

1 **Narrative Double-Consciousness and the Re-scripting of Indigenous Memory in**
2 **Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam***

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8 **Abstract:**

9 Mamang Dai, one of the most prominent voices from Northeast India, intricately weaves the
10 folklore, oral traditions, and landscapes of her native Arunachal Pradesh
11 into her literary works. Her stories and poems explore the convergence of myth, memory, and
12 identity in indigenous communities, offering a unique perspective on the interface between
13 tradition and modernity. Through recurring natural imagery, Dai captures the spiritual
14 connection between the land and the people, often highlighting the role of storytelling in
15 preserving culture amid changing times. This research paper examines Mamang Dai's *The*
16 *Legends of Pensam* through the lens of Folkloristic Metamodernism. This theoretical
17 framework examines how modern Indigenous literature navigates the "in-between" spaces
18 (Pensam) of tradition and modernity. This dynamic can be understood as a link between
19 Western historiography and indigenous orality. The narrator functions in a state of "Narrative
20 Double-Consciousness," rather than merely selecting one mode of truth over another. Dai uses
21 a "structure of feeling" that moves between the sincerity of ancestors and the broken reality of
22 a worldwide world. This is different from the postmodern love of sarcasm and the modernist
23 desire for totalization. The research delineates three fundamental tactics Dai employs to re-
24 script Adi Indigenous memory: language oscillation, narrative double-consciousness, and
25 temporal hybridity. First, the paper examines linguistic oscillation, illustrating how Dai
26 indigenizes foreign political entities by converting "British" and "Americans" into "Bee-ree-
27 tiss" and "Migluns," thereby claiming Adi agency in colonial history. Second, it examines
28 narrative double-consciousness, in which the text accepts both clinical modernities (such as
29 medical diagnosis) and shamanic interpretations (such as spirit possession) simultaneously. It
30 does not put Western reasoning ahead of Indigenous ways of knowing. This is especially
31 clear when you look at how "silence" is shown in both cities and the countryside. Finally, the
32 study examines temporal hybridity by tracing the construction of the Stilwell Road during
33 World War II. Dai blurs the line between global history and local mythology by rewriting this
34 industrial feat as a supernatural, "devilish" invasion where elephants perish like "mythical
35 beasts."

36 The study finds that Hoxo, the main character who "fell from the sky," is a metamodern link
37 between the "Miglun" universe and the Adi woodland. Dai's use of these narrative techniques

38 creates a "diary of the world" that does not just record a past fading away; it also reshapes
39 Indigenous memory to withstand the psychological and ecological ruptures of the 21st
40 century. The article contends that *The Legends of Pensam* signifies a crucial transformation in
41 postcolonial literature, providing a framework for Indigenous identities to assimilate and
42 overcome the trauma of the "new" while remaining anchored in the "shining ocean" of
43 ancestral tradition. By engaging with Dai's novels and poetry, this study also examines the
44 portrayal of liminality, where the real and the mythic coexist, allowing indigenous
45 knowledge to become a dynamic force in contemporary literature. This work aims to expand the
46 understanding of Dai's contribution to postcolonial and indigenous literary studies, focusing
47 on Northeast Indian narratives, folklore, and eco-spirituality.

48 Keywords: Orality, Narrative Double-Consciousness, Eco-spirituality, Trickster figure

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Introduction:

Mamang Dai is a significant figure in contemporary Indian literature, particularly known for her evocative portrayal of Adi's tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Her novel "The Legends of Pensam" is a remarkable exploration of the intertwined concepts of myth, memory, and Indigenous folklore, set against the lush, vibrant landscapes of North-Eastern India. This paper examines how Mamang Dai's novel represents the oral tribal culture of North-East India. It seeks to explore the rich threads linking tribal lore to people's pasts and their lands, and to investigate how the use of memory and myth facilitates this. Mamang Dai is a celebrated Indian author, poet, and journalist from Arunachal Pradesh, known for her profound contributions to literature that encapsulate the rich cultural heritage and traditions of her homeland. Born in the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, Dai has emerged as a significant literary voice, particularly in indigenous narratives and in the representation of the Northeast in Indian literature. Her works exemplify orality through rich narrative style and cultural storytelling techniques. The novel reflects the oral tradition of storytelling, where tales are passed down through generations, emphasising the communal aspect of sharing stories. Dai weaves local myths and legends into the narrative, drawing on the oral histories of Indigenous communities, which highlights the significance of these traditions in preserving cultural identity and history. The emphasis on memory and personal experience is central to the narratives, showcasing how individual stories intertwine with the community's collective memory. Mamang Dai weaves a thread of cultural harmony and integrity through her works, portraying Adi's tribe culture and their way of life. This work is entangled with history, memory, myth, and eco-spirituality—all harmonised within the home territory of the Adi tribe, inhabiting the heart of the Siang Valley. In the beginning, Dai looks back into the past when Adi's world was a cradle of glittering spirits and mythical stories, she states:

Back then, the village heaved with life, and I expected a great welling up of revelations, a web of magic through which we would step lightly like glittering spirits crowned with speech and thought. The years stretched before us like a singing forest: we were always poised to spread wings and float through the cool bamboo (dai iv).

Dai plays with the idea of the Adi community being hung in the balance between reality and myth. She beautifully draws four interconnected elements of tribal lore: a diary of the world, "a song of the rhapsodist, "daughters of the village, and a matter of time."

The novel begins with a prologue that tells the myth of a lady who battled a supreme power

to weave a tapestry. The novel's initial section presents a narrative that feels both illusory and fanciful. The character Hoxo's mysterious descent from the sky sets a surreal tone.

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When Hoxo first opened his eyes to the world, he saw green—a green wall of trees and bamboo, and a green waterfall that sprayed his cheek and washed the giant fern that seemed to be waving to him (Dai vii).

Upon his arrival, Hoxo is discovered by Lutor, the esteemed chief of the Ida clan. Yet, the villagers exhibit a curious indifference, refraining from questioning the child's origins due to their deep-seated superstitions. This aspect of the narrative underscores the influence of cultural beliefs on perception and understanding. The story takes a darker turn when Lutor meets his tragic fate during a hunting expedition, driven by a fateful encounter with Birbirik, a water serpent whose horned head evokes a malevolent spirit. This incident not only propels the plot forward but also highlights the intertwining of myth and reality within the community's worldview, illustrating how supernatural elements shape their lives and experiences.

The "Pensam" as a Metamodern Way of Feeling

The word "Pensam," which means "the in-between," is the main idea behind Dai's metamodernist project. According to Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker's "structure of feeling" (Vermeulen and Van Den Akker), the Pensam is a place where things are constantly changing. It is a place where the "forgotten newness of things" and the harsh truths of a postcolonial reality coexist. Dai's writing goes back and forth between a "new sincerity," which is an honest acceptance of Adi animism, and a sly, postmodern irony about the "miglun" (white man) invasions. Folkloric Metamodernism is defined by this oscillation: it refuses to call the supernatural "primitive" while also recognising the unstoppable rise of the modern state.

The structure of the novel's story shows this "in-betweenness." Dai imitates the non-linear, recursive structure of oral tradition by organising the book into a succession of "rhapsodies." But she grounds these rhapsodies in historical details, such as the construction of the Stilwell Road and the presence of British and American forces during World War II. This synthesis enables the work to serve as both a cultural repository and a modern literary intervention.

The "Japans" and "Migluns" are not depicted as nation-states in the Westphalian sense; rather, they are portrayed as mythical forces. The paratroopers are "Migluns with wings," which connects the old idea of forest spirits with the new idea of flying. This linguistic indigenization makes the strange seem normal (or "familiar-terrifying"). The book turns a logistical success into a spiritual breach when it says that the industrial endeavour of war is like "digging a tunnel right across the world." (Dai) This is the main idea behind Folkloric Metamodernism: it employs the language of the sacred to criticise the neoliberal and colonial

need for "energy and determination."

Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker's "structure of feeling" (2010, p. 5) is built on three main ideas:

Linguistic Oscillation: Using English syntax to translate Ibibio proverbs ("When the moon faints, the chicken remembers the hawk") to show how cultural code-switching can be used in writing. Second, Narrative Double-Consciousness: The narrator, who is both the storyteller and the meta-commentator, copies the oral performer's call ("Do you hear me, listeners?") while also citing archival sources, for example, footnotes. Temporal Hybridity: Anansi-like tricksters criticise bitcoin frauds, merging mythological and neoliberal timeframes.

Linguistic Oscillation is one of the main ways that Folkloric Metamodernism works. In *The Legends of Pensam*, this is done by changing the names of foreign political groups to Adi names. The British are pronounced "Bee-ree-tiss," and the Americans are a scarier version of the "Migluns." Dai does a literary "code-switching" by filtering the geopolitical actors of the 20th century through local grammar. This gives Indigenous people control over the historical narrative. The "Japans" and "Migluns" are not shown as nation-states in the Westphalian sense; instead, they are shown as mythical forces. The paratroopers are "Migluns with wings," which connects the old idea of forest spirits with the new idea of flying. This linguistic indigenization makes the strange seem normal (or "familiar-terrifying"). When the text says that the war effort was "digging a tunnel right across the world," it changes a logistical achievement into a spiritual crime. This is the main idea behind Folkloric Metamodernism: it employs religious language to criticize the neoliberal and colonial need for "energy and determination."((Uoro and Egharevba)

Narrative Double-Consciousness:

Narrative double consciousness is a way of telling a story in which the narrator simultaneously occupies two distinct epistemic, cultural, or interpretive positions. This lets the narrative voice see itself from both inside and outside. The term "double consciousness" in literary studies is based on W. E. B. Du Bois's idea of "double consciousness." It refers to a narrator who speaks from within a lived tradition (cultural, oral, Indigenous, subaltern) while also being aware of external frameworks such as colonial modernity, academic historiography, or global readership. In these kinds of stories, the voice may switch between the immediacy of communal storytelling and the distance of reflective commentary; between performative address ("Do you hear me, listeners?" (Dai) and critical annotation; between mythic belief and analytical explanation. This dual positioning creates a narrative texture that

is both telling and subtly analyzing, putting the story in context, or translating it. This is not just a simple contradiction or fragmentation; it is a dynamic co-presence of perspectives that shows how identity, memory, and knowledge are negotiated between cultures. The narrator assumes the roles of participant and interpreter, inheritor and archivist, believer and critic. So, narrative double consciousness lets texts retain oral ways of knowing while using modern literary forms, asserts Indigenous subjectivity while acknowledging the pressures of colonial or neoliberal structures, and creates a space for dialogue in which different times and worldviews can coexist.

The Narrative Double-Consciousness transitions from a theoretical construct to a tangible, visceral experience. The conflict between the "archival footnote" and the "oral performance" has transcended mere stylistic preference; it has evolved into the sole means of reconciling a past of violence with a contemporary state of cultural preservation.

The Road's Dialectic: Phatic versus Physical

The passage offers two different interpretations of "the road." The headman feels that they are "still without a road" as retribution for the 1911 slaughter, which makes the road an empirical deficiency for the narrator and the outsiders (Jules and Mona). The village is isolated because of this physical absence. But "travelling the road" is a rhapsodic performance for the dancers and the Miri (the shaman). The ponung song takes the people on a historical and spiritual journey back to the killing site. This is an example of metamodern epistemology in action: the road is both a successful ritual (mythic) and a failed infrastructure (modern).

2. The Archive of Multi-Vocal

The narrator employs double consciousness through three distinct "voices" to discuss Noel Williamson's death: "Recorded evidence" of a communication breakdown or of troops' dread is presented in the Colonial Report. The Meta-Commentary: "Everything is speculation," the narrator acknowledges.

Memory and Myth:

Memory plays a crucial role in oral tradition, serving as a means of storing and preserving knowledge, wisdom, skills, and potential. It is an essential source for building and constructing identity. As Assmann (2008:109) notes, "Memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level." This process is not merely a construction; it is rooted in the shared experiences of individuals within a community, reflecting their collective behaviour and

cultural context. The concept of collective shared experience, which is inherently tied to culture, ignites the idea of memory for future generations. The advancement of human civilization towards a cultural-centric perspective is not solely an evolutionary outcome but also a product of appropriating and valuing tradition. According to Nietzsche:

While in the world of animals, genetic programs guarantee the survival of species, humans must find a means by which this problem is offered by cultural memory, a collective concept for all knowledge in the interactive framework of a society and one that is obtained through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation (Assmann and Czaplicka 126).

Memory plays a vital role in preserving the past through narratives, particularly in folklore, which ultimately manifests a community's self-image. Cultural memory acts as a repository for rituals, beliefs, ideas, and customs from forgotten times, safeguarding elements of the past that future generations may not fully articulate. In all literature, traditional stories serve as a bridge connecting indigenous people to their pristine lands, reinforcing their cultural roots and identity. This connection is crucial, as it not only preserves the community's history but also fosters a sense of belonging and continuity. The narratives encapsulated in folklore serve as a means of transmitting knowledge and values, ensuring that the essence of the community is maintained and celebrated across generations.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, folklore is the stories of a group of people that have been passed down through centuries through oral tradition. This concept emphasises the communal aspect of folklore by showing how stories are exchanged and kept alive within a community. Some folklorists call folklore "traditional popularise," seeing it as the lyrical expressions of the working class. This shows how important these stories are to culture, as they reveal how regular people live and what they go through. Vladimir Propp, for example, disagrees with this definition and says that "from a historical point of view, the entire creative output of people is folklore." Propp's viewpoint expands the definition of folklore beyond simple narratives, proposing that it encompasses all forms of cultural creative expression, including myths, legends, and modern stories. Memory and myth together make a complex tapestry of cultural identity that helps societies understand their pasts while staying true to their own landscapes and traditions (Propp 4). In *The Legends of Pensam*, Mamang Dai intricately sketches a variegated socio-cultural landscape, cohesively sustained by vital folklore. One prominent tale is that of 'Hoxo,' described as "the boy who fell from the sky" (Dai, 2005). Understanding the significance of this lore requires contextualising it within the Adi tribe's creation myths rather than relying on a literal interpretation of the narrative. As noted by Dundes (in Bronner, 2007), the meaning of folklore must be understood through the lens of

the behavioural and social conditions that shape it. The mythical and mystical creation myths of the Adi tribe reveal a society that is deeply rooted in ecological consciousness, illustrating how their narratives reflect a profound connection to the environment and the natural world. This Ecological. Awareness is not just a background; it is a key part of the Adi people's identity and cultural activities. This shows how important folklore is to their connection to nature and community. The Adi tribe's folklore is an important means of preserving their cultural legacy and ecological knowledge. It helps them feel like they belong in their landscape and strengthens their identity (Bronner 2007).

Oral literature, or orality, fundamentally involves the sequential remembering of events in one's mind, reflecting a community's social and cognitive existence. Oral literature from many cultures shows that these stories often share the same structures, topics, and patterns, and serve the same purposes across societies. Some prevalent themes in folktales are marriage, not being able to produce children, not having male heirs, mistreating orphans, starvation, and trickster archetypes. There are many different characters in stories that help convey these ideas. These characters can be animals, birds, tricksters, or even things that act like people (Momoh, 1989: xiv). Mamang Dai tells stories in a new way in *The Legends of Pensam*, enabling readers to perceive stories within stories. These stories come from the mythology and traditions of the Adi people. At the beginning of the novel, Lutor narrates a story about Biribik, the water snake, which the people consider nasty. Lutor tells his son Hoxo about a time when "Everyone there knew the story of Biribik, the water serpent." No one had recalled the name of the first person to see it for decades, yet everyone still remembered what happened (Dai 9). Dai also shows how shamans might mislead villages into giving them money and gems by using ceremonies. The Migu clan is an interesting part of the plot because they have a special ship, a danki, made of a metal alloy. The oldest son of the Migu family finds the danki turned over and filled with twigs, ferns, and leaves one day. A lot of people come to see this weird thing and ask about it. But they can't find the danki when they go to the place where it is kept. It looks like the ship is playing hide-and-seek with the people trying to find it. The son eventually figures out that the danki only shows up to members of his clan. This illustrates how significant the vessel is to their family and their culture. This story illustrates the themes of deception and the significance of clan identity, while also highlighting the complex relationship between the Migu clan and its ancestral artefacts (Dai 64).

Eco-spirituality:

Eco-spirituality emphasises a profound connection to the cosmos, viewing it as a manifestation of God's presence. This discipline explores the relationship between individuals and the divine, particularly within the broader context of the universe. A central challenge of eco-spirituality is to recognise the Almighty not as a distant entity but as an integral part of our existence. This perspective is crucial because nature serves as a visible expression of God, allowing individuals to encounter and experience the divine tangibly. Thus, eco-spirituality is not merely a belief system but a way of life that regards the universe as a sacred embodiment of God. Understanding the fundamental concepts of eco-spirituality prompts a reevaluation of human behaviour and attitudes. Historically, humanity has often acted as if it holds dominion over the universe, perceiving itself as separate from nature. However, adopting an eco-spiritual perspective challenges this traditional view of humans as masters of the earth. Instead, it fosters an understanding of creation as a community characterised by interconnectedness—where all beings are linked to one another and the divine. This recognition of interconnectedness encourages individuals to experience a deeper sense of unity with the cosmos and a greater responsibility towards the environment and all living beings (Kurian).

This concept embodies the spiritual connection between individuals and their environment, rooted in a fundamental belief in the sacredness of nature, the earth, and the universe. From an eco-spiritual standpoint, the divine—whether understood as God, spirit, or another form of the sacred—is intricately woven into the fabric of creation. This perspective emphasizes that individuals are in constant interaction with the divine through their senses and intuitions. The Adis experience the transcendent God through the awe and wonder of nature, fostering a deep respect for the environment. Their holistic vision of life permeates every interaction with the natural world, reflecting a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings. The myths of the Adis powerfully articulate the vital relationship between humanity and cosmic forces, illustrating their belief in the sacredness of nature. Moreover, the Adis possess keen insights into the healing properties of natural herbs and recognise the therapeutic benefits the environment offers. Through their rituals, they engage holistically with the divine dimension of nature, awakening to its spiritual significance. Their festivals are vibrant celebrations of joy, marking their connection to the cosmic home and reinforcing their sense of belonging within the larger tapestry of existence (Painadath).

Advocates of eco-spiritualism contend that pre-modern cultures have consistently approached nature with a sense of respect and reverence (Nayar). This perspective emphasises that many traditional societies recognised the intrinsic value of the natural world and understood their

place within it as part of a larger ecological and spiritual system. Such cultures often viewed nature not merely as a resource to be exploited but as a sacred entity deserving of care and protection. This respect for nature is reflected in their practices, beliefs, and rituals, which often celebrate the interconnectedness of all life and the divine presence within the natural environment. By acknowledging these historical attitudes, Eco spiritualism seeks to inspire contemporary society to cultivate a similar reverence for nature, fostering a more sustainable and harmonious relationship with the earth. The book is rich with descriptions of mountain and shamanic rituals, highlighting the deep-seated beliefs of tribal clans in the powerful effects of these practices. A notable example is the figure of Biribik, the water serpent, who is regarded as the embodiment of all spirits within the Adi tribe. The community strongly believes that any unusual sighting in the river is an omen of impending misfortune for the village. In response to such signs, the tribe performs an ancient serpent ritual to heal and alleviate suffering. This theme of the interconnectedness among rituals, nature, and the spiritual beliefs of the Adi people recurs throughout the book. It underscores the importance of these rituals not only as cultural expressions but also as vital practices for maintaining harmony and balance within the community and the natural world. The rituals address the challenges posed by the environment and reaffirm the tribe's relationship with the spiritual realm, underscoring the profound significance of their traditions in navigating life's uncertainties.

Among the significant elements of eco-spirituality highlighted in the book are legends, myths, Pahari paratha (mountain rituals), and the spiritual practices associated with the North Eastern tribes. These elements are integral to understanding the tribes' relationship with their environment, as they encapsulate the cultural narratives and spiritual beliefs that shape their worldview. She states:

Like the majority of tribes inhabiting the central belt of Arunachal, the Adis practice an animistic faith that is woven around forest ecology and coexistence with the natural world (Dai. 1)

Liminality

This idea of "liminality" is more like the way it is usually used to talk about going through a transitional phase. French ethnologist Arnold van Gennep's work was expanded upon by Victor Turner in the 1960s and 1970s. The phrase has historically been linked to anthropological discourse regarding ritual, performance, pilgrimage, and rites of passage; it now signifies a wider array of meanings and theoretical connections. Meethan (2012: 69)

says that liminality is becoming more important in areas including management, health, education, cyberspace, governance, sexuality, and tourism. A notable domain of revitalized interest in liminality pertains to its association with place and space. This intersectional analysis elucidates how liminal experiences can influence and be influenced by their surrounding contexts. This study of liminality helps us understand how transitional situations affect people's and groups' identities, social interactions, and cultural practices. We may see the liminality in Dai's art through the line:

In our language, the Adis' language, "Pensam" means "between." It symbolizes the midway or middle ground, but it could also mean the heart's hidden places where a secret garden develops (Dai vii).

The term "liminality," originating from the Latin word for "threshold" (limen), underscores the spatial and symbolic aspects of social transitions, especially in relation to van Gennep's analysis of "rites of passage." For van Gennep, liminality is deeply connected to the ceremonial norms that characterize significant instances of social transformation. His research underscores the significance of liminal experiences as essential mediators that enable transitions between social stages, indicating that structure and order arise from these transitory states (Thomassen). Victor Turner presents the term 'liminoid' to characterize a kind of creative expression that transcends conventional societal frameworks and rituals linked to liminality. He proposes that inside this liminoid zone, the individual artist is liberated to interact with their social legacy unencumbered by the expectations and standards of their community. This freedom to be creative lets people explore their identity and culture in a more personal and original way. For instance, an artist may use their cultural heritage to make a one-of-a-kind work that shows how they see tradition, rather than following strict rules. Turner stresses that during the liminal period, the lines between positions, including those between teachers and students, are blurred. This makes it possible for new ideas and ways of expressing them to come up without the limits of hierarchy. This idea of the liminoid shows how stepping outside of normal limits can lead to change and creativity, which can help people learn more about their cultural stories and who they are as individuals (Turner). In the story, the character Hoxo represents the shamanic rituals of the Adi tribal community, showing a strong bond with the spiritual and natural realms. He said, "Some things are beyond recall, and such things happen all the time." "It is better to be ready" (Dai 19) shows that he knows life is short and that it's important to be ready for anything that comes up. Hoxo's daily activities, which include looking into the lives of people, animals, and plants and thinking about ways to improve his chess skills, show that he is interested in the world around

him.

Conclusion:

The book offers a deep look at how people and the natural environment are interconnected, drawing on the rich cultural legacy of the Adi tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. Dai uses Indigenous folklore to show how important myths are as living memories that keep a community's knowledge alive while also allowing it to "re-script" its identity to address the problems of modern life. Liminality is a key idea in this story's structure. For example, Hoxo moves through the pensam, which are the gaps between the known and the unknown, the ancestral and the global. This trip into liminality not only promotes personal development but also embodies the metamodern "structure of feeling," as the characters continually oscillate between the authenticity of traditional animism and the irony of a postcolonial context. The method of language oscillation is most clear in how Dai makes foreign political groups feel at home, turning the "British" and "Americans" of World War II into the mythic Bee-ree-tiss and Migluns. Dai uses the local language to call the building on the Stilwell Road a "tunnel right across the world." This shows that Indigenous people have power over colonial history and that industrial incursion is a spiritual transgression. This re-scripting is backed by a double-consciousness narrative that doesn't put Western rationalism above Indigenous ways of knowing. The novel supports both the clinical diagnosis of a child living in a city and the shamanic "serpent ritual" of a boy living in a village, suggesting that truth exists only in "portions." Moreover, the temporal hybridity in Dai's depiction of eco-spirituality signifies a profound veneration for the environment, anchored in history but responding to contemporary circumstances. The natural world is full of spiritual meaning and can heal people like Pinyar and Kamur, whose "faults in the blood" are explained by the ancient miti-mili traditions. The stories throughout the story act as anchors, creating a sense of continuity that underscores the importance of Indigenous knowledge systems in addressing the changes that come with modernity. In the end, *The Legends of Pensam* is a moving reminder of how powerful stories can be in binding people to their ancestry and to the land. Dai uses beautiful prose to celebrate the complexity of Adi culture. She argues that rewriting memory is a smart way to survive, which helps us better comprehend the complicated, ever-changing relationships that shape modern life.

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