



Cover Page



VISUALIZATION OF CONTEMPORARY CHANGE FROM SACRED PLACE TO MODERN STATE A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KOJUM-KOJA IN ESCAPING THE LAND

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Abstract

Mamang Dai's *Escaping the Land* (2021) is all about the compelling story of Arunachal Pradesh's stormy past, spanning the era of the Northern Eastern Frontier to the present. Mamang Dai's, an Anglophone poet and novelist, hails from Arunachal Pradesh. In her work, Dai's describes how the people and places of the state have changed throughout time, with a focus on the tribe of Kojum-Koja. Kojum-Koja was an ancient civilization that emerged on earth millions of years ago. This ancient civilization established many villages and communities; however, since ancient times to the present, this civilization has faced contemporary change such as loyalty and affection among people being replaced with avarice and wealth, which further has seen the change of the mythological period of the prehistoric people of the Kojum-Koja region to a time when politicians seemed to dominate every action in the area. This article brings to light the all-such contemporary change opinions of those caught between the politics of inclusion and exclusion on the margins.

Keyword: Mamang Dai, Kojum-Koja, Escaping the land, Contemporary change etc.

1. History of Kojum-Koja

According to the historians [1] hundreds of millions of years ago, an ancient civilization called Kojum-Koja emerged on Earth. It was a vibrant tribal traditions belonging to Arunachal Pradesh, a state of India. Arunachal Pradesh is biggest state in northeastern India and one of the most stunning states. In addition, the state is highly renowned for its vibrant tribal traditions and culture [2]. In Arunachal Pradesh, there's about 100 sub-tribes within about 26 main tribes. Adis, Apatanis, Buguns, Hrussos, Singphos, Mishmis, Monpas, Nyishis, Sherdukpens, Tagins, Khamtis, Wanchos, Noctes, Yobin, Khambas, and Membas are the main tribes among them.

Although some information about the tribes has been discovered, their origins are still unknown. Furthermore, the knowledge that now exists has been passed down orally from generation to generation. Because the people of Arunachal Pradesh are illiterate, the state's cultural past has never been documented or portrayed. "Oral tradition forms the main accessible source for the reconstruction of the past in the world inhabited by individuals without writing," according to Jan Vansina in his book *Oral Tradition* [3]: A Study in Historical Methodology. (I). Therefore, the only way to uncover the unrecorded history of the distant past is through oral memories. The folklore of Arunachal Pradesh embodies the collective recollections through a "story of origin," which forms the basis of the state's cultural past. Using her widely recognised imaginative skills, Dai uses the novel to retrieve the cultural heritage of the Adi community. Adis thinks they originated in Kojum-Koja.

At the moment, it appears that most of the population of Arunachal Pradesh is from Myanmar and Burma. Additionally, it is reported that there are still Mongoloid tribal groups living there that have the same culture. Tribal conflicts over the years have caused the tribes to disperse throughout various areas.

In addition, individuals moved to other locations as a result of historical natural disasters. The greatest example of the same is Kojum-Koja tribe.

Kojum-Koja was an independent society that founded multiple communities around it. It has been quoted that the Kojum-Koja people lived in peace until a massive flood completely destroyed their way of life. The deluge is thought to have been



Cover Page



produced by Biri-Bote, who was believed to be the lord of waters. Biri-Bote was angry because her son, Biri Angur Potung, a fish, had presumably been slaughtered and consumed at a festival by the Kojum-Koja people. There was no sign of the Kojum-Kojas after the deluge.

Nevertheless, Nyangi Myete, a stunning bride, managed to survive the disaster and subsequently recounted the story of the devastation her people had suffered. These days, the celestial bride is regarded as the pinnacle of honour and grace. The tribes hold that she continues to exist in all naturally beautiful things; for instance, they consider greenery to be her skirt, clouds to be her white robe, rivers and rain to be her weeping and sweat, and so forth.

The culture of Kojum-Koja was very unique and interesting. Some rituals followed by Kojum-Koja people are described below.

1.1 Rituals of a child born

In region, it was customary for people to post a few symbols at the door of their home to indicate to onlookers the gender of the infant. Items like a tiny woven rain cap for a girl and a tiny bamboo bow and arrow for a boy.

1.2 Rituals of a marriage

In this region, the Dowry did not exist. It means that in order to obtain the bride, the groom's family must spend a specific sum in cloths and kitchenware. A woman was also be required to pay a fine if she wishes to get married twice. The ineligibility of widows to inherit their late husband's property is another aspect of the region marital system. She is free to take her belongings, though.

1.3 Rituals of a death and interment

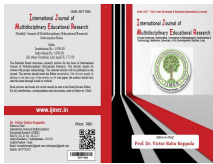
Even though people are swarming to the festivals, it is be astounded to witness how much more they support one another during hard times. They believe that everyone should experience death together. As a result, individuals pay the departed a visit and sometimes even spend the night. They chat about the deceased person's early years in addition to singing. In addition to burying their dead, they also bury all of their belongings.

The compelling story of Arunachal Pradesh's stormy past, from the era of the northern eastern frontier to the present, is found in Mamang Dai's *Escaping the Land* (2021). Mamang Dai skillfully interweaves Arunachal Pradesh's politics, mythology, and history throughout time in *Escaping the Land*.

The book is divided into five sections by the author. The story begins with a glimpse of a traditional house perched on a hill overlooking a mountainous area and dense bamboo thickets. The author discusses the significance of calendars and dates in the lives of residents of a small, rural town where family and tradition were valued. The novel's central theme is time. Everything transpired in phases and history was recorded as it happened according to "time had a method." In the book author, describes how the people and places of the state have changed throughout time. An intriguing array of significant events in the history of the northeastern Indian state are included in Dai's story, such as the fight against oppression beginning in 1911, the Achingmori happening in 1953, the India-China Conflict in 1962, the eventual liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, and its effects on the state [4].

Some parts of the novel vividly interweave the stories of individuals of the tragedies and brutality they suffered in the face of militancy, insurgency, and massacres during the conflict. Dreams and reality clash in a wild combination of magic and mystery during uncertain times in the plot. Dai's blends mythology to provide solace to the hard facts of history.

He thoroughly describes how the loyalty and affection for one's region and people have been replaced by avarice and wealth in these changing times. From the mythological period of the prehistoric people of the Kojum-Koja, to a time when



Cover Page



politicians seemed to dominate every action in the area he pointed in Escaping the Land. This article light the opinions of those caught between the politics of inclusion and exclusion on the margins. In this article, author present the visualization of contemporary change from sacred place to modern state a special reference to Kojum-Koja in escaping the land.

2. Escaping the Land with historical context

History is the recall of past occurrences. By presenting the lives and feelings of those involved in history in the form of stories, literature enhances history. It establishes continuity between the past and the present as a result. This continuity broadens our understanding of the present while explaining the past. According to New Historicists, literature both informs and participates in the creation of history. Mamang Dai is a writer who pays attention to the past. Her narrative transports the reader to Arunachal Pradesh's remote interior throughout its historical period. By painstakingly piecing together the lives of those non-historical men and women who experienced the ramifications of historical events, Dai humanizes history. Dai deepens our comprehension of Arunachal Pradesh's mysterious past and turbulent present by examining its historical background.

The occurrences of colonial conquest, cultural spread, and meddling with political and administrative policies that occurred along the route from NEFA to Arunachal Pradesh resulted in a significant social paradigm shift in the state. The history of Arunachal Pradesh has been shaped by these occurrences and changes. Dai's most recent book, Escaping the Land, is broken up into four sections and tells the story of the state's historical shift from NEFA to Arunachal Pradesh.

Up until recently, Arunachal Pradesh was an uncharted territory. There was no true connection among the plain and the hills due to the region's rugged topography. Not even amongst the tribes themselves was there communication. They knew very little, if anything, about other people living in the country. The jaded tribe members viewed one another as terrifying strangers. They saw the foreigners as hostile invaders who were going to steal their country and enslave them. A deadly rivalry between the outsiders and the tribal resulted from their profound insecurity and unwillingness to accept their administrative enslavement. The result of the feuds encouraged the extension of government authority throughout the region.

The result of the feuds encouraged the extension of government authority throughout the region. The 1911 death of British political officer Noel Williamson in Komsing by Adis and the ensuing events are significant points in Arunachal Pradesh's history. It provides access to research on colonial authority in Arunachal Pradesh. The Aching Mori incident in 1953, in which forty-seven Indian government were slain by the Tagin tribe, was one such significant event that occurred during the post-independence period. These episodes shaped the perception of Arunachal Pradesh as a primitive, barbaric, and unruly state. Consequently, it brought the central government's attention to reorganize the administrative policies in Arunachal Pradesh.

The governor of Assam served as the ministry of external affairs' representative when it came to overseeing the administrative control. In 1954, the property was renamed North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) from North East Frontier Tract (NEFT). In Arunachal Pradesh, the commencement of transition coincided with this change. In addition to Escaping the Land, it is packed with significant historical events like the Chinese invasion of 1962 and Bangladesh's freedom in 1972, which were pivotal points in the change of Arunachal Pradesh's governmental policies. Dai tells the story of Arunachal Pradesh's change in her novel by weaving these historical events into it.

3. Kojum-Koja's tribe and Water Kingdom: Conflict

Escaping the Land focused on the tribe called Kojum-Koja. The people of Kojum-Koja had sufficient to eat and were thus independent of anyone for their existence. They celebrated the festivals and served as a marker for their cultural tradition. The tribe made it a point to hunt and fish before the commencement of each festival because these activities were essential to their survival.



Cover Page



As was customary for the Kojum-Koja people, the story begins when they go fishing during the Pime festival. Tragically, Biri Angur Potung, the son of Biri Bote, "the powerful and mighty king of Sili-Sidong, the Water Kingdom," becomes entangled in the net instead of their typical capture. The younger members of the tribe consume Biri Angur Potung against the elders' recommendations and subsequently become ill [5].

Following the news of their son's death, Biri Angur Potung's parents launch an offensive towards the Kojum-Koja tribe. When the "water army" shows its strength, they demolish the Kojum-Koja people's territory, and finally they vanish from the face of the planet. But Nyanyi Mete, a woman from Kojum-Koja region, preserves the tribe's legend by sharing with others the tales of its members, the outbreak of war, and the tribe's demise.

The Water Kingdom's residents had a strong green facial and body colours which highlighted their love of the natural world. Green and blue are the predominant colours in Dai's novel *Once Upon a Moontime* as well. These two hues, in varying degrees, are heavily employed. Thus, it is possible to view the Kojum-Koja people's slaying of Biri Angur Potung—who is totally shown in green—as the annihilation of nature by man for his own selfish ends. Biri Bote is a strong king who defeats the human species because of his affinity for the natural world. It's also interesting to observe in the book that how Biri Bote's army uses weapons.

"Biri Bote's armies used torrential rain and storms to attack the Kojum-Koja."

With flood, gale, and squall.

Using water. And water. And additional water!

In these conditions, the Kojum-Koja tribe is powerless to protect itself from the fury of nature. Throughout the book, the stories focus solely on nature and natural phenomena [5].

Further the image of the second human species plunging into the ocean represents the negative consequences of over-using the environment. The detrimental effects of disobeying the counsel of the local elders are a key component.

The Kojum-Koja people's faces, which indicate extreme suffering and their bloated stomachs, serve as visible cues of the impact of this rejection in the novel. Thus, the cultural viewpoint mostly rests on the warning element that the text intends to convey to its audience, indicating the potential repercussions of defying the tribe's cultural doctrine.

4. Novel's character and reality

However, the personal and particular events are occasionally ignored in many of historical novel and books, Dai in her book (*Escaping the Land*) allows her main characters to reflect the real-life concerns, struggles, and experiences of regular people in an introspective manner. It highlights how historical events affected common people's lives and invites the reader to make educated guesses about "what happened" in the past. One of the book's main characters, Lipun, talks about the difficulties a government employee had while working in the Indian Frontier Administrative Service during the NEFA era. To get to the designated spot, a foot march across enormous forests took several months. The route was made more challenging by the constant worry that angry tribesmen and dangerous animals would strike. Despite the extraordinary difficulties they faced, these authorities worked in the far-off outpost to keep the government's grasp on the area.

Through her work, Dai captures the vast changes that men and women have gone through in terms of education and feelings of security when moving into or out of their houses. Some parts of the novel vividly reflect people's accounts of the tragedies and brutality they suffered in the face of militancy, insurgency, and massacres during the conflict. Dreams and reality clash in a wild combination of magic and mystery during uncertain times in the plot. Dai blends mythology to provide solace to the hard facts of history. There is no stopping change and the loss of privacy, according to a mysterious rain man. Even if



Cover Page



the phrase "We are safe in the hills" is repeated frequently, rapid changes in the passage of time caused Lutor and his close companions to question the veracity of this assertion.

Dai demolishes exquisite culturally distinct metaphors and alludes to cross-cultural exchanges between individuals from outside India, other regions of India, and the nearby states of Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur.

Loyalty and affection for one's country and people have been replaced by avarice and wealth in these changing times. From the mythological period of the prehistoric people of the Kojum-Koja of the region, to a time when politics seemed to dominate every action in the area, time moved to phases of no return. The narrative brings to light the opinions of those caught between the politics of inclusion and exclusion on the margins. Lutor made lofty development promises when running for chief minister and was "caught between a feeling of great humiliation and a pitying love for his homeland," but Tanik, his more cunning and corrupt political competitor, defeated him with greater resources and manpower.

A variety of fascinating personalities give the narrative flavor. The ecosystem at risk is mirrored in the corruption depicted in the novel due to the non-retreating timber trade, where avaricious traders, politicians, local brokers, and the forest mafia no longer care to uproot the entire virgin forest in the state. Despite acknowledging that events have changed, Lutor, caught between the memories of a bygone era, hopes for a Pan-Arunachal unity and a positive notion of home.

Through Lutor's wish for a country free of corruption and greed, Dai suggests that love is able to mend and turn the state back into the compassionate place it once was. Changes came with time, and the outside world encroached by giving the state more money. While business flourished, Lutor, as the title suggests, sought outside of the country to flee—not as a defeated man, but with the intention of discovering new opportunities that would allow him to return with a better tomorrow.

Further through Lipun's character, Dai demonstrates how the pioneer officials' fervent love to their homeland and people laid the groundwork for modern-day Arunachal Pradesh.

Through Lipun, Dai tactfully conveys to the readers the tribal mindset that precipitated this horrific event in Aching Mori.

"Jai Hind!" was their salutation. The village leader was a large, elderly man who summoned everybody around him to speak with Lipun. They sat down and said, "Observe!" This was the ominous cloud! The black cloud was the army! They arrived with the intention of enslaving us!

"No!" Lipun quarrelled. "Observe yourself." That woman there—what's wrong with her? Why does your son constantly become sick? What's causing your eyes to go blind? No, spirits are not involved. Spirits are not involved. It's an illness! These incidents have place all around the world. Physicians treat patients by prescribing medications. Your people will live longer and be in better health if you allow the government to take over. I assure you that no one will pilfer your property. Nobody is going to make you their slaves. The government will defend you in the event that the Chinese return [6].

"Although they were separated, they received food and shelter as well as instructions to clear fields, cut down trees and prepare wood for building and fencing arable land." After putting in a lot of work, the younger, physically fit men were eventually assigned to take care of the mithuns, harvest thatch for roofing, and bring back pig feed. Years went by. The men in captivity perished. Their wives passed away from illness and hopelessness, and the next generation of males took on their owner's clan title. They couldn't recall where they had been taken. They never gave running away a second thought. For what reason and where would they flee? There was nothing but life, food, and breath.

There used to be a lot of intertribal, intervillage, interclan, and enslavement conflicts. The purpose of wars and feuds was to establish the superiority of one tribe or clan over another. The men and women of the vanquished tribes or clans are taken as slaves by the winners in such conflicts to work for them. Dai depicts the lived realities of the passive victims of the enslavement system while imaginatively evoking the past.



Cover Page



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Now in Arunachal Pradesh, the culture of slavery has officially ended. In the process of outlining the historical context of Arunachal Pradesh in the novel, Dai exposes a specific time period to criticize the immoral actions of the slave system. The story vividly depicts the political unrest that is currently occurring as a result of the insensitivity and apathy of past political administrations, through the fictional characters of political figures such as Tanik, Lutor, Aohun, and Rasa. Dai provides in-depth understanding of the state's pressing problems with rebels and refugees.

Conclusion

Dai brings Arunachal Pradesh's recorded and unrecorded history to life by placing fictional characters in actual circumstances. In *Escaping the Land*, she brought Kojum-Koja's past to life by skillfully fusing fact and fantasy. Although it has long been ignored of all bout the political discourse and Kojum-Koja's past, a complete visualization of contemporary change from sacred place to modern state has been given in this article. Dai has meticulously unearthed historical recollections via oral histories and historical dates from archival sources to chronicle the momentous occasions that have molded the current state of Arunachal Pradesh. The novel's fictitious undertone doesn't take away from the story's historical feel. One of Mamang Dai's most significant works is *Escaping the Land*.

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