
Maritime Myths and Tribal Narratives: Examining the Indian Ocean's Influence in the Oral Traditions of North East Indian Tribes through Fictional Representations

Arathy AR¹

PhD Research Scholar, The Department of English and Foreign Languages, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore

Dr. P. Nagaraj²

Professor and Head, The Department of English and Foreign Languages, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore

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Abstract: Since ancient times, the Indian Ocean has represented more than a mere physical space and it has been an active platform for trade, migration and cultural intercourse that has greatly shaped socioeconomic and cultural structures across many societies. While intense academic work has been expended in making sense of such exchanges at a broader scale, a detailed narratives of these impacts on the tribal world of North East India have remained less studied. This paper explores these overlooked intersections focusing on how the oral traditions and fictional works of North East Indian tribes echo their historical maritime connections with the Indian Ocean realm.

This study illuminates the themes of migration, trade and cultural exchange through the lens of celebrated literary works such as Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* and Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps*. These texts steeped in the region's oral traditions offers a wide array of stories that reflect a deep albeit understated legacy of interaction with the Indian Ocean world. They reveal how seafaring routes and coastal engagements influenced material trade and fostered the flow of ideas, beliefs and identities that strongly weaving the local with the transregional.

Beyond the textual analysis, this study will discover historical, cultural and and also symbolic implications in these stories. It aims to provide an understanding of how sea links affected the ethos of the tribes imbuing their stories with a resonance that transcends time. By focusing on this interlinked heritage, this study looks forward to address a great lack in Indian Ocean research offering a fresh perspective on the tribal histories of North East India.

Keywords: Indian Ocean studies, Interconnected heritage, Trade and migration, Cultural exchanges, North East India, Tribal groups

Introduction: The Indian Ocean has always occupied a central role as a corridor for trade, migration and cultural exchanges that continue to influence the socio economic and cultural landscapes of countless societies. The stories surrounding the influence of the Indian Ocean on various tribal communities are still largely untold. This research paper highlights, the oral tradition and fictional works of tribes of North East India, to exhibit their historical connections to the Indian Ocean. Specifically, *The Black Hill* by Mamang Dai and *When the River Sleeps* by Easterine Kire to draw out the connected historical legacy in contemporary writing on themes of migration, trade and cultural exchanges. Rather than solely focusing on a textual analysis this study also hopes to investigate why the Indian Ocean has historically been important and what these narratives signify more broadly in terms of our pasts, cultures and symbols.

The Indian Ocean and North East India: Historical Context: As a critical axis for exchanges among civilizations, the Indian Ocean has led to the development of distinct cultural, linguistic and economic networks of interaction. Narrative framing in historical discourses focuses mainly on coastal communities and whilst the tribal groups from North East India may not have direct connections to this maritime world, we can argue their indirect connection is substantial. The historical documentation indicates trade routes connected the fertile plains and high mountain regions of North East India to the Indian Ocean through riverine connections and with unique modern modes of transport. This helps share commodities including spices, ivory, textile while also allowing the movement of cultural and spiritual practices. The Indian Ocean is also prominent in the community's myth and ritual and also the maritime theme is a strong one that often appears in their tribal festivals, or in their songs and oral history symbolizing journeys, resilience and transformation. The surrounding biodiversity drawing from the rich existence of its river systems and waterways paralleled many oceanic themes of interconnectedness and can be interpreted as a natural extension of the tribes cosmological vantage.

Fiction as a Medium of Historical Memory: Authors such as Mamang Dai and Easterine Kire are important to preserving and reinterpreting oral histories. They bridge the past and present through a unique blend of mythical and historical elements, creating complex representations of tribal life, and their relationship with the Indian Ocean. These texts show us how fiction can offer indigenous communities a means to articulate identity, reclaim a historical memory, and resist globalization's implications.

Analysis of Selected Works: Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* is a poetic narrative that intertwines the fabric of history and migration. The novel depicts the nature of how individuals and communities are connected within this remote part of the world.

The Indian Ocean and Its Doublings within the Hills: While the Indian Ocean does not connect with the terrains of the Himalaya, a variety of influences extend the story through the historically based networks of trade and migration, which connected the particular highlands to the world beyond. *The Black Hill* is the story of Gimur, a girl from a tribal community who leaves with Kajinsha. Their tale of love is situated within the mid nineteenth century of Northeast India; it is a time when foreign winds had pushed the East India Company into the region, together with inter tribe unrest and within the native dwellers superstitious xenophobia.

The character Kajinsha from the story of *The Black Hill* serves as a tribal priest who embodies the cultural and spiritual syncretism in whom those exchanges effused. Kajinsha's life and the life reverberation to us of his interactions point to the subtle engagement of local traditions with outside influences. As the products along trade routes found their way into the hills like the bamboo items, salt, textiles, metalware, and more to this horizon from the other was interpreted and inscribed in ways that transformed the economy of the commerce and the cultural environmental portraiture of the tribal communities. Not material objects alone, the cultural impressions came laden with airs of invisible imprints from their lands of origin.

Migration and Cultural Fusion: Migration serves as a prominent feature of *The Black Hill* both as voluntary and coerced action. The story studies the journey of Father Nicolas Krick, a French missionary, who navigated across dangerous terrain to reach the indigenous peoples in order to convert them into Christianity. It is this engagement of these outside influences and indigenous peoples that builds a complex tapestry of cultural engagement that is layered with conflict and understanding.

In this narrative Mamang Dai cleverly exposes how migration and trade in the Indian Ocean served as invisible threads that bound the seemingly isolated world of the hills, to the undercurrents of history. The novel ultimately challenges us to think about how despite their isolation, nowhere exists in a vacuum nor is any place solely determined by the cultural practices that are present there. All places are remade by the ebbs and flows of human activity over time and space.

Easterine Kire's When the River Sleeps: The world according to Naga mythology was covered in water initially and the seas were vast and uncharted. The ocean was a chaotic expanse and the spirits of the waters were untamed. A great serpent among these spirits often referred to as Naga, ruled the depths of the ocean. This serpent was not merely a creature but a powerful deity that embodies the essence of water and its dual nature.

The mythology says the earth was born from the chaotic waters through the actions of this mighty serpent. On one remarked day when it decided to organize and create from the chaos, the serpent raised from the depths and began to coil around itself. The serpent then began to twist in every direction causing the waters to stir with every twist and curve.

Gradually, the land began to rise from depths of ocean water. The beauty of the earth began to sculpt itself slowly, the islands began to form, but the serpent soon realized that she was not the only creator, and her creation was about to be thrown into imbalance. The sea spirits grew uneasy when the land and land living became abundant. The spirits feared loss, loss of their dominion. The great serpent called on the water spirits to balance and find harmony of land and sea. The snake would rule over the water and keep the tides balanced and respected the land above. Its people would live in harmony with the earth. That was the start of the life cycle. The rivers flowed from the mountains into the land and back to the sea, nourishing the land. The snake taught people to fish, and to harvest, and to pay respect to the water to have order and calmness. Fishermen learned to pay respect to the serpent and the water spirits were to be acknowledged before they went to sea. Fishermen created many rituals having offerings and prayers so that they could catch what they needed, while also acknowledging the powers of the ocean. The fishermen often dreamed of a snake, who guided them to large fishing areas and taught them how to fish without the destruction of nature.

The story depicts a moral lesson that the people must respect the serpent and the ocean and its connection. The serpent had the power to trigger storms and great floods or drought and was able to protect or harm his people if he was disrespected. There is a famous part of the legend in the story about the careless fisherman who after refusing to take the serpent's advice was met with a great storm that would destroy his boat and almost take his life. This event served as a cautionary tale reinforcing the need for balance with nature.

Identity and Belonging: In these selected texts, the connection between individual and collective identities was emphasized and deliberately placed within the context of historical and cultural discontinuities. The characters in both novels have a similar path towards self discovery within the constraints of external influences. This shows how tribal communities navigate their connections with the Indian ocean. These journeys raise larger questions of belonging and heritage and also portrays the ongoing tension exists between the assurance of rootedness and the uncertainty of mobility.

Globalization and Cultural Exchange: These fictional works demonstrate how globalization has impacted indigenous cultures. The narratives highlight how oral tradition continues to serve as archives of historical memory. The references to maritime influences capture wider cultural patterns of exchange and in these narratives tribal communities demonstrate continuity by adapting to external influences while retaining their unique tribal cultures.

Historical Memory and Storytelling: This article also indicates ways in which storytelling allows for the regeneration and reworking of historical memory. The maritime elements in texts by authors such as Mamang Dai and Easterine Kire allow the Indian Ocean to remain a living influence on historical story, memory, and cultural expressions of tribal traditions. The storytelling encloses a preservation of tradition as well as a site for dialogue with today's current global issues such as environmental sustainability and cultural preservation.

Conclusion: This study illustrates how the history and cultural connections of the Indian Ocean might be present in the oral forms and literary texts of the North East Indian tribes. Through a close examinations of *The Black Hill* and *When the River Sleeps*, the article demonstrate the significance of storytelling is a diverse means of representing, enhancing, and mediating tribal voices. These narratives not only reveal the maritime relations of the tribes, but also suggest broader issues regarding identity, globalization and historical memory. This study indicates how the Indian Ocean acts as a force of change in tribal worldviews, adds complexity to the discipline of postcolonial and indigenous studies, and attends to the disciplinary repertoire of an indigenous reading of history, culture, and identity in a globalized world.

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