



The Mountain Speaks: An Ecocritical Journey Through Mamang Dai's Poetic Landscape

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Abstract: A simple remote corner of the country, the Northeast region of India is a land of pristine natural landscape and ecologically rich biodiversity. By its enchanting jungles, meandering rivers, lofty mountains, and peaceful valleys, the imagination of countless writers and poets been deeply captivated. Its essence however goes beyond nature. The place celebrates its diverse history, with a long line of multi-ethnic communities and strong cultural values. With all these unique ecological and cultural features, the Northeast holds its distinct place in Indian geographical landscape. For the Northeast writers, natural world always takes the center stage in their narratives. Picturized in vibrant colors and sounds, and touched with emotion through sensory language, lyrical prose, and evocative imagery, nature is given a distinct character. Dai's writings also highlight similar subjects concerned with the indigenous groups and their natural surroundings. In her works, a strong relation among indigenous identity, tribal ancestry, and the natural world is revealed. This study places her work within the framework of ecocriticism and attempts to highlight the inherent value of the natural world depicted in her poem "The Voice of the Mountain."

Keywords: *Nature, Ecology, Indigenous, Ecocriticism, Spiritual.*

Introduction

The emergence of nature writing as a separate literary movement was first witnessed during the Romantic age. The literary works of the period admired nature as a genuine source of beauty, tranquility, and comfort. A new strand of literature was thus formed by British poets like Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, and American authors such as Henry David Thoreau and John Muir. Their treatment of the natural world in their writings was presented both as an art form and as a place for personal reflection and regeneration. Because of this, they are often considered the first green philosophers of the movement. Their works were concentrated on the spiritual, ethical, and philosophical scopes of the human engagement with the natural world and provide riveting suggestions of how nature enlightens our experiences and understanding. R. W. Emerson, for example, asserts in his work *Nature* (1836) that nature is not simply a backdrop for his human life, and that it provides direction and insight as an active, spiritual force. In this essay, Emerson suggests that nature allows individuals to encounter divinity directly and, thus, the possibility of revitalization of their existence. Emerson sees nature as a manifestation of divinity and provides understanding into human nature. Thoreau, a close associate of Emerson's, also developed many of Emerson's thoughts in his works *Walden* (1854) though he had a more practical and direct involvements with nature. Much of Thoreau's writing develops from the firsthand experience of nature and from the observation of simple living, solitude, and self-reliance. Thus, it can be said that nature functioned both as a setting and a symbol in literature.

However, in the present-day, the growth of environmental conscience and wisdom could be one of the main reasons why the world of literature itself came to be so infused with the thought of protecting, preserving, and acknowledging nature's deep relation to mankind. As a result of which, in the late 20th century a formal academic field emerged, addressing the need to revise how literature portrays the connection between humans and the natural world. Moving away from anthropocentric views toward a more eco-centric perspectives, Ecocriticism offered a new standpoint to understand how literature both reflects and shapes our environmental values. The publication of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* in the 1960s helped the field gain importance and relevance in contemporary scenario. It further grew during the environmental movements of the 1980s. The term, however, first came into popular acceptance with William Howe Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978). Here, Rueckert defines Ecocriticism as "the application of ecology and ecological concept to the study of literature" (107). The concept was further developed and formalized by Cheryl Glotfelty with her edited volume of *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996). The anthology was the first successful attempt to bring together various essays that explore and examine the affiliation between literature and the natural environment. It holds significance in shaping the ecocriticism as an academic discipline and the subsequent impact it made in environmental humanities.

Mamang Dai's The Voice of the Mountain

A poet and novelist of exceptional merits, Mamang Dai represents the northeast state of Arunachal Pradesh. Dai comes from the Adi tribe of East Siang district. Initially, Dai was selected for the Indian Administrative Service in the year 1979. Though, her passion for writing and journalism eventually led her to follow a career as a writer in literature and media. By creative effort and erudite wisdom, Dai has won the highest honor of the country the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2017 in the field of literature. Her writing commonly touches on themes such as nature, identity, local culture and spirituality, which are drawn from tribal myth, folklore and wisdom. The poet describes her Adi tribal society in a rich, and unique way. Within her work flow deep spiritual beliefs, ancient oral traditions, and the timeless bond between indigenous people and nature. It is observed that all elements of nature are recognized as divine and sacred in the intrinsically spiritual belief system that exists in Adi culture. Therefore, every feature of nature like mountains, forests, and rivers are seen as sacred and worthy of reverence. It is believed that they hold collective memory and ancestral spirits. Dai's works offer a thoughtful reflection on nature and its spiritual connection with human. Her use of lyrical and vivid language shows her deep sense of belonging and respect for the tribal communities and the native land she represents. These aspects of her writings make her work a rich subject for ecocritical study and thus, this paper attempts to unearth Dai's ecological insight as a Northeast woman writer.

The speaker celebrates the ancestral heritage of the indigenous Adi community in the poem. The verse weaves together the cultural and spiritual identity of these ethnic groups. The lines beautifully craft a thoughtful mosaic that exhibits their unique and deep-rooted traditions. Their heritage is deeply connected to the ancient rhythms of the land as the mountains and rivers symbolically appear repeatedly throughout the poem. They are not merely parts of the landscape, but instead are seen as sacred vessels. These natural forms carry ancestral spirits and preserve collective memory. The poem consistently reinforces a vision where connection to nature is central. It is demonstrated in the symbolic worldview as well as in cultural practice of the indigenous Adi people. To illustrate, a core part of the Adi's traditional faith is their belief in spirits and gods such as Donyi-Polo, who represent the sun and moon. This belief system constructs their interpretation of and relation to the universe. While Dai expresses veneration for the deep-rooted cultural and spiritual values of her indigenous communities but at the same time also shows sadness over the gradual vanishing of the same because of modernization. The poem addresses ecocritical themes by displaying the complex relation between cultural preservation and the inevitable influence of modernity.

In the poem, the speaker claims that the natural world actively participates in the unfolding of human history and is more than just a backdrop. Even the title suggests that nature is not merely a physical entity, as it is portrayed having a voice, capable of speaking like any living individual. This understanding aligns closely with Emerson's view on nature as a lively spiritual force, and not just a passive setting (*Nature*). Dai shows how the mountain's elevated position symbolizes its ability to observe life and the natural world. It speaks of the town and the estuary mouth of the river, which reflects its deep familiarity with the landscape. The speaker's ability to "outline the chapters of the world" (line 5) implies that nature is a source of knowledge acting as a guide and teacher to mankind. Here, the ancient landscape changes into an archive of the narratives of tribal ancestors and of the land itself. The poet through the words of the mountain suggests about the profound connection between the people and their natural environment.

The poem further explores a profound, almost ancient connection between humans and nature. The very act of the voiceless man offering fish to the mountain as a gift can be seen as a way of communication that reflects the inexpressible relationship between a man and the natural world. Though this unspoken conversation seems as a primitive way of connecting with nature but it surpasses the boundaries of human language, bringing nature closer to mankind. At the same time, it also exhibits the nurturing and life-giving qualities of nature as river provides the man with food. Thereby presenting the interconnectedness of culture, language, and environment. With the passing of time, the land remains unchanged but human knowledge and way of interaction evolves. The mountain acknowledges both the aged wisdom of indigenous communities as well as the challenges brought by the modern world. This juxtaposition displays the respect of the speaker for indigenous ecological knowledge and at the same time also critiques the disruption brought by modernity. Consequently, suggesting that the traditional ways may offer more sustainable environmental practices. With the image of the "spear leaning by the tree" (line 15) the poet speaks about the conscious act of stepping away from violence and domination. It symbolizes a change from human domination over nature to peaceful relation with it. These lines deeply resonate with ecocritical ethics that questions the corruptive and exploitative human-nature dynamics, and in doing so it promotes a more harmonious and balanced interactions between the two.

The mountain like an old man enjoys the "breeze that is forever young" (line 17-18) signifying the never-ending cycle of life, death, and rebirth, presenting natural phenomena like changing seasons. The speaker talks about the sea waves and mountain peak carrying an elemental and ageless voice, which adds to the larger narrative of the world. At this point of the narrative, language is considered not separate from nature but is something influenced by and profoundly rooted in ecological systems. This view closely finds its parallel with ecocritical thought, which often explores how linguistic systems reflect our relationship with the environment. The symbolic nature of language, pass down from generations, is seen as a tool to understand and interpret the larger system that "orders the world" (line 22). The accumulation of knowledge that human has inherited are deeply ingrained in history and natural phenomena. This could refer to how native knowledge systems often look at nature as a teacher, offering wisdom through stories and experiences implanted in natural world.

The mountain not only observes but also identifies itself with every aspect of nature. Nature acts as both the harsh, barren desert as well as the life-giving, nurturing forces like rain. The mountain witnesses the cycle repeating itself forming every tiny yet essential "particles of life" (line 27) that make up the entire existence like memories and experiences which continues to stick itself with the flow of time. The mountain emphasizes its deep and intimate familiarity of the natural world, like to how sun burned rocks "know" about and waits for the arrival of the rain. The repeated expression "I know" (line 29) suggests complete understanding on the part of the speaker about the nature. This phrase suggests a deep epistemological connection between the speaker and nature. It indicates that true understanding comes through immersion in natural experience, and not through abstract reasoning alone. The speaker finds that every element of nature symbolizes a certain aspect of itself. The rocks stand for patience, long-term existence, as well as the experience of the harsh forces of nature. The cloud displays the ambiguous feeling the speaker feels at the moment. One of the key themes found in eco-poetics or eco-psychology is this very notion of how human emotions is often mirrored in the natural world.

The depiction of the mountain in the poem echoes profoundly with ecocritical thought, chiefly the notion that sentient nature holds wisdom, and a voice of its own. The poet describes the mountain as an oracle, who transcends from being a backdrop to human actions and becomes a commentator on past events, and an observer of impermanence. This idea echoes strongly with the ecocritical thought, as it rejects the dualism of human-nature and affirms that natural entities are sentient and spiritually forceful. The mountain as a wise old entity observes and acknowledges that the universe imparts only the "dream of permanence" (line 36) and thus challenges the anthropocentric ideas of control and stability. From an ecocritical stance, this highlights how breaking connection with the natural world will also ruptures the indigenous identity, which is deeply rooted in ecological harmony. The indigenous worldview is built on the belief system which sees natural land not only a resource but rather as a sacred living presence that forms their language, rituals, and communal memory. The poet claims that withdrawal from ancestral land will result in the loss of traditional ecological knowledge, spiritual practices, and social structures.

In the following lines, the speaker brings a fundamental ecocritical conflict into light. It has been seen many times that humans seek to bring order, constancy, and permanence in their life, whereas nature is seen to resist such control. Ecocriticism critiques this very anthropocentric outlook, as it attempts to highlight how such approach detaches mankind from the ecological truths of impermanence and instability. This ever-changing disposition of nature stands in vast contrast with the human desire for stability and permanence. With the notion that the universe "yields nothing" (line 35), the poem supports the idea that the natural world is apathetic to human concepts of permanence, and so indicating a tension between human ambition and the clear reality of nature.

Myth and cultural memory are often depicted as tied to the land in literature, a focus explored by Ecocriticism. In the poem, a dramatic and mythic tone is set by the speaker's announcement of a warrior's arrival from the past. This warrior character could represent the Indigenous or native resistance to ecological or colonial disruption. The idea of both cultural and environmental survival is embodied by him. It could possibly symbolize a native historical or cultural struggle. The very depiction of the warrior draws the motif of survival as well as conflict between creation and destruction, and the use of myth and symbolic language could suggest a profound sense of loss and emotional detachment. The subsequent lines likewise reflect a deep feeling of loss and existential disconnection as the mountain speaks about the loss of childhood dreams and aspiration. As the poem progresses, this sorrowful tone continues depicting the loss of guidance or the collapse of a traditional belief system through the image of a fallen "star diagram" (line 43). This event can be interpreted as a world where there is no existence of order any longer and men are seen weeping and suffering. However, the speaker survives representing a sense of resilience and resistance. Though she is "lost in translation" (line 45) suggesting a feeling of displacement in terms of personal experience and cultural identity, yet she is happy to endure and have purpose in life despite of hardship.

In the final stanza, the mountain personifies itself as it speaks about its powerful "breath that opens the mouth of the canyon" (line 47) and its image of the life-giving force as the "sunlight" (line 48) on the trees. The depiction of wind as a natural and powerful force, rushing through the gorge gives the landscape a distinct appearance proving once again that nature is capable of crafting its own course. Nature here is described as shaping the land, and thus validating its autonomy and ability to alter the physical world. This challenges anthropocentric views which argues that humans are the only agents of change. The final lines, describes the mountain as a repository of lost memories escaping the force of time and space. It brings home the idea that nature preserve memories, and to gain access to those forgotten stories man needs to reconnect with his ancestral land. The narratives of ancient customs and traditions, which have now turned into legends and myths, are wisely stored in the memory of the mountain. It suggests that the mountain holds wisdom and narratives that humans may only be able to comprehend when and if they come in harmony with the natural world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Mamang Dai's "The Voice of the Mountain" strongly conveys her ecological perspective. With her use of natural imagery as well as recurrent display of environmental themes in the poem, she tries to demonstrate the intricate relationship shared by one's ancestral roots with one's identity and nature. Her poetry also attempts to establish how modernity not only destroys the environment but at the same time also pulls apart the indigenous way of life rooted in it. The poem gracefully depicts the mountain as a timeless natural entity that stands as a silent witness to series of violence and false peace, reflecting how the environment repeatedly endures and suffers the consequences of human conflict. This analysis attempts to place the mountain not merely as a symbol, but as an ecocritical voice that contests dominant historical narratives, and thus calls for a more ethical understanding of peace which embraces harmony with the earth itself.

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