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Research Article



Donyi Polo and Ecocriticism in Select Poems of *Midsummer Survival Lyrics* by Mamang Dai


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Abstract

Mamang Dai is one of the greatest writers of North Eastern part of India. and is basically known for her creative writings on the themes of ecocriticism and past or historical events. Across all her genres, including novels, poetry, non-fiction, and folklore texts, Mrs. Dai skillfully combines themes of ecocriticism, tribal religion, and the lives of tribal people with significant historical events from their land. The current study endeavors to illustrate the ecological perspective and tribal religion in selected poems from Mamang Dai's book *Midsummer Survival Lyrics*. She has

proven herself to be an ecologist and has tried to show that human beings are not superior to the non-human lives available on Earth. Mrs. Dai has very beautifully portrayed the lives of tribal people living in the valley of Arunachal Pradesh and has shown how Donyi-Poloism teaches them to live harmoniously with nature and natural things. The present piece of writing titled *Donyi Polo and Ecocriticism in Select Poems of Midsummer Survival Lyrics by Mamang Dai* aims at providing a detailed study of how tribal people who follow the religion of Donyi-Poloism treat nature and natural things, i.e., flora and fauna, as their siblings. This paper will show how Mamang Dai has shown the concept of Donyi Polo and ecocriticism in select poems of *Midsummer Survival Lyrics* by Mamang Dai.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Folklore, Misty, Non-Human, Harmoniously

Introduction

India is a vast country that lies on the 7th rank in the list of countries with the highest area across the whole world. It extends from Indira Call (Jammu Kashmir) in the north to Indira Point (Tamilnadu) in the south; on the other side, it extends from Sir Krick (Gujrat) in the west to Walangu (Arunchal Pradesh) in the east. Its total area is approximately 32,87,263 km square. And the total cover of the forest area in India is 21.71% of the whole landmass. Arunachal Pradesh, the land of the rising sun and one of the seven sisters, is one of the states with the highest percentage of forest cover. Arunachal Pradesh is the land where 26 tribes and more than 100 subtribes live. Adi is one of the 26 tribes and the most popular among all tribes in the state.

Mamang Dai, an Adi woman born at Pashighat in the East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, is not only a writer but also a positive thinker of her homeland. She was the inaugural female candidate from her state to be chosen as an I.A.S. officer, but she quit the job for being a writer. She has worked with many newspapers, like the Sentinel and the Telegraph. She also has the privilege of being a member of the Wildlife Fund for Nature. Other than these fields, she writes about the tribal life of Arunachal Pradesh. She advocates for the entire landmass of Arunachal Pradesh, its ethnic diversity, the lives of the tribal people, and their way of life. People frequently hear her lamenting over the loss of her mother tongue. She said in an interview that ours is an oral tradition; we lacked written scripts and history. She further said that she wants to do something, give something to her coming generations so that they may feel proud of their history. Mrs. Dai writes all her works in a style that seamlessly blends historical events from the past with her own imaginative stories. Readers gain a comprehensive understanding of historical past events, as well as the tribal people's culture, customs, traditions, living style, and most importantly, their religion, known as Donyi-Poloism, and their steadfast adherence to ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism is "the relationship between literature and the physical environment". The word was originally introduced by William Rueckert in his 1978 essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." This phrase is a broad category, and many researchers have their own viewpoints when explaining its meaning. Mrs. Dai has demonstrated, across various genres, the evolutionary character of the faith and beliefs of tribal people who adhere to the religion of Donyi-poloism, based on their extensive contact with nature over many generations.

Tribal people in Arunachal Pradesh practise the indigenous animistic faith known as Donyi polo. Two words form the foundation of Donyi polo: Donyi signifies the sun, a feminine god, and polo, a male god. Mother Sun is the creator of the whole universe, and whatever creation is there in the world is all because of the energy of Mother Sun. By cultivating a deep connection with the natural world, they fostered an eco-spirituality that encompassed a comprehensive relationship with God, humanity, and the environment. Consequently, their convictions serve as the foundation for their eco-spiritual lifestyle. An in-depth examination of beliefs and notions enables us to have a deeper comprehension of their eco-spiritual lifestyle. Tribal people believe that everything that is created by the Donyi-Polo is their sibling, and any harm done to them or their family members will affect them directly or indirectly.

Midsummer Survival Lyrics is a 2014 collection of poems written by Mamang Dai and published by Wordsmith Publishers Guwahati. The book contains over 50 poems, with the majority focusing on the local birds, animals, plants, and trees. Almost all the poems in this book are directly or indirectly related to the natural surroundings and the memories related to those natural surroundings of the poet. In the poem "Green in the Time of Flood," Mrs. Dai writes:

It was the green land that seduced us
The scent of rain and the river
That found us quite suddenly, one summer,
Restored to one another. (*Midsummer Survival Lyrics*, 5)

These lines give a clear-cut description of Mamang Dai's emotional attachment to land, rain, and the river around her. The state of Arunachal Pradesh names many districts after Siang, the mightiest of all its rivers. The green sight of the valley's field, along with the scent of the rain and river, seduced Mrs. Dai, causing her to fall deeply in love.

The majority of the poems in this book, not just a few, revolve around the theme of ecocriticism. The poet illustrates that tribal people coexist peacefully, fostering a friendly relationship with nature. They hold a deep connection to the landmass' flora and fauna, believing that any damage to these elements would negatively impact them and result in severe repercussions. Most human beings living on this planet take nature and natural things for granted and use them blindly for their maximum profit. Human beings must make judicious use of resources so that future generations can live on this planet with ease. Mamang Dai is an ecologist, and she uses her brain in such a way that she tries to make human beings aware of the problems that she finds in society. In her other poem from *Midsummer Survival Lyrics* titled *An Obscure Place*, the poet writes:

Yesterday we gave shelter to men,
who climbed over our hills
for the glory of a homeland, they said,
those who know what knowing is
and now sleeping houses the men and the villages,
have turned to a stone. (*Midsummer Survival Lyrics*, 18)

Through these lines, we can see that Mamang Dai shows her fear for her homeland by showing how the people from faraway land came to their valley with sweet gestures and a hand of

friendship with them, but as soon as they came into a good position and became stronger than the tribal people, they tried to grab the land and prove their mastery over all the resources available in the landmass. Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* is another novel in which she shows how white-colored Migluns, known as British, came to their land and tortured the tribal people in various ways. They not only spread their mastery over the resources, but they also became masters of the tribal people, wanting to make them slaves and rule over them.

Mamang Dai, in all her genres, frequently writes about her love for nature and natural sources such as rivers, mountains, trees, and valley animals. She describes rivers as beautiful, protective for the people of the valley, and yet fearsome. She writes: "Rivers can do anything, /capsize boats / plunge into the earth" (Dai 2014, p. 71). The anger of the rivers can be dangerous because they swallow "houses, statues, temples, pilgrims" (Dai 2014, p. 10). Mamang Dai is an Adi woman and she grew up in the valley of Pashighat, which is covered with forests and mountains of Arunachal Pradesh, hence her incomparable love for the mountain is not surprising. The mountain is a living entity, and Dai carries very sweet memories for her from these mountains. While the exact origins of the Adis remain unknown and their historical history is uncertain, the mountains have consistently served as protectors and watchful figures for the Adis tribe over the ages: There are mountains. Oh! There are mountains. / We climbed every slope" (Dai 2014, p. 18). Dai holds a deep respect and admiration for mountains, much like Arne Naess's understanding and view of mountains. "From the mountains, we learn modesty; their size makes us feel small and humble, and so we participate in their greatness" (Naess 2008, p. 17). Mountains are not only the physical /natural resources but also the symbol of greatness and modesty and human beings learn the characters like humble, modesty and greatness. In the poem entitled "Writing" Dai considers herself and the entire human race as very normal and ordinary object in-front of the mighty mountains. Mamang Dai says "We are small solitary silhouettes trying to embrace the mountain. The impression of a fern is stronger than us" (Dai 2014, p.2). The final and last line of the poem once again repeats that the human beings should not leave the nature as a matter of less serious, but they should add environment and nature in their day lives and develop an environment of living harmoniously with and in nature.

The poem "Be careful how you cut that tree" serves as a stern admonition to humanity, urging them to refrain from exploiting nature and its resources, so preventing harm to the environment. Nature is permanent and silent, it does not speak but it does not mean that it should be taken for granted; it will take revenge from you of all your deeds. Dai refers to trees as 'priests' and 'gods of a pre-human age' who silently stand at their place and observe the human actions on earth. Trees which not only are producer of large number of manmade objects like medicines, food, furniture, paper, clothes etc. but also act as a superior agent of environment and maintain ecological balance by providing oxygen to atmosphere. The deforestation has a detrimental impact on the global ecosystem and can have profound consequences for human civilization, which may prove difficult to mitigate without the presence of trees on Earth. Dai in her poem entitled *Be careful how you cut the tree* from the book "Midsummer Survival Lyrics" writes:

Be careful how you cut the tree
A dizzy blow can change the sunlight,

Akter the snaking path of a breeze;
Kill the ground with unexpected poison-heat,
These things are unpredictable. (Dai, 2014, p.64)

These lines serve as a serious warning to the entire human race, highlighting how the absence of trees can upset the balance of natural processes. An unexpected poison will spread over the entire earth, and the poison will be in the form of heat, affecting the lives of the world's flora and fauna. Let us take an example from Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*, where the whole village gets troubled after they cut the trees, which were known as the abode of the whole village's forefather's spirit. Human civilization and human life are temporary, but nature, ecology, and natural resources are permanent. Any harm done to nature will have a negative effect, and the whole world will have to face the consequences. Natural disasters are a common occurrence worldwide, and we have no control over them.

Conclusion:

This paper not only shows the theme of Donyi-poloism but also shows that the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh who follow the religion of Donyi-polo live harmoniously with nature, and their peaceful life is incomplete without a cordial bond with the flora and fauna around them. Mrs. Dai, as an environmentalist, tries to draw readers' attention to ecology, and she urges readers to come together with their hands wide open to preserve and protect natural resources so that future generations can live on the planet with ease.

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