

The Land Remembers: Ecological Counter-Memory in the Select Poems of Mamang Dai

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Abstract:

This paper offers a sustained critical analysis of Mamang Dai's poems "Small Towns and the River", "Voice of the Mountain", "Once Upon a Time in Pasighat", and "Remembrance" are read through the interpretative lens of Lawrence Buell's four-criterion ecocritical theory, as theorised in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*; the poet's Adi tribe's Donyopolism, an indigenous, nature-based cosmological religion; and Rob Nixon's important concept of "Slow Violence", as theorised in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. The paper begins with an introduction to the poet, situating her as a Northeastern Indian writer in English who occupies a critical position as an indigenous tribal poet and environmentalist. Her oeuvre thus becomes a set of political texts that resist formidable political and economic forces endangering indigenous people and the land. The subsequent sections analyse all three theoretical frameworks to emphasise their critical importance for understanding her poetry. This is followed by an individual analysis of each poem within the theoretical framework. The paper's core thesis is that Mamang Dai's poems give voice to non-humans, functioning as an ecological counter-memory that resists effacement by the anthropocentric worldview, which privileges man over nature.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Adi, Donyipolo, Lawrence Buell's four-criterion framework, Rob Nixon's "Slow Violence", Ecological Counter-memory, NIAL.

My writing is an exploration into this world, so I guess this becomes a recurrent theme. What is true, what is sacred, what is imagined – it is still a mysterious landscape to me too, even though I was born here. I know not everyone will feel the same way about land and landscapes. I am very attuned to spirit of place and the natural world, wherever it may be. This is my response. To me it is a living presence.

— Mamang Dai, “The Land as a Living Presence”

1. Introduction

This paper analyses four of Mamang Dai’s well-known poems, “Small Towns and the River”, “Voice of the Mountain”, “Once Upon a Time in Pasighat”, and “Remembrance”. The human and non-human narrators in these poems embody Mamang Dai’s environmental poetics and politics. Born in 1957 in Pasighat, East Siang district, Arunachal Pradesh, Mamang Dai has had a diverse career as a civil servant, journalist, novelist, poet, and environmentalist. She has earned recognition both in India and internationally, including the Padma Shri in 2011 and the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2017. Her ecocentric poetic texts are particularly significant within the IWE tradition because of her position as an indigenous poet-environmentalist.

The concept of “ecological counter-memory” has been adapted from Foucault’s notion of counter-memory, theorised in his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”. Here, I define ecological counter-memory as a memory of the human and the non-human, embodied in Dai’s oeuvre, that seeks to counter the erasure of the truth about marginalised Adi tribes and their land. Researchers of Northeast Indian writings in English, also known as Northeast Indian Anglophone Literature (NIAL) (Baishya and Kalita), as well as Mark Bender, Kamayani Kumar, Manjeet Barua, among others, have written about the region’s endangered ecological and cultural concerns as central to the work of writers such as Temsula Ao and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih. Dai belongs to this group of writers who write at the intersection of poetics and

environmentalism, seeking ecological justice and narrating the effacement of their centuries-old culture and language.

Lawrence Buell's four-criterion ecocritical framework, the Adi tribe's Donyi-Polo cosmology (a nature-based belief system), and Rob Nixon's concept of "Slow Violence" undergird the present analysis. Buell's foundational ecocritical approach remains relevant to contemporary ecocritical literary studies because of the comprehensive framework he conceptualises as the basic criterion for an ecologically sensitive literary text. In this study, I have applied one or more of the four criteria, selecting them based on their relevance to the poem under analysis. Dai, an Adi tribeswoman, inherits an ancient cosmology and culture in which oral literature has long emphasised nature, predating the prominence of ecological themes in English scholarship; hence, incorporating her own cultural tradition provides a deeper layer of meaning to her writings. Additionally, Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence," which addresses the critical importance of literary representation of the slow violence enacted upon the natural world over the decades, is vital to a reading of texts documenting the endangerment and erasure of ancient culture and landscape that lack sufficient visibility. The paper also suggests that by blending her personal Adi heritage and her background as an English literature student, Dai enriches her writings, which aim to showcase her culture and traditions by weaving them into contemporary ecocritical discourse.

Lawrence Buell's Theorisation of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism, as a literary theory, brought about a paradigm shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric approach to literary texts. With its focus on ecology and the ecological ramifications of human action, it extended the ethical responsibility of human actors to the wider world. As climate change is a scientific fact, its significance today cannot be overstated. An erasure of this understanding would be what Amitav Ghosh calls "The Great

Derangement”. A seminal work in the field of ecocriticism in literary studies is Lawrence Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), in which Buell draws on the American transcendentalist Thoreau’s *Walden* to expound his thesis on an “ecocentric way of being” (1). In Buell’s view, an ecologically sensitive text must fulfil the following criteria: First, the nonhuman should “not merely (function) as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history”. Second, “The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest”. Third, “Human accountability to the environment is part of the texts’ ethical orientation”. Fourth, “Some sense of the environment as a process rather than a constant or given is at least implicit in this text” (Buell 7-8). These four criteria unequivocally centre ecology and place human action as both influencing and being influenced by the larger natural world. This is not a simple decentring of the human, but a recognition of the fundamental union between the human and the larger world they inhabit.

Buell’s foundational work was followed by two key texts, *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001) and *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2015). These works mark the transition from first-wave to second-wave ecocriticism, emphasising environmental justice and the need to focus on the Global South to develop a more nuanced, contemporary understanding of ecocriticism. As will be elaborated in the following sections, Buell’s ecocritical framework must be adapted to analyse Mamag Dai’s poems, not as a strict checklist but as an ethical-ecological criterion within which her writings are examined and shown to transcend it.

The Cosmology of the Adi Tribe

The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh include the Adi, Miri, Apatani, Tagin, and Nishis, with the Nishis the largest in the region. According to Sudhamahi Regunathan in “Sunshine on Faith: Life and Belief in Some Arunachal Communities,” the state is home to 25 major tribes and about 100 subtribes. These groups follow different religious traditions: indigenous

Donyipoloism in central Arunachal, Mahayana Buddhism in the west, and Hinayana Buddhism alongside Vaishnavism in the east (138). Donyipoloism combines two elements: Donyi, meaning the sun and the feminine creator, and Polo, representing the moon and the masculine energy that keeps time. The Tanis, who practise Donyipoloism, believe that the feminine and masculine forces together form an all-powerful, omniscient, and omnipresent force that governs all natural and supernatural occurrences. The Tanis, including the Adi tribe, consider themselves descendants of Abo Tani, the first man on earth.

The Adi tribe traces its origins to Pedong Nane, the mother of Tani (roing.nic.in/culture-heritage/adis/), and to Sedi, the ultimate creator, of whom Pedong Nane is the great-granddaughter. Their sacred oral literature, *Nyibu Agom*, is central to understanding their customs, practices, and worldview. They believe all earthly beings are parts of Sedi, the divine mother, and that the living and non-living are connected to her divine form. This oral tradition recounts the Adis' mythological origins and sets out rules for legal, cultural, social, and personal conduct. A key emphasis is on harmony between tribe members and nature. Anthropologist S.M. Patnaik notes in "*Nyibu Agom: The Sacred Lore of the Adi of Arunachal Pradesh*" that the Adi are spread across central Arunachal Pradesh, from the Upper Subansiri district in the west through the Siang region to the Dibang Valley in the east. The Adi are nature worshippers, believing that coexistence and cooperation between humans and nature are essential for survival (48). Like many ancient cultures, they regard the sun, moon, water, mountains, and trees as central to their cosmology. A key ecocritical aspect of the Adi is the burial myth, which holds that Teri, the earth, is the mother of all things. God Nido tells Abo Tani, who is walking with the corpse of his mother, Rijom, "that since all things were creations of Teri, the earth, they should be put back in it after they have ceased to exist. He gave the example of nature where all trees, plants, grass, and shrubs go back to earth after they have withered and died" (Patnaik 52). Patnaik further notes that these myths focus on both living

and non-living natural elements, attributing the origins of the earth and the mysteries of life to nature, and depicting a world in which humans and animals communicate (57). As an ancient tribe, the Adi rely on nature, and although modernisation has brought societal changes, their core beliefs remain in a region rich in ecological diversity yet vulnerable. He notes that, “Modern science, technology and recent development which have been witnessed in the area have had a tremendous impact on the process of change in customs and traditions” (45). However, as Indigenous ecology scholar Sarit Chandra Chaudhuri observes in “The Institutionalization of Tribal Religion Recasting the Donyi-Polo Movement in Arunachal Pradesh,” Donyi-Polo became an official religio-cultural movement in 1968, led by Talom Rukbo, in part in response to Christian missionary efforts and Hindu nationalist advances (Chaudhuri), which has strengthened the cultural assertion of their endangered way of life.

Rob Nixon’s “Slow Violence”.

The choice of Rob Nixon’s concept of “Slow Violence” is deliberate, as it aptly captures the slow, almost invisible erosion of ancient land, its people, and their culture, in this case the tribal culture and ecology of Arunachal. While violence in North-East India enters the national and international imagination through images of cross-border wars or insurgency in these states, the endangerment of the ancient land and its people doesn’t find space in the mediascape or in public policy.

Nixon, in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, theorises “slow violence” as “violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed over time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all (2).” While this type of violence doesn’t yet grab eyeballs, it has a snowball effect and devastating consequences for indigenous cultures and the environment. Nixon’s major concern is that in a world where “media venerate the spectacular, when public policy is

shaped primarily around perceived immediate need... How can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention (3)?” He emphasises that writers who seek to redress environmental injustices and dismantle silences “through testimonial protest, rhetorical inventiveness, and counterhistories” are “combative writers” who use their imaginative agility to amplify “the media-marginalised causes of the environmentally dispossessed” and play a critical role in contemporary environmental discourse (5).

“Small Towns and the River”: Of the Human and the Non-Human

“Small Towns and the River” is one of Mamang Dai’s most anthologised poems. Its prominence stems from its portrayal of the crises besetting her homeland and from her engagement with them, both of which are central motifs and thematic concerns throughout her oeuvre. The poem opens with “the” (the definite article) before “River,” in contrast to the generic “Small towns” in the title, thereby positioning the River as central to the narrative. This aligns with Lawrence Buell’s first criterion that the nonhuman presence should not be a background but a dynamic presence. The River has a soul; it is both a witness and a victim to all the grief the land and its people endure. The Adi, too, revere the river as a living deity rather than a passive natural feature. In this poem, the River is the Siang River (a tributary of the Brahmaputra), which flows near Dai’s hometown, Pasighat. It may also stand for any river near a human settlement. The poem begins on a sombre note, with the poet observing that death marks existence in small towns, and that “dust flying” and “wind howling” are perennial features of life there. While this may be read as a juxtaposition of human mortality with the immortality of nature, melding ecocriticism with Adi beliefs places the finiteness of human life within the larger environment, in which we, too, are an extension of nature, and the dust that flies is not separate from our being. Building on this premise, the “wind howling” aligns with

the howling of bereaved family members. After our deaths, whether we are cremated or buried, we return to the same earth as dust. All beings return to Teri, the Mother Earth.

This idea continues into the next stanza, where disconsolate families weep for the dead, each death bringing awareness of the eternal cycle of life and death, in which only the rituals remain constant. The idea of the cyclical nature of human life aligns with the interconnected-universe worldview envisioned by Sedi.

While the human cycle of life and death continues, the River, which has its own soul, bears witness to the natural cycle as it, too, moves from the first drop of rain to the sea. It, too, seeks “a land of fish and stars”. Here, the distinction between the human and the non-human blurs as they share a desire for the final union with Sedi. Memories of a happy childhood are set against the anxiety-ridden town’s uncertain future. Even amid this uncertainty about the land and the ancient way of life, rituals such as placing the dead “pointing west” persist, on the belief that they will merge with Donyi.

This poem clearly demonstrates Lawrence Buell’s four criteria: the nonhuman River is more than a mere backdrop or metaphor; it embodies an ongoing, living presence with a soul that influences the townfolk’s lives. The poem suggests that human interest is not the only legitimate one, as the River possesses agency and independence beyond human control. The poem also implies a sense of human responsibility towards the environment by highlighting the River as a living entity rather than merely a natural element. Finally, the poem emphasises the environment’s dynamism, illustrating the cyclical nature of water as a continual process.

In this small town, “life matters” because of the meaning it carries from the ancient belief in the oneness of the universe. Human and the River continue their journey, hoping to be united with the gods. Death may bring temporary grief to those left behind, but they know the dead have returned to where they first came from. The River bears witness to the ongoing, slow violence of Pasighat. Its ontological presence archives the suffering and anxiety of a

rapidly changing world, which has brought much grief to the people. The grief-laden town, the howling winds, and the flying dust, in which the River too seeks a land of fishes and stars, are symbolic of the slow erosion of ancient ways of life and ecology. The poem doesn't speak of one spectacular death or natural calamity but of a general air of grief that envelops the land. Thus, it narrates what Rob Nixon terms "slow violence," which is incremental and attritional yet still present.

"Voice of the Mountain": The Eternal Witness

The epistemological authority granted to the Mountain in this poem aligns with the Adi belief that the forces of nature are ascribed human characteristics. The Mountain assumes the role of the Adi priests, who preserved oral traditions and shared stories with the community (Patnaik 48). In "The Stratigraphy of Silence: A Critical Analysis of Mamang Dai's "The Voice of the Mountain", Lalthannguri observes, "To understand the poetry of writers like Mamang Dai, one must first recognise that the literary output of this region is fundamentally a literature of witness. For decades, the dominant narrative of the Northeast was controlled by colonial administrators, anthropologists, and later, the Indian state's security apparatus, all of whom viewed the region through the lens of exoticism or conflict management" (861). The Mountain's ontological presence and epistemological authority challenge mainstream human-recorded history, offering a counter-memory of a non-human being who has existed for aeons.

Likewise, the Mountain functions as a revered deity, visited for blessings, like the man without a voice who brought fish offerings (45). The voiceless man and dying languages may also reflect the influx of strangers into the ancient land, leading to the decline of many tribal dialects. As cultures die, their languages too vanish. Repeated intrusions by those who do not speak the local language are commonplace. These have led to a slow but steady change in the land and its demography. The Mountain says, "We live in territories forever ancient and new/

and as we speak in changing languages / I, also, leave my spear leaning by the tree/ and try to make a sign” (45). Lalthannguri succinctly explains the paradox of the ancient and the new, “The territory is ‘ancient’ in its geological and tribal history, but ‘new’ in its political formation as a state within the Indian union, and ‘new’ in the constant flux of modernisation” (863). The Mountain warrior, too, sets the spear (an ancient tribal symbol of its identity) aside and attempts to communicate.

The Mountain identifies itself as an old man who sits, sipping the youthful breeze. It then becomes a vast presence, containing all the “sea waves” and “mountain peaks”. The Mountain’s voice is Sedi’s, whose “chance syllable” orders the world. It then becomes the entire world, “I am the desert and the rain. / The wild bird that sits in the west. / The past that recreates itself/ and particles of life that clutch and cling/ For thousands of years -” The old, wise Mountain knows the vicissitudes of life, denoted here by the cloud, the “uncertain pulse/that sits over my heart.” The Mountain’s unease reflects the land’s broader uncertainty. His wisdom is encapsulated in the words, “Peace is a falsity”. The harsh reality is followed by the image of a returning warrior carrying blood-red peonies, symbolic of the political violence in the land. Eventually, the Mountain becomes one with the human and the non-human: a dead child, the disfigured constellations, weeping men, voiceless women, sunrise, the wind, and the reservoir of memory, which seeks to flee effacement by time.

The poem fulfils Lawrence Buell’s first, second, and fourth criteria. The Mountain, as the poem’s protagonist, possesses consciousness and asserts, “I can outline the chapters of the world” (Dai, “Arunachal”, 45). This highlights that nonhuman elements, rather than humans, shape history, geography, and narrative. This does not suggest human disappearance but instead signifies the unity of human and nonhuman forces, as Buell notes that “human history is implicated in natural history” (7). The Mountain’s existence outside human civilisations grants it agency, emphasising that human interest is not the sole valid concern. Portraying itself

as an old man, the Mountain is an oracle, a cartographer, and a living archive of millennia of history. From its vantage point, it observes the world below, noting how older boats and canoes give way to lit ferries. It has seen it all: the towns that have grown over the years, the estuaries, banks, and the distant horizon. It is not a passive non-human entity; the Mountain interacts with its environment, perceiving, understanding, and recording changes and continuity over time. Therefore, it fulfils Buell's fourth criterion: the environment as a dynamic process.

Sharing a border with a hostile nation such as China, affected by spillover from insurgencies in neighbouring states, and experiencing steady environmental degradation, Arunachal has faced ongoing violence over the years. The Mountain's final words, "I am the breath that opens the mouth of the canyon, ... I am the place where memory escapes the myth of time, I am the sleep in the mind of the mountain" (46), reinforce its authoritative counter-history and give voice to the slow violence the land has endured.

"Once Upon a Time in Pasighat": Aesthetics of Coexistence

The one-sentence poem evokes sweeping, vivid images of the ancient landscape and its uninterrupted history. The poem begins with the familiar mythic/fairy-tale phrase, "Once upon a time," which frames the narrative within the purity and innocence of beginnings and childhood. The poem is dedicated "*For friends of a different sort*", which may be a tribute to the human and non-human beings of her homeland, thereby blurring the line between objective truths and beliefs in non-human beings, akin to fairy tales. Pasighat, with its forests, hills, and River, is more than a backdrop. It is an active presence shaping the lives of its inhabitants, thus satisfying Buell's first criterion. His fourth criterion, that the environment is not constant but is a site of ongoing transformation, is enacted in this poem. Pasighat is not a stable, unchanging land but is constantly changing with the times. The "Remembrance" is equally the remembrance of Pasighat and its inhabitants.

The first stanza opens with the image of an unkempt home, bamboo leaves scraping the floor. There is no attempt to keep the natural world at bay within the domestic space. The poem also refers to her friends, who are of a different sort. This paradigm shift in what a domestic space should be is brought about through reference to her “friends”. Here, the poet dismantles the nature/culture dichotomy. Human dwellings dwell within nature, and vice versa.

The poet uses enjambment and continues with domestic imagery, urging her “love” to let nature run its course. If a fly were to pass by, there is no need to swat it, because the cobwebs in the corner have been created by nature to trap and devour it. The focus is on nature’s ability to control pests, which signals the redundancy of human intervention deemed essential in an anthropocentric worldview. Humans are not essential to the existence and continuity of the natural order. The domestic space, with unswept floors and cobwebbed corners, intensifies the dissolution of the divide between nature and culture.

In the third stanza, there is a shift from the domestic interior to the threshold (“Inside/Outside”). If night were to fall and the electricity failed, life in Pasigbat would not come to a standstill. The absence of modern amenities creates an opportunity for the dwellers of the home to sit outside, as the night doesn’t threaten but extends the same hospitality that the inside offered the outside in the previous stanzas.

In the fourth stanza, the poem shifts from the threshold to the natural world and then expands to the vast universe, reaching the stars, each with its own soul. During sleep, dreams ebb and flow in sync with the sun and moon’s cycles. This sleep nourishes and revitalises the body and provides “rest” for the dreamer. As her love lies sleeping, the poet reflects on the ageing home, where future generations, too, will learn of the timeless continuity of natural cycles. As the sun slowly rises, beams of slanting light enter the house. This ordinary, everyday event brings a profound realisation, a raw, bare-boned truth and beauty, of the unity of the

human dwelling with the universe. The insight parallels the “truth/moral” at the end of fairy tales.

In the poem, the merging of the domestic and natural worlds, together with the dynamic shift from the unswept floor to the star-studded skies and back to the sunbeams entering through the cracks of the old house, symbolises the Adi belief in the essential unity of the human and the non-human.

The phrase “Once upon a time” also signals Pasighat’s changing world, shaped by the slow violence of modernity, enacted through ecological and political violence. The poem’s pervasive wistfulness also hints at the tenuousness of the ancient ways of life, lived in harmony with the surrounding world.

“Remembrance”: Ecology and Conflict

In this poem, the poet traces the links between environmental degradation, cultural endangerment, insurgency, modernisation, and the trauma experienced by indigenous people. The poem opens with a rhetorical statement about the community’s ignorant bliss, oblivious to the darker political and economic forces encircling their land. The blissful certainties of nature, denoted by “rain every summer”, still nights of uninterrupted sleep, and green ferns uncurling by the side of the road, all stand to be disrupted. The second stanza further explores a reminiscence of life’s certainties and sustenance drawn from the rivers and fields. In their innocence, the autochthonous dwellers are unaware of the stranger’s dreams of plunder and occupation of the land, and they lie assured that Donyi (sun), who “lay resting/ in the folded silence of the hills”, would guard them against those that lie beyond.

The second stanza also opens with a rhetorical statement that reinforces their blissful unawareness, as they lead contented lives in the certainty that the fields and rivers will sustain them. The child-parent relationship between the tribals and the land they inhabit, which

provides assured sustenance and protection, stems from their religious belief systems. Their world, as they have known it for millennia, is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient.

The strangers' intrusion and the sudden disruption of familiar natural cycles also call their belief system into question. What was once regarded as invincible and immortal now seems tenuous and vulnerable. This crisis of faith and angst threatens to unravel their cultural and social fabric, which is tightly interwoven with their cosmological belief system.

In the following stanza, we see the jungle, where they foraged for food and medicine, now become a predator ("The jungle is a big eater"). The image of the gentle, unfurling green fern is replaced with "carnivorous green", in which hide rapidly multiplying soldiers armed with weapons. The attendant violence leads to an existential crisis for the Adis as they begin to question their belief in the eternity of their gods, "Why did we think the Gods would survive/" "deathless in memory, / in trees and stones and the sleep of babies; / now, when we close our eyes / and cease to believe, god dies." In this quote, the shift from uppercase to lowercase in the spelling of god, from the first line to the fourth, is symbolic of its significance in the contemporary world. In a religion like Donyipolism, where nature has been seen as divine, the destruction and contamination of natural resources will also mean the desecration of the divine.

The very existence of the gods shifts into people's memories, and their eternal status becomes vulnerable and dependent on people's faith. For a community that has always revered fire and water, two potent forces (part of Sedi) that have sustained them, the gods' presence is now at stake. As they find themselves marginalised and exploited, they are forced to move from their simple life of foraging for food to being "Foragers for a destiny", vulnerable to actions and narratives created by strangers from the outside world. They once stared at Donyi (the sun), represented by the fire, and Polo, the moon reflected in water, two powerful forces that have sustained life, but now all they can do is stare at the outlines of the hills beyond which lie the forces that threaten them. The poem ends with the people looking up to the invincible

sky, seeking strength and guidance. It is hoped that the Gods who bear witness will also grant divine justice to the endangered people.

Lawrence Buell's first criterion, that nature is a presence rather than a backdrop, is embodied in this poem. Nature in this poem is intertwined with the land's history and politics. Buell's third criterion, that human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation, is also critical to our understanding of the poem. Here, accountability is not only environmental but also political. The merging of the political and the ecological is consonant with Nixon's theory of slow violence. The poem addresses ecological degradation, endangered communities, and steadily growing political violence, all of which have partly arisen from struggles over natural resources.

Conclusion

This paper's analysis offers several conclusions about Mamang Dai's poetry and its significance in current ecocritical discussions. First, all four poems examined satisfy Buell's four criteria for environmentally sensitive texts. The poems' focus on place also aligns with Buell's concept of "place-attachment," which denotes a psychological and ethical relationship—what he calls "environmentality." In *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Buell writes that place has long been a fundamental aspect of the American environmental mindset. Here, "place" denotes "space that has been imbued with meaning," a source of "felt value," and a backdrop for social interactions and personal connections with a landscape. It encompasses an environment that is "seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered." This concept implies a conscious awareness of existing within a physical environment that shapes both personal identity and moral outlook (252). Dai's poems extend and enrich this framework, as the non-human are not only foregrounded but also depicted as

speaking, suffering, and narrating, archiving the devastation inflicted upon them and the civilisations that depend on them, and seeking an ethical response from listeners.

Second, Dai's poetry documents what Rob Nixon describes as "slow violence." Her poems narrate the erosion of an ancient land and its people, and a thread of grief runs through all four poems. Even the title, "Once upon a time", suggests a bygone era rather than the present. The slow violence, political, economic, and cultural, inflicted upon Arunachal is embodied in Dai's poems, making her, as Nixon calls her, a combative writer. The poems stand as literary responses to slow violence by endangered communities in the Global South.

Third, the present study's integration of the core concepts of Donyipoloism with Western ecocritical frameworks highlights the importance of incorporating indigenous knowledge and belief systems to strengthen the fight against environmental exploitation and degradation. Tribals have lived in harmony with nature for millennia, and the divinity assigned to the non-human has helped maintain the delicate balance required to sustain both humans and non-humans.

Finally, Donyipoloism was found to be critical to any reading of Mamang Dai. The non-humans are not literary conceits but possess ontological presence and epistemological authority. This cosmological belief system animates her writing, creating a unique idiom suited to the central themes of her poetry. The River with a soul, the Mountain with a voice, the poet with her epiphanic experience in Pasighat, and the community's collective remembrance of their past and the disruptive present tie the human and the non-human together, thereby archiving the counter-memory of their land and its history. The Land Remembers.

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