

## ***The Legends of Pensam: “In-between” Juggling Life of the Adis***

**Book Review by**

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The Legends of Pensam is a novel by Mamang Dai. She is one of the most popular and prominent literary voices from the northeast India. She is from Arunachal Pradesh. She belongs to the Adi tribe of the region; one of the two hundred and twenty ethnic groups of the northeast. This fictional work of Mamang Dai can be read as a bunch of inter-connected short stories. The novel is divided into four main parts and each part has several short stories which can be read independently. Each story is complete in itself. The book does not have a centre character or a centre and there is no chronological structure for the narration. The narrator narrates the stories in-between. Mamang Dai uses a lyrical style in the book. It would be difficult for readers to compartmentalize the language used by Dai as prose or poetic. She brings in a lot of folk tales and historical events into the book. The book can be placed in-between fiction and history. The book can be called a fictitious record of historical facts.

The novel can be seen as a travelogue. The narrator and her friend Mona, the proprietor of a glossy magazine “Diary of the World”, visit the narrator’s ancestral village. The first part of the book is named after Mona’s magazine. The writer records the life of three generations of the Adi tribe in the book. The novel begins with the story of “the boy who fell from the sky”. The first part of the book covers the life of the first generation of the story. The first part tells the story of Lutor, the chief of the clan, and his friend. Lutor and his friend are recruited by the migluns (the British) to work on a massive road project. After three years, they return to the village with a basket containing the child. Lutor’s friend tells the villagers that “there was a great noise and fire in the sky and our son fell to earth”. The boy is accepted by the wife and the tribe without asking any questions. Hoxo is one of the interconnections of the stories. The writer writes about the thinning jungle as she explains the life of the third generation and her visit to her ancestral village, Duyang.

The writer throws light on widowhood. Hoxo’s father, Lutor, the famous chief of the Ida clan, dies in a hunting accident. This is further discussed in the story “Pinyar the widow”. Some stories in the book voice the pain and loneliness of widows. In the story “the silence of adela and kepi”, the line of the prologue “anything can happen and everything can be lived”

is proved in the story. Mona's daughter Adela is diagnosed with the condition of autism. Hoxo tells the story of Kepi whose illness is taken as the curse of ancestors and his father has searched for shamans for a cure.

The life of the tribe is torn between myths and reality, fiction and facts, innocence and superstitions. They are leading a life in between tradition and modernity. The witer beautifully portrays this in between the condition of the people of Pensam. They believe in the story of Birbik, the water serpent and supernatural beings like the miti-mili. The story of Kamur, who slaughters the whole family, is seen as the result of incomplete rites in the past. The last story of the first part explains the construction of the mysterious Stillwell Road which connects three countries. Hoxo's father and his friend are recruited in the road construction.

The second part of the book explains about the colonial expansion of the British in the northeast region in 1911. "travel the road" explains about a clash between the Adi tribe and British soldiers. Some more stories are heard by Mona and her husband Jules; those have been passed on from one generation to another. The narrator's friend Mona and her husband Jules take leave from the narrator's ancestral village.

The third part of the book, "daughters of the village" tells the stories of women who have lived a life of hardships; those who have struggled very hard to meet their ends in Rocky Mountains. Women like Arsi and the narrator's mother. The mother of the narrator is a strong-willed widow. She works as a traveling saleswoman. This part tells love stories of the first and the second generation. The love story between a British officer named David and a tribal woman named Nenem. Nenem is the mother of Losi; the wife of Hoxo. Hoxo tells the story of Nenem, and she seems to be the river: constant, nurturing, self- possessed. The third part also reveals love between Hoxo and Losi. Losi the daughter of Nenem and Kao. Kao is a tribal man who marries Nenem even after knowing her truth.

The fourth part of the novel, "a matter of time", tells the stories of an old man and an elected member Duan, son of Kedu. This shows the entry of politics and democracy. "the road" this story shows "civilization" and "modernity" in the life of Adis. Modern financial institutions, like a bank in "the golden chance", an independent, gambling woman in "a portrait of Sirsiri of gurdum. A group of youngsters sitting around the TV "on stage" shows a drastic change in the lives of Adis. For the first time in the book, people of the Adi compare themselves with others. They have been living a life of contentment, but the third generation

of the book is living a life of comparison. They are comparing their looks, appearance and life with the outer world. The question “Are you happy” is asked by Kasup to the narrator in the story “the golden chance” rings again and again in the stories of the fourth part. This shows that the life of Adis is once again disturbed by the outer world, just like the arrival of the British into Siang Valley.,

Mamang Dai’s enthralling writing style captures the attention of the readers. The readers will be spell bound by a description of the valley. Her writing can be described as picturesque. Her words have the power to create a realistic picture in the minds of the readers.

