


**Research Article**

## Historicality and Locationality: A Comparative Study of the poetic works of Mamang Dai and Eunice de Souza

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**Abstract**

This paper will examine how historicality and locationality are major elements in the poetic works of Mamang Dai and Eunice de Souza with a comparative approach towards their understanding. Both authors address the importance of historizing, the state of Being, revisionist history, and traditional knowledge system to form a true historical understanding of their time and space, which is being marginalised. The research relies on Heidegger's theory of Being and Time, Ranajit Guha's views on historicality and Tagore's view of Bharatvashi. These concepts bring a connection between the identity markers of a community, an individual and poetry as a witness within the society.

The study emphasises the way the works of Dai believe in the historical existence of human beings and locate the spaces and places within the parameters of memory, nostalgia and spirituality. Her works deal with alternative models of history, cultural memory and the problem of becoming geographically marginal. She brings to the centre the spiritualizing past of her community through repeated invocation and calls this recognition just the beginning. On the other hand, De Souza's works are historical but with a realisation of the nuances and are less nostalgic. She is more focused towards inclusive aspects rather than becoming liminal in terms of her Being.

Although they belong to different settings, as Dai is from the Northeast, the marginal and de Souza is from Goa, the mainland, they both perform and explore the idea that literature is a true witness of history at collective and individual levels. It can be the voice of both the marginal and the mainland group of people who are heterogeneous in nature. Every community depends upon the homogeneous performativity, and there the rituals get mythified with time, and this paper explores how the works of these two writers are trying to bring a pattern, a pattern which would help bring alternative identity and recognition through historicality and locationality.

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**KEYWORDS:** Historicality, Locationality, Being, Myth, Orality, Identity, Margin, Mainland.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Background

Poetry and history have been shaping each other since the early times of humanity and are ingredients of one another. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the poets became more conscious towards the utility of poetry and took it more as a witness to contemporary reality. Carolyne Forche popularised the phrase poetry of witness and said that the poet is the only evidence that the event occurred and the sole trace of occurrences. Thus poem is the witness, and the readers become witnesses too and a living archive. History denotes the time past, a storehouse of incidents and an overview of the connection between society, culture, politics, economics and so on. History has been explored by many, but the historicity is very much prior to history. It is the state of *Being* as expressed by Heidegger when he used the term 'Geschichtlichkeit'.

These authors dwell upon the idea of existence as historicity, as the *Being* does not leave the past behind and is affected in the process of existence. This survival of *Being* keeps the possibility of historical enquiry alive in the domain of present and historical culture and tradition. The gap exists between the present and primary form of existence, and this can be collected from the in-depth enquiry of self, identity, history, tradition and culture. Through proper observation, these two authors deal with such observations and demonstrate the historicity to bring consciousness.

Mamang Dai and Eunice de Souza are two voices whose works can be read to understand the context of historicity and locationality with a difference. Mamang Dai is a poet, novelist and journalist from Arunachal Pradesh, who writes on varied issues including environmental degradation, exploitation, marginalisation, loss of culture, identity and all kinds of oppression on land. She used the process of narrativity to bring focus on remembrance and recalling of the elements that made her community survive through the process of evolution. The revision of rituals has been emphasized and re-emphasised by her in the form of memory through literature.

Eunice De Souza is a Goan-Catholic poet who keenly administers her background through her works. Her poetry combines her experiences, anecdotes, confessions and the socio-political aspects connected to her community, people and the Indian mainstream understanding. The intensity of her words and thinking made her protest against the conservative ideas present in her community and society. She is trying to focus on the idea of historicity by fixing the concept of belongingness to the nation and eradicating the concrete idea of Indianness.

### 1.2 Research Problem

The topic of historicity is very prominent in many writers, but what makes the difference is that the locationality varies and has a varied exploration in writers from mainstream and margin. Thus, Mamang Dai and Eunice de Souza from both the sections have been chosen to bring the difference of understanding and the difference of practice they show in exploration of historiography. They are working upon the literature of resistance as they both have gone through the process of

misrepresentation and this issue of historicity is their way towards visibility.

### 1.3 Research Questions

- What can be said about Mamang Dai and Eunice de Souza in their poetic works as a reflection of their historicity and locationality?
- What is the role of poetic display of historicity and locationality?
- What do their literary representations have in common and the differences?

### 1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To study the depictions of historicity and locationality.
- To examine the process of identity formation within the literary domain.
- To examine the strategies of narration and thematic issues.

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

This work is relevant to recover the living history and identity of the heterogeneous communities and the historicity. The research gives voice to the geographically and politically marginalised voice and the mainstream voice by bringing together the works of Mamang Dai and Eunice de Souza. The poetic works of these writers fill the gap within historical discourse, which denies individuality and works through the filter of secular history. The alternative formation of history and moving away from collective history is the task intended by the writers, and this work is to focus upon such aspects found in their literary expression.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Historicity in Contemporary Literature

Heidegger and Ranajit Guha have developed the theoretical discourse on the idea of historicity and its expression in the field of literature and any other form of culture. Guha offers an important contribution in this discourse by questioning the authority of empirical historiography and how history, too, is focused towards lived experiences and memory. Guha brings back Tagore's nation of historicity, which prioritises the inner world rather than the external world and its conventions. This concept brings forth the significance of literature as a space for history. This perspective, which denies the binary between literature and history, maintains a stand that such historical dimensions of the writers can be a process to fill the gap in historiography that is unavailable.

The modern writers like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot combined memory, internal consciousness and life in everyday format, which is an essential part of history rather than the grand form of life alone. These fragmented forms of life with their deep ritualised and mythical understanding have a deeper history of formation of one's identity and self. In postcolonial literature, historicity recovers the memories, oral narratives and individual experiences methodically. It evolved as a resistance literature to the texts that blur the distinctiveness within the society. The comparative study of these two poets would help re-examine the oral narratives, memories of these poets from two

different sections, to examine how individual texts and narratives can shape and form a part of history without privileging the objective history alone. This is an important aspect of history studied in contemporary times with a view of historicity, and this historicity often gets connected with locationality.

## 2.2 Critical Scholarship of Mamang Dai

Mamang Dai is a well-known figure in the context of ecological studies, Naga identity, historical memory, along with an intimate reading of the culture and tradition of the region, which is getting lost. In the context of loss of the self of this region and its people, the study of historicity is very much prominent and necessary for survival with distinction and honour. From the perspective of historicizing and storytelling, it is the way of preservation that Dai seems to have understood, as the tribal history is not seen as continuity in Indian Historiography. It is a resistance against the secular and homogenising format of history.

The research also considers Dai's reconstruction of land as a resistance to the mainstream culture and history, and forming the land as a memory- a storehouse of all the battles the land has fought and survived the ecological imbalance done by the external forces and the bloodshed it has seen. The multicultural land of the Northeast, specifically Arunachal Pradesh for Dai has seen a lot of pain, and that is not still a part of mainstream history, thus her narratives upon the realism, myths of the Naga society set the framework for the historicity, and that is purely locational, based on locational belonging. She shares a territorial identity with her own community, which she acknowledges to keep it alive. Her reference to nature is the natural state of a human being who is born out of nature, who acts as a reservoir of history; to maintain continuity through generational inheritance of regional awareness. She is working towards an alternative formation of history by getting connected to the ancient roots rather than losing the connection.

## 2.3 Critical Scholarship of Eunice de Souza

Eunice de Souza has more critical attention towards gender, identity, societal norms, with a custodianship towards her own culture, community and sources of identity. She blends within her work anecdotes, confessions, and experiences of the Goan Christian community, which has a false sense of superiority and a hybrid origin as compared to other states. She even had an unwillingness to go deeper into the understanding of her community, as it was conservative and pushed her to acquire such an identity which is singular and static and fixed. She is claiming the fact that there are ways of belonging to the idea of Indianness and there should not be any fixed definition for it. Her works challenge the social norms and voice the complexities which shape individual position and its understanding. She explores the relationship between identity and tradition that is unique and rooted and suggests that an artist does not come under the framework to locate their specific locationality through national symbols. Historicity emerges in connection with cultural history and heritage and also with a shared sense of belongingness.

## 2.4 Research Gap

Though the available works offer useful information about the works of the two poets, the majority of the works done considers their works separately but not in comparison with each other. No work is as such done to understand the idea of historicity in the works of Mamang Dai and Eunice de Souza. This article attempts to understand how they display the idea of historicity yet with a difference in the sense of locationality. This work tries to bridge the gap by presenting the two authors from different time periods and different zones and sections to give a wide view of the picture of literature works in multiple levels.

## 3. Theoretical framework of Historicity

Heidegger's work is taken into account, which is upon existential philosophy and the concept of Being. He is of the view that human existence is not away from history and it is within the time and experiences of individuals that history resides. In his *Being and Time*, he argues that human beings are not just an observer of the events and time but are situated within it. The term *Dasein* was used by him to express human existence in the world through experiences through everyday understanding. This is how humans become part of history by foregrounding subjective experiences.

Ranjit Guha's *History at the Limits of World History* is an important theoretical framework to highlight the connection between history and literature (in the form of memory and individual experiences). This work is a critique of history's dependency upon just chronology, mainstream and majority narratives. This aspect or understanding of history made it lack historicity of the common people and it is actually a colonial process which needs to end. Guha brings focus towards Tagore's idea of historicity, which is very much found in literature and thus fills the gap with history, which is unable to access all.

This work is contemporary and thus is relevant to do research on this field as it questions the boundaries between history and literature. The marginalized who are left behind and not being covered in history gets the opportunity to be included in such narratives, which are considered historiographical aspects with all the voices and narratives that achieve significance in historical discourse. He connects with subaltern historiography and the idea of facticity of being is a theoretical basis for understanding the texts which have oral memory, culture, and tradition and lived experiences.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

The current research work undergoes qualitative comparative approach to understand how the authors Mamang Dai and Eunice de Souza explore and utilize the blurred boundaries between history and literature. This approach would include a close reading of the poems and interpretation of the texts in order to understand how they have depicted the themes of oral memory, identity, rituals, myths, culture and tradition. The principal work is to do the comparative study of the two poets to understand the themes better and to bring thematic parallels and contradictions, if any, in the representation of historicity and locationality. The study is focused towards the narratives present in text regarding the community, mythical stories, memories that connect the historicity and there are other observations from different

writers to give an explanation of the context, to support the argument and provide rationale of the reading. This research is focused on limited texts as the representation of all the aspects of an author's work is not possible within such limited scope. Although the secondary resources have been checked including articles, book and theoretical reading from various authors, thinkers, theorists to bring an understanding of the larger context. The study is fully text based, without much ethnographic study or field visit but the aim is to bring contribution to the field of literature with a multidisciplinary view.

## 5. Analysis

### 5.1 Historicality in the works of Mamang Dai

Mamand Dai carries the history of her tribe and is being narrated with a purpose to contribute to the understanding of the next generation. Her re-telling of mythical stories helps in the construction of *Being* (as per Heidegger), the identity and entity of an individual within a community. She emphasizes the connection between story-telling and its culture with identity and its agency. Within such narration present in the collections, there are certain missing parts which get filled by the individual experiences which act as historiography. Nature plays a significant role in her works and she urges the community members to recall and remember the voice of rivers and hills - part of cultural memory. Cultural memory is an important aspect which shapes the identity of an individual, especially from Northeast, who is losing sense of history. Neither they are part of the collective history of mainland nor are they keeping their own history alive through remembrance or writing. Dai is constantly using the term remember in many of her poems to recall the Adi culture in the form of nostalgia to inspire the future generation for further aspiration.

Dai in her poems is emphasizing the aspect of self-recognition and historicality which is possible through a presence in narratives that reflects back upon the stories which are old and precious but due to changes at many levels the roots seems to have mutilated and she needs to rework on it. This re-working includes the alternative formation of history, where the self would meet the primordial self and talk about the forgotten past. Dai portrays all the minute details and elements of Arunachal Pradesh and its communities, which cannot be found in history and this cosmic vision helps her form an alternative history which is missing. Her ancestral beliefs of the worshipping of nature by human beings have many patterns and stories connected to it, becoming the storehouse of historical and cultural heritage, which is getting extinct with time. Historicality is therefore carried upon by the human being and thus has a vulnerability which needs to be strengthened by the writing process. Here her poetry works towards such wealth of history as myth and history fertilize each other and also is interdependent (Peter Munz). She explains why such narratives are very much important to keep the marginal land away from varied misrepresentations of the mainland and also to keep their identity alive which is rooted and modern.

### 5.2 Historicality in the works of Eunice de Souza

Eunice de Souza is a Goan-Catholic poet who works on her community background through her works. This study brings her keen sense to acquire an identity which is not fixed and she promotes multiplicity and flexibility. She brings in her poetic works such themes which can connect people from every location and region. Goa has faced both primary and secondary colonization and has a history which is not aligned with the national history. The discourse of Goa often seemed to be different from mainstream India and her works highlight what Goa shares with the rest of India. She explains that there are matters which can concern everyone without distinction and poetry should portray them. Even if there is a difference in the themes of discussion between mainstream and marginal, yet the themes she wants to express through her poetic works are beyond such boundaries.

De Souza tries to establish an identity of her, a collective identity rather than restricted. She explores her cultural identity yet exposes its conservative outlook and thus works on mainstream critical engagement. She criticizes the conventional ideas of Indian society- patriarchal authority, women oppression, sexual hypocrisy and many more. Her sense of historicality is history in making reference to the contemporary situation rather than just sticking to the history of the ancestral past. She rejects the objectivity connected to the idea of women as a figure who is burdened to act as per the roles assigned to her. She wants to move away from such historicality which never acknowledges the changes and human agency within it. She narrates her helping her look away from the past and yet learning from the past which is a psychological journey for the present to revive.

## 6. Comparative Analysis

### 6.1 In terms of Historicality

Mamang Dai and Eunice de Souza both reflect upon historicality from their own sense of history and its connection to individuals. Unlike Dai, de Souza never cherishes nostalgia; her past memory is full of prejudice and cultural indifference. De Souza is trying to re-position herself in the mainstream parameter of themes. Dai is full of remembrance to bring the historicality present in her community's storehouse to spiritualize the past and strengthen her community. De Souza on the other hand is expressing her disbelief in such a mystical history of the past which is communal and orthodox. She is more positive towards multimodal identity and more close to the mainstream framework.

### 6.2 In terms of Locationality

In terms of locationality their concepts are totally different as for Dai it is a territorial region which is being repeatedly linked to the community and its idea of identity formation. For the Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh, it is not a specific place but a spiritual agency that connects them all in a single thread of rituals, customs and creation myths. For de Souza, the location means a location of a poet, a critic and self which keeps on changing and thus no space can narrow down the identity to specific markers within the society or location. Dai's location is within the memory and for de Souza it is very temporary, as it is

expressed by her in terms of how it is being seen by the others, not just self.

## 7. DISCUSSION

The comparison of the poetic works of both the poets reveals how the literature acts as a bridge to connect the past and the present and depict historicity and locationality. The collapsing of distance between the past and present, event and reflection, witness and experience is being done by the writers and literature (Bruce King). The two authors act as custodian of their own community and depict how it has an impact upon them. They both refer to their specific regions to which they belong and they both see the space as being marginalized in terms of the discourse they follow. De Souza tries to move away from such community beliefs but Dai tries to go closer and explore them with a purpose of preservation. Although they both act as preservers yet there is a difference in attitude towards it. Historicity is the true historical existence of man (Ranajit Guha), and the position of Northeast as marginal land often positions it outside of the historic claims and thus a non-extant within the secular identity. Dai is working towards an identity formation, which gives her community a space rather than stark denial. De Souza is also vocal about such liminal history and wants to bring a change through her works. Both the authors emphasize upon story-telling as a practice of cultural activism and identity formation.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This paper identifies the theme of historicity and locationality in the works of Mamang Dai and Eunice de Souza as they express through their poetic works specifically. They both understand history as a connecting point with the past and helps bring continuity between the past and present (Ranjan Ghosh). They both show how women's voice is so important to keep the historicity alive through the work of story-telling which is a practice continued by mostly women in the society. Memory and forgetting are the concepts which are very important to set a discourse and keep it alive within the social context. Women writers and their sensitivity towards history is also an aspect which is focused upon to understand how they can be the connecting links in spite of the various forms of oppression they go through. This alternative way of looking at history can be done in future with many different writers with different cultural backgrounds.

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