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Marginalization, Identity Crisis and Discrimination in Mamang Dai's *Stupid Cupid*

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Abstract: The notion of identity has gained significant prominence in current cultural studies and literary analysis. The statement conveys the notion of self-perception and the comparative analysis of one's identity with others. Therefore, our identity plays a crucial role in determining our position in society, as it is shaped by various factors such as race, gender, class, religion, ethnicity, and so on, which are recognised by others. Even though the allure of city life enthralls the tribes, they are forced to fight a never-ending battle to exist in a setting to which they will never really belong. Every character in the book is subjected to persecution, but they manage to continue their lives despite their challenges and difficulties. Through her female characters, Mamang Dai provides a voice to the distinctive experiences of Northeastern women, who confront prejudice, and exploitation and are often considered foreigners in their own country. Each character learns more and more about the racial and sexual dynamics that shape women's lives in the Northeast, both in rural and urban settings. Adna learns the hard way that the city's glitter and glamour are an illusion after witnessing the murder of her close friend Amine at the hands of robbers.

Keywords: Identity, marginalization, discrimination, culture, power, female.

Introduction

The term "marginalization" has been conceptualized as a multifaceted phenomenon whereby specific population segments are relegated to society's periphery or lower echelons. The exclusion policy effectively marginalizes certain groups of individuals in economic, political, cultural, and social spheres. This phenomenon results in the unequal distribution of productive resources and opportunities for realizing the full potential of specific segments of society. This results in the impoverishment of the community,



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leading to low wages, discrimination, livelihood insecurity, and overall misery. The individual's ability to ascend the social ladder is being constrained. From a political standpoint, the process of relegation results in the unequal distribution of access to the formal power structure and participation in decision-making processes. This, in turn, leads to the subordination and dependence of certain groups on the economically and politically dominant factions of society. The emergence of a socially ignorant, illiterate, uneducated, and dependent population can be attributed to the economic, political, and cultural deprivation they have experienced. Lacking essential resources for sustenance, they are relegated to a peripheral existence within society. Marginalization refers to assigning reduced significance to a particular entity or individual, thereby distancing them from the core operations of the collective. The act of excluding a minority, subgroup, or undesirables by disregarding their needs, desires, and expectations is a social phenomenon. The concept of identity crisis was introduced by the renowned theorist Erikson, and it pertains to the introspective examination that an individual conducts regarding their self-concept and self-perception. Numerous writers have explored this theme throughout different eras in literary history. The issue of identity crisis has been a recurring motif in Indian English literature and has been thoroughly examined by numerous writers. The authors have explored this theme by examining the social, economic, and cultural contexts through the protagonists' perspectives in their literary works.

Writer cum journalist Mamang Dai is from India's Northeast region. She worked as a government servant for several years before becoming a writer to bring more attention to the history, tradition, and culture of the Northeast via her work. The emotional ups and downs that the tribes go through due to being marginalized, having an identity crisis, and being discriminated against are the primary focus of Dai's works. Mamang Dai's writings are neo-romantic, and she often portrays the Northeast as an exotic place different from the rest of India. This contrasts with most other writers from the Northeast, who writes about insurgency movements, the marginalization of the Northeastern states of India, the region's fight for independence and sovereignty from the centre, etc. Also, it is interesting to note that in the few works of fiction she has written, she has shown tribal women of the Northeast in different and exciting ways and talked about their unique problems. When she says "tribal women of the Northeast," she means the women of the hill-dwelling communities of Northeast India, whose families come from Southeast Asia. So, this



paper aims to figure out how different tribals of the North East are portrayed in Mamang Dai's works like "Stupid Cupid".

Marginalization, Identity crisis and Discrimination

The notion of identity has gained significant prominence in current cultural studies and literary analysis. The statement conveys the notion of self-perception and the comparative analysis of one's identity with others. Therefore, our identity plays a crucial role in determining our position in society, as it is shaped by various factors such as race, gender, class, religion, ethnicity, and so on, which are recognised by others. An individual's identity provides a robust sense of distinctiveness and singularity. Erik Erikson is a prominent figure in the field of psychology, particularly concerning the topic of identity. Schultz and Schultz explain Erikson's psycho-social theory of human development, which is a revision of Freud's psycho-sexual theory but focuses more on social and cultural development than sexuality (Schultz). In his article, Yousef explains that *identity* has been extensively defined as "the distinct personality of an individual. It is also the individual characteristics by which a person is known or by which an individual sees himself/herself 31 as a discrete, separate entity (p.674)."

India's North Eastern State is overlooked because of its location in a distant region. These people were cut off from the majority of the population by differences in geography, customs, culture, tradition, and rituals. The people of this region are being marginalized twice, first by the Government and second by the Society itself. These individuals, having tasted the sourness of Imperial authority firsthand, attempted to speak out often. Edward Said refers to the descriptions of the location as "fantasies" since they were created from the perspective of the conquerors and the way they saw the area. The field of study known as post-colonial studies began its rise to prominence around the turn of the twentieth century. In this sense, Edward Said's book, "Orientalism," published in 1978, represents a new path to the field of postcolonial studies. In his study "Northeast Migrants in Delhi: Race, Refuge and Retail," Duncan Mcduie-ra examines how migrants from the Northeast place a significant emphasis on their outward appearance while interacting with members of other cultures. He says

questioning of nationality and citizenship. Through their physical appearance, Northeast migrants are not only viewed as others, but their otherness is also associated with the ways the



Northeast frontier is understood and misunderstood socially and politically in the Indian mainstream. (Mcduie-ra 87)

People from the Northeast are sometimes called "chinkys," a disparaging epithet, and their citizenship is often questioned or misidentified as that of a Nepali, Chinese, Japanese, etc. This statement said the northeast Indian was not considered an Indian in the Indian Territory. The appearance of migrants from the Northeast evokes misconceptions about people from the region, leading to prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and even violence. The act of travelling from one location to another is intrinsic to the existence of every single human person. People relocate from one state to another in India for various reasons, including personal, cultural, socioeconomic, and geopolitical concerns. In his writing, Sten P. Moslund provides a detailed portrayal of the 21st century "...an immense uprooting of origin and belonging, an immense displacement of borders, with all the clashes, meetings, [...] reshaping the cultural landscapes of the world's countries and cities (2)". This phenomenon is not unique to India. One possible name for this procedure is migration. Migration, on the other hand, gives individuals the perception that they no longer have a home of their own, and the experiences that migrants gather are not necessarily positive or pleasurable; instead, they are sometimes exceedingly bitter and intense. As Salman Rushdie says, "The distinguishing feature of our time is mass migration, mass displacement, globalized finances and industries (425)." This is portrayed in Mamang Dai's work, *Stupid Cupid*. The author of this story has focused on characters in a new setting. Most are members of indigenous Arunachal Pradesh tribes who want to live a peaceful life, migrate from the hills to the city, and break away from the hegemonic force that dominates their society.

After completing her Hotel Management programme in Guwahati and Calcutta, the novel's narrator, Adna, relocated and went to New Delhi; leaving her green behind, she returned to her native land in Itanagar, which is located in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. She imagined a life of dignity, complete with a peaceful meeting spot where friends, lovers, and family could confide in one another. This is pretty popular among the hill tribes. Before she moved to Delhi, she had this goal. While trying to reserve a hotel, she is confronted with many scenarios that need her to embrace others. The people who lived in the city or more traditional neighbourhoods of major cities like Delhi saw this behaviour as a sin. Adna is shown here as an



open-minded and progressive girl who, after the death of her aunt, comes into possession of a piece of land that she intends to turn into a magnificent nest and call "Four Seasons." Adna is quite fortunate because she has a home in Delhi where she can do her business. Her aunt had bestowed it on her as a mark of respect. Because Adna did not have anything to her credit at the time, she would only have been able to purchase something if she already had it. Aside from that, she comes from a family of the middle class, which means that they could not even afford an apartment in Delhi. Mamang Dai has presented Adna in such a manner that it will be easy for her to take advantage of all the opportunities that city life has to offer. Put another way; she is privileged because Delhi provides her with everything she needs. Yoyo can always count on her cousin to be there for her when she is having trouble and to provide her with a helping hand. Yoyo is the one who is accountable for taking on the responsibility of shouldering the whole weight of the agency in terms of taking care of the customers. Adna replied, "I relied on Yoyo to deal with workmen. They were young men like him and came to work wearing thick rubber slippers, baggy clothes and packed caps." (Dai 32)

The 'Four Seasons' by Adna is a tranquil paradise. There is no infidelity at play here, but Adna does acknowledge that sometimes two people seek time apart to explore if they might recover a lost intensity;

It is not quite adultery; I had said at the time. Even now, I did not see a meeting of like-minded souls as adulterous behaviour. They could even be old friends. Sometimes two people may just want some time to see if they can rediscover a lost intensity. (Dai 2)

Adna has feelings for a man already in a relationship with another woman. The moment they met was the catalyst for her falling in love with him. Adna, who resides in Delhi, is said to inhabit a fantastical world filled with love, passion, freedom, and joy. The book does not reveal the character's identity or the identity of the guy she loves. Adna considers him a friend, and she has a joyful and comfortable life because of him. It is possible to draw parallels between Adna's connection with her partner from Delhi and the tightly fixed tags placed on ladies from the North East. Women from the North Eastern region have a reputation for being adaptable and immoral. When travelling in metropolitan centres, most of the North Eastern indigenous women feel freedom and independence from the locations they are initially from. Adna's lover abandons her and then claims he is leaving for Canada, although he provides no valid rationale for his



decision. On the other hand, Adna's lover makes it possible that the man might not be travelling with his wife but with a different woman. According to Spivak, Third World women often have their voices silenced. Women in the Third World are often caught between a rock and a hard place due to the oppressive nature of hegemonic and patriarchal cultures (Spivak). Throughout human civilization, the term "man" has been commonly used to represent humanity, while the social group of women has been disregarded and excluded from mainstream discourse (Zhang, 1999).

The books written by Mamang Dai are significant for several reasons, one of which is how they illustrate the gendering of space or spheres, as well as the apparent contradiction that exists between autonomy and relationality. Some studies have revealed that some women are more committed to their relational selves and get their sense of significance and satisfaction from interaction with other people, from being a member of, as opposed to being separate from, a collective entity. These women strictly conform to the gender roles that society has determined for them and exclusively inhabit those locations. For instance, in the story "Stupid Cupid," Mareb's mother gives up her desires and preferences in order to fulfil the role of the ideal housewife. Mareb remembers her mother:

Mareb had never seen her mother reading nor heard her even once mention a book or an author's name before. Perhaps she had hidden her heart All Mareb remembered of her was her putting up curtains, sewing lace on to the borders of tablecloths and providing some semblance of grace and good living in a life that was constantly on the move ... (Dai, 37)

Therefore, we can argue that the internal structures of their communities still incarcerate women in these communities; even if they do much physical travelling outside the safe setting of the house, they are still at the receiving end of much adverse treatment. A further point to consider is that these civilizations are not patriarchal, and women are relegated to society's periphery. In the majority of the indigenous communities located in the North eastern States, there are restrictions put on the access that women have to information, and males are the ones who make decisions about both public and private matters. In *Tribal Women of Arunachal Pradesh*, Veeranki Maheswara Rao discovered that women, albeit significant in society, were not engaged in decision making.

... decisions related to major issues are taken by husbands ... Men dominated in making decisions



on number of children to bear, arranging children's marriage, taking/giving loans, sale/purchase of animals, settlement of disputes, social visits, and to some extent voting. (Rao, 128)

Stupid Cupid helps gain a comprehensive grasp of North Eastern ladies' difficulties due to being displaced. The author Mamang Dai points out that there is a significant difference between the hopes and dreams that migrant women bring with them to the metropolis and the reality that they face there. When Adna and Mareb initially arrived in Delhi, they were both enthusiastic about the location and adapted quickly to the city and its vicinity.

Those were happy days. Everything was new and young, and every moment felt like a new beginning. In the mid-eighties if anyone had asked us who we were and what we were doing in Delhi, my friends would have shouted back: We are here because we want to be here. We like it here and that's it. (Dai, 13)

Migrants from the Northeast are categorized as "others" because they are seen to have a distinct culture from the rest of India. At the same time, many other communities in India experience prejudice in a variety of settings on account of their religion, caste, or ethnicity. However, at no point is there any dispute about the nationality or provenance of these communities. They can seamlessly integrate into the region, in contrast to the migrants from the Northeast. In the novel *Stupid Cupid*, the character of Mamang Dai portrays some of the day-to-day realities of racial discrimination that individuals from the Northeast confront in Delhi. Specifically, this prejudice is directed against persons of North East. While Adna's cousin Jia and her friend TD attempt to get a taxi for them, a rude woman jumps in the back seat and refuses to let go of the car. Adna is furious with the woman. Jia becomes enraged, exits the taxi, and furiously scolds the woman she encountered on the street.

How dare you say such a thing? Do you think I'm Chinese, huh? I am Indian. Do you know where I come from? Do you know where that is, you idiot woman? And I bet you are not even from Delhi. You must be from some lousy backwaters! Jao!Jao! Hah! And even if I was Chinese you have no right to say such a thing to anyone! It's people like you who create hatred, you know that? You scum! And then she spat into the cab! (Dai,53)

The ladies who relocate to Delhi are not afforded any protection. A Nepalese guy arrives at Adna's flat in



the middle of the night, perhaps around 10 o'clock, and reports that a group of individuals can be seen racing and leaping over the wall. At first, Adna is sceptical of his claims. When he mentions Four Seasons, she agrees to accompany him to Amine's home, where they discover Amine's corpse. Two hotel employees working there for some time have murdered Amine for money. Adnan's dreams have been completely dashed, and now all she wants to do is return to her home in the hills and spend the rest of her life there with her people.

Conclusion

Even though the allure of city life enthralls the tribes, they are forced to fight a never-ending battle to exist in a setting to which they will never really belong. Every character in the book is subjected to persecution, but they manage to continue their lives despite their challenges and difficulties. Through her female characters, Mamang Dai provides a voice to the distinctive experiences of Northeastern women, who confront prejudice, and exploitation and are often considered foreigners in their own country. Each character learns more and more about the racial and sexual dynamics that shape women's lives in the Northeast, both in rural and urban settings. Adna learns the hard way that the city's glitter and glamour are an illusion after witnessing the murder of her close friend Amine at the hands of robbers.

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