

Misconception towards the tribal society: Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*

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Abstract

This paper “Misconception towards the tribal society: Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*” is an attempt made to revise the prejudiced views against the binary world. To support this stance the paper has analysed one of the books by Mamang Dai, a tribal writer from Arunachal Pradesh. The modern world is either unaware or ignores the motives behind the concept of oppression. It is the essential need for the occupants of the planet to take up the responsibility by perceiving certain notions or ideas put forth in the right way. The paper discusses the challenges faced by the tribal communities due to the dominant spirit of certain group of people and also highlights the significance of the indigenous society. The importance of interconnected relationship is enhanced throughout the paper. The paper advocates human race to give up ridiculous qualities in order to create a better world in future.

KEYWORDS: Tribal, Indigenous people, Ecology, wisdom, Social perception

This paper aims at modifying the wrong perception towards one of the muted but important societies thereby helping the world to embrace certain virtue of accepting the differences for a better future.

The creator of the Universe has spread out the planet Earth for all living beings in an unbiased manner and has placed an interconnectedness between the living organisms. Human beings are considered to be the most supreme creation and this concept has misled the human race. Instead of taking up the responsibility of being a caretaker, human beings took up the power to dominate their surroundings in all possible ways.

During the ancient times the human race lived in harmony with their fellow beings and their environment but after shifting homes far away from nature in terms of civilisation their lifestyle brought in clashes among themselves. Cave men had treated nature with dignity on knowing the significance of the environment for their survival. This virtue among them had led to the practice of worshipping nature and as days went this practice started fading due to the changes brought into their living. The technological world demanded human race to usurp, oppress and be selfish to showcase their ability and differences.

The modern society has categorised people mainly based on their faith, complexion and wealth. Some of the societies were muted by depriving them of their fundamental rights and the dominant group interferes the oppressed group's life in all possible ways. One among such are the indigenous and tribal communities who are the actual inhabitants of the planet. The voices of these people are either ignored or unheard by the rest of the society.

Tribal people constitute around 9% of the world's population and they are distinct self-sufficient people largely dependent on their land. Indigenous people face a lot of problems due to the city dwellers. They are being evicted from their lands in terms of 'conservation' and are wrongly accused for over exploiting nature whereas the truth is the modern society is being a threat to them in so many ways and disturb their lives by exploring their lands and exploit them in all possible ways thereby destruct their identity.

This attitude of the modern people has led to the evolution of Tribal literature and the most effective of them were those produced by the tribal writers who are helping it to march ahead due to the effective expression of feelings born out of long time experience. Mamang Dai, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, Narayan are few among the leading tribal writers in India. These writers have contributed to their society and the Indian tribal literature to a wider level by their right choice of tone and subject.

Hansda is a medical officer by profession belonging to the Santhal community. He has written two books on the lifestyle of the Santhals and the sufferings of Santhal women. The women are physically being exploited by the other community men who consider themselves to be superior and the society encourages these attitude of the oppressors and blames the poor oppressed community for the accusations put on them which are not even aware of by them.

Mamang Dai is an Indian novelist, poet and journalist from Arunachal Pradesh. She has received Padma Shri in 2011 and Sahitya Akademi in 2017 for her latest novel *The Black Hill*. Her books include *The Legends of Pensam*, *Mountain Harvest: the Food of Arunachal Pradesh* (2002), *River Poems*, *Arunachal Pradesh: the Hidden Land* (2002), *Once Upon a Moontime* (2005), *The Sky Queen* (2005) and *Hambreelmai's Loom* (2014).

Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* reflects upon the sense of a close knit community that is living in the remoter towns and villages. Mamang Dai has made an attempt of painting a memorable portrait of her land. In this work she has described her community's art of storytelling, their perceptions, the intrusion of the colonisers in their land and their love for nature. On reading the book, the readers could understand the self-sufficient life led by the tribal society. This book was published in 2006 and praised to be a lyrical moving tribute to the human spirit.

Mamang Dai belongs to the Adi tribe, one of the most populous tribe of her State. They live in a region of the Southern Himalayas which falls within the Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh and the counties of China's Tibet Autonomous region. They are recognised as one of the 56 ethnic groups of China.

The modern generation has a wrong way of perception towards themselves as the bearers of progress and look down upon the natives. This pride has made way to compel the indigenous tribal people to live according to the urban rules and expectations. Hence the tribal people are suppressed in terms of development. For centuries the tribal societies have been oriented towards self-sufficiency are considered backward in the present day.

The tribal and indigenous people have never been blocking the lives of the city dwellers and the world is made to believe that these people are being a nuisance to the nature and the modern life. The truth is that the tribal people are made to suffer due to the modern development. For instance, the impact of colonisation has its effect on the tribes as well. Colonisers demand the tribal people to live according to the norms laid down by them and invade their land ultimately leaving them empty-handed.

These were touched upon by Mamang Dai in her *The Legends of Pensam* under the title 'small histories recalled in the season of rain' the narrator describes the intrusion of the colonisers as "the first white priests, surveyors and soldiers had begun arriving in the region almost two hundred years ago, in the early 1800s. Since then, people from other worlds had come and gone, through the only records of their journeys are the stories that the older men and women remember" (37, 38).

Human beings have quoted scriptures for their support and adopted the dominating spirit towards all the other living organisms. Human race has striven towards civilisation and has achieved the present position through various stages of development and process of evolution. In the name of science and technology the modern society has brought in a misconception towards the tribal society that they seem to harm nature.

The writer Mamang Dai has made the right choice of words to make the readers interpret the feeling of the tribal people when their world is being exploited "The early decades of the 20th century were times of great upheaval, when even our remote hills were opened up to the world" (47). The tribal people are made to suffer by fleeing from their home land to other places and adapt to the different location.

Colonisation has destroyed their way of life, tribal people cannot survive without forests and the colonisers kept chasing them by cutting down the trees and their tradition along with it. The natives were being cornered by the whites since they were advancing. Tribal society live without causing any chaos or disturbances to the city dwellers. In a way they are benefiting the whole universe by safeguarding the planet whereas people from the developed areas move into the lives of the tribe and blemish their cultural and traditional values by interfering their system.

This sort of advancement made by the colonisers had led to their own tragic end. One among the colonisers mentioned in the book was Noel Williamson who was well known in the region and he has twenty years of experience with the tribes in the hilly areas of India. He was struck down by a native man which led to a massacre as narrated in *The Legends of Pensam*.

No one is quite sure what provoked the attack. Some recorded evidence suggests a communication gap: the tribe feared that Williamson would bring troops to destroy its villages. Another version says that the white sahib had insulted a man who later followed him to Komsing and killed him. There are also accounts that tell of a scandal some years before this story of seduction and romance between a local woman and another white man following the course of the river. (48)

This incident has made the tribe face the consequences since it was a shock to the colonial power which resulted in severe punishment. The higher officials had ordered to

arrest the culprits and send them to prison in the Andaman Islands. The villagers were further punished by the colonisers in other ways.

A memorial stone was unveiled in Komsing, where it stands to this day overlooking the village long house. The villagers still look after the stone, just as the British had instructed.

It was an arduous climb to reach Komsing, Rakut said, and that the village headman, an old pensive man, believed that maybe it was because of the massacre that they were still without a road. (48)

Thus was the interference of the people outside the tribal community leading to the destruction of peace in a tribal family and this issue was highlighted in the paper as an example of the chaos caused in a society which had been living a proper life without plotting against the other societies. This kind of approach towards any downtrodden society must be strongly condemned as advised by anthropologists and nature writers.

The lifestyle of the indigenous people promotes and helps in the betterment of an eco-friendly relationship. The city dwellers can adopt so many ideas from the native people which could help in tackling serious issues. Tribal people have a different way of looking at things and a better way of handling matters in a far more intelligent way. These people are respected by some of the nations and the government for their survival has always been dependent on cultivating a great relationship with nature.

People living in cities has the habit of neglecting the knowledge of indigenous people and one of greatest attributes that can be learnt from them is adaptability. Human beings are structured to survive almost any where with proper knowledge on ecology and social relations. After a long time the western science which is so proud of its achievements is able to understand that the natives who had no academic knowledge on science are really being a great advantage towards preserving the wildlife because of their profound intellect.

The forests are being destroyed and deforestation is encouraged in the modern world for various commercial purposes in order to cater the needs of the society. On the other hand, tribal society enhances the forest by not harming them because they are aware of the fact that exploiting natural resources beyond a level would lead to the downfall of the human race and other living beings.

Tribal people are more conscious of the benefits of the plants and herbs. Recently scientists and botanists have joined hands with the shamans from the tribe for their high knowledge is truly remarkable. On becoming one with the native people, the world must rectify some of the prejudiced views regarding the tribal wisdom.

Tribal people tries to understand the interconnected relationship between each and every living organisms and thus gain the practical knowledge like hunting, fishing and the various usage of plants as medicine as well as food. City people who are living as outsiders are pushed to the edge of learning these skills instead of a natural in born talent. Modern society have prospered intellectually and materially by isolating themselves from the environment.

The paper has discussed only the minor challenge faced by the tribal society. Human beings are gifted the sense of several stages of thinking which would help in sensing the hazards of wrong perception and it's consequences. The paper was based upon the bottom line that unity comes through other core values like accepting and comprehending.

Life is made complicated by involving inessential criteria, so the paper has accounted few incidents that occur in the lives of the suppressed people to remind the universe that it is time to think and give up certain prejudices for a better future.

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