

## Representation of Social Narratives in Legends of Pensam by Mamang Dai's

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**Abstract:** The *Legends of Pensam* by Mamang Dai explores the rich tapestry of social narratives deeply rooted in the tribal traditions of Arunachal Pradesh. Through interconnected stories, the novel illuminates the intersection of personal identity, communal belonging, and the ever-shifting dynamics of tradition and modernity. Dai masterfully captures the symbiotic relationship between human lives and nature, weaving folklore, myth, and oral histories into the fabric of the narrative. The text examines the hierarchies within the community, gender roles, and the broader implications of colonial and postcolonial encounters on indigenous societies. The interplay of memory, storytelling, and cultural preservation underscores the resilience of these social narratives, offering a profound commentary on the evolving identity of marginalized communities in the face of globalization and cultural homogenization.

**Keywords:** Cultural Preservation, Folklore, Indigenous Identity, Modernity vs. Tradition, Oral Tradition, Social Narratives etc.

**Introduction:** *Legends of Pensam* by Mamang Dai is a profound exploration of the intricate social and cultural fabric of the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. Set in the mystic land of the Eastern Himalayas, the novel intertwines folklore, history, and the everyday lives of its characters to depict the dynamics of social narratives. Dai masterfully employs storytelling to illuminate the customs, traditions, and moral complexities of her community, creating a literary tapestry that transcends the boundaries of time and space. It does not merely recount the lives of the Adi people but delves into how their social structures, ethical frameworks, and communal identities shape and are shaped by their natural surroundings. Through the lens of multiple characters, Dai reveals the interplay of social hierarchies, gender roles, and the tension between tradition and modernity. The novel becomes a space where oral histories and lived experiences converge, presenting a nuanced perspective of the community's struggles and aspirations.

Mamang Dai's *Legends of Pensam* is a rich tapestry of Arunachal Pradesh's cultural, social, and spiritual ethos. This paper examines the representation of social narratives in the novel, focusing on the interplay of tradition, modernity, and identity. It investigates how Dai intertwines folklore with contemporary issues, delves into the sociocultural dynamics of the Adi tribe, and explores the impact of modernization on indigenous practices. Employing MLA 9th edition guidelines, this research situates *Legends of Pensam* within the broader framework of Indian English literature, postcolonial theory, and indigenous studies. Mamang Dai, an acclaimed Indian English writer, poet, and journalist, is a prominent voice from Northeast India. Her novel, *Legends of Pensam*, presents a compelling narrative that bridges the past and present of the Adi tribe, exploring their myths, legends, and lived experiences. "Pensam," meaning "in-between," symbolizes the liminal space that characterizes the Adi worldview.

Folklore is integral to *Legends of Pensam*. The novel incorporates oral traditions, myths, and legends of the Adi people, serving as a repository of cultural memory. Stories like the origin myth of the river and the spirits that inhabit the forest create a mythical framework through which Dai critiques contemporary social issues. These narratives highlight communal values, ecological consciousness, and the interconnectedness of life. Folklore serves as a mechanism for preserving Adi identity. Dai's portrayal of traditional storytelling as a communal activity underscores its role in transmitting values, norms, and history. The stories in *Legends of Pensam* convey moral lessons, particularly concerning

relationships, community obligations, and harmony with nature. These narratives function as both entertainment and a moral compass.

Dai explores how the Adi community negotiates the pressures of modernity while attempting to retain its cultural essence. The characters in *Legends of Pensam* embody the tension between tradition and change. For instance: Characters like the shaman and the young individuals moving to urban areas highlight the clash between individual aspirations and communal expectations. Modernity introduces education, technology, and government policies that disrupt traditional structures. This section examines how these forces influence gender roles, familial hierarchies, and tribal governance.

The novel depicts the fluid yet distinct hierarchies within the Adi tribe, such as the division between the living and the spiritual, men and women, and elders and the youth. Dai subtly critiques the implicit power dynamics within the community. Adi women, often custodians of oral traditions, are pivotal yet constrained by patriarchal norms. Dai's nuanced portrayal of women's lives sheds light on their resilience and adaptability. The transition from oral traditions to written records and from tribal governance to formal education creates generational divides, as seen in various character arcs.

The Adi people's relationship with their natural surroundings is central to the novel. Dai uses this connection to critique ecological degradation and cultural erosion. Rivers, forests, and mountains are not merely geographical features but sacred entities. This section examines how Dai employs ecological narratives to underscore the tribe's spiritual beliefs. Logging, infrastructure development, and migration threaten the tribe's ecological balance. Dai's narrative urges readers to reconsider the costs of progress. "Pensam" encapsulates the idea of liminality-existing between the spiritual and the material, the traditional and the modern. This concept is explored through: Dai blends myth and reality, creating a narrative style that mirrors the Adi worldview. **Transcultural Narratives** The coexistence of local traditions and global influences highlights the Adi tribe's adaptability while revealing the challenges of cultural hybridity.

Dai amplifies the voices of marginalized communities, challenging stereotypes about tribal societies. The Adi people's insistence on preserving their cultural practices is portrayed as a form of resistance against cultural homogenization. The author of this literary work has skilfully integrated traditional folklore and superstitious beliefs into the fabric of the villagers' lives. Dai has structured the novel into four distinct sections, which are titled as follows: "*A Diary of the World*," "*Songs of the Rhapsodist*," "*Daughters of the Village*," and "*A Matter of Time*." The next sections discuss different narratives about the harmonious relationship between humans and nature that existed before colonial governance since the Adis adhered to an animistic belief system that revolved around forest ecology and the symbiotic coexistence with the natural environment. In addition to the realms of human existence and the natural environment, the narratives also depict the existence of a third realm, namely the spiritual realm. A spiritual realm was once prominent, with a harmonious coexistence between this realm, humanity, and the natural world. According to the author, individuals experience premonitions within these diminutive clearings amidst the jungle. Women can envision and aspire towards many dreams. Infants are born with an accelerated growth rate comparable to deer or lion cubs. The character Hoxo serves as the central figure in the narratives, commonly referred to as "the boy who descended from the heavens," (10) as depicted in the initial tale of the literary work. The descent of a male individual from the atmosphere and its subsequent embrace by a pair of individuals represents the tribe's willingness to acknowledge the existence of an unseen and intangible realm. In the same narrative, the author recounts another event wherein Hoxo and his companion Rakut overheard their fathers engaging in a conversation that struck them as peculiar. Hoxo's father recounts the event by stating:

I perceived a distinct sound of water splashing, prompting me to turn my gaze towards the source. To my astonishment, I observed the river's edge being elevated, causing the water to cascade from the posterior region of a lengthy, gleaming creature, resembling either a fish or a serpent. (9)

Subsequently, it vanished without delay. All those in attendance believed as they knew of the existence of the water serpent, Birbik. The visual phenomenon seen by Hoxo's father functioned as an indication of an impending occurrence that was either negative or deviated from the natural order. Subsequently, Hoxo's father met his demise in an incident that transpired during a hunting expedition. It was anticipated that a tragic event would occur. The user did not provide any text to rewrite. In the narrative titled *The Silence of Adela and Kepi*, Mona, the individual who owns a publication known as *Diary of the World*, which specialises in featuring extraordinary real-life accounts, engaged in a conversation with Hoxo regarding her daughter Adela, who had recently received a diagnosis of autism, a perplexing medical condition. According to Mona, on a particular occasion, she encountered a situation when her attempts to engage in conversation with her daughter were met with refusal on her daughter's part. Mona assumed a crouching position adjacent to the girl, attempting to elicit verbal communication from her. However, the girl maintained a prolonged gaze before afterwards averting her gaze as if she had no prior recollection of Mona's presence. During their conversation, Hoxo informs Mona about a parallel incident involving a little child named Kepi, which occurred concurrently with Adela's departure from the world. Hoxo knew about the concept of Kepi, as he was summoned to preside over a ceremonial event to discern whether

Kepi was under the influence of supernatural entities. Hoxo provided an account of the child's condition during which his parents sought out shamans. Throughout the duration, the infant remained still yet engaged in activities such as crying, eating, and sleeping while maintaining a rigid and immobile torso posture. The individuals in question consistently transported him to various locations. Subsequently, an individual suggested that it would be prudent to contemplate conducting a distinctive ritual, which is infrequently observed in contemporary times, if the entity responsible for encircling their son's body was a serpent's spirit. According to Hoxo, it is evident that Kepi's father, Togum, bears responsibility for Kepi's current state. The author describes an instance where he observed Togum venturing into the forest's heart to access the timber stockpile. Togum became aware of the presence of a snake that had taken up residence inside the vicinity of the logs. The individual made the necessary preparations for the hunting expedition; nevertheless, he was overcome with intense emotion upon witnessing the scene. The individual initially believed the creature to be a king cobra. Still, upon closer examination, they discovered that it possessed a captivating appearance characterised by a combination of gold, green, and dark amethyst hues. The creature's appearance was dynamic, exhibiting a remarkable radiance that defied adequate description. I apologise, but you have not provided any text for me to rewrite. Despite being captivated by the visual spectacle, he discharged his weapon and, in collaboration with his companions, investigated the consequences of his actions. The physical presence of the snake had a profound effect on Togum. As the snake's body continued to move, Togum observed a remarkable decrease in its dazzling appearance, coinciding with a perceived reduction in the intensity of sunshine and the vibrancy of the surrounding green forest. This is the reason why the serpent ritual needed to be conducted. I apologise, but you have not provided any text for me to rewrite. In the narrative of "Pinyar," the author describes a mythical group known as the mitimili, who inhabited a bygone era. (28) These entities formerly produced an enigmatic substance known as si-ye, which they distributed to humanity before they vanished. It was exclusively assigned to women, and Pinyar was known for her exceptional skills in producing si-ye cakes.

Mamang Dai weaves old legends and rich tribal mythology into a framework of historical events and present realities, creating a complex plot that contains both the mundane and magical aspects of nature and existence. Her exquisite descriptions of the people, relationships, and surroundings transport the reader directly to the heart of the area. From its inception to the arrival of colonists, a whole way of life is presented. The problems expressed by Tamsula Ao, another well-known voice from the Northeast, show that *The Legends of Pensam* is a work that is pertinent in this time of change. Education and urbanization are already big threats to North Eastern Indian culture. The loss of specific identity markers throughout the establishment of these cultures and the identities they represent has a severe influence on the local tribes. Globalization will transform Naga, Khasi, and Mizo communities into simply brand names and commodity labels with no human value, transforming a proud people's ethnic and symbolic identities if the trend continues in an indiscriminate and unthinking manner. Globalization will eventually lead to the replacement of identity with anonymity.

### Conclusion

*Legends of Pensam* is a masterful exploration of social narratives that bridge the past and present, the mythical and the real. Mamang Dai uses the Adi tribe's experiences to address universal themes of identity, community, and change. By intertwining folklore with contemporary concerns, she offers a profound critique of modernization and its impact on indigenous societies. This paper underscores the novel's relevance as a work of postcolonial literature that celebrates cultural diversity and resilience.

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