

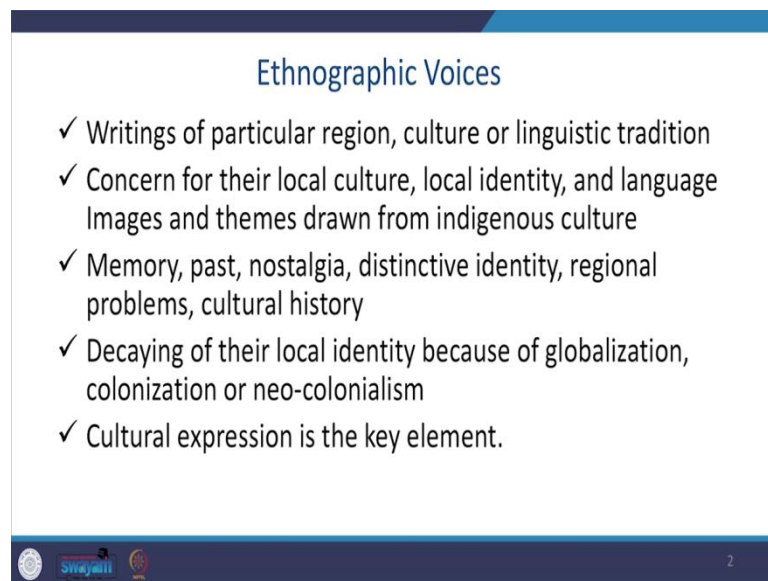
**Indian Poetry in English**  
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**Lecture - 35**  
**Mamang Dai**

Good morning friends, and welcome back to NPTEL Online Certification Course on Indian Poetry in English. Till now, you have heard so many lectures and now, we are coming towards the last phase of our lecture, where we have 3 or 4 lectures sort of the completion of the course. And, that is why today we are going to start a new phase of Indian poetry in English, and this has been titled as *Ethnographic Voices*.

In this, we are going to take a first a poet named Mamang Dai. My dear friends, before we go into the poetic world of Mamang Dai, it is actually very important to understand what exactly is meant by ethnographic voices.

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**Ethnographic Voices**

- ✓ Writings of particular region, culture or linguistic tradition
- ✓ Concern for their local culture, local identity, and language  
Images and themes drawn from indigenous culture
- ✓ Memory, past, nostalgia, distinctive identity, regional problems, cultural history
- ✓ Decaying of their local identity because of globalization, colonization or neo-colonialism
- ✓ Cultural expression is the key element.

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As the name itself suggests, it is actually a voice or it is actually a sort of writing of a particular region, of a particular locality where people actually crave for their own identity. And, through such a writing they try to express the feelings of their region, the experiences of their culture and the greater picture of a sort of linguistic tradition. Such voices actually exhibit a sort of concern for local culture, local identity and also local language.

In such a sort of writing whether it is in the form of fiction or in the form of poetry, images and themes are mostly drawn from indigenous culture meaning thereby from their own culture for a particular region. Now, in such a sort of writing you can come across, the expression of memory, the expression of past, there is an expression of nostalgia, distinctive identity, the problems of that particular region and also a cultural history of that region.


It may be of any region, but in the series of lectures that we are going to undertake, we have majority of these poets from North East, where these poets actually describe and these poets portray the decay of their local identity. You know what is happening nowadays that in the glitch and glare of globalization and all, local cultures are taking a back seat.

And, then this may be because of several reasons, may be because of colonialism, because of also neo-colonialism, and also humans strive to compete in a global world, they actually want to go ahead and in this the local culture, the local language, and the local practices are often being ignored. So, what is of prime importance in ethnographic voice is the cultural expression which is actually the key element.

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### Northeast Literary Tradition

- Dynamic culture
- Tribal ethos
- Portrayal of ecology
- Documenting the tribal history
- Reclaiming the forgotten past



❖ "Tribal History is not seen as a continuity in Indian historiography. (I use the word tribal, not indigenous people or aborigine, because it is appropriate to the Indian context). Yet it is still continuing, the tribals are still being evicted from their land." --Mahasweta Devi

Now, as I said earlier, that in this connection we shall be taking up some major poets of a North-East region which has often faced a sort of ignorance, a sort of indifference as the poetry of that region portrays.

And, but then one must not forget the fact that this North-East also has got a dynamic culture, a majority of the people living in these areas they often have a tribal culture and the tribal ethos. And, and when we talk about the tribal ethos one thing that we have to keep into consideration is--- how they are very close to nature. This may remind you of a sort of eco- friendly nature that North-East people are often infatuated with.

And, in this sort of writing we can come across the documentation of tribal history, and these people try to reclaim the lost tradition or their past, through their memory they actually try to neutralize their feelings, neutralize their experiences which have actually been dominated by a new culture, which is actually a concern of for the North East poets.

In this regard we can also take some of the experience and then statements of one very major literary figure named Mahashweta Devi who says, ‘Tribal history is not seen as continuity in Indian historiography.’ See, the ignorance of the tribal cult, the culture and what she says is—“ I use the word tribal not indigenous people or aborigine because it is appropriate to the Indian context. Yet it is still continuing, the tribals are still being evicted from their land.”

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- Victimization of Northeast people
- Large scale violence and unrest
- Conflict between the indigenous and the state

Robin. S. Ngangom and Kynpham S. Nongkynrih argued: "Much of the uniqueness of North-East poetry is the consequence of contemporary events, violence especially. The writer from the Northeast differs from his counterpart in the mainland in a significant way living with the menace of the gun he cannot merely indulge in verbal wizardry and woolly aesthetics but must perform master the art of witness."

Now, my dear friends! Time and again we can experience and we can see that the way we are trying to progress wherever these scientific ways or the scientific march is ahead ,we find we actually are ignoring our ancient past, our ancient traditions. And, in this regard

North-East people specially the people of that region, they feel that they actually become a sort of victim.

There are different reasons to it. When we shall take up some of the poems we will come to know what these poets are trying to reclaim. Of course, most of the time we have witnessed through newspapers and several channels that North-East used to be a hot bed of violence and unrest, fine. There were lots of disturbances, and these disturbances were actually in the background or in the backdrop of nature, because nature there became a sort of shelter for them. And, the same shelter-- Nature which had actually been very friendly with the people of the North-East, now they find that because of certain interferences, their natural resources are being destroyed or they are facing challenges. There is often a sort of conflict between the indigenous and the state.

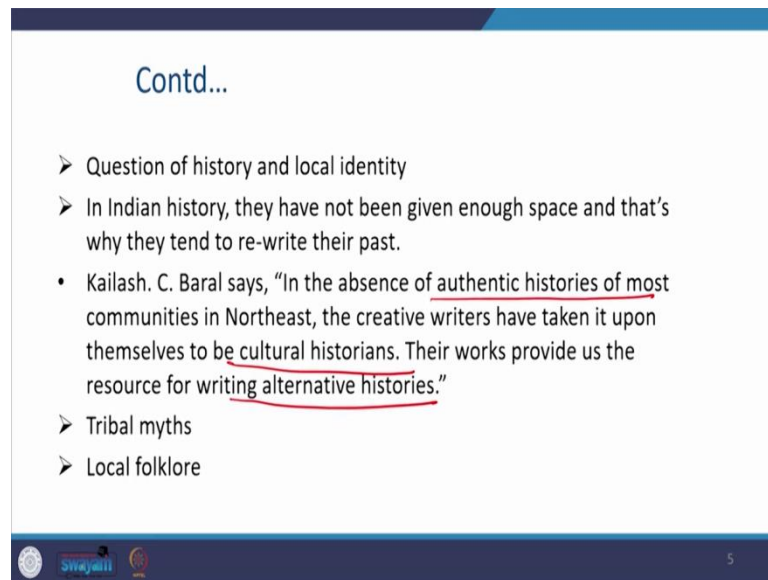
Many people often say that they feel a sort of indifferent attitude, they feel a sort of callous attitude and of course, the way you want to make roads, you want to bring so many global things in any region, naturally that actually entails a lot of cost. And in this way, the people of that region often feel themselves threatened and they also feel their natural resources being a sort of victim of it.

In this regard, it is quite significant to mention the observation of Robin S Ngangom and Kynpham who say “Much of the uniqueness of North East poetry, because we are talking about poetry that is why I have taken this quote, is the consequences of contemporary events violence especially”.

So, this violence has played a pivotal role in the North East poetry and you can find in majority of the poems written by North Eastern poets-- they find how their natural habitats are being destroyed and they find this sort of decay, and that actually inspires them to reclaim their past. The writer from the North-East differs from his counterpart in the mainland in a significant way living with the menace of the gun he cannot merely indulge in the verbal wizardry and woolly aesthetics, but must perforce master the art of witness.”

So, what these two people have observed is that because of the sort of violence and the disturbance, naturally the people of the North-East often feel themselves neglected and they find themselves becoming receiving a sort of callous treatment because of the menace of the gun and they cannot indulge in verbal wizardry and woolly aesthetics. They use the term like woolly aesthetics, but must perforce. They actually become a mute witness to it.

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- Question of history and local identity
- In Indian history, they have not been given enough space and that's why they tend to re-write their past.
- Kailash. C. Baral says, "In the absence of authentic histories of most communities in Northeast, the creative writers have taken it upon themselves to be cultural historians. Their works provide us the resource for writing alternative histories."
- Tribal myths
- Local folklore

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And, then they feel that their history and their identity face a sort of threat. We have on several occasions witnessed, how North-East has not been given enough space and that is why they try to rewrite their past.

One another observation by one scholar Baral who says, "In the absence of authentic histories"; now why he says authentic histories? Because since they did not get that much of opportunity and their language, their tradition, their history that is actually only in the oral form. And, that is why it is being said," in the absence of authentic histories of most communities in North East-- the creative writers have taken it upon themselves to be the cultural historians".


One can find an inkling of the cultural traditions which have been lost, and the poets are actually trying to bring it. Not only the poets, but the writers also of the North East. "Their works provide us with the resources for writing alternative histories". My dear friends, myth is actually an integral part of a culture. Folklore is also that much important when we talk about the history and the historiography.


But, unless and until they get a sort of exposure, these things cannot come to the limelight.

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### Mamang Dai

- Born in 1957, Pasighat, in an Adi Community of East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh
- Poet, novelist, journalist, historian, and former civil servant
- Worked with the World Wildlife Fund in Itanagar for the Eastern Himalaya Biodiversity Hotspots Program
- Covered programs and interviews for All India Radio
- Worked as journalist for *The Hindustan Times*, *The Telegraphs*, and *The Sentinel*.
- Honoured with Padmashri in 2011.
- Sahitya Akademy Award in 2017.



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So, in this regard one very famous name, without whom the history of North-East writings or North-East poetry is incomplete is none other than Mamang Dai. Majority of you might have heard that Mamang Dai, but it is actually a tragedy to note that Mamang Dai got a sort of fame only in the region where she was born. It is actually too late that her works attracted the attention of the outside world when she was nominated for Padma Shri in 2011 and later on in 2017 she got Sahitya Akademi Award.

Now, who is Mamang Dai and why her works are so famous? Mamang Dai was born in 1957 and she belongs to a community of Adi which is a tribal community of East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. Dai is a poet, Dai is a novelist, historian, a sort of journalist and also one thing that is quite noteworthy about her, that she was the first civil servant from her state, fine? Isn't it that much interesting?

She worked with World Wildlife Fund in Itanagar for the Eastern Himalaya Biodiversity Hotspot Program and then you know it is also surprising to know that for her fascination and love of journalism as she left her service from the Indian administration, fine and then she gave several programs on all India radio because she is a great lover of nature.

And, then she also gave several interviews, she worked as a journalist for *The Hindustan Times*, *The Telegraph* and she has been a regular contributor of *The Sentinel* which is one of the main newspapers of North East.

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The slide is titled "Contd....." and contains the following content:

- Dai belongs to the Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh whose faith is “woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world”
- Inspired by the geography and landscape of Arunachal Pradesh.

A quote box on the right side of the slide reads: “I live in a small town surrounded by hills. If I travel to other parts of the state it is the same - more mountains and forests, river crossings and rough roads. So the physical presence of the land is very tangible”. (Mamang Dai)

At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for Swajati and a small number 7.

Dai belongs to Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh and majority of her works, actually revolve around forest ecology because Dai has in many interviews said, that she is not only geographically, but historically attached to the environment, to the forest. So, her stories or her poems are woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world.

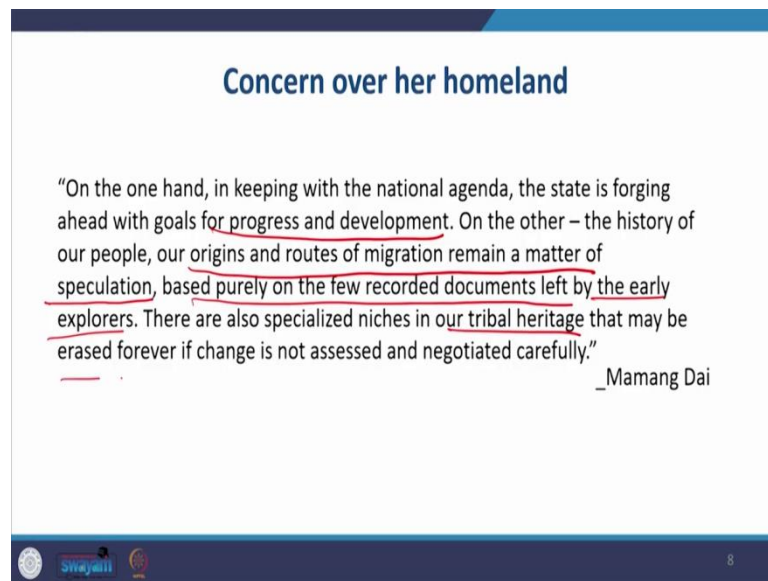
Mamang Dai is also a member and a believer of Donyi-Polo Movement. Now, what is this Donyi-Polo movement? Actually we have already been familiar with ecology, but then the followers of Donyi-Polo Movement believe that not only humans, but even animals, not only animals, but even natural I mean even the objects of nature they also have a sort of life of their own.

So, all the elements including men, animals and nature have an intrinsic worth, fine. So, that is why Mamang Dai was inspired by the geography and landscape of Arunachal Pradesh. And, on several occasions, while in interviews and in several essays what she says is of quite prime importance.

She says, “I live in a small town surrounded by the hills”. She was actually born in Pasighat of Arunachal Pradesh and she says— “If I travel to other parts of the state, it is the same more mountains and forests, river crossings and rough roads. So, the physical presence of the land is very tangible.”

You might not find too much of a writing which actually hinges on feminism or other aspects, though Dai being a woman is historiography, is the local language. She also talks about rivers, storms, hills these are actually the key metaphors in Dai's poetic world. And, not only in poetic world, but so in her fictional world also and one can find a sort of concern in her work for her homeland.

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Mamang Dai herself says, “On the one hand, in keeping with the national agenda, the state is forging ahead with goals for progress and development.” Now, you see, whenever we think of progress and development naturally this is at the cost of something which is actually a very precious and what is that? At the cost of nature, at the cost of disturbance in the hills, at the cost of disturbance in the mountains which have actually been a very important and integral to North East people.

“On the other – the history of our people, our origins and routes of migration remain a matter of speculation, based purely on the few recorded documents left by the early explorers. There are also specialized niches in our tribal heritage. There are many good aspects of tribal literature and tribal heritage”, that have not been you know familiarized to other peoples.

So, that is still hidden and that is why when Dai writes she says—‘that may be erased forever if change is not assessed and negotiated carefully.’ So, she says that if the tribal history and culture they are not exposed perhaps they will meet a sort of eraser. They will



actually meet a sort of ignorance and in order to get that back what is important is it has actually to be negotiated carefully.

Now, when we come to know about Mamang Dai's fascination towards nature, towards hills, towards mountains, it is also very significant to know what are the famous works that Dai is credited with. She has as a poet she has three major poetry collections.

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**Her Literary Corpus**

- ❑ **Poetry Collections**
  - *River Poems* (2004)
  - *The Balm of Time* (2008)
  - *Midsummer Survival Lyrics* (2012)
- ❑ **Fictional Writings**
  - *The Legends of Pensam* (2006)
  - *Stupid Cupid* (2009)
  - *The Black Hill* (2014)
  - *The Sky Queen* (2005)
  - *Once Upon a Moon Time* (2005)


The very first collection entitled *River Poems*; look at actually the titles River Poems the entire collection has got poems which actually talk about the Siang River which actually talk about the natural resources and all. So, river poems she calls it River Poems. It was published by it was published from Writers workshop, Calcutta.

And, then in 2008 came **The Balm of Time**. See The Balm of Time, my dear friends, time plays a vital role in the making remaking of history. And what Dai believes is that it is time that we explored our own heritage, our own history, our own culture. And, then in 2012 came *Midsummer Survival Lyrics*.

So, she has got 3 poetry collections, but apart from that she has also several fictional writings I mean novels *The Legends of Pensam* which came in 2006. Then *Stupid Cupid* in 2009, *The Black Hill* for which she was awarded, *The Sky Queen* 2005, *Once Upon a Moon Time* again in 2005.


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❖ **Non-fiction**

- *Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land* (2003-04)
  - This is about the culture, tradition, legends, and life style of Arunachal people.
- *Mountain Harvest: The Food of Arunachal* (2004)



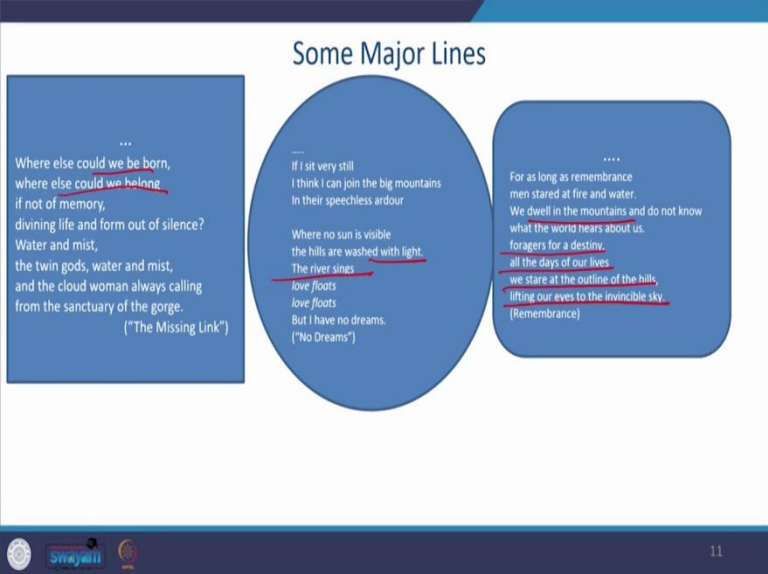
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She has also got some non-fictions *Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land*, this also credited her with an award this actually talks about the tradition, legends, lifestyle of the people of Arunachal region. And, then *Mountain Harvest: The Food of Arunachal*, Mountain Harvest The food of Arunachal.

So, you can find out that how she is confined to her own region and she actually tries to reclaim her past, she actually wants the people of other states and people apart from their own region to know the history, the pattern, the language.

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Some Major Lines



...  
Where else could we be born,  
where else could we belong  
if not of memory,  
divining life and form out of silence?  
Water and mist,  
the twin gods, water and mist,  
and the cloud woman always calling  
from the sanctuary of the gorge.  
("The Missing Link")

....  
If I sit very still  
I think I can join the big mountains  
in their speechless ardour  
  
Where no sun is visible  
the hills are washed with light.  
The river sines  
love floats  
love floats  
But I have no dreams.  
("No Dreams")

....  
For as long as remembrance  
men stared at fire and water.  
We dwell in the mountains and do not know  
what the world means about us.  
foragers for a destiny,  
all the days of our lives  
we stare at the outline of the hills,  
lifting our eyes to the invincible sky.  
(Remembrance)

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Dai's works are vast. She has contributed more in the field of fiction than in poetry, but she can be remembered for her poetry. Actually in one of the poems entitled "Missing Link," I have taken some of the lines from some of the poems in order that I can be in a position to interpret her and could show my readers the sort of the sort of keenness that Mamang Dai has for the mountains and for nature, for hills.

Now, she says how she talks about her own lost tradition and lost history,

"Where else could we born,

where else could we belong"

I mean the question of identity look at these lines.

"Where else could we be born,

where else could we be belong

if not of memory –"

Memory is only our you know, we can only cling to memory because we are displaced people,

"divining life and form out of silence?"

Water and mist, "

Water and mist – she talks about are the river waters which most of the time this area is surrounded by water and mist

"the twin gods,"

These are the only twin gods we actually find only

"water and mist,

water and mist

and the cloud woman always calling

from the sanctuary of the gorge."

So, there is actually the poem is titled “Missing Link” it is actually a missing link between the Siang river and the Brahmaputra.

So, she says that there is actually a connection, but this connection is lost. We are actually dissociated from the main land. Again, she has been talking about memory and nostalgia and all in another poem entitled no dreams what she says you can find her poetic lines are very smooth, they are spontaneous, maybe there is not a musicality because it is actually colored with realism of all sorts.

“If I sit very still

I think I can join the big mountains.”

So, both on my back and on my front I can only find ‘mountains in their speechless ardour’ and you know here we find the philosophy of Mamang Dai who believes that even the stones can have tongues, even the stones can have a life of their own, even other objects like hills and rivers they can have their own identity, they also have got some life which actually Donyi Polo movement also believes in.

“Where no sun is visible” – most of the time we actually do not have a sun we are deprived of the sunlight and there may be a dig also that we are deprived of the sunlight, we are deprived of the opportunities.

“The hills are washed with light,

the river sings,

love floats

love floats,

But I have no dreams.”

Where is it to go? Where should we go? We do not have opportunities, we do not have privileges, we do not have facilities, we have lost our language, we have lost our history, we have lost our identity because we are the distanced people, we are actually the displaced people. And, again in every poem or the other we can find remembrances, and she again says in another poem named “Remembrance “,

“For as long as remembrance

men stared at fire and water

men stared at fire and water.”

So, now, this fire may symbolize strength, but the absence of it also symbolizes cold. So, we actually belong to up to a region where we only require, where we only see fire and water and both these are only the sources of life.

“We dwell in the mountains./ Mountains only are our houses and do not know/ what the world hears about us.” We are totally disconnected from what is going on in the outside world. We are insiders, but then in the outside world what happens we are least informed about it.

“foragers for a destiny

all the days of our lives,

we stare at the outline of the hills

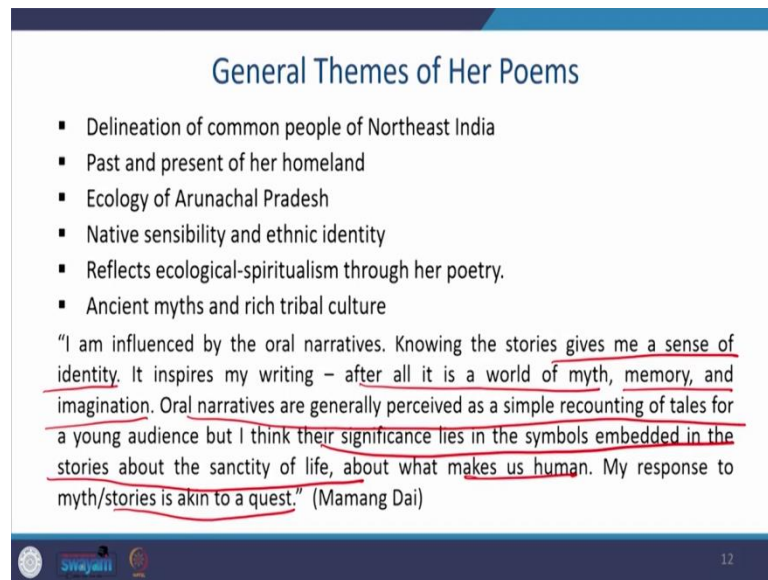
lifting our eyes to the invincible sky”.

Now, look at these lines. These lines actually depict a sort of tragedy of the North East people specially, of Arunachal Pradesh people who are surrounded only by mountains and only by rivers.

And, what the poet says is that we are only foragers for a destiny, we are actually those people who are in search of food, who are in search of a habitat, we are displaced people foragers, all the days of our lives we do not have a history of our own and where is our history because we have been displaced time and again, we stare only at the outline of the hills lifting our eyes to the invincible sky only sky is the limit our ambitions go only to the sky, but there is no one to protect our own interests, there is no one to think of our own welfare. So, we are the people surrounded by mountains and by waters and by hills and where is actually our destiny we do not know.

So, poem after poem, my dear friends, we can find the sort of loss of identity, the loss of language, the loss of history, the loss of literature and the loss of speech as well.

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**General Themes of Her Poems**

- Delineation of common people of Northeast India
- Past and present of her homeland
- Ecology of Arunachal Pradesh
- Native sensibility and ethnic identity
- Reflects ecological-spiritualism through her poetry.
- Ancient myths and rich tribal culture

"I am influenced by the oral narratives. Knowing the stories gives me a sense of identity. It inspires my writing – after all it is a world of myth, memory, and imagination. Oral narratives are generally perceived as a simple recounting of tales for a young audience but I think their significance lies in the symbols embedded in the stories about the sanctity of life, about what makes us human. My response to myth/stories is akin to a quest." (Mamang Dai)

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So, there is actually a delineation of common people of North-Eastern region, not only the present one fine, but even the past has also not been delineated upon, the past is also to be explored. Arunachal Pradesh which is ecologically very rich fine, has often met the indifference of the outside world and the native people are still trying to explore their regional native sensibility and their ethnic identity.

The poetry of this region or for that matter the literature of this region reflects a sort of ecological spiritual through her poetry. Now, if you read some other pieces of literature which come from the North East, we can find that even the forest which is actually a life-giver, the forest has actually become a sort of hideout for all the sorts of terror and violence that are being penetrated and that are being perpetrated upon other people of the North East.

So, North-Eastern region and especially the people of the Adi community and people of that region, they have ancient myths and their tribal culture is very rich, but who is going to listen to them. In this regard Dai herself says, "I am influenced by oral narratives. I have been listening to oral narratives our history is still oral. Oral narratives, and through these narratives it actually gives me a sense of identity. We do not have a record of our own language of our own history. It inspires my writing. So, that is actually the inspiration of my writing – after all it is a world of myth, memory and imagination. Oral narratives are generally perceived as a simple recounting of tales. People may consider that they are


simply the recounting of tales of a young audience, but I think their significance lies in the symbols embedded in the stories about the sanctity of life. Nobody tries to understand what a sort of life what is the sanctity of the life and these are all interposed in our stories and that is why they are my inspiration, what makes us human.”

Especially these tribal people they say, ‘my response to my stories is akin to a quest.’ So, through my stories I actually try to make the outside world believe that we also have a past, we also have a culture and our culture has been neglected, our identity has met a sort of indifference.

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*“An Obscure Place”*

The history of our race  
begins with the place of stories.  
We do not know if the language we speak  
belongs to a written past.  
Nothing is certain.  
There are mountains. Oh! There are mountains.  
We climbed every slope. We slept by the river.  
But do not speak of victory yet.  
An obscure place haunts the hunter.  
The prize slips away.  
Yesterday the women hid their faces.  
They forbade their children to speak.  
Yesterday we gave shelter to men  
who climbed over our hills




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Now, it would be better if I can read the lines because the lines of Mamang Dai are very smooth, very simple. It is not camouflaged in the verbal wizardry, rather it appears as if like the flow of the rivers, like the flow of rivers swung, fine. The poetic numbers also outflow.

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***“An Obscure Place”***

The history of our race  
begins with the place of stories.  
We do not know if the language we speak  
belongs to a written past.  
Nothing is certain.  
There are mountains. Oh! There are mountains.  
We climbed every slope. We slept by the river.  
But do not speak of victory yet.  
An obscure place haunts the hunter.  
The prize slips away.  
Yesterday the women hid their faces.  
They forbade their children to speak.  
Yesterday we gave shelter to men  
who climbed over our hills



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And, let us take one poem entitle *An Obscure Place* and, the way I did it perhaps that will lead you to extract the meaning because meaning here is not hidden.

“The history of our race/ begins with the place of stories”

Because we have an oral tradition

“we do not know if the language we speak/ belongs to a written past.”

Does our language have a written past?

“Nothing is certain”. Because there is no history written here, no. And, and in that way we have to explore our history.

“There are only mountains. Oh! There are mountains.

We climbed every slope. We slept by the river.

But do not speak of victory yet.”

They are still, we still have to have a victory and victory what? Victory of our own culture, victory of our own language, victory of our own identity, victory of our own myth, victory of our own culture but then we do not have a written record of that. And, that is why she says,

“An obscure place haunts the hunter,



“An obscure place haunts the hunter” It is actually a place which is only meant for the hunter who what he does?

The prise slips away”

fine and they are actually forced to and the wild animals often become the target, fine. Perhaps we forget at times that man and nature and man and animals they have to live in a sort of communion what the North-Eastern people especially the tribal people believe.

“Yesterday the women hid their faces.

They forbade their children to speak.

Yesterday we gave shelter to men  
who climbed over our hills.”

What has happened to our culture, because we are people who are hospitable, and we gave actually you know we gave a proper treatment to those people who climbed over the hills.

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Contd...

for glory of a homeland, they said-  
those who know what knowing is,  
And now the sleeping houses, the men and the villages  
have turned to stone.  
If there is no death the news is silent.  
If there is only silence, we should be disturbed  
Listen, the tone of a prayer is hushed:  
If a stranger passes this way  
let him look up to the sky.  
A smoke cloud chases the ants.  
See! They have slain the wild cat

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“For glory of a homeland, they said –  
those who know what knowing is,  
and now the sleeping houses,  
the men and the villages  
have turned to stone.”

And then once you come to this region what will happen, because there is no activity? So, the men and the villages have turned to stone

“If there is no death the news is silent.”

And, again the poet becomes very sad and says, what we every now and then hear is actually the sound of guns and bullets. So, when if there is no death the news is silent.

‘If there is only silence, we should be disturbed’

You know, because we are habituated to hear to the noise and what is this noise about? What is this cacophony about? This cacophony is about the violence which is being perpetrated in the forest area and that way,

“ Listen, the tone of a prayer is hushed: the tone of a prayer is hushed silent.  
If a stranger passes this way  
let him look up to the sky.  
A smoke cloud chases the ants.  
See! They have slain the wild cat. They have slain the wild cat.”

The hunters you know of course, at times the hunters make a prey of these animals, but the poet is shocked, the poet is actually sympathetic.

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Contd...

and buried the hornbill in her maternal sleep.  
The words of strangers have led us  
into a mist deeper than the one we left behind  
weeping, like the waving grassland  
where the bones of our fathers are buried  
surrounded by thoughts of beauty.  
There are mountains. Oh! There are mountains.  
We climbed every slope. We slept by the river.  
But do not speak of victory yet!

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“And buried the hornbill in her maternal sleep.

The words of stranger have led us

into a mist deeper than the one we left behind.”

We have actually been interfered with, our culture has been interfered with and these strangers, who are these strangers? Who are these people

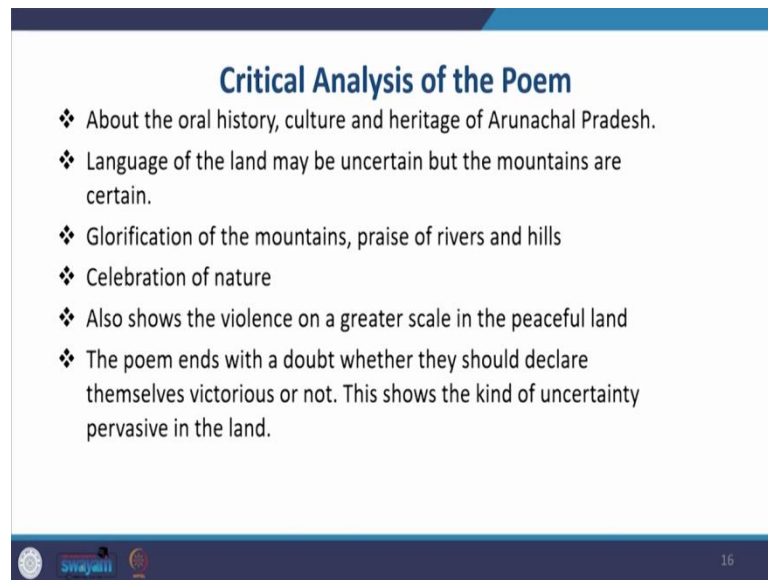
“weeping like the waving grassland /where the bones of our fathers are buried/ surrounded by thoughts of beauty.”

We have actually got a beautiful past where our forefathers are laying buried, but that area is being you know that is echoing with the sound of bullets and if there is no news naturally we are frightened, when there is no sound we are frightened.

“There are mountains. Oh! There are mountains. / We climbed every slope. We slept by the river.”

But do not speak of victory yet! Fine, we climbed every slope, we climbed every slope, every impediment, we slept by the river, but do not speak of victory yet.

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**Critical Analysis of the Poem**

- ❖ About the oral history, culture and heritage of Arunachal Pradesh.
- ❖ Language of the land may be uncertain but the mountains are certain.
- ❖ Glorification of the mountains, praise of rivers and hills
- ❖ Celebration of nature
- ❖ Also shows the violence on a greater scale in the peaceful land
- ❖ The poem ends with a doubt whether they should declare themselves victorious or not. This shows the kind of uncertainty pervasive in the land.

So, if you have a look at the poem you will find that this poem talks about the oral history, culture and the heritage of Arunachal Pradesh. So, Arunachal Pradesh is a mountainous range where you can find beauty still lying, but this beauty, this peace, this prosperity, fine.

This perspective of Nature has been disturbed because of the infringement and because of the interference, because of the intrusion, glorification of mountains and the praises of rivers and hills are also mentioned. We find that Mamang Dai, as a poet of nature not only does she adore the nature, but she actually wants the nature to be celebrated.

The poem actually ends with a doubt whether they should declare themselves victorious or not? Are they really victorious? No, they are at the receiving end and that is why they try to explore. But, then what the poet actually wants is that one should also try to listen to the voice of the mountain. The mountains also have a life of their own.

Nowadays, in a blind race for progress and prosperity, we have been cutting mountains, we have been disturbing the paths of the rivers, but then to what end my dear friend? We often find that these poor silent mountains when they are cut perhaps there is a shriek, there is a cry, but who is there to listen.

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*“Voice of the Mountain”*

From where I sit on the high platform  
I can see the ferry lights crossing  
criss-crossing the big river.  
I know the towns, the estuary mouth.  
There, beyond the last bank  
where the colour drains from heaven  
I can outline the chapters of the world.  
The other day a young man arrived from the village.  
Because he could not speak  
he brought a gift of fish  
from the land of rivers.  
It seems such acts are repeated:

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And that is why very beautifully in the poem entitled “Voice of the Mountain” Mamang Dai will say,

“From where I sit on the high platform, / I can see the ferry lights crossing.”

Now, here it reminds us of a beautiful description of Nature like that of Wordsworth and Coleridge whatsoever.

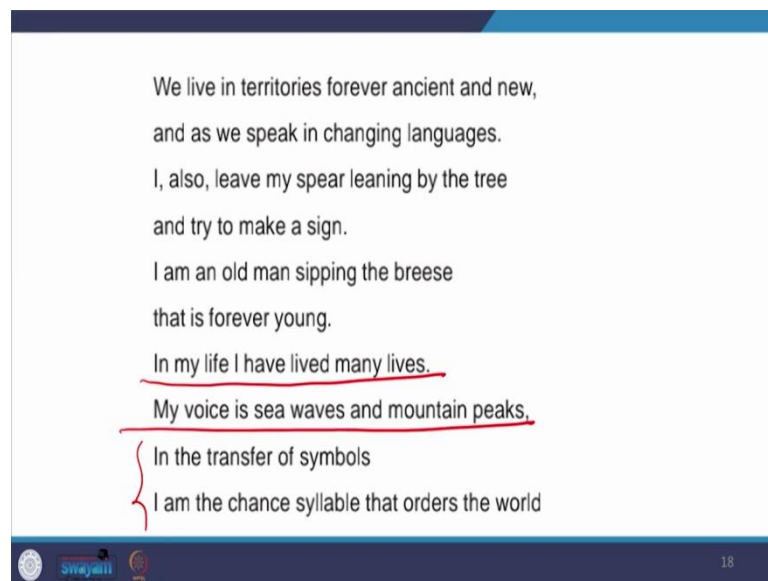
“Criss-crossing the big river. / I know the towns, the estuary mouth. the tidal mouth of a river I know/There, beyond the last bank /where the color drains from heaven/ I can outline the chapters of the world, I can simply imagine.

Being you know, in and around this mountainous range and, in and amid the sounds of the river,

“I can outline the chapters of the world. / The other day a young man arrived from the village. / Because he could not speak/ he brought a gift of fish/ from the land of rivers. /It seems such acts are repeated.”

And, she also talks about the candid nature of the people who greet each other and who greet each other with gifts, because they do not have the proper language when a young man arrived from the village because he could not speak maybe perhaps because our own language was not spoken.

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“We live in territories forever ancient and new,/” – our territories are always ancient, but then they are still new

“and as we speak in changing languages.”

Now, here she says how the particular language of the Adi community or the tribal community has not been recognized. So, what she says is –

“I, also, leave my spear leaning by the tree

and try to make a sign. “

She actually talks about how her forefathers used to express themselves through a symbolic language.

“I am an old man sipping the breeze

that is forever young.

In my life I have lived many lives.”

So, this is actually in a way this is an autobiographical note of the mountains and the mountains say, I have witnessed everything.

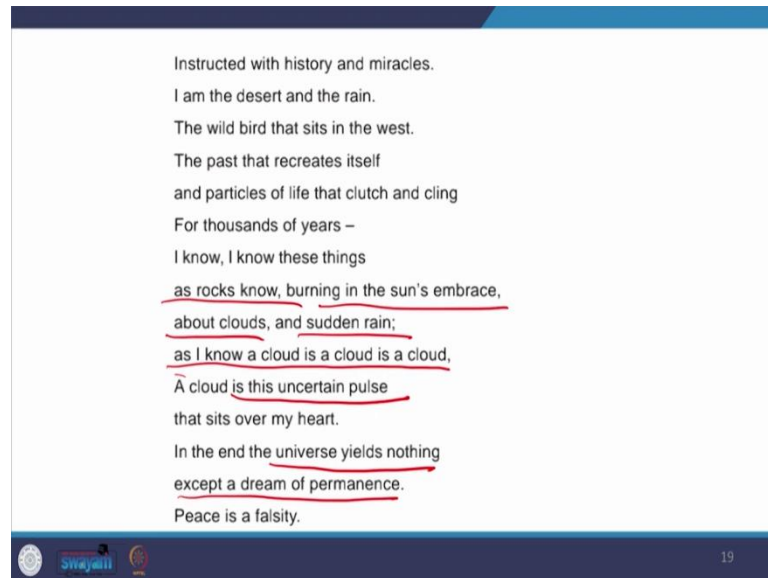
“I in my life I have lived many lives / My voice is sea waves and the mountain peaks.” So, nothing is there except the voice of the sea and I am witness to these voices my voice is sea waves even though I cannot speak you can find how the sea waves suddenly come and beat their breast upon me, fine.

“In the transfer of symbols

I am the chance syllable.”

Look at this beautiful line in the transfer of symbols- I am the chance syllable that orders the world.

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“Instructed with history and miracles.

I am there as a sentinel. I am there as a sentinel and I am instructed with history and miracles.

“I am the desert and the rain.” I bear witness to desert and the rain. I can see this situation of drought, also the situation of rain.

“The wild bird that sits in the west./The past that recreates itself”.

Over the years over the centuries I have been a witness to all these and particles of life that clutch and cling

“ For thousands of years –/ I know, I know these things/ as rocks know, burning in the sun's embrace.”

I have been burning here in the sun's embrace, fine

“about clouds, and a sudden rain/as I know a cloud is a cloud is a cloud.

I can only know that a cloud is a cloud is a cloud nothing beyond .

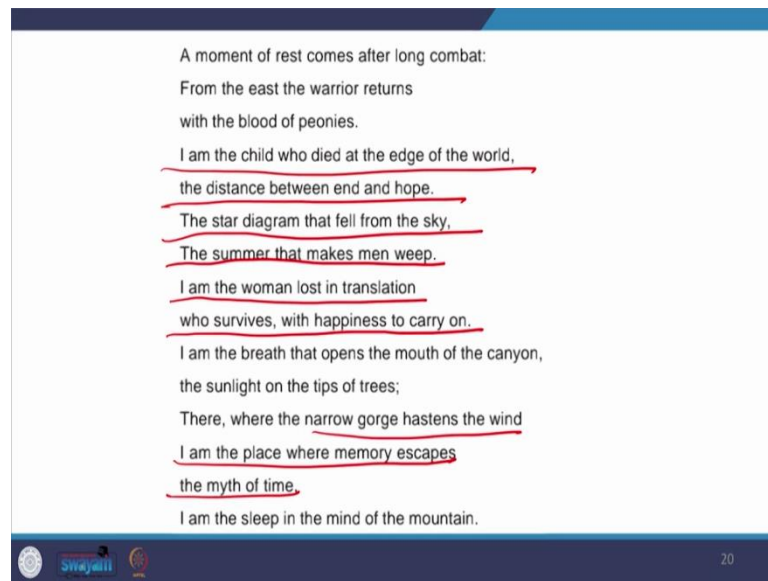
“a cloud is this uncertain pulse.”

So, in the previous poem we talked about

“there is nothing no dreams /that sits over my heart. /In the end the universe yields nothing /except a dream of permanence./ Peace is a falsity.”

You know, I am a witness to all sorts of disturbances and chaoses. I am the mountain who hears to my voice, but I have witnessed everything--- the sun, the rain, the blazing sun you know I have been a witness to, but then do I have a history of my own? Do I have a language of my own?

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“A moment of rest comes after long combat:/From the east the warrior returns /with the blood of peonies.”

And, you know this. There is, at times, the poet also tries to take a dig at how the mountain ranges have become a hideout for all those warriors and when she uses the word warriors, there may be you know a pun also on that word.

“I am the child who died at the edge of the world,  
the distance between end and hope.

The star diagram that fell from the sky,  
The summer that makes men weep.

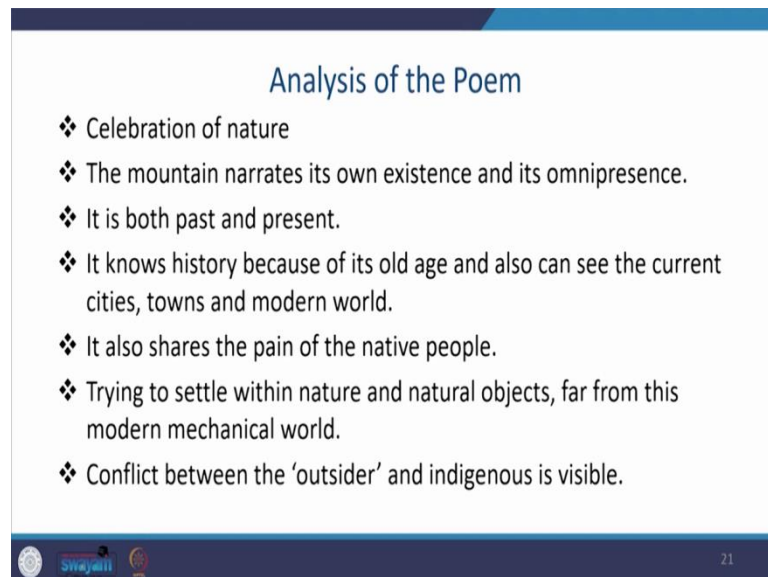
I am the woman lost in translation.” I am the woman and here she says---- I am the woman, I am the woman lost in translation who survives, with happiness to carry on. I have simply hopes, fine just like a woman who is lost in translation fine my history is also like that.



“I am the breath that opens the mouth of the canyon,  
the sunlight on the tips of trees;  
There, where the narrow gorge hastens the wind.  
I am the place where memory escapes  
the myth of time.  
I am the sleep in the mind of the mountain.”

I am only the sleep in the mind of the mountain I rest here, but when mountains are cut  
you know what happens? The mountains also cry.

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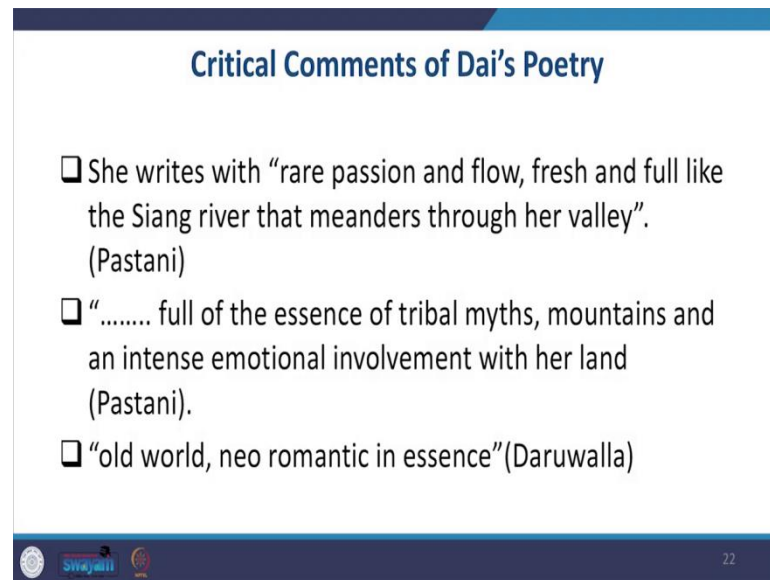
**Analysis of the Poem**

- ❖ Celebration of nature
- ❖ The mountain narrates its own existence and its omnipresence.
- ❖ It is both past and present.
- ❖ It knows history because of its old age and also can see the current cities, towns and modern world.
- ❖ It also shares the pain of the native people.
- ❖ Trying to settle within nature and natural objects, far from this modern mechanical world.
- ❖ Conflict between the 'outsider' and indigenous is visible.

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There is of course, a celebration of Nature here in this poem as well, and one can find a mountain narrating it's own existential crisis because of it having faced several disturbances and chaoses ,it also shares the sufferings of the native. So, the poet actually makes mountain a metaphor here and there is an attempt at settling within nature and natural objects far from modern mechanical world.

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**Critical Comments of Dai's Poetry**

- ❑ She writes with “rare passion and flow, fresh and full like the Siang river that meanders through her valley”.  
(Pastani)
- ❑ “..... full of the essence of tribal myths, mountains and an intense emotional involvement with her land  
(Pastani).
- ❑ “old world, neo romantic in essence”(Daruwalla)

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And you know at times we have also felt the conflict between the outsider and the insider or the indigenous that is also visible. My dear friends,---- the poems majority of the poems of Mamang Dai, which actually rotate round nature, which actually rotate round mountains hills rivers, fine?

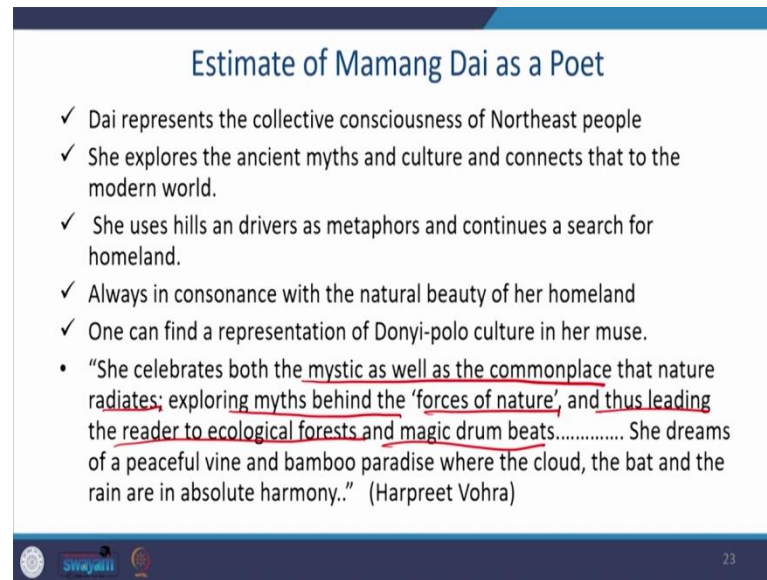
But, then through that she also tries to convey the disregard, through that she also tries to convey the indifference, the neglect of the North-Eastern region and especially of the Arunachal people. There can be quite a good number of comments for the poetic world of Mamang Dai, but then one thing that we can find in Dai as has also been mentioned by Bipin Pastani a contemporary poet of this present day world who says that ‘she writes with rare passion and flow.

Did you when you used to read the poetic lines of Mamang Dai, did you ever feel that you had an impediment in understanding and extracting the meaning? No. Fresh and full like the Siang River that meanders through her valley. So, the Siang River by which side she used to live, and she had spent a lot of time there so, one can find the flow in the same way in her poetry.

Again Pastani says that “there is an essence of tribal myths in the poetic world of Mamang Dai, mountains and an emotional involvement” rather I will call an emotional outburst with her land, an emotional association, a sort of you know nostalgia with her land.

Even the most celebrated poet of Indian poetry in English Keki N Daruwalla says that what she does is she actually recreates ‘an old world with a new romanticism in it’s essence’ and that is how we can find a Mamang Dai’s poetry to be not only sublime, but beautiful.

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**Estimate of Mamang Dai as a Poet**

- ✓ Dai represents the collective consciousness of Northeast people
- ✓ She explores the ancient myths and culture and connects that to the modern world.
- ✓ She uses hills and rivers as metaphors and continues a search for homeland.
- ✓ Always in consonance with the natural beauty of her homeland
- ✓ One can find a representation of Donyi-polo culture in her muse.
- “She celebrates both the mystic as well as the commonplace that nature radiates; exploring myths behind the ‘forces of nature’, and thus leading the reader to ecological forests and magic drum beats..... She dreams of a peaceful vine and bamboo paradise where the cloud, the bat and the rain are in absolute harmony..” (Harpreet Vohra)

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When we estimate Mamang Dai as an ethnographic voice, as an Indian poet we can find that Dai not only talks about her own you know, but then she talks about the collective consciousness of a particular region especially of North East people. She tries to explore ancient myths, culture and tries to connect that to the modern world, to the main land.

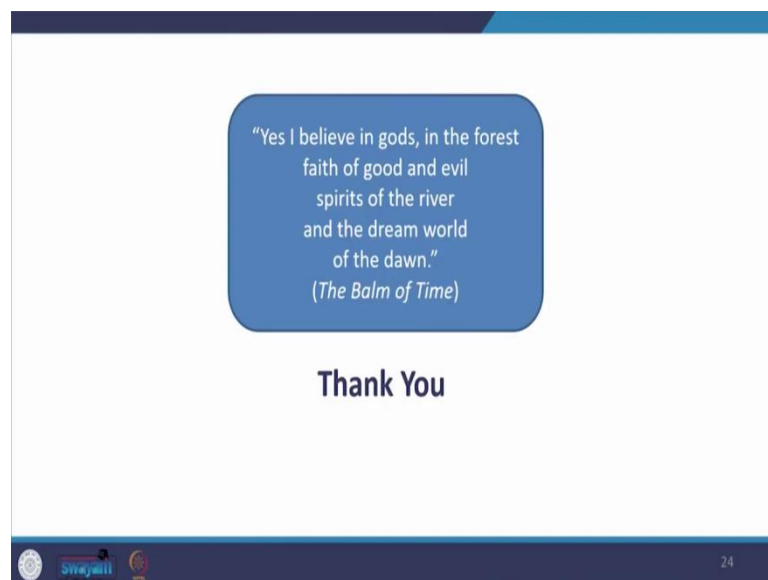
She uses hills and rivers, as metaphors and one can find a sort of continuity for a search of homeland in majority of the poems of Mamang Dai. There is a sort of consonance with the natural beauty where one can find the voice of the mountain, the sounds of the river, fine and then many other sounds which actually bring us very close to believe that man and nature have always been living in a sort of communion.

And, that is because of the craze for progress and prosperity is distancing man away from Nature. And, and you know, we can find a representation as I said in the beginning of Donyi Polo culture in her muse. Actually, Donyi Polo culture believed that everything around us has got a sort of intrinsic worth. It is not only about human beings, but it is also about natural habitats. So, one can also find a sort of delineation of deep ecology in the poetic world of Mamang Dai.

We can take very quickly one comment by one you know by one scholar who says, “She celebrates both the mystic as well as the common place that nature radiates; exploring myths behind the forces of nature, and thus leading the reader to ecological forest and magic drum beats. She dreams of a peaceful vine and bamboo paradise where the cloud, the bat and the rain are in absolute harmony.”

My dear friends, the time has come that we once again try to understand the beautiful harmony that Nature has provided us from time to time and it is for this harmony that we can remember Mamang Dai.

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Before we come to end this talk let me take a few lines from one of her latest collections entitled *The Balm of Time*, where she says,

‘Yes I believe in gods’. But what are these gods?

“ I believe in gods, in the forest  
faith of good and evil  
spirits of the river  
and the dream world  
of the dawn.”

Majority of the poets of North East actually believe that not only is nature close to us, but Nature has always been a friend, philosopher and guide to mankind. And, so long as we

remember this dictum perhaps there would not be too much of chaos, there would not be too much of disturbances that man has witnessed from time to time.

And, today we actually are thinking of creating a sort of ecological balance, but are we also trying to create a sort of balance in our minds about the conflict, about the distance that is being created between man's thought processes and the movements of nature?

With this we come to the end of this lecture. Thank you very much. I wish you all a very good day ahead.