



## Myth and Ecology: A Study of Arunachal Pradesh through the Lenses of Literature and Celluloid

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### Abstract

The current obsession with mythology when it comes to the climate crisis and ecology does not endorse an attitude of nostalgia for the lost paradise; on the contrary, it reflects a new attitude towards nature and the more-than-human world. Myths are nowadays used to criticize the damaging impact of humankind on its ecosystems. Myths are employed to highlight an imbricate relationship of human beings with nature. Amidst ecological collapse and environmental catastrophe, humankind is surrounded by indications that our habitat is turning against us. The present paper attempts to study how the land of Arunachal Pradesh has been encroached by the process of modernization. The ecology of this pristine land has been disrupted. Mamang Dai's novella *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) and Amar Kaushik's movie *Bhediya* (2022) utilize the local myths to throw ample light on the issue of ecological decay on the land of Arunachal Pradesh due to a modern capitalist economy, which is indifferent towards ecological balance. Both Mamang Dai and Amar Kaushik aptly show that while extreme environmental effects and remarkable changes in weather patterns are not uncommon in many other parts of the world, the South Asian countries stand to witness significant adjustments in their socio-economic fronts owing to such rapid and irreversible alterations. The present paper attempts to locate the crisis faced by the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh as they have to undergo a radical process of transformation and adjustment as a result of the implementation of modern technology and a capitalist economy on their land. Both *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) and *Bhediya* (2022) oppose deforestation in the name of road-building. The proposed work will emphasize close scrutiny and analysis of the chosen text and movie, and the explications will be complemented with theoretical build-up.

**Keywords:** Climate, Ecology, Myth, Forest, Species, Nature



Climate Action

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Decision-making about climate change is not only shaped by rational considerations, but also influenced by how communities define themselves, by historic or fictional narratives, and by collective memories. The influence of regional collective identities and knowledge is important in shaping the perception of climate change. These perceptions can influence the adaptive capacity to climate change positively, if values and collective identities of people are considered, or negatively, if people see their values and collective identities not taken into consideration or even threatened. The people of Arunachal Pradesh display a distinct consciousness regarding nature. For them, nature is sacred. They are saddened over the fact that their traditional lives based on nature are getting displaced and manipulated by the rapid and powerful waves of political and economic modernity in the pursuit of advantage and power. The perception of the local Arunachali people matters when it comes to industrial planning at the cost of nature because, ultimately, it is these people who suffer due to changes in the natural environment of the land. The beautiful landscape of Arunachal Pradesh is enchanting. Mamang Dai (2006) writes, "When you look at the land you forget your aches and pains" (p. xi). Unfortunately, the pristine forests and rich biodiversity of Arunachal Pradesh are being hampered on the pretext of progress and advancement. Intangible and nonmaterial aspects such as values, perceptions, or identities have received little attention when it comes to the climate crisis. India is an important component of South Asia. The vast geography of India adds to its uniqueness as a South-Asian nation. The Indian nation is diverse, and this diversity leads to a heterogeneous climate pattern consisting of different weather during different seasons all over. The climate and weather of Northeast India are typically different due to its proximity to the tropics. The north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh has tundra or alpine-type weather patterns due to its elevation. Climate change "policy underemphasizes, or more often, ignores completely, the symbolic and psychological aspects of settlements, places and risks to them" (Adger et al., 2011, P.2) even though these places highlight the emotional, symbolic, spiritual, and widely perceived intrinsic values of the environment.

Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) beautifully maps the densely covered mountains of Arunachal Pradesh. The people inhabiting this 'in-between' place of pensam are shown to be in perfect sync with the elements of nature or environment surrounding them. The readers also find detailed descriptions of the geographical features of the origin as well as the distinctive mental and emotional set-up of its inhabitants. Glotfelty's (1996) definition of Ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (p. xviii) is well evident in Mamang Dai's novella, as it represents how the Adi community is intrinsically related to the environment. Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* presents the world of the Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh, the traditional life-scapes of the community, the gradual changes that come with the onslaught of modernity, and the negotiation of these changes among the marginal people through memories and legends. Adi creation myths, ritual journeys, and shamans come alive, taking us to a different world dominated by origin myths and belief systems. Mamang Dai brings her knowledge of

the primitive customs and beliefs of her people to recount the many legends that influence the lives of the Adis. Being adherents "... of the animistic faith, the Adis believe in co-existence with the natural world and the spirit that is part of the forests, rivers, and the vales. Thus, their stories reflect a half-revealed and half-concealed world, sometimes to be left by the subconscious rather than seen with ordinary eyes" (Biswas, 2006, p.10). In the context of the stories, *Pensam* implies a transitional place, a literal middle ground of the Adi people existing between the traditional and modern ways of their lives. Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* can be regarded as a saga of the progression of changes. The stories accurately describe the devastation caused to the natural world in this pristine land. At the very outset, the thick landscape of the territory of the Adis in the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh is hinted at as the narrator takes us into the "hidden valleys" (Dai, 2006, p.3) which she calls her home. The proximity to nature of the people of Arunachal Pradesh can be guessed when the narrator states that she is from "a village where boys kicked rocks around pretending at football" (Dai, 2006, p.3). Mamang Dai uses the local myths to discuss the lives of the Adis. Many of the myths reveal the interconnectedness between human beings and nature. These myths also act as a reflection of the cultural lives of the Adis. These myths make us realize that the "stories we tell about nature and our place in it matter deeply, as they guide our individual and collective behaviour towards the environment" (Heise, 2019, p.276). The Adi people attempt to negotiate between the past, which lived in raw nature, and the present, which is stripped of a natural and organic way of life, through various myths that speak about the interrelation of the human world and the natural world. The projection of the oral tradition plays a very crucial role in the lives of the indigenous communities, as orality has been the chosen mode of transmitting their history and cultural heritage, while these have been marginalized by the mainstream and dominant forces. A vivacious storytelling tradition is the pride and possession of most of the communities from Northeast India. Many native writers from the indigenous communities of Northeast India endorse elements from their oral traditions in their writings as a protest against the intrusive forces that have negative effects upon the ecology and culture of their lands. Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* maps the myths and oral culture based on the pure nature of the "face-to-face communities" (Dubey, 2011, p.101) which separates itself from the abstruse nature of the modern capitalist economy based on exploitation. Mamang Dai portrays the land with myriad details. One important quality of Dai's work is its unequivocal commitment to the artist's responsibility to the community.

Arunachal Pradesh, the land of the rising sun, situated in the north eastern part of India, is a land of lush, green forests, deep river valleys, and beautiful plateaus. The land is mostly mountainous and is full of dense forests. Isolation imposed by geography has led over twenty-six major tribes with several dialects to live and flourish with their distinct identities and cultures, which find expression in faith, belief, song, dance, and dress. Arunachal Pradesh is also richly endowed with natural resources such as dolomite, graphite, lime stone, marble, coal, oil, natural gases, and hydroelectric potentialities. This land with kaleidoscopic beauty comes to life in the pages of

Mamang Dai's novella. Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha (1995) have coined the term "ecosystem people" to refer to "those people who depend on the natural environments of their own locality to meet most of their material needs" (p.3). This definition is clearly justified in the context of the Adi people of Arunachal Pradesh. Mamang Dai in *The Legends of Pensam* presents before the readers the rustic way of life of the Adi people. The placid narrative used conveys the easy and comfortable life of the Adi people that is attached to the very core of nature. Uninterrupted by the outside world, these people love solitude and do not love the hustle and bustle of the modern world. In these villages, the fields are patchy clearings that dot the thickly wooded hillsides far from the homes of the people:

Every household has plots here for growing vegetables and herbs. These are the open workplaces that their owners grow so accustomed to that they set off from home very early to work all morning, weeding, clearing, and planting. They carry their food with them, and when the sun is high overhead, they shelter in small thatch shacks and eat their midday meal and stretch out by the fire, sipping black tea. This outdoor life in the clear and silent space of the high valleys is addictive, and some villagers often spend the night in their solitary shacks. The others, who leave, pile all the days' pickings of green chillies, pumpkins, yams, and ginger into their baskets before setting off on the long trek back to their village. (Dai, 2006. P.27)

The life of the Adi people used to be self-sufficient, and they could manage well with their own resources of land before the coming of modernization. But with changing times, needs and demands increased, and the meagre resources that they had were not sufficient for them. It is quite obvious that these people living a life without any disturbances are averse to the modern world and are unable to cope with its rapid changes.

At the centre of the narrative of Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*, there is not an urgency to resolve the crisis by rejecting the project of capitalism; rather, what makes the narrative significant is the buttressing of a model of growth where the universal concept of modernizing progress is tested against the indigenous value system of the land. It appeals to a re-scrutiny of development that fosters imbalance and inequality across the human and nonhuman world. The storehouse of myths that the Adi people cherish in their hearts serves not only as explanations for natural phenomena but also as vehicles for conveying moral and social values. The author confirms that the colour green best represents the land of Arunachal Pradesh and affirms that green is "the colour of escape and solitude" (Dai, 2006, p.8). The reference to the colour green solidifies the idea that the people are deeply rooted in their immediate surroundings. The eminent comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell (1988) has remarked that "myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths" (p.416). The nature myths of Arunachal Pradesh are fixed in the collective memory of the local people, and these myths show their respect, love, reverence, awe, and terror towards nature. The myth of *Biribik*, the water serpent, explains how a fisherman, when alone with his nets by the river, saw a serpent which had a head with horns and died of a wasting illness. The

people believe that to see a *Biribik* is an ill sign, and if anyone happens to see this creature, that person is bound to die. Normally, a serpent does not bear a horn on its head; a serpent with horns is an unnatural thing to see. This myth is significant as it suggests that any violation of the order of nature is unwelcome, and if this happens, it is bound to bring bad luck. A place "is not merely a compilation of physical factors or set of geographic coordinates, but rather a cultural construct" (Herrick, 2018, p.84). In her novella, Mamang Dai beautifully constructs the cultural identity of her place through a mixture of myth, ecology, and the cultural heritage of the Adi people.

The indigenous communities have to struggle hard as their natural resources are encroached on for development purposes by those in positions of power. In the era of globalization, development projects and capitalism severely affect both indigenous communities and ecology. By including the cultural myths of the Adi people, Mamang Dai attempts to underscore the need to rethink development paradigms that often allow economic exploitation over ecological and cultural preservation. One particular myth of Arunachal Pradesh is the myth of the *miti-mili* race. The Adi people believe that "once upon a time, there lived a race of supernatural beings called the *miti-mili*. These small, quiet people were the first to make the mysterious *si-ye*, which is the yeast used to ferment rice into beer. Before the *miti-mili* race disappeared, deranged by strange visions, they gave this sacred powder to mankind, and a strong belief grew that *si-ye* had special powers and that it was something to be handled with respect" (Dai, 2006, p.28). The handing over of *si-ye* by the *miti-mili* race to the human beings is significant as it suggests the trust in humans to be protective towards nature. The Adi people handle *si-ye* with great respect and care, and they "sprinkle *si-ye* on the eyelids of those who die an unnatural death, so that their spirit will not return on some restless search" (Dai, 2006, p.29). These traditional myths may look like supernatural accounts for the modern and improved society, but these myths express a way of life in the tribal society that is based on nature. Environmental crisis is "as much a crisis of the imagination as of the environment" (Buell, 2005, p.240). The myths based on nature fuel the imagination of the people to motivate them towards the preservation of ecology and other species.

As Said puts it in his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993),

The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future----these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative....The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them. (p. xii-xiii)

In case of the Adi people of Arunachal Pradesh, the myths they narrate, transmit, and inherit across generations reveal their rootedness to their lands. The mythical narratives shape and influence their perceptions of and relations to their land. Landscapes are material presences integral to the politics of culture, identity, and place of the Adi people. The Adi people own their land through their cultural beliefs and

practices. The myths and practices preserved in the form of mythical stories not only transfer the socio-cultural and political ethos of their society but also make them realize their own roles in the preservation of their lands. We do trace a paradigm of eco-spirituality which need not lead to a progressive and cultured civilization but to a change in perspective that lets the natural be free without attempting to tame it and perceive it as an ever-present, all-encompassing life force. The Adi people believe in the myth of the existence of "a green and virgin land under a gracious and just rule" (Dai, 2006, p.42). They believe that with the fall of human values, people begin to decimate their forests and land, and "the big trees were brought down. The spirits of our ancestors who dwelt in these high and secret places fell with the trees. They were homeless, and so they went away. And everything had changed since then. The canopy of shelter and tradition had fallen. The wind and the sun burned our faces" (Dai, 2006, p.42). These myths promote conservation and sustainability, cautioning against the exploitation of natural resources and emphasizing the importance of living in harmony with nature to avoid the contemporary climate crisis.

Forests, rivers, and animals prominently figure in the myths of the Adi community, and they carry hidden ecological meanings and values transmitted across generations. These myths harmonize, organize, and reflect a sense of rootedness towards ecology. These myths are rich in ecological motifs, highlighting the cultural significance of nature in the Adi worldview. The serpent ritual, where the spirit of a dead snake is invoked to have mercy on a sick child, is a practice that is based on the myth of negotiation between animal spirits and humans. The Adi people's spiritual reverence for nature and the animal world highlights the ecological wisdom of the Adi people, who have lived in harmony with nature for centuries, emphasizing the importance of traditional knowledge in conservation efforts. The Adi people cherish their creation myth, which marks that:

In the beginning, there was only Keyum. Nothingness. It was neither darkness nor light, nor had it any colour, shape, or movement. Keyum is the remote past, way beyond the reach of our senses. It is the place of ancient things from where no answer is received. Out of this place of great stillness, the first flicker of thought began to shine like a light in the soul of man. It became a shimmering trail, took shape, expanded, and became the Pathway. Out of this nebulous zone, a spark was born that was the light of imagination. The spark grew into a shining stream that was the consciousness of man, and from this all the stories of the world and all its creatures came into being. (Dai, 2006, p.56)

The creation myth assumes that the consciousness of man is linked to the other species in the ecological order. The Adi myths oppose the prevailing anthropocentric notion, which establishes the superiority of men over other beings of ecology. The Adi people believe that "the life of a man is measured by his actions, and his actions are good if their origin is pure. From nothingness we have come to be born under the stars, and almighty Donyi-polo, the sun and the moon, whose light shines on all equally, is the invisible force that guides each one of us" (Dai, 2006, p.57). The narrative of *The Legends of Pensam* also includes the hardships of the Adi people as they have to bear

natural calamities very often: "It rains during the day, it rains all night. It can rain nonstop for sixty-two days at a time. Not a peep of sunshine. Not a breath of wind. Every summer the tangled undergrowth clinging to the hills is swept away by the downpour, causing landslides that cut off all communication and links" (Dai, 2006, p.37). But still the Adi people are not averse towards nature and feel comfortable in the lap of nature. They believe that their land has the quality of absorbing people "into a forgotten newness of things" (Dai, 2006, p.37). The interaction between species in the natural world has been characterized by human domination. By incorporating the Adi myths in her *The Legends of Pensam* (2006), Mamang Dai asserts that human beings depend on natural diversity and all species depend on one another, hence, only a sympathetic attitude towards nature and other species on the part of human beings can save this earth from destruction.

The assertion of the synergic relationship between human beings and the natural world is the key idea in Amar Kaushik's movie *Bhediya* (2022). By drawing attention to the symmetry between human actions and environmental catastrophe, the movie encourages us to untangle the recursive environmental consequences of our capitalist era, marked by heavy industrial projects at the cost of ecological damage. Set against the backdrop of Arunachal Pradesh, the narrative of the movie articulates that human nature is intertwined with the natural world, indigenous cultures should be protected, and our relationships with other beings should be nurtured. The movie is built on the myth of *yapum* (shape-shifting wolf), the protector of natural order, who threatens or kills those who violate the law of nature. The storyline of the movie is simple, but the issues raised are intricate as well as complex, and the myth of *yapum* incorporated in the narrative of the movie accurately justifies the ecological issues and concerns raised throughout the movie.

In the movie, we see the character Bhaskar Sharma (Varun Dhawan), a greedy contractor from a Delhi-based multinational company, coming to the town of Ziro in Arunachal Pradesh for a road-building project that needs to cut down the trees of the forests. Bhaskar is bitten by *yapum* which is referred to as *vishanu* or virus in the context of the movie. *Yapum* is represented in the movie as the shape-shifting wolf that guards the jungles and bites those who attempt to harm nature. Bhaskar himself is transformed into a *yapum* and begins to kill people associated with the road-building project who destroy nature in the name of advancement and progress. Finally, it is revealed that Bhaskar's love interest Anika (Kriti Sanon), a veterinary doctor, is the original *yapum* who has been protecting the forests for a hundred years. Different characters like Mr. Panda, the local liaison (Deepak Dobriyal), Mr. Neri, the local engineer (Baharul Islam), Prakash Paja, the timber contractor (Dosam Beyond), Janardan, Bhaskar's prejudiced cousin (Abhishek Banerjee), Jomin, the in-house contractor with progressive views (Paalin Kabak), Mr. Bagga, the Indian chief of the multinational company (Saurabh Shukla) are aptly fitted into the narrative of the movie dense with eco-cultural concerns.

The myth of the shape-shifting wolf is entangled with various facets of ecology. We have already seen in Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* that the Arunachali people

consider the forest and its animals as sacred, and these beliefs stem from their spiritual connection with the environment. The local people consider that these connections are interlinked with their survival and preservation. These “places are considered sacred and auspicious as it is believed that some supernatural spirits haunt these places and thus a vast tract of land is protected from destruction” (Barua, 2009, p.41). Amar Kaushik’s *Bhediya* appropriately situates the myth of the shape-shifting wolf with the oral myths and totemic beliefs of the local people from Arunachal Pradesh. Here, behind the narrative of a shape-shifting wolf, lies a catastrophic corruption of natural order.

The myth of wilderness as a savage and threatening place has contributed to configuring a positive vision of urban societies and artificial spaces under the control of humans. But evocations of certain ancient myths, like *yapum*, project an attitude and ethic of responsibility towards nature. Such myths are validated as important points of reference in the quest for a new understanding of the natural world and effective interspecies communication. The forest works as a functioning metaphor in *Bhediya*, which justifies the claim. In this regard, we can cite these words of Robert Pogue Harrison:

Ecological concern over forests goes beyond just the forests in so far as forests have now become metonymies for the earth as a whole. What is true for a particular forest’s ecosystem is true for the totality of the biosphere. Humanity begins to appear in a new light: as species caught in the delicate and diverse web of a forestlike planetary environment. More precisely, we are beginning to appear to ourselves as a species of parasite that threatens to destroy the hosting organism as a whole. (Harrison, 1992, p.199)

The shape-shifting wolf in the movie is a part of the ecological system. The wolf is not a threat to humanity, rather, it is a part of the natural order, which is capable of correcting the mistakes made by humans and restoring the very balance to the Earth. The audience has to learn that the wolf cannot do it alone; in fact, it needs the help of humans to rejuvenate the Earth. The wolf, though projected as a man-eater, becomes devoid of its dreadfulness and gets more and more humanized in its affection towards the earth and its creatures. The myth of *yapum* effectively shows the shift from a human-centred to a nature-centred system of values that can be attributed to deep ecology as deep ecology “is concerned with encouraging an egalitarian attitude on the part of humans not only toward all members of the ecosphere, but even toward all identifiable entities or forms in the ecosphere. Thus, this attitude is intended to extend, for example, to such entities (or forms) as rivers, landscapes, and even species and social systems considered in their own right” (Sessions, 1995, p.270).

The binary between man and nature, civilization and primitiveness, urban and tribal, etc., sets the narrative of the movie in motion. Arunachal Pradesh has a “long tradition of local self-governance...community institutions governing various aspects of their personal and collective lives” (Mishra and Mishra, 2016, p.149). They protest Bhaskar’s indifferent attitude towards nature regarding the road-building project. Bhaskar’s casual attitude towards nature is reflected when he says, “the plants in our balcony are



the closest things to nature to us" (Kaushik, 2022). This attitude of Bhaskar is representative of modern capitalist society's attitude of negligence towards biodiversity. This kind of crony capitalism has resulted in "a harmful business environment, it looks challenging to promote environmental protection, mass welfare, and coordinated economic development" (Shahnazi et al., 2024, p.2). Increasing privatization and adoption of the ideology of the free market have brought prosperity in different countries along with unforeseen consequences, including environmental degradation. The cinematic text pursues its line of capitalist critique by effectively employing the myth of *yapum*. Even after being pathetically bitten by the wolf, Bhaskar declares, "In real life, only one greenery matters. The greenery of bills! Money! ...Forest doesn't fit in anywhere amid all this. This is how I am. The whole world is such" (Kaushik, 2022). Greed for money and commitment to heavy industry at the cost of nature are signs of the downfall of the human race. Metaphorically, the image of *yapum* represents the resurrection of the archetype of the 'noble savage', uncorrupted by human civilization based on corruption and materialism.

The myth of *yapum* is beautifully woven into the whole story. The green land of Arunachal Pradesh is highlighted throughout the movie. Myths around forests, rivers, and animals add an additional dimension to the cultural construction of Arunachal Pradesh. The wildlife of Arunachal Pradesh is rich and varied. Elephants and tigers are abundantly found in the foothill areas. The leopards and jungle cats are quite common in the territory. Rare species of snakes live in the dense forests of the region. The mithun, a semi-domesticated animal, is the most precious possession of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. This animal has religious significance and an intimate relationship with the socio-economic life of the people. Traditionally, the mithun is a unit of wealth and allowed to move freely in the jungle till it is brought home either for meat on festival occasions and marriage, or for sale or barter. Bhaskar's disrespect for this revered animal of Arunachal Pradesh is strongly highlighted in the movie. When Bhaskar makes some sarcastic comments on the beliefs of Arunachali people regarding the Mithun, Panda says, "No, no! No, sir. It's called a Mithun. Never insult a Mithun. Its ego is really huge" (Kaushik, 2022). But Bhaskar laughs and continues his sarcasm. Here, Bhaskar is totally dismissive of the eco-cultural myths that teach humans to respect other species. Bhaskar's behaviour can be criticized from the ecocritical perspective as Bhaskar represents here polarization or "hyper separation" (Plumwood, 1993, p.47) between humans and animals, which is based on the exploitative notion that animals are radically different from, and inferior to, humans because animals are bodies without minds.

Myths like *yapum* oppose this idea of human superiority and attempt to establish an ecological attitude based on balance and equality. *Yapum* or *Vishanu* is the supernatural werewolf in the movie. Whoever comes and tries to harm the jungle, the werewolf attacks the person, and the victim becomes another werewolf. When Bhaskar is terribly bitten by the werewolf, he is gradually transformed into a werewolf himself. Bhaskar, in his werewolf form, is protective of nature, but his human self wants the road-building project to be completed so that he can derive enough money out of the

project. Bhaskar suffers a real crisis as he is divided between two selves, i.e., human and animal. Bhaskar's internal conflict between being practical and ideological can be seen as a metaphorical representation of the external conflict between human progress and development, and the preservation of nature. The myth of *yapum* reminds us that the relationship between Earth and World is not a simple one. Responsible humans have an implicit duty to let things disclose themselves in their own inimitable way, rather than forcing them into meanings and identities that suit their own instrumental values.

In the movie *Bhediya*, while describing the Arunachali people, Panda remarks that "the Apatani tribal folks have been living in this jungle for over twenty generations. This is not just their home but their entire livelihood. They worship these forests" (Kaushik, 2022). This description brings to mind the concept of "ecosystem people" as mentioned in Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* (p.31) while referring to the Adi tribe. The local tribes of Arunachal Pradesh show their apprehension towards any elements that can cause damage to their forests, as forests are emblematic of wilderness, which signifies nature in a state uncontaminated by civilization. These are the most potent constructions of nature to protect particular habitats and species, and are seen as a place for the reinvigoration of those tired of the moral and material pollution of the city. Forests have an almost sacramental value: they hold out the promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the earth, found in a space of purity, founded in an attitude of reverence and humility.

The myth of *yapum* is reimagined and adapted to the theme of ecological sustainability. The myth validates the idea that once the human mind is seen as the sole source and locus of value, rejecting nature and other species, nature ceases to have any worth or meaning. The rise of capitalism has turned nature into a market commodity and resource without significant moral or social constraints on availability. When Bhaskar says, "all the cursed things come from the jungle" (Kaushik, 2022), Anika, the local veterinarian doctor, retorts, "Forests don't send cursed things. Cursed people like you tamper with forests and get into trouble. Nature has a balance. If you ruin it, it will affect you too. The jungle you want to cut down is the lungs of India. The little bit of oxygen you get in your cities comes from here" (Kaushik, 2022). Here, Anika's statement negates the idea of deforestation. Towards the end of the movie, it is revealed that Anika is the original *yapum* or *vishanu* who has been protecting and safeguarding the jungle for the last hundred years. The myth of *yapum* becomes very relevant in the contemporary ecological crisis when progress and preservation of nature must go hand in hand. Anika, as *yapum*, considers that roads should be made along the boundary of the forest without harming the ecosystem. As King (1989) says:

A healthy, balanced ecosystem, including human and nonhuman inhabitants, must maintain diversity. Ecologically, environmental simplification is as significant a problem as environmental pollution. Biological simplification, i.e., the wiping out of whole species, corresponds to reducing human diversity into faceless workers, or to the homogenization of taste and culture through mass consumer markets. Social life and natural life are literally simplified to the

inorganic for the convenience of market society. Therefore, we need a decentralized global movement that is founded on common interests yet celebrates diversity and opposes all forms of domination and violence. (King, 1989, p.20)

The myth of Keyum, as mentioned in Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*, which speaks of a consciousness where humans and other species of nature are interconnected, also finds a reflection in *Bhediya* when Bhaskar realizes that, as a *yapum*, the jungle resides in some part of his unconscious as the primal instinct. The local Ojha explains, "Humans and forests have shared a special pact for centuries. That neither would harm the other. But when humans break that pact and cut down the forests, the virus infects them. The jungle will always live in some part of the human mind. The virus unleashes that part. Then that person forgets all civilized behaviour, manners, and inhibitions and turns into a wild beast" (Kaushik, 2022). When Anika is shot down and captured by the police and hunters, Bhaskar completely relies on the jungle to unleash the inner strength in him so that he can transform into a wolf and save Anika. Anika's final words to Bhaskar, "What you think of as a curse is a great responsibility. You are better off as human. You are better off as human. You are not worthy of being an animal" (Kaushik, 2022) at once establishes the futility of all human enterprises based on human supremacy and ecological destruction. Though initially Bhaskar treats the wolf with disrespect and thinks that it must be eliminated to ensure the safety of life and the further progress of human civilization, later he realizes that, in reality, he himself is the undesired capitalist worker and intruder who has permanently put the ecological stability of the world at risk. Bhaskar utters, "So far I thought I was the hero in this story and the wolf was the villain. But it is the other way. Between the wolf and I, the wolf is the hero" (Kaushik, 2022). This realization is the key point of the whole movie, which justifies the message of the movie, "when there is nature, there is progress" (Kaushik, 2022).

The impact of the rapid changes to which a South-Asian nation like India has been subjected in the recent past "has rendered a complicated ethnic situation extremely complex" (Bhan, 1999, p.34) in regions like Arunachal Pradesh. The land of Arunachal Pradesh, on which the narratives of *The Legends of Pensam* and *Bhediya* unfold, is a picturesque place that strikes with its beauty and in that image of "primordial Nature we can easily recognize the feature of a paradisiacal landscape" (Elaide, 1961. P.41). The selection of such a landscape intensifies the struggles of certain territories within South-Asian nation to manage their socio-economic problems without harming the ecological balance and serene beauty of nature in the face of a highly emerging capitalist culture that seems to be ruthless at times. Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* and Amar Kaushik's *Bhediya* offer a chance to foster "ecological thought wherein it becomes easy... to gain the dots and see that everything is interconnected" (Morton, 2010, p.1). The mythical narratives of both the novella and the movie selected for the present study are luminal and emergent which offer the readers and the audiences new and novel modes for envisioning the crisis faced by a remote territory of a South-Asian nation with the advent of a capitalist economy that completely

overlooks the ideological standpoints and eco-cultural ethics to gain profit at any cost. The myths used by Mamang Dai and Amar Kaushik claim that if the earth suffers, there can be no moral justification for refusing to consider that suffering. These myths act as an antithesis and critique of an unnatural civilization that has lost its soul.

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