

HEGEMONIC POWER IN MAMANG DAI'S *STUPID CUPID*- A SUBALTERN STUDY

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ABSTRACT: Hegemony is a term used by the Marxists to describe the maintenance of power without the use, or direct threat, of physical force; normally by a minority class whose interest are contrary to those over whom power is exercised. In other words, hegemony epitomises the elite's dream. The voice of Mamang Dai in *Stupid Cupid* records the power structure with simultaneous oppression and marginalization of the weaker sections focussing specially India's North East and creates an environment in understanding what we mean by hegemonic power. *Stupid Cupid* is Mamang Dai's second novel where she renders a variety of women characters belonging to Arunachal Pradesh as well as other states of India to face the exploitations of the capitalist and cultural rejections, which can only be overcome by adequate representation of the people living in hills into the mainland India.

KEYWORDS: Hegemony, Subaltern, Marginalization, woman

INTRODUCTION: Hegemony is a term used by the Marxists to describe the maintenance of power without the use, or direct threat, of physical force; normally by a minority class whose interest are contrary to those over whom power is exercised. (Hawthorn 146). In other words, hegemony epitomises the elite's dream while the counter hegemony is a quantitative extension of the sign of the displaced hegemonic power. Mamang Dai is a writer from Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh. She received prestigious Sahitya Academy award in 2017 for her novel *The Black Hill*. Her other notable works are *The Sky Queen*, *Stupid Cupid*, *The Mountain Harvest: The food of Arunachal Pradesh*, etc. The voice of Mamang Dai in *Stupid Cupid* records the power structure with simultaneous oppression and marginalization of the weaker sections focussing specially India's North East and creates an environment in understanding what we mean by hegemonic power. In *Stupid Cupid* Mamang Dai renders a variety of women characters belonging to different parts of India such as Adena, Mareb, Jia, Green, Shiela etc. The objective of this paper to highlight the discrepancies due to hegemonic power faced by the characters specially the girls from North East Indian in assimilating with the main stream metropolitan life. Here in this study attempt has been made to introspect the untold miseries as well as the progression of tribal women of North East India.

ANALYSIS: The North Eastern Region of India is often neglected as it is situated in a remote part of the country. Difference of geographical location, custom, culture, tradition and rituals also separated these people from the main stream of the country. Besides, in appearance the tribes of North East are more or less like the Chinese. As a result, whenever these people try to assimilate with the mainstream people of Delhi or other metropolitan cities, they often feel a sense of insecurity, a kind of negligence. And it is truer to the people of hill tribes living in the North Eastern states. Experiencing the bitterness of the Imperial rule these people often tried to speak. As in 1985 Gayatri Spivak threw a challenge to the race and class blindness of the Western academy, asking 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1985). The description of the place was the outcome of the point of view of the colonizers, which Edward Said calls "fantasies". The dawn of the twentieth century accompanied in the era of post-colonial studies. In this regard, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is a new direction to the post-colonial studies, as, he projected that colonialism had a discursive component. The

search for one's identity, for one's root has ever since become a major concern, as the world has become a global village marked by a rapid movement, displacement and resettlement of people---both within and outside the nation, which finds reflection in the writings of Mamang Dai's unique novel *Stupid Cupid*.

Moving from one place to other is a day-to-day life of every human being. In Indian too there are people moves from one state to the other for various reasons such as historic, socio-economic, cultural or personal reasons. This process may be called migration. Migration on the other hand creates a sense of homelessness and the experience that these people accumulate are not always good or enjoyable rather extremely bitter and intense. This is what one can see in the novel named *Stupid Cupid* by Mamang Dai. Here the novelist has focussed a new arena of characters, most of them are tribes of Arunachal Pradesh who longs to live a peaceful life, make a shift to the cities from the hills and to make themselves free from the hegemonic power. Adna the narrator of this novel shifted to New Delhi leaving her green home land in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh after completion of her Hotel Management course in Guwahati and Calcutta. Before leaving to Delhi, she had a dream to live a decent life having a peaceful meeting place where men and women, lovers and friend could freely exchange their feelings, which is quite common among the hill tribes. However, she has to face a number of embracing situations while she tries to book a room. The city dwellers or the main stream people of the metropolitan city like Delhi looked up this act as sin. Adna is portrait here as a broadminded progressive character who inherits a piece of property of her late aunt and plans to transform it into a lovely nest and named it as 'Four Seasons'. Adna is lucky to have a bungalow in Delhi to have her business. It has been conferred upon her by her aunt. Without its Adna would have not been able to buy it because during that time she has nothing to her credit. Besides she belongs to a middle-class family who may not have the power to buy even an apartment in Delhi. Mamang Dai has portrayed Adna in such way so that she could enjoy the city life without any hurdles. In other words, she was lucky to have all that she needs in Delhi. Yoyo her cousin always extends his helping hand to her in need. Yoyo is the one who bears all the trouble of the agency in looking after the customers. Adna says, "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)

Adna's 'Four Seasons' is a heaven for peace lovers. For Adna two people may just want sometime to see if they can rediscover a lost intensity and there is no adultery here:

"It is not quite adultery; I had said at the time. Even now, I did not see a meeting of likeminded 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 is in love with a man who is already married. She fell in love with him because when they first met Adna lives in a dreamy world of love, romance, liberty and ecstasy in Delhi. The name of the man who she loves is not mentioned in the novel. Adna calls him a friend and lives a happy comfortable life. Adna's relationship with her boyfriend from Delhi can be related to the intensely fixed tags of the girls of North East. North Eastern women are often considered as flexible and immoral. While most tribal women of North East when they travel in metropolitan cities carries a sense freedom, independence from their native places. Adna's boyfriend leaves her alone and without giving a reasonable explanation says that he is going to Canada. However, Adna's friend Green says the reality that he may not be travelling with his wife rather with a new girl.

Mareb, the first caller of 'Four Seasons' is another free styled woman who is married to Dayud and has daughter yet for excessive desire she came in the life of Rohit. Both Mareb and Rohit becomes close friend indulgent to meet each other decides to meet the agency of Adna and becomes her friend. Mareb resigns to the socially defined happy life with Dayud. In the novel Mamang Dai portrays Mareb as the most liberal minded woman who has been enjoying her life outside marriage because of her family constrain. Mareb agrees to marry Dayud of her father's choice. She says that she is not willing to live a life like her mother keeping herself to the four walls of her home. Dayud's marriage with Mareb has been his secondtime but his act is not such a big incident for he is a man but Mareb's relationship with Rohit is labelled as adulterous.

Rita is another tribal woman who is pursuing her studies in Delhi. She knows nothing about Adna nor about Jia. When she makes friendship with Yoyo, she becomes familiar to Adna. Highlighting the positive progression of North East Dai writes:

"Rita was from a different tribe from another district and neither Jia nor I knew anything about her. It is a big state, I told my friend, and for most of our history the different tribes had never even interacted with each other properly, even if they lived in the next valley. It was only now that young people like Yoyo and Rita were meeting in schools and colleges." (Dai 88)

Dai here also introduces another female character named Amine. Adna's close friend Amine, originally from Jammu but grown up in Shillong for her father's association with ONGC is not seen to encounter any difficulty for her tribal features. She also reacts to the stereotype marriage in Indian society which is often monogamy by declaring that marriage does not possess intensity. So, she justifies falling in love outside marriage to be "looking to rediscover something" (Dai 2)

The world of Adna is not always fair. The peaceful world of Adna has completely shattered just after the murder of Amine. She is murdered by the labours of Amine's bungalow. Not finding Adna, they go to Amine, as they often see Adna with her, in demand of some money. When Amine has refused, they slaughtered her taking the advantage of her husband's absence.

Amine's death shocked Adna. She is now afraid of living alone in her apartment and decides to return back to her homeland. Even Mareb is also blessed to had Dayud as her husband. Accept Jia all the woman characters portrayed by Mamang Dai have fail to enjoy independence and freedom in true sense. Jia has lost her baby at the age of eighteen. When her husband abused her for that incident, unable to bear the injustice she left home and come to Delhi for building up her career in Journalism.

The elderly people of Adna's family had always a fear how a girl like Adna can live in a big city like Delhi alone. As they often heard shocking news of rap, murders and cruelty in Delhi.

"From our hometown's news would reach us about family get-togethers and picnics, and the elders asked us when we would return. We knew this was their way of saying. They hoped we would marry and settle down with good, local men, because how would anyone meet the right person away from home... They followed the news about shocking murders and the cruelty of Delhi, which was reported daily. (Dai 14)

Adna is also aware of the differences when she says:

“Oh, the North East is a different country altogether” (Dai 13)

But she longs for an acceptance as she says:

“There were so many of us in the city now, from Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland from Arunachal Pradesh, Assam Manipur and Sikkim and we mingled with others from every small town and settlement of the country.” (Dai 13)

However, the difficulty always lies at the grass root level where the people of North East had to face the bitter experience when they try to assimilate with the main stream of the people. Jia a cousin of Adna narrates one such experience when she tries to hire a cab a Delhite woman shouts screams at her *“Hey! You! Jao! Go back to your town....* (Dai 52) to which Jia reacts:

“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!” (Dai 52)

CONCLUSION: Mamang Dai here uncovers the bitter truth that there is no security in Delhi for the people of North East. She narrates a number of such instances to highlight the fact that the problem of acceptance and rejection is not strict to one place, but is seen as a strategy to maintain to establish the hegemonic power. She also narrates the exploitation made by the central government in the name of development of North East. Despite of Cultural disparities between the tribal and non-tribal, Mamang Dai believes in pan Indian nationalism. She traces how the existence of customary law in hill region which allows polygamy to a man might sound socking in Delhi, the idea of buying a water bottle in Delhi sounds equally shocking to Jia. Mamang Dai through her *Stupid Cupid* persistently tries to communicate that the exploitation of the Capitalists and cultural rejection or hegemonic suppression can only be overcome by adequate representation of the frontier regions into the mainland.

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