

Introduction

North East is a region with varied cultures, customs, traditions, culinary habits and festivals. It is like a juxtaposition of varied cultures and traditional forms. The North East region comprises of beautiful mountain peaks to the vast flowing rivers. It is a place of eternal beauty and magnificence. Places like Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Assam and Sikkim, always surrounds with the natural and beautiful objects throughout the region. The fresh air of religious austerity is found in the sacred place of Kamakhya in Assam. This sense of religiosity is further extended from Assam to Arunachal Pradesh, where we can find the monasteries or Pagodas in Tawang. The divergence of cultures and traditions make it a unique place. The pristine and sanctified feeling is always there with the place. It always abounds with the thought that the North East is by far the most diverse region that has many cultures, religions, traditions, rituals and communities. Ecologically, it is the most different region that has all the qualities they would have in a region. North East regions have the charm of beautiful objects of nature. It has a wide range of all the natural supplements. It can be considered to be an area of natural by-products. Besides these things, it is a region of vast ethnic diversity. There are many things for exploration in the region. North East is by far the most diverse and varied region in India. Therefore, North East can be considered as the storehouse of varied customs and traditions.

North East can be called a place of varied cultures and rituals. The historical identity of North East is very interesting. Since the time of Vedic Era, it was regarded as the place of the “Kiratas” (mentioned in Mahabharata). The North East is a divergent region that truly makes the myth alive again. There are many references of Mahabharata, the epic. North East according to many critics is the place of much religious importance. There are many stories and folklore

which are connected with gods, goddesses and demon kings. It is a place of both religious importance and eternal beauty. The North East region is one of the major places of diverse cultures and traditions. There are many tribal communities in North East region who are either living in the hilly areas or in the plains. The Mongoloid race is the chief race of all the groups in North East. In all the places of the North East, this race is predominantly found. North East region of India can be considered as a region of beauty and elegance. The anthropological significance is wide and varied. The North East is a place where the anthropological origins of a different race can be seen to the utmost. A wide range of natural objects and vivid types of customs make the region completely separate from all the other regions of India. Earlier to the period, the North East solely gives importance to the cultural affinities that are found in the region. Among the ethnic groups, many tribal groups are there which use to rule the places since the past. Tribal consciousness is always accustomed throughout the place of North East. Surprisingly enough, the North East is a region of varied anthropological differences that are persistently found in the region. In India, North East is a region of ethnicity, customs, traditions, rituals and different kinds of festivals. It is because of these things that we find diverse cultural forms in the North East.

North East is ecologically also very different from all the regions of India. It is a region of a different kind of terrain and vegetation altogether. The North East region has a different approach to its natural background. There are places like Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Manipur where mountain peaks and hills could be found. The Himalayan range sustains from Arunachal Pradesh to Sikkim with a wide variety of landscapes and terrain. Assam being a plain area is away from hilly tops and snow-clad mountain peaks. North East has wide access towards the thrilling experiences in different parts of it. The places

are treacherous enough to betray our thoughts, but the landscapes are always enamouring to provoke us. There is a varied approach towards the places of North East. Since the past, North East seemed to be the place of different kinds of flora and fauna. The famous one-horned rhino is the most found animal in the North East. There are some other unique animals that are originated from this place only. Among them are the golden langur (found in Western Assam), Takin, a primate and Mithun, a mammal, like bison, found only in Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, it can be assumed that the ecology of the place has many features that make the place truly enticing and enamouring.

The ecological understanding is also evidently found in the racial groups of North East. North East is considered as the biggest bank of tribal communities in India. Starting from the Bodos in the plains to the Kacharis in the Midlands and stretching them to the hilly areas with Dimasas and Karbis. These tribal communities have their own origin and oral literature and folklore. The Nagas, Garos, Aos, Manipuris, Mizos and the different tribal groups of Arunachal Pradesh that are different in culture and tradition. The ethnic lives of the tribal communities are sometimes different from the people of the mainland. Ethnicity is the biggest problem in the North East. Before Independence, the tribal communities fight amongst themselves to show their supremacy. They never rely on each other, and for that reason, the British superseded them and took them under the control. They initiated their mission to make them believe that their style of living, their religion and everything else was not the part of “civilization”. They were made to rely on the things that they do or practice in their day to day life are all bizarre and weird. That’s why they need the change to overcome the false rituals they follow. As the tribal communities came up to the resolution that they should convert themselves to secure a life of being civilized and modern, they forsake their own religion, dogmas, customs and traditions. Thus, they

endangered their own question of existence. In this way, the tribal community went to the state of being losing its significance as an indigenous race. The tribal community were rather creating the problem by themselves; they did not turn towards the original race and hence lost their identity. After Independence, the problem was growing bigger and bigger. Because of their identity crisis now they are questioning themselves as, “Who actually are they?” This problem of ethnicity is rather more politicized nowadays. In the metropolitan city, like Delhi, these people from North East are termed as “foreigners”. This is a matter of disrespecting the people of North East in the urban cities. As being different, they had to undergo many problems. They are harassed, sexually abused and sometimes molested and raped by some people of the metropolitan cities. The distinction that they make is by their facial reconstitution and complexion, and sometimes by their dress habits. As the people are from stereotypical society, so they take it for granted that the girls or women of North East pose “loose character” as said in Nongbri’s book *Migration, Identity and Conflict*. They are sometimes given the names of “chinky” or “Momos” or “Chinese” that is truly disrespectful for the inhabitants of North East. This problem is truly disturbing for the people of the hilly areas. Therefore, ethnicity nowadays is not only a problem of facial reconstitution rather it is a more racial and political problem as well.

The ethnicity is a common said problem with that of the people of North East. For ethnicity sometimes there is conflict or violence. “Violence” is always accustomed with North East, since the days of invasion by various races. Violence is a common day to day term that refers to the bloody and even genocidal tendency of people to kill each other without having any proper reason. The people of the North East took up the step not to fight amongst themselves and promised each other that they would help each other at the moment of distress. This was the step to evade themselves from the killings of each other. For this thing, they were able to save

their motherland from foreigners. But after the British order convinced them to change their original identity, they faced many problems. They lost their customary traditions and identity and are rather without any identity in the modern state. So, the problem of ethnicity gave rise to the conflict of identity. The conflict had rather gone deep inside and made the people realise that without their roots they are not going to survive for long. Thus they are on the search of their own regional identity.

After the invasion of the British forces, the tribal groups were convinced to take Christianity as their religion. Many tribal groups including, Garos, Aos, Nagas, Mizos and some tribes of Arunachal Pradesh took Christianity as their religion. But apart from that, there are many other religions that are still existent in the tribal community. For example, the Donyi-Polo in Arunachal Pradesh is one such religion. This is the culture of the past which makes them rooted to it. The myths are always accustomed with many symbols. In the North East, all the tribal communities have their own myths. The myths and folklore are the construction of fantasy and imagination in the consciousness of the people. It is extremely philosophical or metaphysical in origin. The factor of religion sometimes makes people realize the conflict between the ideologies. Hence, we find the religion of the indigenous races were at stake during the time of Christian missionary influence.

The influence of Christian missionary had its impact upon the mind of the people, as there were very few person left who followed the traditional norms and customs. The followers of the Christian religion were huge in number and had their own rules and regulations. They were staunchly following the rules and were unbiased with the customs and traditions that are followed by other people. As they had only one God, i.e. Christ, so they usually were pragmatic and sceptical about other religions. The missionaries always targeted the tribal

communities and made them feel that their belief system had no sign of civilized aspect. Many people were greatly influenced by their colour and dress habits and thought themselves to be “inferior” to them and always wanted to be following their lifestyle blind-folded. The tribal communities were leading their life to suffice themselves only by using the basic amenities of life. They were never interested in voyaging overseas and explore different lands. The tribal communities were only busy with fighting amongst themselves. They were involving themselves with the factors of survival and annihilation. They kill people only to acquire lands and to show their supremacy over others. But as they meet the British people they realized that their way of leading their life was not appropriate. And by following the British immigrants they tried to change their standard of living. In pursuing so, they make themselves aloof from their own cultures and traditions which later on created a serious barrier in their life.

Devoid of any roots the tribal people are considered as to be ethnic. This word “ethnic” makes them think that they belong to the minority section. Though being a part of it, yet actually not a part of it. They are made as the people without any voice. That is why they tried to raise their voice by agitating against the prejudices of the people of the mainland. When these efforts became futile, they turn to be violent and made themselves extremists and militants. They fought to bring their voice to the people and the government. Voice remains to be the main evidence of the people from the periphery. The peripheral men and women were always facing the consequences and were away from the benefits of the policies of the government. So in order to draw their attention, they formed some groups which would let their voice to be heard by the government. Some were negotiating and some were making a statement by creating violence and turbulence. Ethnicity made them realize that they are incomplete without any cultural entity. The cultural entity was the important factor of the tribal

community. The voice of the tribal people was then heard after the violence and turbulence grew more and more throughout the states. This was a major problem in the early '90s. Strikes and protests were the commonest things that were prevalent in the period. These two things were always tried to derail the peace and tranquillity that was associated with the place. During this time, many people were killed and many terrorist organizations that rouse their heads. The North East in that period was like an "active volcano" that was continuously erupting and killing people. Therefore, the tribal people in order to make their voice went to the barbaric side.

North East literature is a flourishing literature that had an impact on the linguistic forms of many Indian languages. But it took a long time to know and explore the North East literature. The North East literature was an area on which not many writers were interested. They did not give so much importance to the literature of the North East and rather called it literature of the periphery. It was only in the early 21st century that the people started exploring the place, but it was also on the negative ground. People in the '90s were facing a lot of difficulties in the form of bomb explosions, bandhs, hartals, and extortion by kidnapping. These things took away the peace and tranquillity with the place. And these things made the people of entire India think that the North East is a dangerous place to live in. Hence the people, mostly from the urban cities, grew a negative outlook over the place of North East. This was the main reason that very few writers, took up the challenge to portray the conditions of the people of North East. Writers like Anjum Hassan, Sanjay Hazarika, Siddhartha Deb, Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao, Dr Indira Goswami and many more were giving emphasis to the problems of North East. The North East writers focused on the chief aspects of violence, ethnicity, migration and myths. *The Strangers of Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India's North East* and *Strangers No More: New Narratives from India's North East* are the two most important works of Sanjay

Hazarika. *The Strangers of Mist* throws light on the issues of ethnic clashes, separatist outbreaks and political unrest. The book configures the problem of migration from Myanmar and Bangladesh, and also gave emphasis on the ethnic problems that arouse because of migration. The book is a true justification regarding the plights and difficulties that the Northeastern people usually face in their day to day life. The next work, *Strangers No More: New Narratives* from India's North East talks about the old and new struggles, contemporary trends and the changes that have taken place in the region. It is a collection of little-known stories that are brought by Hazarika in a brilliant manner. Like Hazarika, Temsula Ao also talks about violence through her works. In her work, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* explores the ten stories that happened in Nagaland. These two writers are completely different from Mamang Dai. Dai's works encompasses the myths and folklores of Arunachal Pradesh. The myths and legends are fully explored by writers like Mamang Dai.

This dissertation focuses on Mamang Dai and her works. Mamang Dai is a well-known writer, poet, journalist and novelist of North East literature. Her writings mainly idealise the myths and legends of her place, i.e. Arunachal Pradesh. She also gives concern to the vital aspects of contemporary life. Dai in all her works give importance to the problems of the North East. Her works also give importance to the aspects of identity, ethnicity and varied situations that arose because of the false notions of the people of the metropolitan cities. North East in the works of Dai is explored with a beautiful vision that is unseen by many other writers. Contemporariness in thought makes her works truly distinctive in nature. They had a close encounter with the buried thoughts that usually rests with every Northeastern people. As a poet and novelist, she tries to explore the world with a wider vision. Dai's novels meet the demand of the people as it speaks about the classical myths and historical events. Her chief known works

are *The Black Hill*, *Legends of Pensam*, *The Sky Queen*, *Stupid Cupid* and *Hambreelsai's Loom*. In her works, she not only discusses the past incidents but also talks about the present day problems. *The Black Hill* embraces the myths while *Stupid Cupid* brings in the modern day world. Both the works are set on the ethnic identity of the tribal inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh, yet the question of the roots still lurks in the background. Dai's views about North East are truly based on the chief aspects of the problems that always engulf the state from time to time.

Dai's world of fiction rests on the thoughts of the problems that existed from the earlier period. Her works are based on the ethnic groups of her own place. She always bends towards her culture and dogmas which are followed by them from the ancient past. Her belief in the classical world makes her rooted to have own ideals. She barely gives emphasis on her own vision. She in all her works continue to give full justification regarding the beautiful aspects of Arunachal Pradesh. Dai's vision about her place is full of beautiful experiences in the mainland. As being a native of the place she is able to visualize the inner beauty as well as the problems from which the people use to suffer. She, in her works, talks about the problem of identity. She is able to make an important appeal to the people of the mainland, by asserting over the problems they face in their day to day life. The works usually transfer us to the beautiful terrain of the place, i.e. Arunachal Pradesh. It tries to make us confine with the eternal beauty and charm with the place. Throughout the fictions, the ecological ideas of landscapes, sublime, apocalypse and many others could be seen. The characters in the novel had been used in such a manner that they suite it. The works are devoid of any engagement of thought or emotions. The narration in her novels is truly excellent and would bring in the crucial aspects of the North East.

Mamang Dai is considered one of the major female novelists in the world of North Eastern literature. The images of the female characters are cited with glare and beauty. These characters are very strong and could change the entire sphere of the novels. Females in the novels have a typical insight into the features of womanly nature. They are both sublime and courageous simultaneously. Dai blends her characters with strong as well as submissive features of women. She is indeed just to project the typical figures of women with the tribal outlook. Dai focuses on North East women to be very different from the women of other states. The tribal communities of North East are mostly patriarchal in origin, but there are certain tribal communities which give more authority to the females also. Patriarchy can be a major barrier for the females of the society, but the females of the tribal community have also some authority which makes them equal in some matters. The tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh and other North-eastern states always practice patriarchy as to be their primary measure. This patriarchy is somewhere accustomed to matriarchy. In Manipur, the bridegroom has to give the dowry and also has to live with the bride's family. In Arunachal Pradesh, the same system is there, but there are some rules which they had to abide by. The leaders or shamans are the people of the higher order. The rules and regulations are always made by the shamans. They always try to make the people aware that they cannot go against the principles which are enforced by them, and if they did so they would be excommunicated from their community. Thus, the females of the society are the worst sufferers of the community.

The North East literature is the most explored area now. The writers of today's generation give their contestation with the renowned authors of the then period. The works of the North-eastern writers marks its transparency with the insight of the writer's idea about the ecology of the place. It also gives importance to the problem of ethnicity and identity.

It is for sure that North East literature is by far the most different literature as it imbibes the traits of myths, folklore and contemporary issues. Among all the writers, Mamang Dai ably uses all the elements that are needed in the works of North East literature. She, in her works, went to the extent of saying that literature of the North East is not a new area. In her works like *The Black Hill* and *Stupid Cupid*, she is able to portray the two aspects of North East. Both the texts hint at the problems in the writings of the North East writers. *The Black Hill* has an important issue of a love affair between the two individuals of two different communities. This love affair becomes a trivial issue when it comes to the strangling of the conversion of religion. The diminishing of the traditional belief of the tribal community and make them realize the “inferiority” is skilfully executed in the novel. This thing brings in the problem of identity and ethnicity in the novel. But the other novel *Stupid Cupid* stands out to be placed in a different era. It posits the same themes of ethnicity and identity but set on a different ground. This makes the novella projecting the features of migration, racism and prejudiced notion of the people of the cities. Therefore, the North East literature is a literary area that gives scope to explore the factors of admiring the literary ground and also the contemporary problems which remain coherent in the works.

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