

Small Towns And The River

Mamang Dai

Small towns always remind me of death.
My hometown lies calmly amidst the trees,
it is always the same,
in summer or winter,
with the dust flying,
or the wind howling down the gorge.

Just the other day someone died.
In the dreadful silence we wept
looking at the sad wreath of tuberoses.
Life and death, life and death,
only the rituals are permanent.

The river has a soul.
In the summer it cuts through the land
like a torrent of grief. Sometimes,
sometimes, I think it holds its breath
seeking a land of fish and stars

The river has a soul.
It knows, stretching past the town,
from the first drop of rain to dry earth
and mist on the mountaintops,
the river knows
the immortality of water.

A shrine of happy pictures
marks the days of childhood.
Small towns grow with anxiety
for the future.
The dead are placed pointing west.
When the soul rises
it will walk into the golden east,
into the house of the sun.

In the cool bamboo,
restored in sunlight,
life matters, like this.

In small towns by the river
we all want to walk with the gods.

Savari

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<http://www.dalitweb.org>



Mamang Dai is a poet, novelist, journalist and former civil servant from Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh. She is the author of *The Legends of Pensam*. The above poem, *Small Town And The River* is from her poetry book called *River Poems*.

Please read her interview [here](#).