International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Cultural Conflict in Mamang Dai's the Black Hill

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Abstract:
This paper examines the deep cultural disparities arising from the encounter between indigenous tribal communities and external influences in the northeastern province of India. It intricately touches on the condition of the Abor tribe, whose spiritual and cultural perspectives encounter the emergence of colonial and missionary influences. It also argues for the fates of traditional beliefs, displacement, and resistance in the face of cultural hegemony. This paper highlights the trajectory between animistic traditions and Christianity and the influence of territorial disputes on indigenous identity. Exploring the irreversible transformations evoked by cultural conflict while lamenting the loss of an ancient way of life. This essay ultimately intertwines how The Black Hill discusses cultural conflict as both a destructive and trans-formative force, highlighting the costs of progress and assimilation.

Keywords: Cultural, Trajectory, Colonial, Territorial, Indigenous

Mamang Dai is a prominent novelist who won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for her exceptional portrayal of an unknown story in India, highlighting the cultural disparities that arose due to colonization. The story is about the Abor tribe community, which faces troubles and tribulations in survival under the aegis of British colonization. However, British colonization badly impacted these people's traditional lives in one way or another. This paper primarily explores the cultural conflict of the main character, who experienced a tremendous change in both public and private life.

Mamang Dai's The Black Hill, like her earlier novel, The Legends of Pensam (2006), is centered on cultural conflicts, which arise when hitherto unfamiliar communities come together. The second conflict emerges when women overstep their demarcated zones and rules. Mamang Dai writes, "They are women of the tribe, who protect family and clan. They are women who can break tradition and are ready to pay the price. Women have been doing this at different times throughout history" (Sarangi Web). Therefore, she does not think of Gimur and Nenem, her central protagonists in the novel and The Legends of Pensam, respectively, as essaying novel roles or New Women (Sarangi Web).

The story begins with Gimur, who, being a girl, is not expected to be out at the close of the day awaiting the return of the men. They had met the strangers for the first time in their lives. Gimur, imperious by nature, was very often where she should not be; her kith and kin enforced a strict watch, "They were always looking for her, thought Gimur, her friends, relatives, uncles, aunts. Her mother most of all. What did they want that they were always looking for her?" (Mamang Dai 1). It does not seem to matter what part of the country or cultural group one belongs to, the rules for women continue to follow an unwritten code of restriction and rigid norms. "Gimur did everything that young girls in the village were expected to do; in fact, she was better than most at household chores, but as her mother always said, she

was uncontrollable and daring, more like a boy, whistling, climbing trees and getting into scrapes" (Mamang Dai 2).

In short, Gimur was flouting the norms laid down for women, especially by not being docile and doing things meant for boys, and yet she was no laggard at household chores. By the 17th year, when the story began, she had grown quieter and less imperious to the point of being uncommunicative. Though she now preferred spending time alone at the back of her home, in her mind, she wandered over the hills, speculating on what lay beyond. It was almost as if the strictures of her earlier days, combined with the inevitable changes that puberty and teenage wrought, had tied Gimur down physically yet made her beautiful and certainly did not succeed in subduing her mind.

All the people of Mebo, just not Gimur, were consumed with curiosity about the white men who wanted to establish a trading post downstream from hills around Mebo and protect the people who panned gold from the river bed of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries (Ahmed, 2021**).** Since the villagers did not trust strangers, the village elder, Lendem's father, decided, "They want to talk. We will talk, but we will not show them the way here. We will meet them at the foot of the hill by the river. We will travel at dawn, all the men of the village. One look, they want one look. We will also see who they are. One look matters" (Mamang Dai 4). Distrust of people and motives almost inevitably sets the stage for conflict.

The main character, Gimur, can glimpse the men who returned. They seem like gods to her, and she scans their faces for signs of change. They are meeting with strangers may have wrought. Gimur is more interested in their experience and not in the fact that they are from the opposite sex. Yet, her mother tried pulling her back and admonishing her, "Hide your face girl," a reflex action honed by years of seclusion, deeply ingrained and conveyed from generation to generation.

Her mother's prodding finally pushed Gimur into the verandah at the back used for drying paddy, where she became lost in contemplating the moon, "Shine on my face. Enter my body, float in my blood and settle in my heart like a golden swing" (Mamang Dai 4). Lost in her thoughts, she almost missed the lone stranger, a man, "like a rising spirit with burning eyes and a hard, angry mouth." He responds, "I am Kajinsha" and she in turn says, "I am talking to the moon." So brief yet impactful was their first meeting that, "Gimur felt strangely bereft" (Mamang Dai 5) and Kajinsha memorised the way back to her house, leaving as silently as he had come, tracking the British. Kajinsha did not belong to Mebo but had come from a village beyond the Dau River in the Mishmee Hills.

The second chapter of Black Hill chronologically moves into 1848, and the subtitle 'Far Away, Another Life' takes the reader to France where the third salient protagonist Nicolas Michel Krick begins his life and journey. Early in 1848, Krick took up his first appointment at the Phalsbourg parish in northeastern France, as a second curate. Soon after, the February Revolution removed the King (Louis Philippe) and established the second republic with Napoleon III as president. Events like the British victory in the First Opium War, Nanjing Treaty of 1842 and Treaty of Whampoa in 1844, empowered France and other European powers to take forward Christian missionary work in countries of SE Asia. The unexplored territories of Tibet held a particular fascination, when aged 29, Michel Krick arrived at the Foreign Missions Office in Paris. The reader has to wait for the next step in Krick's journey, for Mamang Dai moves the narrative forward to the next chapter.

Chapter three of the novel encapsulates the confrontation between the British and the Abor, which had intensified since the elders from Mebo set out to take the one look that mattered. Gimur was again crossing the bar set for women by travelling to meet the people, whose village that had been burnt by the British had sheltered. This was a man's pejorative and women were less than welcome. Her father, the

strongest in the village had suddenly collapsed and died and the clan blamed the "white devils" though no real reasons beyond bad visions could be settled upon for his untimely death. At the village a clear demarcation of gender based roles is evident as Lendem goes to the Moshup, the male barrack found in every Abor village, and Gimur to his elderly aunt Moi's home, a clear demarcation of gender based roles. Reports of villagers raiding the British camp and killing three guards emerged and Moi to everyone's surprise said, "They are very clever and careful people. When they want something they will never leave until they get it. Mark my words, I know them" (Mamang Dai 20). Her husband had been one of the first Abor tribals to interact with the British, and even recruit hill tribes for the Anglo-Burmese War of 1824.

He had originally gone to find a woman, who had eloped with a man from another tribe and was apparently given shelter by the British. Women are honor bound to marry within the tribe and a strict segregation of roles based on gender was enforced. Therefore Moi has violated the social norms of the tradition when she joined her husband and accompanied all male missions to meet the British laying claim to areas on the banks of the river Dibang in Suddiya. She has become an object of interest being the first tribal woman they have met, especially a certain missionary's wife, who tries to teach her to write and read. Just as Moi was beginning to comprehend the English alphabet, the British stockade is attacked by other tribal groups lead by the Khamptis in 1839 and her husband died defending the garrison.

Moi would return to the garrison as the missionaries were forced to move away from Saddiya. As Gimur listened to Moi's story, she recalled her father, who had sided with Kamptis and fought against the British prior to his death, "Moi gave her another legacy from that time, "Keep the things, handing Lendem some book and giving Gimur a book and a pencil." It might be interesting to you later on, "When Gimur got home, she had thrown the pencil and book into a basket" (Mamang Dai 23).

Gimur spotted Kajinsha among the men, who come out the moshup after the meeting and then learnt from Lendem that among the men was the son of Mishmee chief, who had died in the Suddiya attack. She learnt his village was far away and he had come with other tribal chiefs to discuss action against the British. It did seem the clans were finally coming together united by their common goal of ousting the British from their land. The hitherto intangible story of Kajinsha and Gimur takes on a definite form, as do the modalities of bringing Krick to Assam:

A fire draws people together" said the elders, and it was true. At that time there were more than twenty-four recognised meroms-fireplaces-burning brightly in the Mebo loghouse, each merom for a particular clan. All the talk was about war, "Our numbers are many" they said, "Who can threaten us? The British may conquer the world but they will never take our land. The words of the miglun are like flea bites (Mamang Dai 25).

The tribes gathered at Mebo to retaliate against the burning of the neighboring village. And, after an age, a common enemy has brought the brother in arms, back to Mebo. For the name Mebo, it meant "both desire and nostalgia for the long-ago time when brothers lived together" (Mamang Dai 27). The importance of Mebo lay in its strategic position guarding the route and ranges that led to the northern Abor villages. Even the word "Abor" has been coined by the people of the plains, for they were actually were part of the "Padam," speaking a dialect of the Mishing language.

The novelist has skillfully woven customs that govern the Abor tribes. In the first instance she traces back the circumstances of the present conflict to protection of Abor slaves by the British, "The slaves were the offspring of the men and women captured by the Abors in the tribal wars, who had been

absorbed into the tribe to perform domestic and agricultural services" (Mamang Dai 26). The successful recapture of some runaway slaves by the Abors had resulted in retaliatory burning of villages by the British. It implied an extremely strict segregation of the members of each tribe, that proscribed dilution of tribal identity. Of course, it also implied that the British inevitably choose the path of imperial benefit. In the second instance, she portrays the life of women typified by Gimur's mother, "She worked day and night planting, weeding, washing, fetching, digging. Her hands were black with charcoal, wood, fire, paddy, husk, pigs, fowl" (Mamang Dai 33). Yet, in spite of keeping home fires burning, women are relegated to positions circumscribed by customary laws and men. Thus, her mother has become a shadow of her former self after her husband, one of the most powerful men in the clan had died- apparently, the power died with the man and the woman was left bereft in more senses than one. She constantly berated Gimur for looking beyond the hearth which she prescribed as the correct place for women. The books that Gimur dabbled in once in a while lead to severe rebukes from her mother, "Go out and work. See how the leaves and shoots grow. Do they speak words or make a sound? No. If you work you will have no time for the idleness, wasting time with the white, dead leaves" (Mamang Dai 33).

In the third instance Mamang Dai recounts vividly the customary planting of rice in the fields or arik fed by rain located away from the village. Therefore, small raised temporary shelters called ippo were constructed to allow a head start at dawn cutting out time wasted in traversing the distance from the village. The ippo also acted as night shelters for watching over fields. They were lonely, unguarded, and rendered especially threatening by the proximity of forest and mountain that both bore the name Kumku. But Gimur seemed to take them on with equanimity, comforted by the proximity of her friend Nago in the neighboring field.

One night when a roaring storm broke, it awakened Gimur to the first of Kajinsha's silent, portentous, and over time poignant visits to her ippo. Though only Nago was privy to the visits, the word got around insidiously till Lendem, her defacto suitor was forced to convey his disproval couched in no uncertain terms. Yet, the crux of the matter was not just a rival suitor, it was the fact that Kajinsha was not from their village. Gimur, the constant rebel wanted to say, "What is the difference? And what is so great about our village?" (Mamang Dai 33), but kept silent to fight another day. Over time, the visits that became more frequent and ardent, Kanjisha and Gimur's relationship deepened in terms of both intimacy and emotion.

Mamang Dai to pen the part with a sweetness that is both direct and endearing. Finally, when Gimur asked Kajinsha what he wanted, he replied, "I want life. You and me, and no secrets" (Mamang Dai 35). Therefore, they are betrothed to one another, without the sanctions of family or society; and Gimur would once again be consciously crossing the prescribed line for women. Though, premarital physical intimacy between men and women did not seem proscribed among the Abors.

In the second part of the chapter, the novelist narrates about Father Nicolas Krick, who has arrived at the Foreign Missions Office in Paris, eager to travel to Tibet. It is aptly subtitled "Over There" in reference to an elusive goal that somehow manages to lie just beyond the immediate horizon. After a fair number of fruitless attempts to enter Tibet through China, the British presence in Assam and assurances from Vicar Apostolic of Bengal clinched the deal for a route through Assam. In addition, Assam was made part of the Apostolic Vicariate of Lassa by Pope Pius IX in 1850.

Watching Gimur's weakness, nausea, yearning to eat yam, ginger, and salty orange coloured clay, Nago said, "Maybe it is time for you and Kajinsha to be married" (Mamang Dai 44). The obstacles in Gimur's

path were forbidding, for she was willfully breaking the tradition of marrying outside the clan and therefore would be ostracised, "Her uncles and relatives were respected elders, but they were taciturn men, who only spoke of Abor pride. She knew what they would say: an Abor girl should behave according to custom" (Mamang Dai 45).

In complete reversal of the dowry system, it is the groom's family that has to pay for a bride. Though Kajinsha is ready to speak to her family and pay the required bride price call a-re glek, the very fact that he is an outsider made him completely unacceptable, "Abor villages were secure enclaves where rules of tradition were never crossed. Inter-tribe relations were a betrayal to the community and girls marrying outsiders were spurned, useless like mustard seed scattered to the winds" (Mamang Daig 46). Thus, a woman's will and freedom had to be fully compliant with the set norms to be accorded acceptance by the village Kebang or council, which wielded unquestionable authority, "Her romantic life would be brushed aside. It was something Gimur could not think of" (Mamang Dai 48). She instinctively understood that Kajinsha, "in his own territory he was a chief with a place and a people. He would demand her cognizance of the and say, "My child must be born in my village" (Mamang Dai 48).

There was no way a woman could reconcile her heart and loyalty; she was a chess piece to be moved only by rule. Anything else demanded an awful price to be paid by only the woman in question. It did not seem Kajinsha was going to face the same issues when he took Gimur home with him. The knowledge of her pregnancy spread insidiously leaving her mother Moi, Nago, and Lendem wrapped in a cocoon of silent rage at Gimur transgression; and they espoused an equally obstinate adherence to customary laws that bound the tribe. Gimur steeled herself to face the hard fact of leaving her home and family, with little hope of return; and slowly made preparations for a final departure alternating between elation and fear.

In the second part of the chapter, the novelist shifts the narration to Guwahati where the three priests have just landed and are unable to come to terms with the landscape, people, languages or their mission. Disease, discomfort and even discord seem regular visitors at their rather cramped dwelling place. It gave Krick the undeniable opportunity to set off on his own on 26th May, 1851, " for an exploratory journey, going through the Assam towns of Tezpore and Nawgong, to the Mishmee and Abor tribal areas at the foot of the 'Himalaya's" (Mamang Dai 55), hoping to reach Lassa in Tibet. Like the warriors at Mebo, Krick too is unable to travel in the monsoon and stayed over at Nowgong, where book from a garrison library told him of the 1839 killing of Adam White and 80 sepoys by the Khamptees and Mishmees in Upper Assam.

It was the same attack in which older family members of our Gimur and Kajinsha have been involved. Though the episode caused the earlier Protestant Christian Mission in Suddiya to move out, but Krick was entranced by the very names of Suddiya, Saikwa Ghat, Abor, Khamptee, and Mishmee. He finally set off towards Saikwa Ghat, taking inspiration from a young areca palm that had survived the massive storm of the night before.

In the third part titled Journey, the novelist recounts in mesmerising details of Gimur and Kanjinsha's journey, leaving Mebo at nightfall, following the river, turning back one last time, "Come," he said. He held out his hand. And she followed" (Mamang Dai 61). As they moved out together in silence:

In that dark unknown world a torch was burning in her heart. This is everything, she thought. This is what I wanted, and it is happening. I am free. Her life, she felt was rushing like a stream in her veins, the stretch and bend of her legs as they climbed hill after hill… (Mamang Dai 62).

Kajinsha seemed to know the way by instinct and experience and cared deeply for Gimur and in reciprocation she knew that there could be no turning back. Given her condition people would later wonder how she undertook the long and ardurous journey to the Mishmee territory, she would in fact have traversed the route during her pregnancy, climbing to the final higher elevations near the Dau River in the final months. Years later, people, who are well acquainted with her did not praise her fortitude, physical courage or endurance, they only saw it as a girl's wild streak possibly inherited from ancestors, who had broken rules. Women seemed to be destined to live roles thrust on them, irrespective of personal desires, and in time became anonymous and nameless in the genealogy of the tribe, "But every once in a while, there was a sudden bend in the road, a separate heartbeat that made someone into a wild woman…like a destiny waiting to be nudged into all or nothing passion" (Mamang Dai 63). Perhaps Gimur was that person.

The finer details of their journey and their happiness, the dangers they faced, the change in the landscape as they moved north, closer to the mountains, and then open expanse of the river that would lead them to Saddiya is etched with a fine pen. At the point, the novelist uses the river as an intersection of the past and present when her father and later Lendem travelled to meet the white sahibs in the past; and in the present Krick's path would cross with that of Gimur and Kajinsha's path, enroute to Sadiya. When Kajinsha asks Gimur to get into the boat he has made and hidden in the banks of the river, she refuses, "She would never get into that thing.

A woman was supposed to avoid water and she had already broken enough taboos wading across streams and river beds in the middle of the night." Long term conditioning of the mind and spirit were difficult to outgrow even for someone as independent as Gimur. She only agreed when Kajinsha said they were rowing towards Saddiya. Their first stop on the part of the journey would be Chunpura, where they met Chowsa, who offered them a hut to rest. Chowsa along with Kajinsha's father had fought in 1839 raid on the British Garrison. Later the British burnt the Khamptee villages around Tengapani and the tribes were forced to relocate to new locations. In a complete reversal of fortunes both sides subsequently turned to each other for trade and protection in conflict in from here on it was a home run in Mishmee territory, moving directly north towards the mountains, now following the Lohit River. In due course, they would reach and rest in Kajinsha's uncle's home in near the bed of the Dau river. Their journey was thus almost over. It is therefore easier to deal with them individually as far as possible and then give in to the intertwined narratives as required, "High in the mountains near the headwaters of the Dau River, Kajinsha and Gimur settled down to their new life together" (Mamang Dai 74).

The girl from the Brahmaputra Valley is making a home in the land where the trees had no leaves. She came from Mebo, across the Siang river near present day Pasighat surrounded by rain forests of the big broad leaves. Her home for the first time had compartments and it was well stocked with corn, salt and logs and "rows of skull trophies of mithun and wild oxen that lined the walls of the front room called the mathung, traditionally reserved for guests" (Mamang Dai 74).

It is noteworthy that demarcates an external area of a home or dwelling for people outside the family seems to be common in most human societies irrespective of geography. Far below the house flowed the Zayul Chu River that would be by turn called the Lohit and then Brahmaputra as it reached the plains of Assam. Behind them in the North reared the high mountains that protected Tibet. On the other hand, Kajinsha had grown up here when his father and uncle moved north and sought the help of Tibetans against the British.

On a personal note it was perhaps the happiest time, a period of honeymoon if you will for Gimur and Kajinsha. The novelist pens a picture dappled in light and tinged in warning dark lines, "This was love-time, when the heart of every flower smiled and all the trees and leaves and the wild grass glinted and sang in the light of the sun and moon. This was before-time, when enchantment could well out of a stone, when ksha-ghosts and evil spirits, sowers of poison and seeds of mist, hadn't yet crept into their garden" (Mamang Dai 76).

Gimur, from the Abor tribe had spurned tribal customs by eloping with Kajinsha, who belonged to the Kmaan tribe. Therefore, none of the elders of Gimur's community would be present for the wedding rituals which were complicated and cumbersome. In the absence of her relatives, "Kajinsha would still have to reciprocate gifts his relatives bought for him. This was called the flow of the commodity basket where the groom would seek the help of his relatives, who, in turn would approach other relatives until everyone involved in the marriage celebration in a system of delivery and payback that could sometimes be very costly" (Mamang Dai 77).

Chief Zhuma, Kajinsha's uncle is accompanied by people from the Kmaan clan brought meat and fish with them. Kajinsha has served them pork and rice beer. Later towards the close of the ceremonies, Kajinsha would present Chief Zhuma with a silver pipe for smoking. A gift that was not only much appreciated but it served to strengthen an existing bond against enemies as Zhuma is well known for his ruthless prowess.

Gimur had one more task to perform as part of her initiation into life with Kajinsha; to visit his first wife and son. He had shared how he had been forced into a marriage of political convenience when he was young and still in mourning for his father. They would travel to the village of Sommeu, located in the present day Tibet Autonomous Region. Sommeu is a typical Tibetan village with stone houses, fluttering prayer flags, and people clustered in open curiosity as Kajinsha walked in with Gimur. The double storied house where ailing Auli his first wife lived with her special.

The final approach to Mebo was dearly familiar, even as fought back thoughts of how unlucky it was to return to the exact spot one had left and silently approached her home in the night, Lendem came out to greet her, "Thank almighty Donyi Polo that you are back." She then learnt of her mother's recent death and that Lendem had performed the final rites. As they recapitulated the past over the dying embers of the fire it became morning, what she had imagined to be the end of life was turning out to be very different, "and no matter how tightly Gimur shut her eyes and tried to embrace the darkness, a field of white light hovered over her trembling lids. This was not the end of the story" (Mamang Dai 64). This was Gimur's hallmark-she never gave in to circumstances no matter how difficult they were or how fraught with danger. Fortitude and undaunted courage were her sterling qualities.

When she met her friend Nago, she undergoes a sea change tremendously. Nago too had married out the clan, but her husband agreed to work in the fields in Mebo. But she soon began seeing visions predicting events that brought the great Abor shaman or miri to their village for her initiation as an accredited miri. In the midst of all the, Krick arrives and is welcomed into Mebo, again guaranteed by his apparent powers of healing and Lendem's good will. Another tragedy strikes Gimur while at Mebo, when her aunt Moi dies, carrying with her all the untold stories of her interaction with the miglun. Krick is finally very happy to find "the tribe of the tattooed cross," and Gimur, who also bears the same motif.

Mamang Dai gives some description of what Gimur looked like, "She had a very straight back and walked with a peculiar tilt holding her arms still by her side as if she were guarding something. Her narrow eyes were stretched back so tightly in her pale, taut face that they looked like black streaks

painted on a mask, but it was an animated mask of changing expressions and vitality" (Mamang Dai 181). Gimur reminded Krick of Bellona, the Roman goddess of war and he was intrigued by her aloof manner and posture. It is significant in the context of events in the future to note the empathy Krick felt for Gimur as he learnt of some of her past from Lendem, "She had done the unthinkable. She was the female warrior, who had crossed rivers and mountains carrying a bright banner of love with the man called Kajinsha.

Yet the dominant impression that Krick gleaned of Gimur was of a person running away from something. Krick yearned to offer her solace, "because of the time he had spent on that hillside when Kajinsha had brought him meat and fish from their household" (Mamang Dai 182). Though she instinctively understood the empathy, yet she was restricted by her belief, "If I speak it will mean I am seeking help and that will be the end of my strength" (Mamang Dai 182). Even as they questioned each other's belief systems, she finally said, "It is not the light of God you tell me about. It is not the spirit of my ancestors. It is something I have given birth to. It is all I have and all that I know.

But I will never give up. Perhaps there will be a second chance" (Mamang Dai 182). That in a nutshell is Gimur; down to earth and unbowed by trials and tribulations in her life. While in Mebo, overlooking the Siang River, Krick realised the meaning of Kajinsha's words, "Had not Kajinsha the Mishmee told him the land was their book?" (Mamang Dai184). He also realised that he would soon move out towards Tibet, his destination, and almost as a premonition, "And in that moment he knew, without a doubt, that the end, whichever way it came or form it took, either cruel death or resurrection, would come from the hills" (Mamang Dai 184).

Over a period of time, Mamang Dai details Krick witnessing the actions of a powerful miri called Mutsang, musing over his belief systems and understanding, "that-all rituals have their roots in tradition. This was the tradition of the Abor, who believed that everything that happened to a man was controlled by good and evil spirits" (Mamang Dai 186). Thus in keeping with the spirits that governed Mebo, it was the appearance of a fire demon that became the immediate cause for his departure from Mebo on Holy Saturday, March 1853. Unfortunately, there are no records that detail his movements or life till autumn in that year.

The third part of the chapter begins with Nago's envisioning of Moi's death coming true. It resulted in initiation of rituals to declare Nago a miri. In addition, it was one more deep loss that Gimur had to bear-she had been deprived of a true kindred spirit, who had travelled beyond Mebo and gifted her the pencils and books. The deep distrust of all things new resulted in a section of Mebo rising against Lendem by virtue of his friendship with Krick and a village meeting in the presence of the Miri had been called to resolve this issue. At the point Gimur's thoughts on the matter are both original and pragmatic, "What a place, she thought. No sooner is a man's back turned than they will begin to talk about him.

How suspicious they are. This was what she hated about the village. It was so small, with all the families huddled together. There was no space for anyone to escape. The collective superstition and fear suffocated their lives. Yet, they were not the elders justified in their superstition and anger? History had shown them that no matter how friendly they were, in the end the migluns brought only death and destruction" (Mamang Dai 192).

This is as much a portrayal of Gimur's mind as it is of the Abor and British by Mamang Dai. Lendem in contrast, had a much simpler outlook, "The priest is just a man like us, if he wants to know something about us why should we be afraid? We are honest people. If we speak the truth, Donyi Polo will protect us" (Mamang Dai 192). In the midst of all the, Gimur seemed to have found the long elusive peace,

"From Lendem and Moi, Nago and the words of the shaman she had learnt a new respect for things that were theirs. With respect came a new humility equal to an all encompassing love and forgiveness for all that had happened.

By the end of the year Lendem and Gimur set out. At the point in the narrative Gimur reflects on her impending reunion with Kajinsha; she hugs the certainty of his being there and what she knew of him like a secret close to heart and invisible to everyone else. For Lendem, aware as she is of his affection for her, she resists the temptation to keep him hoping for an answer, "I have needed you but I do not love you. I need your friendship" (Mamang Dai 198). She also realised that she would fall back on Lendem when the need arose in the future. There is clarity of thought and purpose in Gimur that sets her apart.

As they pass the place Gimur buried her son, the jungle and river have obliterated every sign and instinctively blames Kajinsha for the, whole pain filled episode right from the point of her first departure from Mebo, "What have you given me she recalled shouting at him-and his answer: I have given you love. Hah. A broken thwarted love, she had thought" (Mamang Dai 199). What follows is possibly one of the most magnificent pieces of prose in the superbly crafted and written story. It also demarcates the raison d"etre for Gimur and her existence; lifting what could be a mundane yearning and experience into a near mystical plane."But it was love, yes, she told herself now. She had loved and tasted a passion that was equal in grandeur to a state of being alone and complete. Every step of the way had been a quest for the, sometimes it was full of joy, sometimes it had been hard and bitter, but no matter what, one could no more give up the quest than give up life and breath" (Mamang Dai 199).

Their meeting Kajinsha at Chowsa's dwelling in Chunpura is one of the most bucolic in the book. While Kajinsha and Gimur renew their relationship, the presence and very pleasant company of Awesa, Chowsa and Lendem, made "Gimur realise for the first time the sweet companionship of friends" (Mamang Dai 201). When Lendem was ready to depart, it was difficult for Gimur to hold back her tears and many promises of meeting again are exchanged between the men.

The chapter ends on the less than happy note of news about Krick's presence in Saddiya enroute to Tibet and Kajinsha's firm resolve in denying him passage through his territory; though he could not predict what action his neighbors and contemporaries Lamet, Khorussa and Limsa would take in the circumstance. It almost presages events in the future. Kajinsha's impression of the British when he had escorted an emissary from Marpa's territory to Saikwa Ghat was less than propitious. It was further marred by the enslaved people from the Assamese and Singpho communities, who worked for the British. Apparently, a companion named Augustin Etienne Bourry Krick had been sent to accompany Krick to Tibet based on his letter to them in the previous year.

Over time, a false sense of security developed and as much as Gimur tried she could scarcely keep hunger at bay; the land beset by a particularly lean season yielded very little. A sudden visitation from Chowsa brought news of widespread British troop movement all over their territory. The killing of the priests was being avenged and Chowsa advised moving north but Kajinsha would not seek shelter from Marpa and be ensnared by his machinations. Kajinsha remembered his father's words, "We do not know how long anything will last. Even the sky changes colour. But there are more things to be afraid of than dying" (Mamang Dai 262).

Yet, the brave Kajinsha would be betrayed by neighbours and relations from Sommeu was finally hunted down and captured; he had forced Gimur to jump to safety just before the perpetrators entered his home, which was already aflame. The first punitive expedition against the Mishmee was led by Lt. F. G. Eden

owed its success to villagers, who guided them; the latter probably were emboldened by hopes of personal gain or advantage in local inter clan wars. Mamang Dai writes in heart rending eloquence, "It was a great show of British might and authority.

In a final act of colossal intrepidity, Gimur would travel to Debrooghur, accompanied by Lendem, Awesa and a few others. Under the cover of darkness and a clansman, who was employed by the British. She would manage to see Kajinsha locked behind iron bars, "She was not prepared for the. She had planned for speed and action and tearing down of a door or house. Now she stood staring, falling forward against iron bars. She did not shed tears but her thudded because she knew he was weeping to see her again" (Mamang Dai 278).

All those, who had heard the terrible cry that morning, knew that Kajinsha's death in a Debroogarh Jail was the beginning of warand turmoil. It would provoke a string of attacks on settlements along the border in Upper Assam, that would go on for half a century, swallowing even the Abor territory.

The Black Hill deserves to be called a saga of the time, people and lands that it traverses, adroitly juxtaposing the tremendous topography, the embattled history, unique culture, and universal human emotions. Mamang Dai, a daughter of Arunachal, writes without being apologetic or strident, with an objectivity that comes of wide trans regional experience, and her own laudable achievements.Set in the less than familiar landscape of NER, a richly woven carpet of tribal culture, landscape and people in 19th century Assam**.** Gimur's part in the narrative justified Mamang Dai's core belief that women, who can also break tradition and are ready to pay the price. Women have always been doing this at different times throughout history" (Jaydeep Sarangi Web).

Another salient feature of the novel is the author's ability to weave in the oral narratives, thereby creating a unique sense of identity, inspired by a world of myth, memory, and imagination. The entire novel, therefore in a nutshell is actually a quest against a world view that the author is still exploring" (Sarangi Web).

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