

Yigam Taipodia

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Himalayan University

Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, India

yigamtaipodia@gmail.com

A Critical Study on the Portrayal of Voice of Sorrow and Sombreness as an Accumulation of  
Various Experiences and Assertions in the Poems of Mamang Dai

Abstract

Mamang Dai (b. 1957) was formerly a civil servant but currently a journalist and a writer from the Adi community of Pasighat, East Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh. She is also the founder of the Arunachal Historical Society. She has written extensively on the cultural history of Arunachal Pradesh and is a member of North East Writer's Forum. A versatile poet, novelist and storyteller Mamang Dai is one the prominent contemporary authors from northeast India. The various elements found in Dai's poetry are tribal myths, tradition, culture, landscape, tribal life of Arunachal Pradesh, neo-romantic essence. There is also portrayal of sad and sombre voices in different poems of her collection which shows different tone and pictures. Some of them show the picture of sorrow brought by death, sorrow for love, some cry in the modern world, some are sorrow with internal struggle leading to longing for peace and some sorrow of helplessness. The tones are melancholic, elegiac and nostalgic. This paper will give the reader the glimpse of different factors and various tiny corners of sad and sombre tones in the poems of Mamang Dai.

Keywords: *Mamang Dai, Northeast Writing, Poetry, Sadness, Sombreness, Poetic tone.*

## Introduction

Poetry from northeast India reflects many folds of this world; the world of myth, culture, tradition, violence, bloodshed, war, sufferings. The co-existence of this paradoxical world in their poetry is a source of identification as the poets of this region. The writers of this region are deeply rooted to their land and stories, yet their poetry and prose universally communicate itself to all the readers. Literature has been always a reflection of social realism, human existence, voices of different emotions and feelings. This is an effort to create an inner space like a place where ‘the self’ and the other realities describe every human emotion within the limitation of words.

Poems can express a wide variety of emotions. There is sad form of poetry as well as happy ones. One of these sad forms of poetry is also known as elegy. Elegies express a lament often over death of a loved one. This makes elegies especially popular for funeral. An elegiac tone can be seen in the poems of Dai. The present study focuses on such issues in details.

## Discussions

The eloquent lines of Mamang Dai’s “Small Towns and the Rivers” reflect elegiac tone:

Small towns always remind me of death

My hometown lies calmly amidst the trees.

To begin with the sadness of a loss of dear one. An unavoidable phase of life is “Death”. Everyone is carefree and unaware of their eventful death. Death is something will

be experience eventually by everyone. The above lines were written in the memory of the poet's aunt who died in New Delhi. She was beautiful, loved, and died at a young age. Her death was deeply mourned. A sense of separation and gap which can never be filled in the lives of the living is revealed in an elegy. In Dai's poetry the grief of present is pictured through the images and metaphors choose mostly from nature. Loss of a loved one is irreplaceable but lamenting their death and immortalizing the deceased in their works is a sign of a great poet.

To deal with a broken heart is very difficult; it takes both an emotional and physical toll on the person. Feelings of sadness are often accompanied with sorrow, depression and sometime disbelief.

My love, what shall I do  
I am thinking how I may love you  
to war, and big issues  
more important than me. ("An Obscure Place")

The above four lines in the poem talks about the sadness associated with the struggle to love. It is a cry of helplessness of a woman who feels the suppression of her love to other important issues of the world. It has presented a sensational picture of desire to love and be loved. Poet has indirectly presented the patriarchal society with a blend of tribal essence where waging war and hectic life of a woman were common events and domestic in nature. The poet also utilizes the opportunity to incorporate victimisation within these lines. It can be witnessed to landscape the existential despair of a loved one in the contemporary world. The poet strikes a sombre, almost wistful note in;

And they are talking about escape  
about liberty, men and guns,  
Ah! The urgency for survival.

But what will they do

Not knowing the sorrow of women. (ibidem)

In the midst of turmoil and dissatisfaction a clear picture of parallel sorrow of women is presented. Since ages women are victimized in the time of war and violence. To quote her from an interview, “However the poem is a love poem. A woman is anxious about losing her love. It’s a take on the camaraderie of men that makes them respond to war, politics, migration and survival. They say unhappy women are the great survivors.”

Next let us discuss the despair of struggle in this world.

Life is so hard, like this.

Nobody knows why.

It laments the philosophical hardship of life. Human existence is always a part of major debate and discussions. The hardship, sadness, pain, fear are the ingredients of life along with the beautiful, happy, love and cheerful things. The fragrance and delight of life admits all these state forms the soul of a life. It is a continuous process to turn the wheel from the axis of sad to happy cheerful things. Experiencing various difficulties in our lives, leading to depression and never-ending questions of Why, How and What. It reminds us that Life has no guarantees and may be changed instantly.

The poet has shown the relationship between life and agony and it is linked with reasons unknown. The indigenous tribes and people experience a sense of loss and displacement. Silence of the women and their children and the hushed tone of their prayer convey the seriousness of the act. In tribal world the purpose of confrontation is not to dominate but to strike a balance with nature. A sense of uncertainty is revealed in lines:

But we do not speak of the victory yet

An obscure place haunts the hunter.

The prize slips away.

Nothing is permanent, nor can be achieved easily. A plight of uncertain future is depicted at the end of a journey. It results in a dilemma face by this generation. Uncertainty questions the existence of a prize to ponder upon. It is parallel to the story of a tragic figure Sisyphus in Greek mythology doomed eternally to roll a boulder up a hill in Tartarus (*The Myth of Sisyphus*).

A sorrow is not necessarily shown only through images only but it can be voiced out in tone as well. Some of Dai's poetry is melancholic in tone, like;

Come, let us listen to the rain

All that we had is going-

Or already gone

Just like a life

So intimate and incomprehensible. ("The Wind and the Rain")

The separation of land of indigenous people has been a historical truth and accounts for the devastation and deprivation of many indigenous people.

The night has no more songs

what will it sing...

...And our dreams have been stolen

by the hunger of men travelling long distance, (ibidem)

Language becomes a metaphor for potential change. Stories within the fabric of north-east folklore provide the theoretical framework of their writing. Dreams are mystical and provide a source of guidance for people living in this world. It is sustainable and comes with a mixed bag of illusion and assumptions. But it can also be a hope to abide by the string of joy and happiness:

The river sings

Love floats!

Love floats!

But I have no dreams

It shows the internal sad and struggle of the speaker. Nature has always been a source of pleasure and giving, here a voice of hopelessness is portrayed in the surrounding of love.

A sorrow can be rapid and piercing. The metaphor for 'Torrent of Grief' has been picked from phenomena of nature, soulful yet full of strength. This is evident in lines:

The River has a soul.

In the summer it cuts through the land

Like a torrent of grief. ("Small Towns and Rivers")

Silence has its own pain. A voice that has been silenced or the state of silence holds the loudest cry. A cry for freedom can be reflected in the silence of a being. Silence can be a voice to loss of identity, being nostalgic, internal struggle, unquenching thirst for recognition. Literature is a silence source to portray such suffocating emotions. The agony of such pain can be seen in the lines:

If there is no death the news is silent,

If there is only silence, we should be disturbed. ("An Obscure Place")

Yesterday the women hid their faces.

They forbade their children to speak (ibidem)

I am a woman lost in translation

Who survives, with happiness to carry on. ("The Voice of The Mountain")

## Conclusion

Dai advocates love for all being and all things as the crucial method for ushering peace and healing for indigenous people and everyone on earth. Her poetry manifested all the major qualities of romanticism; no word can express her love for Nature. Most of her poems are deeply attached with nature with sombre tone. Dai's own feeling about a happy and hoping for generous future are reflected in the line like

One day they say, the wind will sing  
Songs of laughter, and tenderness.

She is concerned about the deteriorating relationship in the wake of capitalism and consumerism that pose as a threat to tribal life. Through most of her poems with different images she tries to weave the different tone of sad and sombreness, the traditional beliefs as such. She held her strength through the medium of her writing especially her poetry. To quote her, "We all write because we also care. Poetry is the voice of protest, and it is the voice of love."

### References

Guha, Ananya. "A Phenomenal Woman- An Interview of Mamang Dai"

<https://books.google.co.in> Accessed 25 August 2019.

<http://en.m.wikipedia.org> Accessed 19 August 2019.

<http://journals.flinders.edu.au/index.php/wic> Accessed 28 August 2019.

<http://m.poemhunter.com> Accessed 18 August 2019.

<https://www.thehindu.com> Accessed 4 September 2019.

[www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu) Accessed 19 August 2019.

[www.shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in](http://www.shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in) Accessed 17 August 2019.