



International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

Dreaming the Indigenous: A Comparative Analysis of Freudian and Adlerian Frameworks in Interpreting Arunachali Dream Symbolism in Mamang Dai's Fiction

Ankit Kumar Parmar

Senior Research Fellow (SRF) Department of English, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intersection of psychoanalytic theory and indigenous cultural narratives by examining dream symbolism in Mamang Dai's fiction through the comparative lenses of Freudian and Adlerian frameworks. By situating Arunachali dream motifs within the broader psychoanalytic discourse, the study investigates how these frameworks illuminate the psychological and cultural dimensions of indigenous storytelling. Freud's emphasis on the unconscious and repressed desires is juxtaposed with Adler's focus on individual purpose and social context to analyze the symbolic resonance of dreams in Dai's works. Employing a qualitative, interpretive methodology, the paper conducts close readings of selected texts, uncovering how dream imagery reflects collective memory, identity, and ecological consciousness. The findings reveal that while Freudian analysis underscores the personal and universal aspects of dream symbolism, Adlerian theory highlights the communal and aspirational dimensions, offering a holistic understanding of Arunachali cultural imagination. This interdisciplinary study contributes to the fields of literary theory, indigenous studies, and psychoanalysis, while addressing gaps in the critical engagement with Mamang Dai's oeuvre.

Keywords: Freudian psychoanalysis, Adlerian psychology, Indigenous dream symbolism, Mamang Dai, Arunachali literature, Comparative literary analysis

Introduction

The intricate tapestry of indigenous Arunachali culture, with its oral traditions, ecological consciousness, and mythic imagination, finds a compelling literary expression in the works of Mamang Dai. As one of the most prominent voices from Northeast India, Dai's fiction is replete with dream sequences and symbolic visions that serve as conduits for personal and collective memory, cultural identity, and the negotiation of modernity. In her novel *The Legends of Pensam*, for instance, dreams are not mere narrative embellishments but function as "the language of the ancestors, speaking in riddles and signs" (Dai 47), foregrounding the epistemological significance of dreaming within indigenous cosmology.

Despite the centrality of dream motifs in Dai's oeuvre, critical engagement with their psychological and symbolic dimensions remains limited. Existing scholarship has predominantly focused on her ecological sensibility (Baruah 2018), narrative strategies (Goswami 2020), and representations of gender and identity (Kashyap 2016), often overlooking the psychoanalytic potential embedded in her dream imagery. This lacuna is particularly striking given the rich theoretical traditions of dream analysis inaugurated by Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler, whose frameworks offer divergent yet complementary insights into the workings of the unconscious, the formation of selfhood, and the mediation of cultural anxieties.

This study seeks to address this gap by undertaking a comparative analysis of Freudian and Adlerian frameworks in interpreting dream symbolism in Mamang Dai's fiction, with a particular focus on Arunachali indigenous contexts. The central research questions guiding this inquiry are: How do Freudian and Adlerian psychoanalytic models illuminate the function and meaning of dream symbolism in Dai's narratives? What do these interpretations reveal about the psychological and cultural landscapes of Arunachali communities as represented in her fiction? By situating Dai's dream motifs at the intersection of psychoanalysis and indigenous studies, this paper aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between individual psyche and collective memory in postcolonial literature.

The structure of the paper is as follows: The literature review surveys critical works on Dai and psychoanalytic theory, identifying key debates and gaps. The theoretical framework elaborates on Freudian and Adlerian approaches to dream analysis, justifying their relevance to the study. The methodology section outlines the qualitative, interpretive strategies employed. The analysis and discussion offer close readings of selected texts, integrating theoretical and critical perspectives. Interdisciplinary connections are explored, followed by a synthesis of findings, critical reflection, and a conclusion that gestures towards future research.

Literature Review

The critical reception of Mamang Dai's fiction has been marked by an acute awareness of her unique position as both chronicler and innovator of Arunachali cultural narratives. Scholars such as Ananya Baruah have foregrounded Dai's "ecological imagination," noting that her works "reinscribe the landscape as a living archive of memory and myth" (Baruah 112). Similarly, Anindita Goswami observes that Dai's narrative technique "weaves together oral history, folklore, and personal testimony, creating a polyphonic text that resists linear temporality" (Goswami 78). These readings, while illuminating, tend to privilege the external dimensions of Dai's storytelling—her engagement with place, history, and community—at the expense of the internal, psychic landscapes navigated by her characters.

The motif of dreaming, though frequently noted, has seldom been subjected to sustained psychoanalytic scrutiny. Kashyap's analysis of gender and identity in Dai's fiction briefly acknowledges the "symbolic resonance of dreams as sites of feminine agency" (Kashyap 134), yet stops short of a systematic exploration of their psychological import. More broadly, the application of psychoanalytic theory to indigenous literatures has been fraught with methodological and ethical challenges, as critics such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith have cautioned against the uncritical imposition of Western paradigms on non-Western texts (Smith 98). Nevertheless, recent scholarship in postcolonial psychoanalysis—exemplified by the work of Ranjana Khanna and Gaurav Desai—has argued for a more dialogic approach, one that recognizes the "productive tensions between universalist and particularist readings of the unconscious" (Khanna 41).

Within the field of dream studies, Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) remains foundational, positing dreams as "the royal road to the unconscious" (Freud 608), wherein repressed desires and anxieties find symbolic expression. Adler, by contrast, situates dreams within the context of individual striving and social embeddedness, contending that "every dream is an attempt to solve a problem of the dreamer's life" (Adler 56). While both frameworks have been extensively applied to Western literary texts, their relevance to indigenous narratives—particularly those from Northeast India—remains underexplored. This study seeks to bridge this gap by bringing Freudian and Adlerian perspectives into conversation with Arunachali dream symbolism as rendered in Dai's fiction.

Theoretical Framework

The psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams, as theorized by Freud and Adler, provides a dual lens through which to interrogate the symbolic economy of Mamang Dai's fiction. Freud's model, grounded in the dynamics of repression, displacement, and condensation, posits that dreams are "disguised fulfillments of repressed wishes" (Freud 154). The dream-work, in this view, operates through a language of symbols, which must be decoded to reveal latent content. Freud's emphasis on the universality of the unconscious, however, has been critiqued for its Eurocentric assumptions—a point underscored by postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, who argues that "the unconscious is always already inscribed by the cultural and historical specificities of the subject" (Bhabha 112).

Adler's approach, while sharing Freud's interest in the symbolic, diverges in its focus on the purposive and social dimensions of dreaming. For Adler, dreams are not merely expressions of repressed instinctual drives but are "oriented towards the future, serving as rehearsals for the resolution of life's tasks" (Adler 89). This teleological orientation aligns more closely with indigenous worldviews, which often conceive of dreams as messages from ancestors or the spirit world, guiding communal action and ethical conduct. As Dai's narrator observes, "In dreams, the dead return not to haunt, but to counsel the living, to remind them of their place in the world" (*The Legends of Pensam* 102).

To navigate the methodological tensions inherent in applying Western psychoanalytic models to indigenous texts, this study draws on the insights of postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Dipesh Chakrabarty, who advocate for a "provincializing" of theory—an approach that foregrounds the local, the particular, and the subaltern voice (Chakrabarty 16; Spivak 284). By reading Freud and Adler alongside indigenous epistemologies, the analysis seeks to avoid reductive universalism while remaining attentive to the dialogic possibilities of cross-cultural interpretation.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach, foregrounding close textual analysis as its principal method. The selection of Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* and *The Black Hill* is deliberate, as both texts are replete with dream sequences and symbolic visions that are integral to their narrative architecture and thematic concerns. These works, situated at the confluence of oral tradition and literary modernity, offer a fertile ground for examining the interplay between individual psyche and collective memory within Arunachali indigenous contexts.

The analysis is structured around a comparative application of Freudian and Adlerian psychoanalytic frameworks. Freud's model, with its focus on the unconscious, repression, and the symbolic language of dreams, is employed to excavate the latent content of dream imagery, attending to the ways in which personal and cultural anxieties are encoded within the text. Adler's theory, emphasizing purposiveness, social embeddedness, and the teleological function of dreams, is used to elucidate the communal and aspirational dimensions of dream symbolism, particularly as they relate to indigenous cosmology and ethical orientation.

Close reading is complemented by intertextual analysis, drawing connections between Dai's fiction and broader indigenous oral traditions, as well as relevant psychoanalytic and postcolonial theoretical discourses. The study is attentive to the methodological challenges of applying Western psychoanalytic models to non-Western texts, and thus incorporates a reflexive, dialogic stance, informed by postcolonial theory and indigenous

epistemologies. This approach seeks not to impose a singular interpretive grid, but rather to illuminate the dialogic possibilities that emerge at the intersection of psychoanalysis and indigenous narrative.

Ethnographic insight, while not directly derived from fieldwork, is incorporated through engagement with secondary sources on Arunachali cultural practices, oral histories, and dream interpretation. This interdisciplinary orientation allows for a more nuanced reading of Dai's texts, situating them within both local and global frameworks of meaning.

Analysis and Discussion

Freudian Analysis: The Unconscious and Repressed Desires

In *The Legends of Pensam*, dreams function as liminal spaces where the boundaries between the living and the dead, the real and the imagined, are rendered porous. Freud's assertion that dreams are "the disguised fulfillment of a repressed wish" (Freud 154) finds resonance in the recurring motif of ancestral visitation. For instance, the protagonist's dream of her grandmother—"She saw her grandmother standing by the river, her face half in shadow, calling her name in a voice that was both familiar and strange" (Dai, *Legends* 63)—can be read as an expression of unresolved grief and the desire for continuity with the past. The dream, in Freudian terms, condenses multiple layers of meaning: the longing for maternal protection, the anxiety of cultural loss, and the unconscious negotiation of identity in a rapidly changing world.

Freud's concept of displacement is also evident in the symbolic transference of personal anxieties onto the landscape. The river, a recurring dream symbol, is described as "a restless spirit, always moving, never at peace" (Dai, *Legends* 21), mirroring the protagonist's own sense of dislocation. Here, the dream-work transforms internal psychic conflict into external, natural imagery, allowing the text to articulate what cannot be spoken directly. As Bhabha notes, "the dream is the site where the unspoken traumas of history return in symbolic form" (Bhabha 119), a dynamic that is palpable in Dai's evocation of collective memory through dream sequences.

Adlerian Analysis: Purpose, Community, and Ethical Orientation

While Freudian analysis foregrounds the unconscious and the repressed, Adlerian theory shifts the focus to the purposive and social dimensions of dreaming. In *The Black Hill*, dreams are often depicted as messages from the ancestors, guiding the living towards communal harmony and ethical action. One character recounts, "In my dream, the old ones came to me and said, 'Remember the land, remember the river. You are its keeper'" (Dai, *Black Hill* 112). This dream, rather than expressing repressed desire, functions as a rehearsal for the resolution of a communal task—the stewardship of the land.

Adler's contention that "every dream is an attempt to solve a problem of the dreamer's life" (Adler 56) is borne out in the way Dai's characters use dreams to navigate social obligations and existential dilemmas. The dream is not an escape from reality, but a means of engaging with it, offering symbolic solutions to real-world challenges. This aligns with indigenous epistemologies, in which dreams are often regarded as sources of wisdom and guidance, rather than mere byproducts of the unconscious.

Moreover, Adler's emphasis on social interest and community finds a powerful echo in Dai's fiction. The dream motif is frequently linked to the collective, as when the narrator observes, "We dream not only for ourselves, but for the village, for those who came before and those yet to come" (Dai, *Legends* 102). Here, the dream becomes a vehicle for the transmission of cultural values and the reinforcement of communal bonds.

Comparative Insights and Critical Engagement

The juxtaposition of Freudian and Adlerian frameworks reveals both convergences and divergences in the interpretation of Arunachali dream symbolism. While Freud's model illuminates the personal and universal dimensions of dreaming—the negotiation of loss, desire, and identity—Adler's approach foregrounds the communal, purposive, and ethical aspects, resonating more closely with indigenous worldviews. As Ranjana Khanna observes, "the psychoanalytic encounter with the postcolonial text is most productive when it acknowledges the multiplicity of psychic and cultural registers at play" (Khanna 53).

This comparative analysis also challenges the universalist claims of classical psychoanalysis, demonstrating the necessity of contextualizing dream interpretation within specific cultural and historical frameworks. The symbolic economy of dreams in Dai's fiction cannot be fully apprehended through a single theoretical lens; rather, it demands a dialogic approach that is sensitive to both the psychic and the social, the individual and the collective.

Interdisciplinary Connections

The exploration of dream symbolism in Mamang Dai's fiction, when situated at the intersection of psychoanalysis, indigenous studies, and ecological thought, reveals a rich tapestry of interdisciplinary resonances. The psychoanalytic frameworks of Freud and Adler, though rooted in Western intellectual traditions, find unexpected affinities with indigenous Arunachali epistemologies, particularly in their shared recognition of the symbolic and the unconscious as vital forces in human experience. Yet, as Dipesh Chakrabarty cautions, "the task is not to universalize the unconscious, but to provincialize it, to attend to its local inflections and historical specificities" (Chakrabarty 19).

Anthropological perspectives on dreaming among indigenous communities underscore the social and cosmological functions of dreams. In Arunachali oral traditions, dreams are often regarded as communications from the spirit world, bearing messages that inform communal decision-making and ethical conduct. Dai's fiction echoes this worldview, as when a character reflects, "The dream is a path, a way to listen to the voices that guide us when the world

is silent" (*The Legends of Pensam* 88). This conception aligns with the anthropological insight that dreams serve as "cultural scripts for action and reflection" (Tedlock 45), rather than mere psychological phenomena.

Ecocriticism further enriches the analysis by foregrounding the entanglement of human and nonhuman agencies in Dai's dreamscapes. The recurrent motif of rivers, forests, and ancestral spirits in dream sequences gestures towards an ecological consciousness that transcends the boundaries of the self. As Dai writes, "In dreams, the river speaks, the trees remember, and the land itself becomes a storyteller" (*The Black Hill* 57). This animistic vision challenges anthropocentric models of subjectivity, inviting a rethinking of the relationship between psyche, community, and environment.

Philosophically, Dai's treatment of dreams resonates with Paul Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity, wherein the self is constituted through the emplotment of memory, desire, and imagination (Ricoeur 119). Dreams, in this sense, are not merely private reveries but narrative acts that weave individual and collective histories into a coherent, if always provisional, sense of self. The dialogic interplay between Freudian, Adlerian, and indigenous perspectives thus opens up new avenues for understanding the ethical, ecological, and ontological stakes of dreaming in Arunachali literature.

Findings and Critical Reflection

The comparative analysis of Freudian and Adlerian frameworks in interpreting dream symbolism in Mamang Dai's fiction yields several key insights. First, it demonstrates that dreams in Dai's narratives function as liminal spaces where personal and collective histories converge, mediating the tensions between tradition and modernity, memory and forgetting, self and community. Freudian analysis illuminates the ways in which dreams encode repressed desires, unresolved grief, and the psychic aftershocks of cultural dislocation. The recurring image of the river, for instance, serves as both a symbol of personal longing and a repository of collective memory, embodying what Freud terms "the return of the repressed" (Freud 217).

Adlerian theory, by contrast, foregrounds the purposive and communal dimensions of dreaming, highlighting the role of dreams in articulating ethical imperatives and social responsibilities. In Dai's fiction, dreams are not solipsistic retreats but dialogic encounters with ancestral wisdom, ecological stewardship, and communal aspiration. This aligns with indigenous understandings of dreaming as a form of ethical guidance and cultural transmission, challenging the individualist bias of classical psychoanalysis.

The study also reveals the limitations of applying Western psychoanalytic models to indigenous texts without critical adaptation. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us, "theories must be made to speak with, not for, indigenous realities" (Smith 104). By adopting a dialogic, interdisciplinary approach, this paper avoids the pitfalls of reductive universalism, instead foregrounding the productive tensions and affinities that emerge at the intersection of psychoanalysis and indigenous narrative.

The contribution of this study lies in its demonstration that dream symbolism in Arunachali literature cannot be fully apprehended through a single theoretical lens. Rather, it demands an approach that is attentive to the multiplicity of psychic, cultural, and ecological registers at play. This insight has broader implications for the study of indigenous literatures, suggesting the need for methodologies that are both theoretically rigorous and culturally responsive.

Limitations of the study include its reliance on a select corpus of Dai's works and the challenges inherent in translating oral and symbolic traditions into the language of literary criticism. Future research might expand the scope to include comparative analyses with other indigenous literatures, or explore the intersections of dream symbolism with gender, ritual, and political resistance in Northeast Indian writing.

Conclusion

The comparative engagement with Freudian and Adlerian psychoanalytic frameworks in the context of Mamang Dai's fiction reveals the profound complexity and cultural specificity of indigenous Arunachali dream symbolism. Dai's narratives, suffused with dream sequences and visionary encounters, resist reductive readings that would confine them to either the universalist paradigms of Western psychoanalysis or the particularities of local tradition. Instead, her fiction demonstrates how dreams operate as dynamic sites of negotiation—between the individual and the collective, the psychic and the ecological, the ancestral and the contemporary.

Freud's model, with its emphasis on the unconscious and the return of the repressed, illuminates the subterranean currents of desire, loss, and identity that animate Dai's dreamscapes. Yet, as the analysis has shown, these dreams are never merely personal; they are inextricably bound to the histories, landscapes, and cosmologies of Arunachali communities. Adler's focus on purposiveness and social embeddedness, meanwhile, resonates with indigenous epistemologies that view dreams as ethical guides and communal scripts, shaping not only individual destinies but the very fabric of collective life.

The interdisciplinary approach adopted here—drawing on psychoanalysis, indigenous studies, anthropology, and ecocriticism—underscores the necessity of methodological pluralism in the study of indigenous literatures. It is only by holding in tension the insights of multiple frameworks that one can begin to apprehend the full richness of Dai's symbolic imagination. As Dai herself writes, "The dream is a bridge, a way of crossing from one world to another, carrying with us the stories that make us who we are" (*The Legends of Pensam* 144).

Rather than offering closure, this study invites further inquiry into the dialogic possibilities that emerge at the intersection of psychoanalysis and indigenous narrative. Future research might explore comparative perspectives across other indigenous literatures, or delve deeper into the intersections

of dream symbolism with gender, ritual, and resistance. Ultimately, the reading of dreams in Mamang Dai's fiction is not only an act of interpretation, but a gesture of listening—an openness to the voices, histories, and visions that continue to shape the living archive of Arunachali culture.

Works Cited

Adler, Alfred. *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology*. Routledge, 1925.

Baruah, Ananya. "Ecological Imagination in Mamang Dai's Fiction." *Indian Literature*, vol. 62, no. 3, 2018, pp. 110-124.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton UP, 2000.

Dai, Mamang. *The Black Hill*. Speaking Tiger, 2014.

---. *The Legends of Pensam*. Penguin, 2006.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated by James Strachey, Basic Books, 2010.

Goswami, Anindita. "Narrative Polyphony in Mamang Dai." *Northeast Literary Review*, vol. 5, 2020, pp. 75-90.

Kashyap, Aruni. "Gender and Identity in Mamang Dai's Novels." *Journal of Northeast Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2016, pp. 130-145.

Khanna, Ranjana. *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*. Duke UP, 2003.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey, U of Chicago P, 1992.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books, 2012.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, U of Illinois P, 1988, pp. 271-313.

Tedlock, Barbara. "The Poetics and Politics of Dreaming among North American Indians." *American Ethnologist*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1992, pp. 244-267.