

# Memory and Representation in the Legends of Pensam

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## Abstract

Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*, taps into the socio-cultural beliefs and practices of the Adi tribes of Siang valley by narrativising myths, oral legends, folktales and rituals. Blending myth, memory and history she outlines the multiple layers of history and culture – largely forgotten, marginalised, and silenced - unravelling in the process the incapacity of the official national narratives to fully accommodate or adequately express tribal sentiments. Her tales counterpose rational/national modernity narratives with a confident re-presentation of 'otherness', an 'otherness' that is primarily shaped by the exclusionary logic of the rational/reasonable. Dai, intertwines the personal and the political - the individual and the collective – while foregrounding the significance of memory and writing in the creation of oppositional agency. Deeply enmeshed in the Arunachal life and politics, the tales foreground an alternative aesthetic idiom and an anti-teleological enquiry to the established traditional (outdated) vs modern (progressive) rhetoric. The paper - drawing on Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism – attempts to explore Dai's bold narrative strategies that reorient and reimagine the popularly held beliefs about Arunachal, created and perpetuated by the culturally sanctioned hegemonic discourses on identity and authenticity.

**Keywords:** Myth, Memory, Self, Other, Identity, Authenticity, Nation, Representation

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