



Quest for Self-Identity in Mamang Dai 's Novels.

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Abstract : Mamang Dai , a versatile author belonging to the Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh is a powerful writer who creates characters both men and women who seek freedom and independence ,elegant , sophisticated , assertive ,simple , hardworking and who aspire to be someone in their life and carve a place for themselves in the society in her novels.Due to lack of education , employment opportunities and success in their life , the characters move from their native villages to towns and cities.A few characters keep on looking and thinking of a better world full of opportunities somewhere just outside their hometown.A sense of overcoming their failure and lack of opportunities to a pasture more greener which can give them an identity which completes them.Her novels are short stories having men and women who try to define themselves , Create an aura ,an arena which they can proudly call their own having a voice to express their desires and aspirations to fulfill their potential as human beings.It is with this perspective the present paper seeks preliminary examination of the various characters who seek and look for their roots and their self-identity in Mamang Dai"s novels.

Keywords : Men , Women ,characters , self-identity , opportunity .

In the English writings from North-East India ,one can find that the writer's of the region are deeply concerned with the important contemporary issues related to society , politics , education , unemployment ,nature etc existing and prevailing in their native areas and across the world.

There has been a immense change in the writings of women writer's in their themes , form ,language , attitude and diction after post independence era. One can see a transcend from traditional to modern not only in all other spheres of life but it's impact on literature too.Women writer's have become bold and frank by expressing their personal experiences in their writings.

Mamang Dai , a poet a journalist and a former civil servant of Arunachal Pradesh beautifully depicts the myths , folktales ,legends ,history ,ethnic and contemporary life in her novels through her storylines and various characters.Quest for self-identity being one of the basic issues in most of her characters in her novels.As quest for self-identity is a basic necessity to a human living in a society.Without self-identity ,the dignity and grandeur of a human life becomes quite meaningless.Every individual wants to attain personal and world view of life which makes ones existance in life quite worthy and meaningful.

Mamang Dai creates various characters both men and women who do seek to get an identity of their own.They look for a better place and better opportunities where they can prove themselves based on their capacities.For

some there is success but later it just proves to be an illusion ,for some it is a continuous process and for few it is just a hope.

Methodology

The topic selected is a literary attempt so the research work is done with the collection of the primary sources which is in the form of original text/novels of Mamang Dai.And secondary sources in the form of reference books , critical works and journals were collected and then cross examination was done and the research was carried forward by using descriptive and analytical method.

Aim

The research paper attempts to focus and understand how the theme of quest for self- identity have been put upon the selected novels and also try to observe how it helps in better understanding of it and how relevant the theme is relevant in our current time.

In *Stupid Cupid* (2009) ,Mamang Dai's second novel , Adna is a woman who leaves her hometown Itanagar and settles in New Delhi ,a city over 2000 kilometres from North-East India after getting a management course in Guwahati and Calcutta.She inherits a piece of property,a four cornered house in South Delhi and transforms it into a guest house. She tries to create an identity for herself faraway from her native land there in Delhi. She loved the liberal ways of Delhi as she too had liberal views in her life. On the other hand she was advised to settle and get married in her locality by her elders and well-wishers.But to contradict their advice and opinions , getting into marriage and settling down in her locality was not the plan and the kind of identity she wanted for herself. She didn't want to be just called and recognised as someone's wife only. So, she dared to dream big and carve ,create a place ,an identity which she can call her own ,which defines her existence and her beliefs. She embarks on a journey to Delhi to create an identity for herself. Adna says ,

" The watchful expectations of a small town being a total stranger among strangers beed a relief and a pleasure. It always surprised me that I could feel so much affection for a place that I was not even born in. " (Dai ,2009 ,p-14)

Adna's eagerness and excitement to leave her hometown and experience an unknown , unfamiliar place where she was not even born can be seen and understood in the above given lines. She was surprised to know and feel how she felt and reacted for a new place which she didnot know and was not even born there.

" In the city everything was new , like a new beginning. Life begins where you want to belong and this was it ,it seemed to me.For the time being ,anyway." (Dai ,2009, p-20)

Adna's willingness and desire to get herself adjusted and start herself anew seems so determined.Though the city as new and her work in the city being a new one ,she feels and asserts that life begins and belongs wherever one feels it to be so.And how she finds herself adjusting herself and loving her life's endeavour there in Delhi till now.She seems quite amazed and positive for a new beginning ,a new life and a new self ,her real new self which will give her a new identity in a non- native place.

" I saw the lights of the city outside and suddenly all I wanted to do was to go away.I didn't want to be in Delhi.I didn't want to own Four Seasons.I felt ashamed of my stupidity. "

(Dai,2009 ,p-146)

For Adna, Delhi becomes the city of her dreams. She feels and believes that she has found , freedom , love and independence in Delhi. The new world which she tried to create brings threat on the life of Amine , Adna's friend causing her untimely death. After Amine's death , Adna gets a close experience of violence and death that exists in the city and realizes that the city and her dream is only an illusion.

" And that how that season of love ended and we scattered like beads." (Dai ,2009,p-149)

So, eventually after the death of Amine everything changes for Adna and her business. She and her associates had to take a back foot and make certain decisions which seemed vital at this point of time. Adna was packing to get back to Arunachal Pradesh leaving behind her other staffs there in Delhi. Her business took a standstill ,it ended. So, it seemed like their togetherness as a team got scattered like beads of a necklace.

" I saw Four Seasons, resting in the shadows. How hard we had all struggled to make it run. And what a summer it had been Our lives had turned around a modest white building as if the house represented the magic place where all our dreams would come to life and become real." (Dai,2009,p-152)

And on her journey back to her hometown after shutting down her business of Four Seasons in Delhi, Adna realizes that her business has come to an end. She recalls how she along with her team along with her dead friend Amine struggled to get things done , run and establish her business. And how she did not sense the danger of the possible murder of her friend Amine only for money. The Four Seasons ,was her dream , her idea to make lovers meet and along with that make a living and an identity for herself not sensing the danger of living and working in Delhi which she later experienced and realized the reality of life at the cost of losing her friend Amine forever.

In the novel , Escaping the Land (2021) by Mamang Dai, Lutor is a man who fails and accepts his failure when he was a candidate for the office of Chief Minister. He wanted and longed to establish a homeland free from corruption and greed. He used to think and feel that he could heal and restore his state to a land of humans as it earlier used to be .He promised for development ,he wanted to be elected as their leader ,their representative. He wanted to be a leader of the people who would work for the development of his region which he believed was possible if he has a name ,a proper identity for himself which gives him power and possibility for accomplishing his dream as a true devoted leader for his people and his land.

" They had started something and this would be the forum to launch their long cherished dreams for a bright future." (Dai,2021,p-54)

Lutor was into youth activities and worked on a constitution for fledging a Students Union that took birth at this time.

" I am a politician , said Lutor. I go to New Delhi. I say look ,this is what is happening in Arunachal Pradesh. Our state is being run by extortionists and militant groups. Our villages are living in fear." (Dai,2021,p-79)

He was really worried and upset on finding that a dead body had been found a week ago but no identification could be made for the dead man .No one was looking for the dead man. Lutor thought how could a man be killed in their forest and no one knows about it. No one claimed the dead body of the victim. So, he felt since he was a responsible citizen and a leader , a politician, he could do his bit and at least report to the centre about the current scenario going on in his state.

" People said Lutor was truthful ,courageous and impulsive.".

(Dai,2021,p-276)

He thought he knew this by a feeling of well-being, by a conviction that everything could be achieved or rearranged by this understanding feeling akin to love. But suddenly, without the slightest warning it seemed to be slipping away. Hell is when you are losing control. He could feel it. Everything was spinning away, out of his hands.

" Now we have an election to fight, Rudar said. Get out of it. Come on!. Yes, yes, said Lutor." (Dai,2021,p-277)

Lutor pondered on various issues engulfing his mind and land and he feels everything can be rearranged and achieved. And in the midst of his thoughts he is been checked on by his companion Rudar that he should come out of his current mental state and fight an election on which he agrees.

" Our people are the salt of the earth , and all we can do as politicians is an affirmation of this belief. A leader will lead, but it must be in the right direction. For this we need to hear your voice and receive your mandate. This is how we should look at each other. Every moment history is being written." (Dai,2021,p-280)

Lutor, continued to believe and live in anticipation. He felt he would never abandon his image and never stop dreaming not a pan-Arunachal unity and when people believed in what they were saying.

" People were milling around and asking, 'Who, who? How much? What about him, what about her, hey! How can that be? Ash, impossible!.' " (Dai,2021,p-293)

Election results were finally out and everyone were eager to know the results. Lutor leader of the ANP got defeated by his rival Tasong. It was a result which no one had expected. It was unimaginable , unreal that Lutor lost the election.. His result was a death blow for the ANP. His dreams were shattered . His dream to be a leader for his people , his land was over. His desire to have his Identity as their leader and lead and create a pan-Arunachal lessening the growth of greedy traders , politicians, local middleman and forest mafia were in shatters.

" It's a knock out,'he said,'like losing in the boxing ring.' " (Dai,2021,p-296)

When the election results were out everyone including Lutor could not accept the fact that he lost in the election. But, he now accepted his fate and the mandate of the people of his area. On a phone call to his friend Umsi, he tells her that he is been knocked out of the race he was racing for.

" There were places where he had never been. Maybe he could start again , travel to different places and start looking. Looking for what? Well, he could just look. Look at the hills, that mountain there like the reclining face of an old man with a protruding chin lifted up to the sky. Look again ,and there would be something to find." (Dai, 2021, p-297)

Lutor, had accepted his fate and he had a tentative plan to visit Delhi. He had a journey ahead of him. He didn't actually know but he hoped that something would turn out to occur and a decision would come it itself. He was quite oblivious at this stage of his life. And for that to turn up he had to visit , travel different places and start looking.

In the above discussed novels by Mamang Dai , i.e Stupid Cupid (2009) and Escaping the Land (2021) , we can see how both the protagonists, Adna in , Stupid Cupid and Lutor in, Escaping the Land , dream and try to create a name , a self-identity by trying to run a guest house as her business in Delhi and how Lutor tried to make a name for himself as the leader of his people and land facing various adversities in their struggle and in life. But, all

shatters down because of an unseen , unrealised fact existing in cities and the the role of money in election process which could bring a huge difference and change in their life.

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