amiable woman" and not some celestial bride. She is a "member of *Doying Ang* world, where the God, *Doying Bote* lived. As she lived in the abode of *Doying Bote*, she was also called *Doying Yingu Ute Mone*."(15) I will go into details about these overlapping of themes, images and motifs in Dai's fiction and the Adi folktales in my next chapter. Here, I just want to show how the Adi narrative tradition has an influence on Dai's writing. Even in *The Legends of Pensam*, Dai sketches the character of Nenem as *Nyanyi Myete* when she describes her as the river in Pg. 121, where she says that, "she was like the river, constant, nurturing, self-possessed. Like the river, she was the soul of our land." Then again in Pg. 125, Nenem is further drawn as *Nyanyi Myete* when she is said to have "come from the land of fish and stars...." Dai writes,

Nenem, apparently, was a gift from the mythical land among the stars that was the dwelling place of a beautiful bride, also known as the celestial aunt, who came down to earth to bless the civilization of men with wisdom and grace. Nenem's mother had already lost two siblings before her and she had been worried that she would have no children. A shaman had been called and during an elaborate ritual he had invoked the spirits of the celestial aunt to bless the couple with a beautiful child. Some time later, the girl Nenem had been born.

Thus, Dai heavily "borrows" from the Adi folktales and this shows that these stories are still very important to the society of Arunachal Pradesh. Such technique of "using" the tales in a modern form of representation, like the novel, is very commendable. And this paves the path for my next chapter, "Intertextuality in the Folktale and Mamang Dai's Fictions."

Thus, Mamang Dai's language in her novels is a kind of English which foregrounds her Adi identity. She uses the language, English, in a way that can be called an 'Arunachali English'. This is English which does not take away from her 'vernacular' identity; rather it asserts her regional identity, and this makes her English "Indish," and her an 'Indish' writer. I have borrowed the term "Indish" from Prof. Raj Kumar, who in his presidential address at the All India English Teachers' conference held at Bhubaneswar in December 1970 raised the question ;

"Is it possible for us to think of a new language for a new India which I may provisionally call 'Indish' --- a language having the alphabet, the framework, the basic structure of English in the Roman script, but an organic language growing freely and assimilating new words, new ideas, new constructions, new idioms, even, if necessary, new letters of the alphabet, from each one of the regional languages of India?"²⁶

"Indish" according to Prof. Kumar is a kind of "nationalized", "socialized", "vernacularized" English; such an English is substandard and is not even remotely connected with the creative use of English by Indians. "Indish" is a hybrid of English and one of the regional languages of India, and according to Prof. Kumar, "when it is evolved, each linguistic state will have an 'Indish' of its own." He recommended the adoption of 'Indish' as a lingua-franca for the country and even foresaw the coming into existence of 'Indish literature' --- "a rich and exotic dish of many flavours" from all over India gaining recognition at the national and international levels. 'Indish', he felt, will meet no resistance or ill-will from any part of India because of its close association with regional languages. In fact, a major part of the teaching of Indish would be through the medium of regional languages and the mother tongue, in short, it would be, in Prof. Kumar's words, "English that is becoming un-English everyday." So, if we take Prof. Raj Kumar's idea of 'Indish' style of writing as built up by Indian writers who are almost bilingual, if not multilingual, through the strange historical facts of contemporary Indian civilization, then we can legitimately categorize Mamang Dai as an 'Indish' writer based on her novels and her poems. Her language has a sense of nostalgia and a rootedness like that of Rohinton Mistry and Jim Corbett. Her writing exhibits deep feeling for the Lost World --- the glory of the past. Another theme in her writing is "rediscovery", or its cousin, "reconnection." Such writing can be categorized in the loosely defined term,

²⁶ Verghese, Paul C. *Essays on Indian Writing in English*. N.V.Publications: New Delhi, 1975,p.8.

“Indo-Nostalgic Writing.” According to the definition provided by Wikipedia, this term encompasses writings in the English language, wherein nostalgia, regarding India (hometown in India), represent a dominant theme or strong undercurrent. The writings may be memoirs or quasi-fictionalized memoirs, travelogues, or inspired in part by real-life experiences and in part by the writer’s imagination. This would include both mass distributed “Indo-Anglian” literature put out by major publishing houses and also much shorter articles (eg. feature pieces in mainstream or literary magazines) or poetry, including material published initially or solely in webzines. The writings are often less self-conscious and more light-hearted, perhaps dealing with impressionistic memoirs of places, people, cuisines, only-in-India situations, or simply vignettes of “the way things were.” This kind of writing shows (and perhaps somewhat romanticized) feelings for childhoods in the sub-continent. For instance, Mamang Dai in her poem “A Stone Breaks the Sleeping Water” says:

I wish I had inherited fruit trees.
 Tall, full grown trees
 with flowering branches and ancient roots
 nothing vanishes so surely as childhood
 the life of clay, the chemistry of colour
 this I realise in the season of dying
 in the month of the red lotus
 when the stone breaks the sleeping water.

Mamang Dai, like the true post-modern poet, hardly writes a well-crafted poem, but it is the sense of nostalgia that shows in her poems. For example, in “The Missing Link” she says:

Remember the river’s voice:
 Where else could we be born
 where else could we belong
 if not of memory.....

 Remember because nothing is ended
 but it is changed.
 And memory is a changing shape

showing with this fading possessions
 in lands beyond the great ocean
 that all is changed but not ended.

Therefore, we can rightly call Mamang Dai as an “Indish” writer, who writes “Indo-Nostalgic” writing.

Mamang Dai’s negotiation with identity is both internal as well as external. She is a writer from the Northeast who writes in English about Arunachal Pradesh. So like her contemporary in the mainland India, she faces the dilemma of writing in an alien language, but also an internal anxiety from the region for which she writes. The term ‘North Eastern’ literature yokes together the writings from the seven-sisters, but is unable to capture the variety and complexity of the region. For this reason, many writers such as Harekrishna Deka from Assam, and Temsula Ao from Nagaland have expressed discomfit with the term ‘North-East India’ and ‘North Eastern’ writers respectively. In India’s political imaginary, the term serves to describe a region that is both mysterious and dangerous. Historically, it is somewhat unknown; a “heart of darkness.” A section also strongly argues that the term is colonial and hence, an artificial construct. There is nothing called a “north-easterner” and the concept is purely geographical; it tends to homogenize an extremely heterogenous cluster of people as there exists no common history and heritage of the people in North-East India, though formerly the current states of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Meghalaya used to be constituent states of former Assam. Even the undivided Assam is now a site for a million mutinies. For instance, though Assamese is the most visible and used language in Assam, in recent years, linguistic nationalism among the tribes has added ample variety to literature of Assam and has changed the definition of Assamese literature itself. It no more means everything in the Assamese language, but any kind of writing that has emerged from Assam. So, Assamese literature is written in Bodo, Karbi, Rabha, Mishing etc. There are more than sixty tribes in Assam and each of them has their own language, folktales and songs, and different myths about their origin. This is the reason why, ‘Literature from Northeast’ is a very difficult term to define. The ethnic and linguistic diversity has encompassed languages, cultures and literatures, and people are still wondering about the identification of Indian literature and the same question has also risen in the case of Northeast. Now, if we take the argument further that the concept of “north-easterner” is purely geographical, and that the term tries to homogenise a heterogenous cluster of people, then, we can safely conclude that the people of the Northeast is better off without the regional identity. So, according to this

hypothesis. Mamang Dai is an 'Indish' writer who writes in English about Arunachal Pradesh. This further supports my statement of calling Ms.Dai an 'Indish' writer, and not an 'Arunachal-ish' writer. As Rajashekhara says in *Kavyamimamsa*, "for a non-regional poet, all languages are one as he has an equal right on all languages."²⁷ So, Mamang Dai is definitely not a 'traitor' when she uses the English language to write.

For me, in whichever language, whether in English or translated, the literature of the Northeast is alive, vivid and heart-wrenching. And Mamang Dai gives an encompassing meaning to this writing. A poet writing in Assamese voices out the same anxiety that Orhan Pamuk does, when he asks: "In which language do we dream? Fellow poets of other states, respond with their different symbols and through their poems, and using their images, here we wade through gutted entrails slippery with blood, and we run through the green bamboo crushing earthworms and frogs, living amidst death and resurrection all at the same time." Ultimately, the literature of the Northeast is about transformation. Here, legends may be portrayed with the intensity of reality, and reality is portrayed with the intensity of longing for a vanished past. It is quite simply about the desire to find words that are a re-affirmation of belief, and expressions of hope and metamorphosis.....

And this, for me, is what Mamang Dai's writing is all about...

²⁷ Rajashekhara. *Kavyamimamsa*. Ed. Sadhna Parashar. D.K.Printwood Ltd.: New Delhi, 2000,p.150-51.

INTERTEXTUALITY IN THE ADI FOLKTALE AND MAMANG DAI'S FICTIONS

"Life imitates art...."

Oscar Wilde.

Oscar Wilde's statement quoted above is fascinating because it confounds the realist agenda that 'art imitates life.' Whereas Julia Kristeva²⁸ and the followers of 'intertextuality' believe that 'art imitates art,' Wilde takes this notion further when he declares that 'life imitates art,' as texts are instrumental not only in the construction of other texts but in the construction of experiences.

In this chapter I will first investigate whether or not my primary texts can be possibly termed as novels in the traditional term. I will also investigate the target readers for whom Mamang Dai wrote her fictions. She is an elite Arunachali, but her texts are based on oral traditions of the past which is popular among the rural, uneducated population. So did she write for them? Or did she intend to target the English educated Adis by writing in an alien (English) language? Or, further still, did she try to incorporate a global audience, i.e. the non-Adis of Arunachal Pradesh? Then I shall explore the cultural contexts of the texts, viz. the folktales that Dai uses and how is it different from the folktales recorded by Obang Tayeng in *The Folktales of the Adis*. For this operation, I will use the tool of intertextuality formulated by Julia Kristeva and propagated by Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette.

According to me, *The Legends of Pensam* and *The Sky Queen* cannot be considered as novels because, a traditional novel has :

1. A unified and plausible plot structure
2. Sharply individualized and believable characters.
3. A theme.

But my primary texts do not quite follow these regular traits of a novel. For instance,

1. A plot structure. A plot is defined as a series of events which is linked by an unbroken chain of cause and effect, concerning a character who urgently wants something important that will not be easy to get. The events should reach a satisfactory

²⁸ Julia Kristeva (b. 24 June, 1941) is a Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic, psychoanalyst, sociologist, feminist, and most recently a novelist. She is now a professor at University Paris Diderot.

conclusion. For example, Event B must be the effect of Event A, Event C the effect of Event B, and so on. In other words, each event in a novel, whether dramatic or apparently trivial, must have consequences, i.e., it must make a difference to what comes next. But *The Legends of Pensam* does not have a plot structure. Here, a series of stories are divided into four sections, viz.,

- (a) A diary of the world
- (b) Song of the rhapsodist
- (c) Daughters of the village
- (d) A matter of time

These sections are not bounded by any chronological order. Every event in the book occurs at the call of the moment and not because it is produced by a previous event or cause. In other words, every story can be read as an individual short story, which is neither context bound nor leaves a trace of a prequel or a trail of a sequel. In fact, in the literary e-journal, "Muse India," Mamang Dai uploads the chapters of *The Legends of Pensam* as individual story. Chapters like, "Pinyar, the Widow," and "The Heart of the Insect" and "The Case of the Travelling Vessel" are examples of such stories. The characters in the first story, Pinyar and her son Kamur does not appear in the rest of the novel, nor do they have any contribution to the plot of the novel. This chapter can be easily extracted and can be read as an individual story. Similarly, the second story does nothing to further the plot nor does have any contribution towards the development of any character in the book. In fact, in this chapter there are no characters at all. This is a story within the story, where Ms. Dai has introduced a rhapsodist who narrates an account of a journey where the travellers encounter the spirit of "Dimitayeng, the lonely spirit who stirs up the lake waters and clutches trespassing men in the embrace of ice." (p.59) Thus, the purpose why Dai wrote these stories is because she wanted to tell about the myths and beliefs of her community by braiding them into a story and thereby, emphasize the significance of myth in her society. As the old rhapsodist said, "It is better to call the spirits. It is necessary to let the *miri* speak to them so that the territory of men is safe from their jealous rage." (p.60) This technique of handling the folklore in the garb of a fictional narrative is clear from the way Dai uses the concept of *Keyum*, which is "a nebulous zone that divided the world of spirit and men" (*Pensam*, 31) to explain the madness that prevails on Kamur. It badly affects his life and Dai presents it in a way that such misfortune can befall anyone. This is why Levi-Strauss considered myths as invariable emotional perceptions of experience of truths, expressed as 'the logic of the concrete.'

J.N.Choudhury in his essay, "Basic Pattern in Myth-Making: Myths of Arunachal Pradesh" says that the so-called primitive man tried to explain the course of nature and its vagaries as his so-called civilized counterparts, so that he may be assured of stability and security in the midst of constant flux of events. The thought process of the pre-literate man is neither pre-logical nor anti-logical. It is however primarily symbolic having its roots in the unconscious, and is almost always elaborated in myths.

The third story, too, does not have any contribution to the plot of the book. It describes the tale of the "danki" of the Migu clan which was a possession of the Lotang family and showed itself only to the members of the clan. It was a blessed vessel as it made the clan prosperous, but it is also responsible in bringing down their fortune by splitting into two halves and then disappearing eventually. This tale probably comes with the moral that nothing is permanent in life. For Dai, another purpose of Dai recording this tale is to reveal how clan affinity is strong among her people. After the vessel vanished, the Migu clan called a *shaman* to perform an elaborate family ritual, but the *shaman* ran away robbing them. An uncle of the clan gave chase to him, but ended up killing three innocent people on his mission. He fled away from his ancestral village in order to escape the punishment and got married and settled down in the village of Sirum in the Duyang group. He returned to his own village after fourteen years, but due to this marriage bond between them, the Duyang clan and the Migu clan became friends forever. It is said that whenever a person falls ill or any kind of misfortune befalls, "all the remembered links of kinship are called up and word is sent to clan members to come to the aid of their brethren." (65) Therefore, we can come to the conclusion that such chapters in *The Legends of Pensam* cannot be considered as "cause and effect" which brings about the outcome of the book, so we can safely conclude that *The Legends of Pensam* do not have a basic plot structure. And when a story in a novel lacks this important cause-and-effect chain, or when the chain is a weak one, the novel is said to be episodic. Hence, I prefer to call *The Legends of Pensam* as an episodic novel.

The Sky Queen is a mere twenty page book with two chapters, which tells of a story which is actually a folktale. The first chapter deals with the destruction of the *Kojum Kojā* civilisation and the second chapter tells about *Nyangi Myete*, the celestial lady of the *Kojum Kojā* family. Even here each of the chapters can be read as an individual story. And so, even *The Sky Queen* can be termed as an episodic novel.

2. I also have to deny to the proposition that *The Legends of Pensam* and *The Sky Queen* has sharply individualized and believable characters. For instance, in *The Legends of Pensam*, the character of Hoxo, “the boy who fell from the sky” is shrouded in mystery. His characterisation has a quality of magic realism in it, the kind we find in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the kind which is not real, but the way it exist, one do not want to question its reality, because it feels like if we pull on the thread of reason, then the mystical curtain will fall and the illusion of magic will go away. That is the case with Hoxo. Nobody knows his origin. He was found by his father in the forest, and was carried to his home in the basket. And he is accepted by everyone because they are simple people who know that it is not necessary to understand everything. Stranger things have happened in the world and they just let things to be ...

As *The Sky Queen* is a folktale, basically a fable, it does not have any real characters. The main characters are *Biri Angur Potung*, the son of *Biri Bote*, who is actually a fish-like creature. Then there is *Koru Ponsung Babu*, the Bat and *Nyangi Myete*, celestial lady of the *Kojum* family, who like Hoxo, “came gliding from the skies...” (*The Sky Queen*)

Thus, these two novels lack sharp sketched characters. They are products of the writer’s imagination, borrowed/influenced heavily from the folklore of the Adis.

3. A novel should have a theme or a major concern. A novel’s theme is the main idea that the writer expresses. Theme can also be defined as the underlying meaning of the story. The theme of a novel is more than its subject matter, because an author’s technique can play as strong a role in developing a theme as the actions of the characters do. It might be love, courage or cowardice; loyalty or disloyalty; growing up or seeking individuality, for example, J.D.Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). A common theme which can be found in novels is the conflict between appearance and reality. The theme of an individual who strikes out alone to face the world is used in many works. For example, in Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Other common themes in novels include how art and life are reflected in one another, the meaning of religion, and whether technology helps people or whether it is a harmful aspect of society.

However, the theme in *The Legends of Pensam and The Sky Queen* can rarely be interpreted in only one way. I mean, *The Sky Queen* is a folktale told in the author's way. And a folktale has the ideas and imagination of our ancestors which explains their understanding of the world. In *The Legends of Pensam*, the gist says that it is an intricate web of stories which celebrate the human spirit. But there is no particular theme as such, because there is no particular protagonist in the novel. It is a memoir which Mamang Dai had to pen down because this is her history, her life in the garb of a memorable narrative.

Hence, I have proved that both my primary texts – *The Legends of Pensam* and *The Sky Queen* – does not fit into the regular traits of a traditional novel. This is because folk narrative is traditional, oral, rural, composed in speech and performed; whereas novel is a modern, urban and a written form. In a modern novel, characters are vastly more important than situation; in a folktale, the development is not of the people but of the situation in which they find themselves in. Therefore, when these two genres adopt a symbiotic relationship, study becomes interesting. Moreover, when oral literature is penned down, it undergoes a translation. The book, *The Epic; Oral and Written*, edited by Lauri Honko, Jawaharlal Handoo and John Miles Foley talks about these borderline phenomena between orality and literacy. It says that:

The idea of a predominantly one-way traffic from oral to written has been replaced by more complex models, concerning, for example, oral styles in written text and the “written like” handling of materials in oral performance; the visible or invisible use of notebooks and manuscripts in the oral performances of epics; various forms of copying oral text; the transfer of ownership of oral texts, the mental editing of textual elements, oral and written, between performances, the intertextual formation of mental texts in the mind of the singer, etc. This discussion has generally made the border between orality and literacy more fluid than before. (26)

Indian culture possesses oral and literary epic traditions as strong parallel streams. Here, interaction between oral, semi-literary and literary epics has been observable for centuries. In India written and oral cultures are generally merging. The transmission of traditional literature has occurred through a variety of modes of communication, both oral and written.

With writing, folk songs and folk narratives were recorded or retold in writing. The great Indian epics – the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* – as well as the great collection of stories – the *Buddhist Jatakas*, the *Panchatantra* (fifth century) and the *Kathasaritsagara*, “ocean of stories” (eleventh century) – are texts based on what were originally oral traditions. The opposition between the oral and the written involves many intermediate forms. For example, the Indian epics, which very often begin with a story about themselves, contain conversations about the conversion of an oral tale into a written text. These epics have many of the properties of the oral genre – formulas, repetition at different levels as a key device, story within a story and so forth. They even have tellers and listeners inscribed within the tale. Their narrative ideals are often those of the oral tellers, for they have been a product of culture primarily oral. For instance, the *Mahabharata* has a story about how it got to be written down. Vyasa, the poet/editor of the epic, wanted someone to take down the words as he composed it orally. As it was a difficult task, no one dared to come forward. Finally, Ganesha, the elephant-faced God offered to do it, under the condition that Vyasa should never keep him waiting, that the dictation should be as fast as Ganesha could write. Vyasa agreed. But as the folk version says that Ganesha is a God whereas Vyasa is a mere mortal who had to answer calls of nature from time to time. Sometimes he had to think a little to choose the right word. So, every now and then, he would throw in a difficult word that Ganesha could not figure out, and while he was struggling with it, Vyasa would take his break. That is the explanation given for the presence of difficult words (*granthi*, or “knots”) in the normally simple epic Sanskrit of the *Mahabharata*. Early texts were usually published not by being written down and read silently, but by being read aloud to an appreciative audience, a patron, or a court. As Alan Dundes in his book, *Folklore: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, points out:

In early stages of writing, it was an aide-memoire; to write was to write down, to read was to read aloud. When the poet Gunadhya²⁹ cannot find a patron, he reads it to the birds and beasts – reconverting the written into the oral, as early writing was meant to be. The words are dormant on the leaf or the page waiting to be awakened by a living voice. (344)

²⁹ Gunadhya, a poet from the Andhra king Hala, has written the much acclaimed *Brhat Katha* which was retold as many famous compendium of fables.

But this is about the early stages of writing. The scenario of Indian literature after modernism is quite a different picture. In the seventies Indian literature moved nearer to the down trodden and the exploited. During this time the Naxalite movement came and with it the *Uttara Adhunikta* entered the literary scene. In the Indian context *Uttara Adhunikta* arrived as a reaction to media operated and market guided reality – a reaction to modernism of the sixties of the existential anguish, of the crises of identity and of the frustration of the idealist but it carries with it the trend of progressive literature of protests and struggles. *Indian Literature Today* edited by R.K.Dhawan says:

In India *Uttara Adhunikta* has arrived to challenge the very idea of Euro-centrist modernism, internationalism – the tendency to compare every literary text/trend with some Euro-American product. Now one realises that by borrowing things from the West one cannot bring about change and enter the realm of modernity. The elements of modernity are to be sought in our roots and traditions in our own realities. We come across many instances of writers trying to explore their roots and find their moorings, and probe whole areas of experience blurred during period of extreme modernism of the last several decades. (21)

Thus in the *Uttara Adhunikta* era the effort is to be natural, to be Indian, to be near the common man, to be socially conscious. In poetry there is an indigenous mode of perception for the search for roots. Even Indian English writers like Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh and also poets of the Northeast like Temsula Ao (Nagaland), Mamang Dai (Arunachal Pradesh), Pradip Acharya (Assam), Robin S. Ngangom (Manipur), Esther Syiem (Meghalaya) etc. are using the English language without suggesting a self-conscious distancing from the Indian situation and without showing any lack of commitment to Indian-ness. Now the writers are in search for their regional identity, racial history and regional traditions. Interestingly the search for roots made the writers of contemporary Indian literature make use of mythology, folk belief, fables, mythical history again to depict the present day predicament. It has become now all the more necessary because the status of words like ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ has turned out to be problematic. Playwrights like Girish Karnad use myths, folk legends and religio-centric tradition to show the present day existence. Myth is now accepted as meaningful sub-text of literary text. A.K.Ramanujan is another writer who has been dealing with oral literature and folklore since the early 1950s. As Dr. Atma Ram said in his book:

Folklore is integral to the life patterns of the people. It incorporates deeply felt convictions and experiences, and is frequently at the core of the literature of the region. In literature it appears in two major forms: transcriptively and functionally. In a good work of literary art it is shown in action and is present with all the appeal in its own right, but it is put to work. (6)

Thus, we can see that folk literature has been a part of the great Indian literature down the ages. Even today, in the northeast, may be because of multi-ethnicity and poly-cultural ambience, the folk literature and the modern literature live side by side. This is the reason why Mamang Dai's writing is the way that it is. And when these folk literature is further fictionalised to make it fit into the genre of the novel (as what Mamang Dai does), it definitely undergoes certain transformation which no longer makes it a folktale nor a proper novel.

In the next section I will investigate for whom does Mamang Dai write. In my previous chapter I defended her choice of using English as her medium of writing. But by choosing an elite medium to address some of her native, ethnic, cultural issues, she does not aim for a parochial readership of exclusively the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh; rather she incorporates an entire global audience to know and witness her place through her writing.

There are many instances in *The Legends of Pensam*, where one can notice this all-inclusive attitude of Dai. The inclusion of the "migluns" is like the construction of the Stillwell road which runs through the heart of Arunachal Pradesh to China, in the same way, the outsiders in the text (whether it is the British officers, or the narrator's friends, Mona and Jules), this technique of the author makes *The Legends of Pensam* travel through Arunachal Pradesh right to the heart of a world-wide audience who can now relate to it.

Mona is of Arab-Greek origin and her husband Jules is French. Such a diverse and unusual creation on the part of the writer is probably because she wants to say that Arunachal Pradesh, though very much a part of India, is hardly a tourist place for Indians, and is mostly visited by the journalists, anthropologists and research scholars from all over the world for mostly exotic research purposes. There is hardly any "mainland" Indian tourist who goes to the North Eastern states for travel purposes because it is a strife strong area. Thus, Dai paints an authentic picture with such minor detailing. Another reason I feel is that *The Legends of*

Pensam has an autobiographical element in it. I strongly feel that the author's participation in the story, when she narrates from the first person narrative is not a mere stylistic technique, but it is because it tells the story from the pages of her diary. Especially in page 83, when she talks about the loss of love, the loss is so personal that one cannot help but wonder if it is Ms. Dai speaking out of the pages. I am aware that by such a statement, I contradict myself of what I earlier said that the characters in the book are not believable and realistic, for if we consider that the narrator is actually Mamang Dai herself, then, we will have to take into account the fact that – Hoxo, Losi, Rakut, Nenem, David, Pinyar, Kamur – everyone is as real as the sun in the sky! But why can't they be real? Where the legends exist along with the folk, where myth exist along with the daily chores, why can't "a boy who fell from the sky" on the most extraordinary place on the earth cannot exist like an ordinary human being?

Another instance of appealing to a global reader is in the chapter, "The Silence of Adela and Kepi." Here, the strange case of Adela, daughter of Jules and Mona, who one fine day stopped communicating with the world, just like that, is told. Such behaviour, which modern science might define as autism, is very effectively compared with the village boy, Kepi's situation. While Adela's withdrawal syndrome was followed by numerous medical examinations and her admission to an autistic school; Kepi's case was met by a performance of the snake ritual to ward off evil spirits. I believe that Mamang Dai's intention behind telling this story is that she wanted to tell the world that the fundamental situations of human life are always much the same. This is what our oral traditions teach us. As we know our folktales are always archetypal with other cultures. The tribal folklore has also savoured the tales that percolated from outside and this percolation enriched the folklore of every state, every country, for the human mind is attuned to the same thought, same ideas relating to life and way of living. As all human beings pass through the same stage of social development, the gregariousness of human beings enhances the process of percolation. Even today the tribal community of Arunachal Pradesh has adhered to the ancient social system. The other communities like the Nagas, the Mizos, the Khasis have converted to Christianity. Assam and Manipur are predominantly Hindu society. But in Arunachal Pradesh, though Buddhism is followed, some tribes, particularly, Adis and Apa Tanis still believe in their indigenous faith. They have their own religion and their own deities, their faith in *Donyi-Polo* (literally translated as *Donyi* – sun, and *Polo* – moon) that recognises the sun and moon as the cosmic symbolic power through which the supreme spiritual being, the world spirit is made manifest. The tribal people live in a composite and congenial community guided by common interests.

Based on my research for a comparative study of the oral stories of Arunachal Pradesh with that of other tradition to show how the stories are archetypal, I draw two conclusions:

1. The oral traditions among the central Arunachali tribes have little in common with the mainstream Indian traditions, even with those in nearby Assam. The only exception is a number of legends about the marriage of a tribal woman to a Hindu prince or god, which reflect the influence of Hindu culture along the Assam border where they are told. However J.N.Chowdhary has listed some of the influential factors of other religion on the tribal culture of Arunachal Pradesh. For instance, the creation myths of the Adis tell us that in the beginning there was no shape or form; everything was enveloped in darkness. We are naturally reminded of the myth of creation in the Bible and our own conception of utter chaos and confusion in the beginning, in the Hindu mythology. Dr. B.S.Guha observed that to the Adis all existence is endowed with life and the evolution of what we consider inanimate, have come through the normal physiological process of birth. This conception is similar to the Rig Vedic idea of *Dyaya Prithvi* (the Heaven and Earth), who were together in the beginning of creation, and gave birth to all beings. Dr. Verrier Elwin remarks:

The NEFA stories of the origin of creation of the world, the sky and the earth and the heavenly bodies have almost Miltonic grandeur of conception. Earth and sky are lovers and when the sky makes love to earth every kind of tree and grass and living creatures come into being. But the lovers must be separated, for so long as they are together there is nowhere for their children to live. (22)

From the above story we can see that the primitive philosopher was under some psychological compulsion to conceptualise a beginning of all creations. And for this he found it natural to anthropomorphise the natural courses as he sees them. The early Vedas have ample evidence of this kind of conceptualisation. Chowdhary then points out the importance of the recurrence of the imagery of the sky and the earth being the first born of creation in the above story. He then quotes from Hasting's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* on this idea:

No historical or proto-historical motive can be assigned as the cause and neither migrations of races nor the diffusion of myths and folklore affords the slightest justification of this fact. The universality of the sky-god and the uniformity of his essential characteristics are logical consequence of the constant uniformity of the

primitive systems of cosmogony. (23)

2. Stories in central Arunachal Pradesh have a set of substantial parallels with stories told in Naga Hills, Chin Hills, Chittagong Hills and further east, across Myanmar and rest of upland South East Asia and South West China.

There is a folktale known to the Apatanis as “*Bunyi-Bunye*” or “The Two Sisters.” When the two sisters see a fruit tree and want to eat its sweet fruit, a snake appears and says: “this is my tree and my fruit. If you want to eat it, you must first marry me.” Both sisters get startled but one plucks up the courage to take a snake husband. Before long, however, she decides she wants more than a snake to lie in her bed and she burns its skin. Meanwhile the second sister begins to see that a reptile spouse is not such a bad idea and attempts to marry another snake, but her jealousy is rewarded with a fatal bite. Tales about snake-husbands are, of course told literally across the world. But, this Arunachali story belongs to a specific type, and found almost exclusively in Asia (one version recorded from Egypt), with several examples from India, including Nagaland and Assam (“*Champaboti*,” the Assamese snake-husband folktale) and many more from China.

The other story that links central Arunachal Pradesh with the rest of the extended eastern Himalayas is an origin myth explaining the coming of death as compensation for the shooting down of Sun/Moon (i.e. the *Donyi-Polo* myth). This myth has three elements - Excessive heat of multiple female suns (and male moons), which leads to shooting down one (or more) of them to cool, which further leads to the coming of mortality among men. Myths about the Sun are scattered all over the world, but it is significant that the closest parallels, including the female Sun and male Moon, are found among the Tibeto-Burman speakers in the extended eastern Himalayas. It is for this reason that Levi-Strauss considered tales as miniature myths. The tales in one society might be found in the myths of another, while vice-versa is also true. The coming of death story is very popular among the Adis, with different versions in different tribes. For instance, the Minyongs believe that death came due to the breaking of an earthen vessel by *Ninur-Botte*, while the Gallongs believe that death and weeping came into the world because *Tani*, the first man forced a bird for its spittle! The primitive philosopher thought in terms of symbols and imagery. J.N.Chowdhary in the book, *Folklore in North-East India*, tries to interpret it on several levels. In the first story, the primitive philosopher seems to convey the meaning that one cannot go back to the original position once it has been passed. The original vessel cannot be remade again. It is ‘the logic

of the concrete', in action, expressed in 'aesthetic' imagery. This meaning is akin to the momentariness or the *pratiyasamutpada* of the Buddhist philosophy. The vessel was, and is no more. The man was, but is no longer, and hence the connection. In the second story, the primitive philosopher was obviously aware of the inexorable course of death, but he was reluctant to acknowledge it as essentially inimical to him. He must make light of his sense of fear and awe before the tremendous force of death as a natural phenomenon. So he connected death with his own transgression (his insistence on having the spittle), and thus personalised, as it were a natural force. In the midst of disaster of one kind or another, and the constantly changing moods of nature, he seeks stability and security. So, he emphasizes man's transgression, and minimises death's malevolence towards man. In another version of the same theme, the Minyongs say that there was no death in the beginning until gods in their mercy sent death to keep down the population. Death is conceived in the role of the benefactor who keeps down population to the level of subsistence. The tenor and emotional content of the stories related above finds a strange echo in at least one Mahabharata story which Bhishma related in reply to Yudhisthira's queries: 'Whose child is Death? Why does Death sweep away creatures of the world?'

Stuart Blackburn in his essay, "Oral Stories and Culture Areas: From Northeast India to Southwest China," attempts to account for the parallels in oral stories, I turn to a historical explanation, not to borrowing across culture, but to borrowing down generations within the same population. This is called "vertical transmission."³⁰ The historic principle of vertical transmission has an explanatory potential. For example, it is a known fact that the Apatanis and Lahus (another tribe) speak related languages, not because of historical contact, but because of a common linguistic inheritance. Here the question arises that if this model is applicable to language, then why it is so rarely used to explain similarities in other domains of culture? One answer is that any argument, such as "vertical transmission", which relies on "inheritance", has been since 1940s, tainted with racism and discredited.

The similar and sometimes identical stories in the extended eastern Himalayas could be best explained through "vertical transmission," as coming down from oral tradition transmitted over generation of Tibeto-Burman speakers who migrated and settled in the region. However,

³⁰ Blackburn, Stuart. "Tribal Transitions: Cultural Innovation in Arunachal Pradesh, India. Challenging the Romance of Tribal Cultures." *Indian Folklife*, Vol.2, Issue 1, July 2002. <http://www.indianfolklore.org>

horizontal diffusion cannot be ruled out altogether. Since, it takes only one person to transmit a story from one village to another, the reason behind the history of these similar stories can be explained by contact between populations. For example, regions like Assam, where speakers from different language families have evolved a common culture. Some of the population of the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh had migrated to Assam and settled in the region as the Assamese tribe “Mishing”. Today, they speak Assamese language, wear Assamese clothes (with their indigenous print), follow Assamese customs and surprisingly, do not want to get associated with the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh. Thus, we can conclude that similarities in material culture and practices may often result from horizontal borrowing; whereas parallels in language, ideas and stories are more likely to be transferred through “vertical transmission.”

In *The Sky Queen*, Nyangi Myete belongs to the *Engo Takar*³¹ (the land of fish and stars) race. In the article, “Oral Narrative and Myth”, Mamang Dai herself says that the *Ego Takars* is similar to the *Dreamtime*³² of the Australian aboriginal literature. She says,

All the things that we perceive – the sun, the moon, hills and rivers were all born out of that mythical place that exists as the dreamtime, the place of ancient things from which the stories of the world, the stories of gods and goddesses and the birth of man and life on earth unfolded since thought and speech began. There are similarities across the world in the first stories of wandering tribes and vanished empires. The ancient Mayan and Aztec civilisations worshipped the sky god and sacrificed to the mighty sun, and stretching from China throughout the Far East across to the frozen frontiers of Alaska and to the Americas, myths and legends are the basis of traditions and beliefs of communities across the world. So, it is with the Homeric legends, the gods of Northern Europe, Hindu mythology, and myths of ancient Egypt and Rome (p. 4-5)

³¹ An early community who preceded present race of humans. All festivals and other socio-cultural traits were developed by the Engo Takars, who passed them onto present race of humans.

³² Aboriginal people believe that in the Dreamtime the traditional Aboriginal way of life was established by the Mythical Beings. They believe that their ancestors were taught about their tribal lands by the Mythical Beings, and were told how they as descendents of these beings should behave. This was their Dreamtime, and this teaching is as important to them as the Ten Commandments.

Thus, we can see that Mamang Dai in portraying her mystical, mythical characters in her fictions was also trying to evoke a call of universality of human race. In *The Legends of Pensam*, the narrator and her friend Mona, has a discussion about how Jules is so accommodating and adjusting and can fit into any situation anywhere around the world. And watching Hoxo and Rakut talking intently with Jules and sharing their life stories and a bottle of rum with the same earnestness, the narrator felt that even they “would get on with anyone, no matter where in the world you put them. They were like that.” (p. 43) I, therefore believe that *The Legends of Pensam* and *The Sky Queen* were written in a way that a global reader can also respond to the cry of these tribal folklores which are residing in the mist over the river, in the green-ness of the bamboos, and in the stillness of the snow-capped mountains from time immemorial.

In my third section, I will try to explore the elements of intertextuality that Mamang Dai uses in her works, mainly in the two concerned texts. Daniel Chandler in his essay, “Semiotics for Beginners”, quotes Julia Kristeva, who declares that, “every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it.”³³ She argued that rather than confining our attention to the structure of a text, we should study its ‘structuration’ (how the structure came into being). This involved setting it ‘within the totality of previous or synchronic texts’ of which it was a ‘transformation.’ Theorists of intertextuality problematizes the status of ‘authorship’, treating the writer of a text as the orchestrator of what Roland Barthes refers to as the ‘already-written’ rather than as its originator. According to Barthes, a text is a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations and the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them (Barthes, 1977, 146). The concept of intertextuality reminds us that each text exist in relation to others. In fact, texts owe more to other text than to their own makers. Michel Foucault declared that:

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences:

³³ C:\Users\Sony\Downloads\research materials\Semiotics for Beginners Intertextuality.htm accessed on 6/19/2011.

it is a node within a network... the book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands... its unity is variable and relative. (Foucault, 1974, 23)

Chandler says that intertextuality is not a feature of the text alone, but of the 'contract' which reading it forges between its author(s) and reader(s). Since the dominant mode of producing texts seems to involve masking their debts, reflexivity seems to be an important issue to consider how marked the intertextuality is. In the case of *The Sky Queen*, the use of folklore is quite reflexive. This text is a recording of an oral tale in Mamang Dai's style. Even the alteration that she does, is quite minimal and do not actually contribute to any changes in the outcome of the story. In other words, the scale of adoption/intertextuality is quite explicit and the criticality to comprehend the intertextuality involved is very easy for the readers. If we have to compare it with Obang Tayeng's recording of the same tale in *The Folktales of the Adis*, then I will argue that it is not so much of an alteration, but more of 'inputs' in Tayeng's tale which is missing from Mamang Dai's *The Sky Queen*. For instance, Tayeng divulges that the *Kojum Koja* was an early tribe of the *Engo Takar* race, whereas Dai's tale has no mention of that information. The purpose of such editing is probably because, Dai meant this text as a children's book and so she tried to make it as simple as possible. This text is a Katha Publication and the book is replete with art by Srivi. It is a colourful book meant as a fable for the junior readers. In the case of *The Legends of Pensam*, the reflexivity of the use of intertextuality is much more layered and more implicit in nature. Here, Dai has adapted her folklore in order to enrich her story. For instance, whether it is the story of *Biribik*, the water serpent in page 19, or the story of Mithun as the totem of the community in page 86, her use of folklore has given a rhetorical touch to her writing. The use of myth, like, "tree was a symbol of strength and ants symbolized fertility and the birth of many sons" (63) and, "grave error for women to linger by streams and rivers after sunset, for the night is restless with strange dreams and lost spirits..." (84), makes her writing sensational and kind of exotic. In an interaction with Mamang Dai, I asked her about this accusation made to Indian English writers of selling exotica, and her reaction to it is very nonchalant. She replied, "if people consider me as exotic, I don't mind being exotic!"³⁴

Again if we compare Dai's version of the concept of *Keyum* in *The Legends of Pensam* with Tayeng's recording, then the alteration involved is quite noticeable and makes one wonder what does *Keyum* actually means to the Adis. In Tayeng's recording, *Keyum-Kero* is a state

³⁴ Dai, Mamang. Seminar interview. 14 October, 2009.

of emptiness from where *Yumkang* (“tiny imperceptible patch of darkness”) from which *Siang* (“tiny particles of mist”) came and similarly Bomuk (“little specks of moist”), *Mukseng* (“an inky tiny layer of cloud”) and finally *Sedi* and *Melo* (“first physical manifestations”) emerged. The tale goes on to inform how from *Sedi* and *Melo*, the world with all its creatures – human, animal, spirits – came into being. Thus, it is basically an indigenous creation story. But Mamang Dai’s version of *Keyum* as Nothingness is metaphysical and modern. According to her “*Keyum* is the remote past... out of which the first flicker of thought began to shine... from where the light of imagination was born... which grew into the shining stream of consciousness of man... from which all the stories came into being.” (*Pensam*, 56). Thus her version, although, also a creation story, deals with reason and thought; whereas the original folktale (considering Tayeng’s recording of the tales as authentic) shows how our ancestors used to reason out the ways of the world. Dai further uses the concept of *Keyum* in page 176, when she compares the darkness inside the caves with the stark darkness of the nebulous zone of *Keyum* (called the darkness beyond the reach of memory). Standing true to her agnostic beliefs, she explains that “it was not god who created light; it was the spark of imagination that gave birth to light.” Here, the trace of secondary orality³⁵ is seen when she voices her fear that such stories (like that of *Keyum*) needs to be recorded via the medium of films, television etc., as the old rhapsodists are a dying breed. Thus, the final section of the book, “A Matter of Time” hints at the arrival of modernity, and with it technology like the television, the maruti van, roads. This hints at the acknowledgement of outsiders and an act of embracing the outside world.

Again, in the characterisation of Nenem as Nyangi Myete, Dai personifies the celestial bride and “thus mythological belief is projected into the present reality through natural surroundings and the interpretation of human imagination,” in Dai’s words. This is what is meant by second-hand folklore – where, on one hand, the reader cannot escape from the innate Adi-ness in the text; yet, they get to know their folklore in the context of the present frame of time. The kind of alteration that Mamang Dai uses, gives a new meaning to the existing folktales. It makes it more philosophical and pragmatic and easier for the non-Adi readers to relate to the Adi culture.

³⁵ New medias like disc, tape, radio, television are secondary orality. Modernisation, new technology and innovations gave rise to new folklore and new traditions. Mass media was at first seen as destroying the “purity” of folklore and oral tradition, but it soon turned out that mass media in fact was becoming a new carrier of folklore and the retelling of films and soap operas and other genres was changing the temporal boundaries of folklore rather than destroying its content or purity

Here I will further delve into the theory of intertextuality to explain some other elements in the texts. Gerard Genette proposed the term ‘transtextuality’ as a more inclusive term than ‘intertextuality’ (Genette, 1997). He defines ‘transtextuality’ as “all that which puts one text in relation, whether manifest or secret, with other texts.” He lists and defines five subtypes:

1. Intertextuality: the “effective co-presence of two texts” in the form of quotation, plagiarism and allusion.
2. Paratextuality: “the relation within the totality of a literary work, between the text proper and its ‘paratext’ – titles, prefaces, postfaces, epigraphs, dedications, illustrations, footnotes, dust jackets etc. In short, all the accessory messages and commentaries which come to surround the text.”
3. Architextuality: the designation of a text as part of genre or genres (Genette refers to designation by the text itself, but this could also be applied to its framing by readers)
4. Metatextuality: explicit or implicit critical commentary of one text on another text (metatextuality can be hard to distinguish from the following category)
5. Hypotextuality (Genette’s term was *hypertextuality*): the relation between a text and a preceding ‘hypotext’ – a text or genre on which it is based but which it transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends (including parody, spoof, sequel, translation)

Now, whether it is the art illustrations in *The Sky Queen*, or the epigraphs, the chapter headings and the historical data in *The Legends of Pensam*, paratextuality is a very important operation to dissect my primary texts. In *The Legends of Pensam*, two major historical instances are braided into the narrative – the Abor Expedition of 1912 and the great earthquake of 15 August, 1950. The Abor Expedition which resulted from the killing of a British officer, Noel Williamson by a native tribesman called Matmur Jamoh, is mentioned by Dai in the chapter named “travel the road” in the second section “the songs of the rhapsodist” with the epigraph,

“On the velvet road they go

The red birds of summer circling the earth”

The epigraph sets the mood of an invasion – here, the colonial invasion of the British and the protests of the natives initiated by a common man. The colour “red” in “the red birds of summer” depicts blood and violence. The chapter heading is also in keeping with the struggle for independence. “Travel the road can be interpreted as the “*mighluns*” as travellers, or the

freedom fighters travelling the road to become free from colonial exploitation and they are “the red birds of summer who is circling the earth”, thereby protecting their lands from the outsiders.

Another instance is the roping of the great earthquake in the chapter, “rites of love” in the third section “daughters of the village” with the epigraph,

We descend

From solitude and miracles

The earthquake rocked humanity, both historically and also fictionally (in *The Legends of Pensam*). In the story, such an earthquake had never happened before. So, for the characters it was almost “miraculous.” The affinity of the people with the land, the river, the nature and their attachment to the beautiful mountains is profound. They are so accustomed to their landscape that it has an identity for them. All this changed due to the earthquake. In page 126, it says,

The river that Nenem had so loved was thrown off its course as a mountain collapsed and blocked its path. In a furious battle the river rose in a mass of churning, heaving water and swung inland, swallowing half of Pigo town. All the houses and the tree-lined avenues of the miglun quarter were gone forever. Then it swung west and spreading wider still it tore away every sign and symbol of the past years, and the school that Nenem had hated and the town itself were sunk beneath the flood waters. According to the old people the tremors continued for many months and the town and the market place were covered with dead fish.

All “the daughters of the village”, whether it is Nenem or her mother, understood “the rites of love” when they were gripped by the danger of losing their loved ones due to the earthquake. Nenem hold on to her daughter Losi every time the earth shook as a desperate attempt to hold on to something tangible from her long lost past. And her mother cried for her dear old husband who got separated from her. “The rites of love” were never performed better, before

the earthquake of 1950! Thus, such chapter headings and epigraphs assert the factuality and historicity of the primary text.

While the oral tradition has always been connected directly with the cultural response to the past and of our knowledge of the past³⁶, its role in historiographic metafiction is tied up with that of the trappings of realism that paratextuality relies upon. The desire for self-authenticating oral presence is matched by a need for permanence through writing. Such fictive historical writing raises the question of how the intertexts of history, its documents and traces, get incorporated into an avowedly fictive context, while still somehow retaining their historical documentary status. The post-modernist's use of such paratextuality might be regarded as a highly artificial, un-organic mode of doing what novels have always done. But perhaps, the truth of historical fact can only be recounted today as self-consciously novelistic fiction. Linda Hutcheon points out in her essay, "Postmodern Paratextuality and History," that there is a second function of paratextuality, which is primarily a discursive one. The reader's linear reading is disrupted by the presence of a lower text on the same page, a factual data in a fiction, is in order to wake the readers up, or to give the readers a break from a coherent fictive narrative, much like that of an advertisement break in a cricket match in order to make the viewers understand that the game is a context of a larger text. In other words, these notes operate centrifugally, as well as, centripetally. Hutcheon further says that a third function of this kind of paratextual insertions of historical documents into historiographic metafiction is related to the Brechtian alienation effect: like the songs in Brecht's plays, the historical documents dropped into the fictions can have the effect of interrupting any illusion, of making the reader into an aware collaborator, not a passive consumer. The potential for ideological challenge is, then, perhaps present in these modes of art that incorporate history self-consciously and materially.

Whatever their functions, what these paratextual insertions do is to ask one important question: how do we come to know the past? And what do we know of the past? To write of the past as either historian or as novelist would seem to be equally a matter of constructing and re-constructing. Thus, such mechanism of intertextuality problematizes the idea of a text having boundaries and questions the dichotomy of 'inside' and 'outside': where does a text 'begin' and 'end'? What is 'text' and what is 'context'? Much like the same way Mamang Dai says in *The Legends of Pensam*,

³⁶ Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. Dryden: New York, 1951, p.4

Everywhere, people like us, we turned with the world. Our lives turned, and in the circle who could tell where was the beginning and where the end? As Rakut often said, 'we are peripheral people. We are not politicians, scientist or builders of empires. Not even the well-known citizen or the outrageous one. Just peripheral people, thinking out our thoughts! (190)

This paragraph always reminds one of James Hilton's book, *The Lost Horizon* (1933). In the Shangri-la valley, people do not believe in being absolutely good or absolutely bad. They just believe in following the middle path, much in accordance with the Buddhist philosophy.

THE ADI IDENTITY AND ITS REPRESENTATION: PHILOSOPHY, FOLKLORE, AND
LITERATURE

Knowing others is wisdom,

Knowing oneself is enlightenment.

Lao Tzu.

In my third chapter, I intend to investigate the Adi identity as reflected in the folklore of the people and the writings of Mamang Dai. For instance, a major question is, is it possible to talk about the innate Adi-ness of the Adi people of Arunachal Pradesh. For this it is important to comprehend the Adi Self. The idea of the Self is produced by the various proponents of culture – laws, institutions, myth, legacy etc. similarly the idea of the Adi Self is also made up of the tribal culture. In my first two chapters I have discussed the Adi culture – their customs, rituals, folklore, myth etc. – and how this culture is inherent among the Adi people. Here, I try to probe certain questions regarding the culture in a larger context, viz. :-

1. How does one read an Adi culture?
2. Why the Adi culture is what it is?
3. What is the one supreme factor/force that decides the paraphernalia of the Adi identity?

In order to trace the genealogy of the Adi Self, we need to start from the time when the idea of the Self first originated. It is in the fourteenth and fifteenth century Renaissance period that the human capacity was celebrated and it bestowed a powerful legacy on the Europeans. They termed this movement “The Enlightenment.” Though this movement is usually associated with the eighteenth century, its roots can be traced to the Renaissance period, when a group of thinkers known as the “humanists” argued that the proper worship of God involved admiration of his creation and in particular of that crown of creation: humanity. The reason why this intellectual movement was named as “The Enlightenment” is because it was primarily believed that human reason could be used to combat ignorance, superstition, tyranny and to build a better world. The principal target was religion (embodied in France in the Catholic Church) and the domination of society by a hereditary aristocracy. The goal of Renaissance humanists was to recapture pride, breadth of spirit, and the creativity of the

ancient Greeks and Romans, to replicate their success and go beyond them. Europeans developed the belief that tradition could and should be used to promote change. By cleaning and sharpening the tools of antiquity, they could reshape their own time. During this time the famous philosopher of the time, Michel de Montaigne in his *Essays* (pub.1580), asked: “What do I know?” by this he meant that we have no right to impose on others dogmas which rest on cultural habit rather than absolute truth. Powerfully influenced by the discovery of thriving non-Christian cultures, he argued that morals may be to some degree relative. For example, who are Europeans to insist that Brazilian cannibals who merely consume dead human flesh instead of wasting it are morally inferior to Europeans who persecute and oppress those whom they deserve? The other contribution of Montaigne to the Enlightenment stemmed from another aspect of his famous question: “What do I know?” That is if we cannot be certain that our values are God-given, then we have no right to impose them by force on others. Inquisitors, popes and kings alike had no business enforcing adherence to particular religious or philosophical beliefs. This has a taint of associations with discredited racist and fascist thought. I feel that Montaigne in a very sublime manner talked about the colonisation of the non-Western people by the Western empire on the notion that the non-Western communities are traditional and therefore the antithesis of the dynamic, changing West, has proven very resilient and influential. Advocates of modernisation often assert how people need to leave traditional ways behind them – not just because traditions are part of the past in this view but also because they are held to be antithetical to change. The model of contrast between the West and the Rest is also used quite widely to explain social inequalities and differences within the so-called developing nations that used to be grouped as the Third World. In this view developing nations have both modern and traditional sectors inside them, as if time ran on unrelated tracks not just for the world as a whole but even within some societies. Nor are such beliefs only held by self-described opponents of tradition. Multiculturalists and cultural conservatives often cherish traditions because they see them as islands of stability, in a modern world they judge to be unmoored and inauthentic. These sentiments usually add a mid-twentieth century anthropological perspective to the doubts about modernity and nostalgia for the past derived from anti-Enlightenment thinking.³⁷

In this changed political climate, many intellectuals became concerned with what it meant to call non-Western people traditional. Since tradition was so strongly imbued with the sense of being the antithesis of modernity, it seemed less and less appropriate to apply the idea to

³⁷ science.jrank.org/pages/8126/Tradition.html

societies that now had the very same sets of institutions and ambitions that were identified with modernity in the West. In fact, as many thinkers came to insist, that the use of term like 'tradition' did much more than impose anachronistic mistakes about the contemporary social lives and institutions of people outside the West. For in so doing, it also demeaned and diminished them. In the first place it belittled their modern achievements, such as their struggles for liberation and their quest to achieve economic and political equality with European and other Western nations. In this way it, if anything, distorted these societies' actual histories. This seemed all the more discordant in the context of the 1960s and 1970s, when the former colonies mostly seemed to stagnate. But secondly and even more insidiously, to call these people traditional seemed to deny that they possessed even the capacities to have such histories at all. The strong distinction this usage drew between those who were tradition-bound on the one hand and the dynamic West on the other now seemed offensive to the international ethos of equality among people. Most important, it also echoed the sorts of colonial stereotypes about non-Western people about anti-colonial movements had resisted in their struggles for freedom from Western domination. To say that people were ruled by the past began to sound suspiciously like an excuse for ruling over them in the present. And Michel de Montaigne with his question of "What do I know?" nails on the task of "making-the-savage-civilised" of the West by preaching the non-Westerns and converting them into Christianity.

One of the very popular philosopher of The Enlightenment is Rene Descartes³⁸, who in the seventeenth century attempted to use reason as the schoolmen had, to shore up his faith; but much more rigorously than had been attempted before. He began with the bare minimum of knowledge: the knowledge of his own existence – "I think therefore I am." From there he attempted to reason his way to a complete defence of Christianity. Thus, in the Enlightenment period it was felt that logic could be a powerful avenue to truth. It seemed that logic alone could be used to defend all sorts of absurd notions; and the philosophers and thinkers of this time insisted on combining it with something they called "reason" which consisted of common sense, observation and their own unacknowledged prejudices in favour of scepticism and freedom.

³⁸ Rene Descartes (31 March, 1596 – 11 February, 1650) was a French philosopher and writer who had spent much of his adult life in the Dutch Republic. He has been dubbed as the "Father of Modern Philosophy", and a much subsequent Western philosophy is a response to his writings, which are studied closely to this day.

According to the Western philosophy, the Self is understood in relation with the mind. Whereas according to the Indian philosophy, the Self is an all embodying consciousness; it is a liberation from delimiting structures of the mind, where the latter itself is not the product of the ego. There is a huge difference regarding the philosophy of mind in the East and the West. And based on these differences between the Eastern and the Western philosophy of self, I will try to assert that the Adi philosophy of self is coterminous with the mainstream Indian philosophy.

One of the main concerns in the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of the mind, mental functions, mental events, mental properties, consciousness and their relationship to their physical body, particularly the brain, is the mind/body dualist problem. Dualism is a set of views about the relationship between mind and matter (or body). It begins with the claim that mental phenomena are, in some respects, non-physical. In the Western philosophy, the earliest discussions of dualist ideas are in the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. Each of these maintained, but for different reasons, that humans' "intelligence" (a faculty of the mind or soul) could not be identified with, or explained in terms of, their physical body. However, the best known version of dualism is due to Rene Descartes, and holds that the mind is non-extended, non-physical substance, a "*res cogitans*".³⁹ Decartes was the first to clearly identify the mind with consciousness and self awareness, and to distinguish this from the brain, which was the seat of intelligence. His Cartesian Dualism suggest that the body works like a machine, that it has the material properties of extension and motion and that it follows the laws of physics. The mind (or soul) on the other hand, was described as a non-material entity that lacks extension and motion, and does not follow the laws of physics. Descartes argued that only humans have minds, and that the mind interacts with the body at the pineal gland. This form of dualism or duality proposes that the mind controls the body, but that the body can also influence the otherwise rational mind, such as when people act out of passion. Most of the previous accounts of the relationship between mind and body had been uni-directional. He was therefore the first to formulate the mind-body problem in the form in which it still exists today.

The problem with Cartesian dualism is the infamous mind/body duality. Descartes's solution that the interaction takes place in the pineal gland is not very feasible because wherever the interaction takes place, there is the problem of something unextended interacting with

³⁹ Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010.

something extended. In the *Nyaya* philosophy, on the other hand, the self is not claimed to be unextended, but at the same time it is not also a physical substance (as the Cartesian would have believed). *Nyaya* distinguishes two different senses of extension. One sense of extension involves preventing another substance from occupying a space (true of physical substance). On the other hand, extension can mean “being in contact with” another substance. While the self is in contact with other substances, it does not prevent it from occupying the same space. Thus, as mental substance is said to be extended, and therefore not so completely different from physical substance, the interaction is not so obviously problematic. This interaction happens at the physical as well as the metaphysical level. Like for instance, I always feel that in the western culture tradition and modernity can never exist together. But in the Indian society, and or in the Adi society, tradition and modernity have always existed simultaneously. The biography of the author, Mamang Dai, is a perfect example of what I mean to say. Dai, a literate modern woman, an elite Adi, had left her prestigious job of an Indian administrator to come back home and write about her landscape. Her writing incorporates the age old folktales, which reflects our tradition, into the modern narrative of the novel. In her essay, “Dialogue with History”, she herself ponders about her literature and also what does she writes about. She says,

Is it a mystical scenario full of tradition and ethnicity, or is it modern, post modern, political, feminist, activist, what? I really am stumped for answers. Sometimes an answer pops up but another replaces it soon enough, so these are random, variable thoughts which however, I think are valid because they spring from landscape that is always lurking in the back of our minds – lets say something like that of the idea of the jungle, or indeed the idea of the hometown. It is a landscape of ‘feeling’ that goads us, eludes us, and keeps us struggling with no alternative, but to write it down, even from a distance, because these are things that belongs to hometowns, which in turn, generally becomes that ‘remembered place’ where we took our first steps before we left, to study, or settle elsewhere.

Further she says,

People say: Nothing like your own home. Where else can a person feel so familiar with houses, roads, everything and everyone? The thing is one can. One can feel quite at home in the aura of sunlight, city streets, connecting

with people anywhere. People can transplant. Husbands, wives, children, artists and writers do, and in today's world people cross over all the time bearing multiple identities and being global citizens. But after a while without any apparent prompting we begin to feel conscious of a separate identity. There is a secret corner where we return to, and it is in this space that writing begins. It is a place that carries the same ticklish past-present relationship with hometowns. It is the place where we first came face to face with the rituals of life and death, and the place where we first began to dream. After a while we come back. It is home ground, our world. With all the definitions of 'homeland' I think the final one is that it is the place we return to. Of course, it is not a completely poetic landscape. Here, in the place of our birth everyone knows our credentials – favourable or negative. There are witnesses. Elsewhere we respond to allurements of the senses. Here, we cannot be seduced. There is a tangling so unapparent we realise it only when we begin to look for it again. Of all those who go away the elders will say: They will be back.

And they do come back. The "call of the roots" is very strong for them because they come back not only to their own people, but also to their culture and history which defines them. They come back to the nature which itself has an identity for them. There is a strong relationship between character, culture, nature in the Adi life, folk tale and literature. And this I argue is embedded in the Adi history.. Every event or social practice has a story behind it, which is depicted in the folktales. Whether it is the story behind not having a script or the story how the mighty animal *mithun* came to be considered as the totem for the Adi society as told by Dai in page 186 of *The Legends of Pensam*, everything is embedded in history. As Dai says,

In this circle of hills, as in every corner of the world, all history is a history of connections..... There are many stories that link clans. Sometimes we forget how these connections were made, but everything is interconnected. Sometimes a connection is born in the middle of war. Sometimes it is through a woman, sometimes

land and sometimes it is through an object out of the past.⁴⁰

And such attachment to the nature and culture is very well recorded in their folksongs too. For example, Dai records the love for one's land in the song,

These were our arrows,

This, our poison.

This, our warrior's art,

• These, our songs of love.⁴¹

This bond that the character and nature share is significant because of the glorious past that binds them. For instance, Mamang Dai's famous poem "The Missing Link", where she describes the river as a memory in a changing shape, has a whole historical background to it. Dai in "Dialogue with History" informs us that in 1878, Lieutenant Henry Harman, a British officer wanted to establish the fact that the Tsangpo of Tibet and the Brahmaputra of Assam are one and the same river. The connecting link between the two was lost somewhere in the intervening hills. As this area was beyond the British jurisdiction, Harman and his troops could not explore this area, and so, this part of the river that flowed through it became known as 'the missing link.' Since he could not travel to that part of the place, Harman sent a Sikkimese agent called Kinthup into Tibet and floated down five hundred logs cut to a specific length into the Tsangpo at the rate of fifty logs a day. His idea was that if the logs arrived, it would prove that the Tsangpo – Siang – Brahmaputra was one and the same river. But an unfortunate incident happened. The Tibetan authorities captured Kinthup and sold him to slavery. He, therefore, could not carry out his task. It was after four years that Kinthup could make his way to a small monastery in Pemakochung, from where he carried out his duty and proved Lieutenant Harman right, but by then Harman had died and there was no one to receive the floating logs! Dai concludes her essay as,

... these are the stories. For anyone looking to dialogue with history there are many surprises lurking here. There is history in a word. Behind a word is a geography, a landscape of life and people, children's voices and all the things

⁴⁰ Dai, Mamang. *The Legends of Pensam*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006 (p. 61)

⁴¹ -do- (p. 115)

happened to us, the way we responded or did not. The jungle is not just a patch of green, the river is not merely a flow of water rushing down to the sea. Similarly these hills are not an empty frontier. They are the map of all our remembrances that float in and out of memory like breath and life and make up this kaleidoscope of you, me, them, us, the way we were, or the way we hope to become.

Remembrances, memory, glorious past, nostalgia are very important in the tribal culture. The past is ingrained in their present. They consider it as their way of life. And this celebration of the past spirit can be detected in their life, literature and culture in all its varied forms. Like for example, Dai says in "The Missing Link",

I will remember then
The great river that turned, turning
.....
Remember the flying dust
And the wind like a long echo
.....
There are no records.
The river was the green and white vein of our lives
Linking new terrain,
.....
I will remember then the fading voices
Of deaf women framing the root of light
In the first stories to the children of the tribe.
Remember the river's voice:
Where else could we be born
Where else could we belong
If not of memory
.....
Remember, because nothing is ended
But it is changed.
And memory is a changing shape

Showing with these fading possessions.

These musings are reiterated in Mamang Dai's fiction. They grow out of a philosophy of coexistence that does not see 'connections' between present and past, self and nature, human and animal in binaries. The identity of self is always played out on a diffused plane occupied by different objects of the universe, constantly interacting with one another on equal footing, where the human has no special place. This is the basic difference that informs the Adi self consciousness viz-a-viz the idea of self in the West. It is an expression of a human consciousness that sees all other 'beings' as extension of itself.

In Adi society, as depicted in *The Legends of Pensam*, man and nature co-exist in a very meaningful way. The Adis believe that nature is not an inanimate object and considers it as a character in itself, which has a direct impact on their existence. They are also bonded with one another by virtue of Mother Nature. For instance, in page 9, the story of Biribik, the water serpent,

Everyone present knew the story of Biribik, the water serpent. No one, for generations now, remembered the name of the first person who had seen it, but the event was fixed in their collective memory. It had happened on a night of heavy rain when a fisherman was alone with his nets by the river. He heard a rushing sound as the waters parted and then suddenly, when he looked up at the tree he was sheltering under, he saw a serpent coiled up in the branches looking down at him with ancient eyes. What shocked him the most was the fact that the serpent had a head with horns. The fisherman ran for his life, all the way back to the village, but as everyone could have predicted he never recovered from the effects of that terrible vision. Within a year, he had died of a wasting illness.

Thus, such stories are locked in the collective minds of the Adis, and these stories contribute in forming the Adi Self and the Adi Identity.

Again, in page 63 and page 77, Dai gives us instances where we can witness that the Adi people personifies nature and associate various myths with it. These myths in turn, govern their life meticulously. For example,

The tree was a symbol of strength and the ants symbolized fertility and the birth of many sons. (63)

Again,

It was a big thing to invoke the sun and the moon. Words have magic, and powerful words have powerful magic. (77)

Again, in *The Legends of Pensam*, Dai mentions about the importance of recording the past in the form of memory and folklore, when she talks about myth and memory being reborn in the performance of the *Ponung* dancers in page 50. I quote her,

In the end all we have is remembrance..... it (the song of the dancers) is a language that never ceases, and they sing because the hills are old, older than all sin and desolation and man's fascination with blood....

Thus, what I want to prove is that in the Adi philosophy, as in the mainstream Indian philosophy, tradition and modernity co-exist as naturally as the mind and the body does.

The second distinction between Western philosophy of mind and the Indian philosophy is that where Descartes believed that the Self is composed of thought; *Nyaya* believed that the consciousness is a quality of the self and not the essence of the self. I quote:

On the *Nyaya* view the self alone is the substratum of consciousness; but consciousness or thought is an adventitious quale and originates in the self only when other necessary causal conditions are available.⁴²

Nyaya says that since the body is made up of things lacking consciousness, then consciousness must be the result of something besides the body. *Carvakas*⁴³ argue that mind does not result merely from combination, but that consciousness emerges when the material elements are combined in a certain way. Now I intend to draw the similarities between the *Carvaka* philosophy and the concept of *Keyum Kero* of the Adis. As I already mentioned in

⁴² www.freewebs.com/.../Comparative%20Philosophy%20of%20Mind%20.

⁴³ *Carvaka*, also known as *Lokayata*, is a system of Hindu philosophy that assumes various forms of philosophical scepticism and religious indifference. It seems named after *Carvaka*, the probable author of the *Barhaspatya-sutras* and probably a follower of *Brihaspati*, who founded the *Lokayata* philosophy. In overviews of Hindu philosophy, the *Carvaka* is classified as a "faithless" (*nastika*) system, the same classification as is given to *Budhism* and Jainism. It is characterised as a materialistic and atheistic school of thought. While this branch of Indian philosophy is not considered to be part of the six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy, it is noteworthy as evidence of a materialistic movement within Hinduism.

my second chapter that the Adis believe that *Keyum* is the remote past beyond the reach of our senses. They believe that in the beginning there was only *Keyum* or nothingness. Out of this great stillness, thought began to shine like a shimmering trail, out of which the spark of imagination began was born. It grew into a shining stream of consciousness of man and “from this stage all the stories of the world, its creation and all its creatures came into being.”⁴⁴

Thus, there is a remarkable similarity between the two philosophies. Both believe that consciousness is the result of a particular combination of material factors. Such similarities draw a link between the Adi philosophy and the mainstream Indian philosophy.

My third point is based on the Adi belief of *Donyi Polo*. As I explained earlier about Dualism, which states that there is a divisible, mechanical body and an indivisible material mind which interact with one another. The body perceives external inputs and the awareness of them comes from the soul. Earlier I mentioned about Cartesian dualism. There is also Moral dualism⁴⁵ which is divided into Bitheistic and Ditheistic dualism. In Bitheistic system, one god could be male and the other female (cf. Duotheism). Ditheism system would be one in which one god is creative, the other is destructive (cf. theodicy). While Bitheism implies harmony, Ditheism implies rivalry and opposition, such as between Good and Evil.

Just like the Bitheistic system, the Yin and Yang principle of the Chinese philosophy also represents the philosophy of balance, where two opposites co-exist in harmony and are able to transmute into each other. Some of the common associations with Yang and Yin, respectively, are: male and female, light and dark, active and passive, motion and stillness. In the Yin–yang symbol, there is a dot of Yin in Yang and a dot of Yang in Yin. This symbolises the inter-connectedness of the opposite forces. Contrast is needed to create a distinguishable reality, without which we would experience nothingness. Therefore, the independent principles of Yin and Yang are actually dependant on one another for each other’s distinguishable existence. The Yin and Yang symbol has very little to do with Western dualism.

⁴⁴ Dai, Mamang. “Oral Narratives and Myth ” *Glimpses from the Northeast*. Shillong: National Knowledge Commission, 2009 (p.3)

⁴⁵ Moral dualism is the belief of the **great complement** (in eastern and naturalistic regions) or conflict (in western religions) between the benevolent and the malignant. Most religious systems have some form of moral dualism – in western religion, for instance, a conflict between good and evil.

The point I want to make is that, like Bitheism and the Yin and Yang principles, the Adi belief of *Donyi Polo* also represents the binary forces. The Adis have many stories of their creation myth and folktales which have the sun and moon in them. Sometimes the Sun is a woman, sometimes a man. Sometimes the earth is made by two brothers in the sky, sometimes by *Techimdum*⁴⁶. The Moon too is sometimes woman, sometimes man. Thus, the *Donyi Polo* tradition has similarity with the two above mentioned Eastern principles, as it also symbolises the co-existence of two opposite forces in harmony.

The fourth distinction between the Indian philosophy (also Adi philosophy as represented both in folk and literary writings) and the Western philosophy is that whereas Rene Descartes believed that only humans have minds and therefore animals cannot feel pain; the Consciousness/Matter Dualism in the *Samkhya* and *Yogic* philosophy believes that the distinction between Self (Spirit/Consciousness *Purusha*) and Matter/Nature (*Prakrti*) is of central importance. It believes that *Prakrti* originates from *Purusha*. When they are in the presence of each other, certain things arises, viz.:

1. Reflections of the intellect.
2. The faculty that makes things personal (the I – *Maker/Ahamkara*)
3. The instinctual mind (*manas*)
4. The capacities to perceive sense data.
5. The capacities to act.
6. The principles of the elements of sense perception.
7. The gross elements.

And when the *Prakrti* and the *Purusha* become enmeshed and entangled, there arises mis-identification.

Samkhya's view of ontology holds that the human self shares its components with animals and all other objects of existence. Further, it is also argued that every object of existence has consciousness, which undercuts any possibility of a binary that would privilege the human over the animal or nature.

The Adi society is an animistic society by and large. Thus, it can never support Descartes's idea about "only humans with minds." Instead it says that the Self and Nature should co-

⁴⁶ The *Mishimi* myth narrates that there was only water in the world around, at its beginning. The God, called *Techimdum* used to live below the water.

exist in order to bring harmony, peace and order to society. It believes that the false confusion between the Self and what is not the Self is considered the fundamental ignorance that perpetuates bondage in this world. Liberation is sought by becoming aware of such distinctions on a very deep level of personal knowledge, so that one may eventually use the great faculty of the mind – intellectual reflection (*Buddhi/Mahat*) – without mistakenly identifying it with the *Purusha*, and then the effects of such entanglement will unravel and one will no longer be bound by incarnations or confused by *Prakriti*.

I, therefore, have proved with the help of these four distinctions between the Western and the Eastern philosophy of mind that the Adi philosophy is a part of the Eastern philosophy. In my next section, I will try to locate the Adi genealogy by interpreting three of its folktales in the anthropological method and the historic-geographic method.

My first tale is called “How the World was Made”. This story is about two brothers, Lopong Rimbuche and Chom Dande who lived before the earth was made, when everything was water. One day they thought there should be human beings on earth. But then they realise how man will survive if there is nothing but water in the world. At that time they saw a lotus flower growing in the sky, and the brothers threw this down and immediately the earth’s waters were covered with flowers. Then they called the winds from the four quarters. The four winds then scattered dust everywhere. The brothers then patted the dust down, piling it up here and making a hole there, till finally the earth was made. That is why the earth is of different colours and that is also why there are hills and valleys. The second tale is “The Story of *Donyi Polo*.” The core Adi belief, spiritual as well as mythological, is expressed through the ballads known as *Aabang*⁴⁷ which recount the creation of the world, and the birth of man. The story of *Donyi-Polo* is one such. This story is about *Sedi*, who was the only one there when nothing else was. Then *Sedi* created water on the surface of the earth. Still there was emptiness. So, *Sedi* created *Tani Ami*, the man in the womb of *Pedong Nane*, the rain mother, the mother of humankind. But darkness still prevailed, so *Sedi* created two great lights to shine over the earth. Shine they did. But they were so strong that the men and the animals screamed in the scorching heat. The rivers dried up and the plants withered. The two great lights, male and female, ate human flesh and drank human blood; their hands became stained with blood. That was why people called them *Donyi*, or the two man-eaters. The

⁴⁷ Some *Aabangs* are short and sharp and the narrator may use dramatic eye and body movements to hold the audience captive. An *Aabang* may vary in duration from a few hours to three or more nights. In this oral tradition, the role of memory becomes crucial

people then decided to kill the lights. For this they turned to *Ettung Tiklung*, the little bamboo frog. His rough skin could well rival a rhino's, it was so rugged. The dreadful flames of the man-eater could not burn or melt his skin, it was immune to *Donyi's* scorching heat. So, *Ettung Tiklung* killed the greater light at the behest of the people. The weaker light fainted on seeing her husband killed before her eyes. She who was the sun, was unconscious for many days. Even when she regained consciousness, she did not come out of her dwelling for many months. Once more the earth was enveloped in darkness. Once more the people were in trouble. They decided to hold negotiation with her. So they sent *Rokpo*, the Cock. He crowed long and hard. But though he tried a lot, he could not get the mourning widow to come out. That is why, to this day, there is a long, long gap between the crowing of a cock in the pre-dawn hours and the actual time when the sun rises. When the cock failed, the people decided to send *Ullu*, the monkey as the peace negotiator. But *Ullu* being 'ullu', he went and shouted right in the sun's ear so she'd notice him. Unfortunately, though predictably, this had the opposite effect. The startled widow was so angered by *Ullu's* insensitivity that he stamped her feet in rage. Immediately the earth began to shake and shudder. In this great earthquake, the road down to *Ullu's* home was broken into tiny bits. *Ullu* could no longer roam the earth as he had done before. This is why *Ullu* monkeys are only found in the eastern Arunachal Pradesh. Then the people decided to send the dove as negotiator. But even though the dove spoke softly, the widow did not come out. He returned to earth again, sadly. And from that day, the dove had been weeping – 'kuyku-ku....kuku...ku...' every morning and evening at the time of sunrise and sunset. Finally the people decided to send the crow who was shrewd, tactful and cunning. He was also regarded as the good orator. He flew up to the sun and said that if she came out and gave light to the world, she could eat more human flesh and drink more blood. On hearing this, the widow's tears dried up. Thirsty for blood, she rushed out and, in a frenzy, killed thousands and millions of people each day. Since then, misery and sorrow fell on the shoulders of the people, and since then men and women have to die every day. After a while, the widow was appeased. Elaborate rites of purification for her dead husband were conducted. He was given the name *Polo*, which means the one who lost the brightness of living eyes. This is how *Donyi-Polo* came into being.

The third story is called "The War with the Stars." Long ago, the Stars and the Fish were very close. Among the stars, there was a baby star called *Puirsem*. One day while playing he died and fell from the sky, a shooting star into the water, and was carried down with the stream. A water spirit called *Japu Talar* caught the star and ate it. The Bat was the witness to the scene

and being a tale bearer, he flew to the star people and told them what had happened. The star people were furious. They thought of taking revenge. One day they caught the otter and sacrificed him. The Bat again saw the incident and immediately reported it to the fish people. This is how a war between the Stars and the dwellers of the water began. The stars began to shoot arrows at the frogs and fishes. They tried to take shelter behind the rocks and stones, but they could not cover themselves completely, and the arrows speeding past them gashed and grazed them on either side. This is how the Fish acquired the gills they have to this day. When the catfish tried to climb up to the stars, it was struck with a large rock. This is how it got its big head. This is why fishes never leave the shelter of the river stones or hide themselves in the sand. The war went on for ages. The Fish attacked the Stars whenever there were heavy clouds and the Stars struck back with lightening. But today the Fish and the Stars have become friends again. That is why at times when the stars are shining in the sky, the river sparkles back at them.

This is the summary of all the three tales. I chose these particular tales because they are about the creation of the world in the pre-human civilisation, i.e., before man came into this world. In order to know about the core values of the Adi civilisation manifest since its legendary origins, one needs to go back to the folk tales time and again. There is an attempt now to analyse the stories by an anthropological interpretation.

Along with the recording of folktales of non-literate cultures, anthropology has developed several paradigms for the interpretation and the explanation of the significance of tales in society and their relation to culture. According to Dan Ben-Amos⁴⁸, the validity of the interpretation of folktales depends on its agreement with observations of social conduct, analysis of language and religious symbols, and information about socio-political structure and history. On the basis of these premises, anthropological interpretation has taken three directions:

- (a) First is the consideration of tales as a reflection of culture and history. The world of imagination must draw on the knowledge of reality, history and the specific belief system. Hence, it should be possible to read in, and not into, these tales the past and present life of the people who tell them and to consider the tales as a mirror of culture, a world-view and modes of thought. This method helps to explain the *Donyi-Polo*

⁴⁸ Dan Ban-Amos (September 3, 1934) is a folklorist and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, where he holds the Graduate Program Chair for the Department of Folklore and Folklife.

myth, which links central Arunachal with the rest of the extended eastern Himalayas. As I mentioned in chapter 2, that this myth has three elements:

- (i) Excessive heat of multiple female suns (and male moons).
- (ii) This leads to shooting down one (or more) of them to cool.
- (iii) This leads to the coming of mortality among men.

Myths about the Sun are scattered all over the world, but it is significant that the closest parallels, including the female Sun and male Moon, are found among the Tibeto-Burman speakers in the extended eastern Himalayas.

- (b) In the second trend of anthropological interpretation, folktales together with social acts, art forms, and rituals, might provide glimpses into the inner workings of the mind in traditional societies.
- (c) Third is the functional interpretation of folktales that purports to explain their significance in terms of a contribution to social and cultural cohesion. Functional interpretations depend on observation and inference. This method explains how the tale, “War with the Stars” could be interpreted as the destruction of the *Kojum Koj* civilisation, as told by Mamang Dai in *The Sky Queen*.

Next I will try to analyse the tales through the Historic – Geographic method. This method purports to reconstruct, locate and date the primary form of a tale through a systematic comparison of all its available written and oral versions. The two fundamental concepts of this version are *type* and *archetype* (or *Urform*). Folklorist Stith Thompson defined the type as a “traditional tale that has an independent existence,”⁴⁹ but in practice a tale type is not an existing story but a construct formulated in the course of classification of themes and episodes. Its correspondence to actual tales told around the world is variable, depending on the tradition in which the tale is told and on the tradition in which the typology is based. The fundamental theoretical difficulty that the historic – geographic method has had to confront is the weak link between its two basic concepts, *type* and *archetype*, often requiring reification of the former in order to recover the latter. This method incorporates principles of comparative philology. To a certain extent the concept of *type* corresponds to the notion of *root* – the ultimate constituent element common to all cognate words. In that respect type is

⁴⁹ Blackburn, Stuart. “Tribal Transitions: Cultural Innovation in Arunachal Pradesh, India. Challenging the Romance of Tribal Cultures.” *Indian Folklife*, Vol.2, Issue 1, July 2002. <http://www.indianfolklore.org>

the thematic core of a tale that is found in all its versions in different cultures and historical periods.

For instance, in Arunachal Pradesh, the absence of a script among tribes like *Adis* and *Apa Tanis* is often explained by a myth. These communities believe that the gods once gave them script, written on the dried skin of the *mithun*, a type of bison, but they ate it up during a great famine. Instead the *Adis* credit themselves with a long memory. A popular folksong laments the lost words of *Sedi*, the creator:

All the words were written
They were written on dried skins.

All the songs were written
They were written on dried skins.

But I was hungry, I was hungry,

I ate the story, alas!

The *Nibo Robo* stories,

I myself have eaten all the words!⁵⁰

This myth is told across the entire Himalayan range, from far western Nepal to Southwest China and beyond; and from the more than hundred reported versions, two major variants can be identified.⁵¹ One, found throughout Nepal, centre on a contest in which the winner will be literate and the loser will gain a drum and become the keeper of oral tradition, a division that reflects the two kinds of ritual specialists in these cultures: a literate lama-type and an illiterate shaman-type. In the second variant, writing is lost by accident: the animal skin or paper is eaten, burnt or dropped in water.

Again in my previous chapter, I tried to explain the parallels in oral societies with the two historical explanations – the vertical transmission and the horizontal transmission. Here, I will explain a bit elaborately about these methods. The relationship among the numerous

⁵⁰ *Fresh Fictions*. Selected by The Northeast Writers' Forum. New Delhi: Katha, 2005. p.25.

⁵¹ Many of these versions have been collected by Prof. Michael Oppitz of Zurich University. See Michael Oppitz, *Paideuma*, Vol. 52, 2006, p. 27 -50.

versions that share a thematic core is based on three assumptions that are sometimes considered the “laws” of the dynamics of tales in society. They are:

1. Tales are disseminated centrifugally, “like ripples in a pond”, independent of human migration, trade contacts and linguistic affinities. This method is what I described in my second chapter as the vertical transmission. This “law” does not believe in borrowing across culture, but borrowing down generations within the same population.
2. Tales maintain their thematic similarities through a self-correcting principle that guides narrators toward median versions: each storyteller learns the tale from multiple sources, and the eventual synthesis then serves as one of the main sources for subsequent narrators. This I explained as the horizontal diffusion.
3. Innovations (mostly through errors and faulty memory) that trigger a positive response can be established in a community and generate a subtype of a tale.

Now the question here is, if oral histories define the origin and genealogy of a community, then why is it that the oral history of a society reflects and resembles that of the place in which it has adapted, and not of the place from which it has descended? For instance, the Ache and all central tribes of Arunachal Pradesh claim in legends, oral histories and conversations that they migrated across the Himalayas from Tibet. Yet if this were true, one would expect to find similarities between cultural practices in central Arunachal Pradesh and southern Tibet, and none are evident as far as my research says. Even if housing and dress, for example, changed as an adaptation to a different environment south of the Himalayas, commonalities in oral traditions and ritual practices can be expected. But this is not the case. As Stuart Blackburn says, the stories told in central Arunachal Pradesh have apparently little in common with those collected in Tibet. Even though some small populations of central Arunachal tribes straddle the international border, trade across it and share cultural practices with nearby Tibetan and Tibetanised populations, but this is the result of more recent historical contact in this border area and not of a common inheritance. As to language, although linguistic groupings are highly speculative, few linguists place central Arunachal Pradesh languages and Tibetan (*Bodic*) in the same group; some linguists do, however, classify the Arunachal languages with those further East, in northern Myanmar (Burma) and

Yunnan.⁵² To sum up, there is very little evidence from any cultural domain, certainly not from oral traditions or ritual practices, of historical links between southern Tibet and central Arunachal Pradesh. On the contrary all the scholarly evidence points East, to the extended eastern Himalayas as a cultural area.

Blackburn in his essay says,

This contradiction between local tradition and scholarship presents a dilemma: can oral history be so constantly wrong? More, however, is at stake for the people of central Arunachal Pradesh, for whom the claim of northern origins is fundamental to their cultural identity. Apatanis, for example, things Tibetan (bells and beads) but draw a sharp line between themselves and the Halyang, the outsiders, especially the Assamese⁵³. Since the eighteenth century, when the Tibetan influence began to wane in central Arunachal Pradesh, threats to local culture have been seen to come from the south: the penetration of the hills by a new power, with civil administration, courts and military, the growing trade with the plains and the in roads of Christianity and Hinduism. All of these led to the erosion of traditional bases of authority and in some cases to armed conflict, even as late as the mid-twentieth century; since the 1970s, the response to this perceived culture loss has been to strengthen 'tribal identity' by emphasizing rituals and dress considered to belong to 'the time of the ancestors, who came from Tibet.' This retreat northward, away from the dangerous south, has also inspired a re-invented religion centred on Donyi-Polo (Sun-Moon) which, as discussed above is the defining myth of the region.

Thus in this chapter, I first tried to establish the Adi philosophy as a part of the Eastern philosophy of mind, and then I tried to trace the Adi society to their point of origin by interpreting their folklore. As I proved that the Adi society takes pride in being a traditional society, it can also adapt to the winds of change and modernity with equal ease. If the Westerners use the idea of tradition to make non-Western people appear exotic and

⁵² David Bradley, "The Subgrouping of Tibeto-Burman," in Cristopher Beckwith (ed.), *Medieval Tibeto-Burman Languages* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p.73 -112; and Sun, "A Historical Comparative Study of the Tani (Mirish) branch in Tibeto-Burman," p.399 – 409.

⁵³ Most of the tribal societies have a disliking for the people living in the plain regions (*Mayank*, as they are called) because of the double colonisation of the plainsmen, both linguistically and politically.

backward, non-Western people have used this concept to portray themselves as special communities, worthy of distinctive rights, entitlements and identities. And as Ms. Dai pertly says, “if people considers me as exotic, I don’t mind being exotic!”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Dai, Mamang. Seminar interview. 14 October, 2009.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I have tried to revive a dying tradition through my dissertation. I believe that our age old traditions, customs, rituals which are now-a-days ignored in the hustle and bustle of our busy lives, are actually the emblem of what we truly are. These proofs of our identity are recorded in our folklores and oral literature – whether it is folksong, folktale, riddles, proverbs etc. Thus in order to revive them, we will need to first resurrect the folk literature. Mamang Dai has done it in her way by using orality in a modern form of representation; on my part, I tried to do it by working on Mamang Dai herself!

I find Mamang Dai's way of presenting an ethnic group's cultural ethos and beliefs interesting. This would seem unreal to modern sensibilities, but then one may realise that such oral tradition reflecting people's values and beliefs have been part of every community, through the ages, though they may have been submerged in the clatter of the machine age.

In the present time when the North East is confronted with rapid changes, these ancient tales need not be perceived solely as something of the past as 'dead'. With each new understanding, a story will unfold endless doorways. The tribal traditions can act as a catalyst for the creative instincts of a people to identify their culture. In this way this literature of oral narrative also gives us our sense of identity. In short, culture and identity will mean nothing unless it can be shared. It is also from this view that I have chosen these two particular texts of Mamang Dai because while it gives readers the glimpse of a tiny corner of a world largely unknown to the outside, it also preserves in print nuggets of oral history.

The encounter of the traditional and the modern (contemporary) shows how one can sustain the other. This character of the encounter may be studied in what we may call the Griotic tradition⁵⁵ that we are familiar with from Lee Falk's comic strip *The Phantom*, where Old Man Mozz,⁵⁶ the teller of tales, recounts and revamps the narrative as well as the beliefs of the community. Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*, also has the first person narration and the affinities illuminates the author's claim.

⁵⁵ A griot is a West African storyteller. The griot delivers history as a poet, praise singer, and wandering musician. The griot is a repository of oral tradition. As such they are sometimes called bards.

⁵⁶ In many *Phantom* stories over the years, Old Mozz has been known by different names and with different spellings. His home is the Bandar Village and he is the "teller". In the jungle, world lessons of life, the memory of great deeds and great disasters are passed on by word of mouth in stories. The great "tellers" know all the jungle history and this history and the tribal lore is handed down from "teller" to son. Much like the *Phantom's* lineage where son follows father, Old Mozz is the descendant of a long bloodline of "tellers". He is custodian of the Bandar tribal memory and guardian of the *Phantom* lore!

In my dissertation, I have made certain hypothesis. For, instance, in chapter one, “The Adi Narrative Tradition and Mamang Dai’s Fictions”, I have claimed her identity as an ‘Indish’ writer. In the second chapter, “Intertextuality in the Folktale and Mamang Dai’s Fictions”, I first proved with adequate reasons that the two concerned texts, *The Legends of Pensam* and *The Sky Queen* cannot be considered as novels in the stereotypical term. At best, one can call them as an episodic novel, but not a traditional ‘novel’. I have then used Julia Kristeva’s literary theory of intertextuality and Gerard Genette’s theory of paratextuality to explore the overlapping of folktales in Mamang Dai’s fictions. In the third chapter, “The Adi Identity and its Representation: Philosophy, Folklore and Literature”, I have postulated that the Adi philosophy is very distinct from the Western philosophy of mind. The Adi Self is an amalgamation of tradition and modernity and the Adi World is a world where this amalgamation is preserved and cherished and it is carried along in every step of life. Here, I have also formed a debate regarding the folklore being the compass with which to trace the point of origin. If that is so, then why is it that the cultural practices of the Adis and the other Arunachali tribes resemble more to the neighbouring Assam than to the Tibetans across the Himalayas, from whom they claim to descend. I have attempted an exploration of such queries in details by doing a field research in Arunachal Pradesh and doing a face to face interview with Ms. Dai. But due to lack of time, I could not carry out my wish of doing a field work. Though I will try to fulfil this wish of mine for my PhD thesis!

I will continue to work on literature from the North East as it is very close to my heart. Also, literature from this region is very rich and at the same time the least known in the global market. This is a very serious issue because if we take a look at the Indian literature, then in every aspect of every period, ‘North East literature’ has been contributing equally with that of any other literature produced in any other region. For example, as a regional literature, Assamese literature has been existing since the fifth century itself, having been pioneered by Srimanta Sankardeva. During that time, all literary activities were done in Sanskrit language. An important feature of this period is the sense of achievement that the people felt in reviving the ancient works and thereby protecting them from being lost sight of. For instance, King Narayana of Assam (sixth century) commissioned the poets and scholars to write popular works on scientific topics and translate the epics and *puranas* “so that the books would be read by women and *sudras* in his age and by *Brahmanas* in later times.” He also happened to

remark that, “it is only by these means that the scriptures can be protected from loss in this *Kaliyuga*.”⁵⁷

This translation of the text into regional languages brought a sense of participation among the people, for they influenced their poets to some extent to include their own ideas and feelings in those versions. This is the reason of reinterpretation, remodelling, and changes in the original epic stories. For example, (Late) Dr. Chandraprasad Saikia’s Assamese novels, *Mahabharata: Biswas aru Bismoi* (first published in March, 2007) and *Maharathi* (first published in January, 1992). *Maharathi* has Karna as the main character and it had won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1995. Thus, the epics became so intimate with the people that characters and places in them were worshipped and exemplified in every occasion. The songs and folk plays were inspired by them. Thus, one may trace a continuous influx of contact of the folk and the epics, giving and taking, and enriching mutually.

In folk literature, too North East has many valuable works. Here, I will particularly give example of contribution of literature from Assam. Folk literature has existed intimately with folk. The uneducated masses are safe from being wholly ignorant of good thought and being strayed away from the path of righteousness by the oral tradition of this literature. The best quality of this literature is its musical appeal due to which the people have found a natural resource of pleasure in it. For example, the Bihu songs of Assam. In these songs, oral literature is being created even today. The songs deal with common affairs – of love and joys, of pain and sufferings, of romance and tragedy. To the singers and the listeners, they bring a sense of understanding of the ways of the human heart and mind. These folk songs portray various men and women in innumerable circumstances in a very realistic way, and they are the forms of modern fiction to the common people.

Some specimen of English translation of Bihu songs, taken from *Folk Literature of Assam* by Prafulla Dutta Goswami, are given below. Here the girl sings in anguish:

What have I eaten up, O mother, O father

That you babble about me

Only let this year’s Bihu be over, my father

Not long shall I stay in your house

⁵⁷ Bhuyan, Surya Kumar. *Literature in Modern Indian Languages; Assamese Literature*, p.56.

This yellow bird, lovely its wings,
 once it flies up, it cannot be caught,
 this youth, if it goes away
 no more is to be got back.

Yearning and bird motif is very common in the Bihu songs.

From folk songs, let us move to folk literature. In his book, *Folkways in Literature: An Aesthetic Imperative*, Prof. Navakanta Barua talks about how the folkways in literature became an aesthetic imperative for fifth century Assamese poet and preacher, Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva, who was a staunch advocate of the 'chaste' literary style. Contrary to the popular belief, Sankardeva (1449 – 1568) did not sire Assamese literature. Nor is he the 'adikavi' as Bhanubhakta is of Nepali literature. He had a hundred year old tradition of literary activity to fall back upon, an activity that had flourished under the patronage of Indo-Mongoloid Chieftains of the area. Sankardeva's plays play an important role in his creative psyche where the folk elements are transformed beyond apparent cognition. He uses the puppetry tradition in his *Ankia Natak*, the first drama form in Assamese literature which he introduced. According to Prof. Barua, Sankardeva not only adapted the alien language to the native puppetry form (using humans in place of pith and straw characters), but expiated at the same time the narrative technique of another folk tradition, the *Oja-pali*, which, as an independent institution, still flourishes. In the writer's words,

Of the two types of Oja-pali, the Maroi or Vishahari and the Viyaha are the most prominent. The maroi oja, belonging to the snake cult is probably much older than the viyaha oja (viyaha is Vyasa, i.e., the narratives belonging to the Mahabharata themes) to be expected in a snake ridden terrain. The neighbouring Khasis still have the dreaded cult of the U-Thlen, as a God peeping even through their Christian faith (the 'U' is the masculine adjunct to substantives). The Oja stands for a preceptor as well as an adept in serpent lore who prescribes cure for snake bites. The Bhagavata also probably had a softer corner for the nagas Vasuki protecting the new-born Krishna across the

Yamuna on that stormy night; and Krishna destroys all the Asuras and Daityas, but merely sends Kalinga back to his original habitat. It was, it may be conjectured, though vaguely, that the snake cult practices did not appear profane or revolting to the Vaishnava cult. After all, who is not afraid of snakes, that mystery creature sleeping for about six months like the Vaishnava Narayan from shayana ekadashi to uthana ekadashi. (14)

Sankardeva translated this *oja* into the *Sutradhara* of the classical Sanskrit drama. While his verses are patterned to the native speech patterns of his time, in his plays and songs he uses an artificial prose and verse combining Maithili and eastern Hindi to lend a dignity to the narration and the dialogues and songs of the play. This distinguishes his 'noble' art from the commoners' dialogue between the *oja* and the *pali*. This artificial language, known as *Vrajavali* in Assam could not normally be used by actors freely without referring to the text followed by the *Sutradhara*. Because of this language, historians of Maithili literature often included the plays of Sankardeva and other Vaishnava poets as specimens of Maithili literature written in Assam. Thus, in Prof. Barua's words, "the dignity of the 'word' was saved from the loose speech of common parlance."⁵⁸

Like Sankardeva, Rabindranath Tagore, the seer-poet of Modern India, did accommodate folk cults and ways in his envisioned synthesis of the Upanishads, Buddhism and Western humanism. In his later works, like *Chandalika*, he uses occultism. Here we find *dakinis* being invoked to bring back the phantom Ananda. In his latter poems like "Prantik" and "Shesh Lekha", there are images of intimate tantric imagery. Thus, the folk had immense scope in reinforcing their own creative genius with the inheritance of the literary background which proved itself as quite an influential factor in the development in the folk art of composition.

Then again in the modern era, literatures from the North East have emerged as extremely significant. As I argued in my first chapter, during the 1970s, *Uttara Adhunikta* entered the Indian literary scene. Now the writers started writing their compositions in the English language. Crops of writers from the Northeast like Mamang Dai, Pradip Acharya, Robin S. Ngangom, Esther Syiem, and others gave birth to new forms of writing, where the writers were in search of their regional identity, racial history, and regional traditions.

⁵⁸ Barua, Navakanta. *Folkways in Literature: An Aesthetic Imperative*. Santosh Offset: Delhi, 1995, p. 15.

The literature of the North East has always been in the literary scene from time immemorial, whereas something like Dalit literature has made its appearance much later with the writings of B.R. Ambedkar. But whereas Dalit literature has become a genre in itself; the literature from the North East is still in the periphery. Even when I was doing my research for my dissertation, I came across many works on sub-genres like Indian English Women's literature, Dalit literature, Partition literature etc. as part of the Indian literature. But nowhere could I find anything like 'North East literature as part of Indian literature.' North East literature is considered exotic and is hardly taken as a part of the 'mainstream literature'. Why?

I understand the primary reason for this lack as political. Since time immemorial, North East has always been alienated from the 'mainstream' India. Northeast has always been at the margins of Indian politics. Democracy works with numbers and one just needs to look at the Indian parliament to get an overview of the North East political situation. There are approximately only twenty two representatives from the eight-sister state (including Sikkim) at the Lok Sabha. Thus, North East is a marginalised region in the Indian politics. Therefore, the literature produced from this part is also in the periphery of the mainstream Indian literature.

The second reason is an economic one. Economically, Northeast is still not at par with the other parts of India. For example, both Assam and Punjab are agrarian society, but the economic growth of Assam is much less than that of Punjab. The main reason behind this is Assam's insurgency problem. Northeast is a strife strong area. Even the literature of this region marks this turmoil. For this reason there is no major infrastructure to promote its literature like what we find in other parts of India. Most of the important national journals are based in Delhi, like Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts has units like Kala Nidhi and Kala Kosa, which has published literary works, and Northeast writers hardly find a place there.

The third reason is a linguistic one. Education in post-colonial India has been mainly through the medium of the English language. That is why Indian English literature has a global identity because English has become a lingua-franca for people around the globe. But in Northeast the situation is quite different. For example, it is in 1826 that Assam came under the British rule. Thus, it is one of the last few states to be colonized. So, the English language had made its entry very late in Assam. This is why most of the major Assamese writers write

in his regional language even today. For example, Homen Borgohain, Dr. Lakhminandan Bora, Nilamani Phukan, Jiban Narah, Harekrishna Deka, Anuradha Sarma Pujari etc. Hence, the literature finds it hard to reach the present generation readers, like me, whose only way to know the literature of his place is through translated works. Now new writers have come up who writes in English, like Khynpham S. Nongkynrih (Meghalaya), Easterine Iralu (Nagaland), Mona Zote (Mizoram), Guru T. Ladakhi (Sikkim), Simanta Bhattacharya (Assam). In 2009 an anthology of poetry from Northeast India has come up called *Dancing Earth* where these upcoming writers' works are published. Today one can detect a change in attitude among the Northeast people. They seemed to be questioning why at all Northeast literature needs to depend on the centre for recognition. They seem to be seeking a separate space within Northeast for Northeast literature. For example, one can now find, North East Hill University (NEHU) in Assam, which organizes poetry seminars. Then there is Assam Valley Literary Award founded in 1990 by Williamson Magor Education Trust to celebrate the achievement of the writers of the region.

It is for all these reasons that I further want to work on the literature of this region because just like the place, the literature which is produced in the Northeast has many issues and is also very complex because of the identity crisis that people of this region suffer. And I want to specialize in oral culture because I like the sense of antiquity that it carries with it.

The best thing I like about oral literature is that it draws on the cultural memory. Memory and words are the two most important features of oral literature. As Dai says in *The Legends of Pensam*,

... words are important. You can change a man's thoughts by the use of right words.
I know, I know, where you live they think we only sit around the fire and talk,
but this is our business. Words can solve riddles and transform our life. Our
village is very old and patient, don't worry. (158)

Just like Professor Dumbledore says in the Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2 movie that words actually have real magic, Dai also says that,

But we have words, and the right words open our minds and hearts and
help us to recognise one another.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Dai, Mamang. *The Legends of Pensam*. Penguin: New Delhi, 2006, p.191.

As Dai herself says in “Oral Narratives and Myth”, that in the fast paced global world of today, one may well ask what the worth of these old stories and legends is. The question of direction and destiny has become one of great complexity and soul searching. And the question is where do we begin? What is the most important thing to start with? Perhaps in this myth and memory have their rôles to play. How do we identify ourselves as members of a community belonging to a particular place, with a particular history? Some of the signs for this lie in our stories. We are here today as members of a community with a particular set of beliefs, by an act of faith, because we believed in the ‘word’ as composed in our myths and legends. It is here that we may find that peculiar, indefinable something by which we recognize each other, and make others see us as a group, a society, a people of a particular community. Today one may find that these stories have no logic, but they were born out of the minds of men. Life generated it in us, and the significance of songs and stories is that they demonstrate the complex nature of human faith founded on memory and the magic of words in the oral tradition. And for this matter, it is very important to preserve these stories. As she says, “It was important to record our stories. The old rhapsodists were a dying breed, and when they were gone, who would remember?”⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Dai, Mamang. *The Legends of Pensam*. Penguin. New Delhi, 2006, p.176.

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