



‘The Black Hill’ -A tale of oppression, struggle and survival

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Abstract

Every human race is unique in its identity and aspires to prosper like the rest of the clans. However, many tribal groups and marginalized ethnic groups face hardships due to cultural relativism. The powerful races subdue them and take over their resources. They are mentally harassed and exploited. They are treated as lesser humans and deprived of most amenities, which has become a worldwide phenomenon. India is also not an exception, and voices have been raised against the oppression and depression of tribal and other minorities. Minorities have been struggling to survive against the hegemony of dominant races.

In India, tribal groups, which number more than 40 million, also need special attention because most live a deprived and isolated life and, in history, are marginalized. The isolation of these tribal groups is not in the national interest and threatens the fabric of Indian democracy. Many tribal groups like the Bhils, Gonds, Mizos, Santals, Nagas, Oraons, Mundas, Khasis and Khonds are fighting the mainstream mindset for survival.

Keywords: Ethnic cleansing, History, Resistance, Tribal suffering, Cultural Struggle

In her preface to Arunachal Pradesh the Hidden Land, a non-fictional description of the northeast state, Dai emphasizes the need to revive the unknown cultural ethos and the past tribal histories of India to safeguard national integrity and the fabric of democracy. She says:

Today change has come like a steamroller.

The transition from unknown frontier to

the modern state has been sharp and the question of direction and destiny has become one of great complexity and soul searching. On the other– the history of our people, our origins and routes of migration remain a matter of speculation based purely on the few recorded documents left by the early explorers. There are also specialized niches in our tribal heritage that may be erased forever if change is not assessed and negotiated carefully. (Dai 9



Thus her novels present the picture of tribal struggle and suffering in the history of modern India. Mamang Dai describes oppression, their struggle for survival, and their urge to exist. This paper tries to unveil many tribal-related issues like oppression, cruelty, subjugation and exploitation which the tribal face. The article delves deep into atrocities perpetrated on tribes by the dominant societies. The narrator's keeping herself aloof from the stories though she belongs to one of these tribal races, gives the touch of universality.

The story is set between 1847 and 1855. This novel, **The Black Hill**, is primarily a story of two tribes, i.e. Abor and the Mishmee. The background of writing *The Black Hill* gives deep insight into Dai's imagination, where she correlates the unknown hidden past to the recorded history of a Mishmi Chief who is put to death for the assassination of French Father Krick and Augustine Bourry.

The Black Hill is a judicious mixture of history and imagination. The story moves around the three main characters of story i.e. a priest, who represents the 'a cross and a sextant', Kajinsha, a man from Mishmee tribe and a woman Gimur who hails from Abor Tribe. Gimur is born in the Abor tribe in Assam.

Historian Alexander Mackensie states, "Beyond the Abors eastward lie the various tribes of Mishmi. Roughly speaking, it may be said these tribes occupy the whole of the north-east corner of the Assam valley." (47).

At the novel's beginning, the writer describes how the English people came as intruders and tried to overtake the ethnic tribes. They were after creating a source of income. The locals did oppose them but were ultimately overpowered by the white men—miglun— "They want to protect those pathetic fishermen and gold washers who worked for us and have now fled to the Assam plains. The miglun want us to make peace because it is their territory now, and they want the gold. That is why a miglun officer is coming to meet us from Assam, from SaikwaGhat", Lendem's father

"Kajinsha was born in a village across the Dau River in the Mishmee Hills. The village is nonexistent; even way back, it had been an anonymous settlement not put on any map. While describing Kajinsha's childhood, Dai portrays the origin and early settlement of the Mishmi tribes. She describes the tribal village of the Mishme tribe as a nameless settlement in the mountains where the Tribes had lived an isolated life. Her narration of Kajinsha's village presents the authentic account of the Mishmi tribes:



What was the village in those days but a house or two, a family i.e. father, mother, children and a few clan members. If they moved that was the end of their village. In the 1800s, what was known as the Mishme Hills was a sparsely populated region of towering mountains and swift-flowing rivers where three great clans of the Mishmee tribe lived. However, the people of Mishmee country called themselves the Kmaan, Taraon, and Idu people and the term 'Mishmee' was an alien word to them. If anyone had asked Kajinsha who he was he, would have said he was Kmaan, distinct from the Taraon whom the Kmaan knew as Tah-wrah or Chimmu, and the Idu clans, whom they called Mindo and who occupied the territories further south and northwest. (Dai 6-7)

Gimur marries Kajinsha though they belong to different tribes and go across the boundaries. The writer says these two are babies of the hills and represent their clans. "The land was there for him to explore at will. The trees were a swathe of green that revealed its secrets to this man who knew their hidden paths and frozen routes over the mountains that kept the tribes apart." (Dai 35) "Colonialism certainly depended upon the use of force and physical coercion. But it could not occur without a set of beliefs that justify the possession and continuing occupation of other peoples' lands," believes Benedict, Anderson.

Not only the outsiders plundered these ethnic tribes, but also the unfortunate thing about these tribal people was that the dominant parliaments gave them the same treatment after independence. The intruders plundered them to make them civilized both in the pre-independence and post-independence eras.

Dai presents Kajinsha as a victim of forced expulsion. He suffers a lot to save his territory. He is not responsible for Krick's death. He is rather framed due to inter-tribe clash and the spirit of vengeance. As Herbert Spencer quotes in *The State Versus The Man*, "that the laws it passes are not in themselves sacred; but that whatever sacredness they have, it is entirely due to the ethical sanction--a moral sanction which, as we find, is derivable from the law of human life as carried on under social conditions. And there will come the result that when they do not have this ethical sanction, they have no sacredness and may rightly be challenged. The function of Liberalism in the past was that of putting a limit to the powers of kings. The function of true Liberalism in the future will limit the power of Parliaments."

In *The Black Hill*, we are shown how the hill tribes are steeped in their soil, breathing and living vigorously. How, despite various taboos, blind faith, and backwardness, they live together in the lap of nature. They are well-willed people. It is the role of colonialism that is under the scanner. It is depressing and disheartening that the law of the land works under ethical conviction. Whatever is approved by moral conviction is imposed on society. If ethics do not support a rule,



it is then discarded.

While Kajinsha's father said, '*if a man owns the land, he owns rest*', that was once upon a time. Now, the times have changed Kajinsha's perspective and aim - If there is land, you must stake your claim to it. "*We read the land. The land is our book.*" It is religion, nothing less".

However, for Kajinsha, '*their land could not be divided up, for they had lived in these lands for centuries, while empires had come and gone.*'

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