

Hegemonic Power, Patriarchal Domination and the Progression of Tribal Womanhood in *Stupid Cupid* of Mamang Dai

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Abstract

The history of human life has always been a record of power structures with simultaneous oppression and marginalization of the weaker sections from time immemorial. Mamang Dai is one among the contemporary writers, who is the voice of the tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh. Dai's second novel *Stupid Cupid*, renders a variety of women characters belonging to Arunachal Pradesh tribe with highly contrasting images. The objective of the present paper is to highlight the discrimination and chauvinism faced by the characters in the city. The migrant women tribes experience multiple oppressions and marginalization in the hands of city dwellers. But Dai's tribal women characters are unique and strong who long for freedom and independence. She has envisioned the advancement of tribals though they are victims of brutality, segregation, exploitation and tyranny in every walks. The present analysis introspect the untold miseries as well as the progression of Tribal womanhood as depicted in *Stupid Cupid*.

KEYWORDS:Oppression, Discrimination, Marginalization, Advancement.

Mamang Dai is a promising writer and journalist from Northeast India. Dai switched from being a civil servant to a writer to limelight the nativity, tradition and culture of the Northeast through her writings. Dai's novels are more concerned with the emotional fluctuations of the tribes due to Marginalization, Identity crisis and Discrimination. *Stupid Cupid* is set in Delhi but the characters expose the emptiness that is prevailing in Northeast of India. Dai bridges the divide between the North and North-Eastern through them. It is well known that in Delhi, the people of Northeast are treated otherwise. The migrated North-Easterns' fascination for the city life, disillusionment in love and trapping in an extramarital affair make their life and identity questionable.

In India, Migration takes place due to various reasons. Mass movements took place due to historical, political, economic and personal reasons. However, the Indian community has shown greater amendments, adaptableness, flexibility and availability. The sense of homelessness which every immigrant suffers is extremely true and intense but in the recent times it has been that this concept has been minimized and made less intense through social networking and also with a sense of unity. In the novel, the author

has shown to us the new arena of characters, who longs to dwell and breed in the city in order to free themselves from the hegemonic power operations at varied levels.

Adna, the narrator of the novel, perches in New Delhi leaving her hometown Itanagar after completing her Hotel Management Course in Guwahati and Calcutta. She wants to provide a decent meeting place where men and women, lovers and friends, could harbour without any inhibitions. She comes up with this idea after her embarrassment several times when she tries to book a room. She has been looked up as if she is committing a sin. Adna is not bound by traditional views or beliefs. She is broad-minded and progressive. She inherits a piece of property of her late aunt and plans to transform it into a love nest namely, "Four Seasons". The elders of her place always had a strange thought about living in Delhi which is evident in the words of Adna:

From our hometowns news would reach us about family get-togethers and picnics, and the elders asked us when we would return. We knew this was their way of saying. They hoped we would marry and settle down with good, local men, because how would anyone meet the right person away from home.... They followed the news about shocking murders and the cruelty of Delhi, which was reported daily. 'No one will help you there, because no one will know who you are', they said. (14)

In most communities in Northeast, there is a practice of marrying within a specific ethnic group, class, or social group, rejecting others on such basis of being unsuitable for marriage. People who marry outside their own communities are either disowned or looked down with contempt. Adna mentions about her own aunt who married a man outside her community and was never talked about in the family thereafter as it was believed that she has brought shame to the family. Adna, like her aunt, wants to marry someone she loves, regardless of the community the person belongs to.

Adna falls in love with a man who is already married. She fell in love with him because when they first met he was wild and rebellious. Adna lives in a dreamy world of love, romance, tenderness, liberty and ecstasy in Delhi with her current beau. Adna addresses him as Friend; his name is not revealed throughout the novel. She lives with extreme fear that this relationship might end. When Adna meets Mareb's boyfriend Rohit, she pangs with the fear of Rohit knowing her friend's wife. She could not imagine a life without him and at the same time she can never own a citizenship in the new land being a migrant. There are many interrogations about the undefined prospects of Northeast and about the extramarital affair in an individual's life. It is found since the last six decades.

Adna's relationship with her boyfriend from Delhi can be related to the deeply fixed labels about Northeast women. North-Eastern women, especially tribal North-Eastern women, are considered flexible and immoral. While most tribal women from Northeast carry their sense of freedom and independence from their native places, they are mostly misunderstood by others however true they are. Adna's boyfriend leaves the country for Canada without giving a reasonable explanation, Adna says that her friend wanted to be with his wife, but Green, a friend of Adna explained the realities to her by pointing out "Maybe he's not travelling with his wife. He might be travelling with a new

girl'. I said this as a challenge. 'The man who crosses the line once can do it twice, thrice. What's to stop a guy?'"(117)

Stupid Cupid aids an ample understanding of North-Eastern women's experiences owing to displacement. Mamang Dai highlights that there is a huge gap between the migrant women's desires and anticipations from the city and the resulting reality. When Adna and Mareb first came to Delhi, they were both optimistic about the place and they easily got used with the surroundings of Delhi. Adna says,

Those were happy days. Everything was new and young, and every moment felt like a new beginning. In the mid-eighties if anyone had asked us who we were and what we were doing in Delhi, my friends would have shouted back: We are here because we want to be here. We like it here and that's it.(13)

Women's participation in the public space cannot benefit them opportunities for their own personal development. It is for the well-being of their families. They do not allow women to go to public gatherings. Jia, Adna's cousin, wants to join a course in Delhi, but she is not allowed to study and to go out of the state of Arunachal Pradesh by her father. Jia has modern views; she disobeys her father and joins a school in Delhi. Adna is happy with the decision of Jia and she says, Jia's father had been against sending his children to study in distant schools out of the state. (71)

Rita is also a tribal woman who studies at Delhi knows nothing about Adna, Mareb and Jia. They too do not know who Rita is, though all of them are tribes. She befriends Yoyo. Only now the young tribes become friends after going to schools and colleges out of their state. Dai shows the positive advancements in the Northeast in Delhi. She writes :

Rita was from a different tribe from another district and neither Jia nor I knew anything about her. It is a big state, I told my friend, and for most of our history the different tribes had never even interacted with each other properly, even if they lived in the next valley. It was only now that young people like Yoyo and Rita were meeting in schools and colleges. (88)

The tribals were subdued in the mainstream society. Mareb did not want to live the kind of life her mother led, confining herself to the four walls of her home. But, despite of her substantial views, she finds herself trapped and gradually shaped by the traditional ways of thinking and she agrees to marry a man of her father's choice. There is no hospital in the hills of Assam during her labour. Dayud, Mareb's husband felt terrified of it. His fear was that the hospital would not have the required facilities for a complicated delivery and perhaps Mareb should have been moved to a hospital in a bigger town. The Minister of Northeast state says that the central government does not have enough funds to cater to the needs of northeast states. Though they raise funds for the welfare of the tribal people, it is impossible to spend it for them wholly. He also added that it is impossible to suffice the needs of the people with the money when everyone is a target. The deprivation of their basic amenities in a fast growing nation like India is distressing.

Northeast migrants are seen as culturally different from the Indian mainstream and are classified down as 'others'. While many other communities in India is also being discriminated in several places on the basis of religion, caste and ethnicity. Yet the nationality and the origin of these communities are not questioned, at every cost. They can fuse into the heartland but the Northeast migrants cannot. In *Stupid Cupid*, Mamang Dai represents some of the daily experiences of racial discriminations that the Northeast people encounter in Delhi. When Adna's cousin, Jia and her friend, TD try to hire a cab for them, a rude woman dumps herself in the back seat and refuses to give up the cab. To add to their fury, the woman also makes a very racist remark, "Hey you!Jao!Jao! Go back to your own ... Desh!" (52), thereby questioning their nationality and citizenship. Jia gets furious and jumped out of the cab and shouted at the Woman in the street and scolded at her angrily thus :

How dare you say such a thing? Do you think I'm Chinese, huh? I am Indian. Do you know where I come from? Do you know where that is, you idiot woman? And I bet you are not even from Delhi. You must be from some lousy backwaters! Jao!Jao! Hah! And even if I was Chinese you have no right to say such a thing to anyone! It's people like you who create hatred, you know that? You scum! And then she spat into the cab! (53)

There is no security for the women who migrate to Delhi. On a night at about 10.00 p.m, a Nepali man comes to Adna's apartment and says that some fellows are jumping over and are running there. At first Adna does not believe him. When he points out Four Seasons she goes with him to Amine's house where they find Amine's dead body. Two workmen who have been working in their Hotel murder Amine for money. All of Adna's hopes are shattered and she wants to go to her hills and wants to spend the rest of her life at the hills and village.

Though the tribes are captivated by the aroma of the city life, they face constant struggle to live in a place which they never belong to. All the characters in the novel in a way or other undergo oppressions but they continue to live through hardship or adversity. Thus, Mamang Dai gives voice to the distinctive painful experiences of the wretched North-Eastern women, who are discriminated, exploited and treated as aliens in their own country on account of race, gender and class.

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