



## Ritualization and Routinization: Discovering Liminal Spaces in Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*

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### ABSTRACT

Derived from the Latin term "limen", which means threshold, the term 'liminality' was first traced in the Dutch, German and French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep's book *Le Rites de Passage*. Van Gennep examines the ceremonies occupying an individual's "life crises" into three major distinctions: rites of separation, transition and the rites of incorporation. If Gennep's tripartite structure is studied very carefully and explored in the characters of Mamang Dai's magnum opus *The Black Hill*, it can be very well observed that the Adi and the Mishmi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, about whom Dai has penned down this novel are the same liminal beings, who are in the transitional status of being yet not being. Conferred with the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel, author Mamang Dai, basically scribbles the painful dilemma of three central characters- Gimur, Kajinsha and Father Krick- who have undergone a typical unsettling situation on one hand and an unlimited freedom on the other hand throughout their journey in the novel. The characters' anxieties, frustrations and uncertainties are quite akin and can best be expressed through the impactful words of critic Bjorn Thomassen, who in his book *Liminality and the Modern Living Through the In-Between* writes that liminality is about human beings' journey through various experiences and their reaction to change. So, placing the liminal theory on one side and the predicament of Adi and Mishmi villagers as portrayed in Dai's *The Black Hill* on the other side, this paper is an earnest attempt to trace the liminal spaces that occurred in the daily routinized structures of Arunachali tribes in the dilemmatic historic period between 1847-1855.

**Keywords:** Liminality, adi, mishmi, culture, space

### Introduction

Being a bright and talented tribal woman from the 'Land of the Dawn Lit Mountains' (Vohra, 2013, p.46), author Mamang Dai proudly claims her residence at Pasighat, East Siang district. Dai cracked the IAS exam in 1979, but after serving the job as a civil servant for some days, she discontinued in the same profession and took up writing as her professional career and successfully prospered herself as an author, poet and journalist. She has been conferred the prestigious Padmashri Award by the Government of India in 2011, for her marvelous contribution in literature and education. In the year 2017, Dai has also been honoured with the acclaimed Sahitya Akademi Award for her remarkable novel *The Black Hill*. (Kumar, 2017-18, p.90) Besides, she has been the correspondent with several renowned newspapers of at both national and international levels. In 2003, she received the Verrier Elwin Award for her book *Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land*, that documented the culture and customs of her homeland. (Dai, 2004, p.4) Dai's identity and her sense of belongingness can best be explored in the lines of her another web of short stories, *The Legends of Pensam* (2006), where she writes, "I was born in the mountains, in a village where boys kicked rocks around pretending at football". (2006, p.4) In her conversation with Dr. Jaydeep Sarangi (2017), Dai very specifically elucidated the importance of oral traditions and folklore in the life of the tribes of Arunachal and

how through that territorial space these indigenous tribes posit their unique identity in the hidden peripheral zone:

Oral tradition is a way of life that nurtured us through centuries. All our beliefs, rituals and customary practice have come to us via the oral traditions. About literature, very briefly, the classical literature of Adi people consists of epic narratives originally transmitted in ritual language by a Miri, the Shaman well versed in different branches of evolutionary history. Collectively this literature is called Aabang. (2017, p.2)

In an article Dai mentions about Arunachal Pradesh that the state is still one of the last frontiers of the world where indigenous faith and practices survive in its almost original form as handed down by the age old ancestors. (Vohra, 2013p.47) Also, in one of her book *Understanding the Tribal Religion* (2004) she endorses about the miris of her land, "Through the voice of the miri, all that has been lost or forgotten in the daily routine is restored and revived". (2004, p.89)

Dai tries to portray through her novel *The Black Hill*, the unique and arduous life of the tribes residing on the border between Arunachal and Tibet. The place in which the indigenous people have been instructed or forced to live has given birth to a space of new beginning bounded by Eco spiritualism and green living. Thus, the objective of this study is to explore those liminal spaces observed in the borderland areas and to trace the spatial gap of cultural liminality specifically in the characters of the novel and the sense of uprootedness that developed in the unsettled and unstructured routinization of the Mishmi and Adi tribal communities as mediated through the silent and dark villages of *The Black Hill*. The paper will primarily proceed with the theory of liminality as Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, Bjorn Thomassen and other social scientists have mentioned in their researches and ethnographical records over the past years. It will also focus on the elements of spatial theory as discussed by Edward Soja and Edward T Hall in their respective works.

### Literature Review

Till date, on Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*, various research have been conducted. In 2021, an M.Phil. thesis has been written on Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* titled as 'Cultural Transformation: A Study of Change and Continuity in Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* and *The Black Hill*', focusing on the cultural transformation of the society due to effects of modernity and colonial process. (Khaund, 2021p.5) Again in 2021, there is another research paper titled 'Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* an Eco-critical and Socio-cultural Perspective' where the writer has mentioned about the indigenous tribes' deep connection with nature and their constant attempt of preserving nature. The paper further states the problem of mainland India's indifferent and ignoring attitude towards these tribal societies in Northeast India. (Santhiswari & Palanisamy, 2021p.119) Next, in 2019 a paper titled 'Retelling History: Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* as a Native Spirit' has been written capturing the tribal ethos in a historicism perspective. (Lakshmi, 2019,p.339) Again in the same year P. Chakraborty (2019) writes "'The Hidden Valleys of My Home": Home, Identity, and Environmental Justice in the Select Works of Mamang Dai' stressing on the concept of identity in relation to nature. (2019, p.53) G. Basumatary in her paper "Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*: A New Historical Reading" expounds on the fact that how oral history becomes a process of historiography. (Basumatary, 2019,p.161) In 2018, a research paper titled 'Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*: A Story from Border Perpetuating Borderland Consciousness' has been written to highlight the surviving struggles faced in the borderlands of India. (Rexlin & Latha, 2018,p.600)

So, after a close reading through all these research works, it has been obtained that very few studies till date have discussed the detailed liminal aspect or the in-betweenness as confronted in the characters of *The Black Hill*. Contemplating social seclusion and alienation from the mainland India, the Adi and Mishmi tribes have linked their identity sticking to the borderlands driving their lives in-between the waves of the "fixed" and the "floating worlds", during their passage from one social status to another. (Turner, 1969, p.vii) So, this paper is going to discover those liminal spaces as figured out in the text and its characters.

The very thought of liminality or 'in-between' irked its presence with Mamang Dai's declaration in the 'Acknowledgements' section of the novel, "For many reasons this work turned out to be quite a complex exercise. I thought I had the middle, beginning and end; but most of it was in-between, a striving for kinship with the past, if only passing in between the pages of a book." (Dai, 2014, p.295)

### Research Methodology

The methodology of the present paper is 'textual analysis', following interpretive and analytical reading, primarily based on the close view of the text *The Black Hill*. The attempt is to draw the periodic transitions and the cultural transformations with a purpose of deep understanding of the author's intentions and strategies towards the Adi and Mishmi communities as highlighted in the novel.

### Results and Discussions

From the pre-colonial to the post-colonial era, the anarchical or the imperial rule has always cornered or pushed the tribal people in the margin. Getting separated or facing difficulty with adopting the mainland cultures, these tribes have got connected to their own ancestral roots and the nature, shaping their own unique identity in the form of oral folklore. Thus, this paper aims to discuss the uprooted existence in the unsettled lives of the tribes and how these unkempt or ignored routine has given stage to a unique cultural

representation. The paper will also substantiate on the transitional cultural practices of the specific tribes due to modernization and cultural globalization.

### Liminality

In 1909, French, German and Dutch anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in his book *Le Rites de Passage* made a unique contribution to the term 'liminality'. He scrutinized the ceremonies accompanying an individual's "life crises" and called it as rites de passage, further pointing out that when the activities associated with such ceremonies are examined in terms of their order and content, it is possible to distinguish in the form of a tri-partite structure: separation, transition, and incorporation. Considering this entire process as a whole, he labeled these the schema of rites de passage. Passage, according to him might more appropriately be translated as "transition" and schema as "pattern" inclining towards the growth of "process" and "structure". (VanGennep, 1960,p.vii) Victor Turner in his paper 'Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage' writes:

If our basic model of society is that of a "structure of positions", we must regard the period of margin or "liminality" as an interstructural situation. Rites indicate and constitute transition between states. By "state" I mean here "a relatively fixed or stable condition"- and would include in its meaning such social constancies as legal status, profession, office or calling, rank or degree. (Turner, 1970, p.93)'State', according to Turner refers to any kind of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized. He regards transition as a 'process' or a 'becoming' and in the case of rites de passage even a 'transformation'. (1970, p.94) Turner defends the interstructural character of the liminal by explaining how between instructors and neophytes, there exists a "social structure" of highly specific type. As in the liminal period there is complete equality and unity between instructors and neophytes. (p.99) Turner delineates Gennep's three phases as- the first phase separation becomes the phase which clearly demarcates sacred space and time from profane or secular space and time. It includes detachment of the ritual subjects from their previous social statuses. During the intervening phase of transition, which van Gennep labels as "margin" or "limen", the ritual subjects undergo a period of ambiguity, a sort of "social limbo" which has few of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural statuses. The third phase "re-aggregation" includes actions which represent the return of the subjects to their new, stable and well-defined position in the society. (Turner, 1974, p.57) Turner elaborates about liminal rites in a religious administration belonging to societies which are highly structured, cyclical and repetitive. He distinguishes between the liminality of rites of status elevation and the liminality of rites of status reversal that may be found during periods of rapid and unprecedented social change-which themselves has liminal attributes like age, sex, property and other natural and cultural differences. (Turner, 1969, p.189)

Sudipta Kaviraj in his book *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (1995) highlights psychological liminality unraveling author Bankimchandra's central concern of a society that can be described in two ways in which a social world required definitions, a kind of basic social map which defined "permission and prohibitions". (1995, p.2) The social and moral worlds in which men do reside are made up of two "dissimilar and contradictory elements- the desires which make men and the controls which make society". (1995,p.2) American Indologist Wendy Doniger O' Flaherty in her work *Sexual Metaphors and Animal Symbols in Indian Mythology* (1980) uses sexual metaphors and animal symbols to express religious concepts of the relationships between men and women, gods and goddesses and humans and deities. (1980,p.ix) To explicitly comprehend Doniger's theory it is necessary to cite her examples and one such instance is the use of 'blood'. In Indian view, the most basic of all body fluids is blood, which is essential to both male and female. In Rig Veda, blood is used to kill demons on one side and again on the other side, in Rig Veda, the same blood is mentioned as the female sexual blood- not menstrual blood but the blood of defloration. (1980,p.19-20)

In *Liminality and the Modern Living Through the In-Between* (2014), social scientist Bjorn Thomassen defines liminality as moments or periods of transition during which the normal limits to thought, self-understanding and behavior are relaxed, opening the way to novelty and imagination, construction and destruction. According to him liminality is about how larger groups or entire societies undergo change and transition, how they live through the uncertainties of in-between- and ultimately how they come out on the other side of it. On one hand, liminality involves a potentially unlimited freedom from any kind of structure and on the other hand, liminality covers a typical unsettling situation in which nothing really matters. (2014,p.1) Arpad Szakolczai inscribes that the term liminality should have been the "founding" terms of "modern philosophy". The Latin "limit" is equivalent to Greek peras, so "liminal" in the sense of removing the limit is identical to apeiron, the famous first word of Greek philosophy contained in Anaximander's first fragment. The word became a central category in Pythagorean thought, and Plato and Aristotle discussed it in well-known disquisitions. (Horvath et al., 2015,p.11)

Homi K. Bhabha (1994) throws light to liminality by exploring the concept of 'boundary' and 'beyond', where he writes, "The boundary is not that at which something stops, but as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing." (1994, p.1) According to Bhabha, the 'beyond' is "neither a new horizon nor a living behind of the past". (1994, p.2) Post-colonial narratives often deals with the issue of liminality since the masses have to adjust to a sudden shift of power within their culture. Colonized nations often need to struggle to bring back a sense of normalcy after the end of colonial rule. In

most cases it means ensuring that anarchy, internal feud, and dictatorship doesn't threaten the democracy and interdependence of the nation whilst trying to achieve development and ensure security from other foreign threats. (Mukherjee, 2021,p.174) Bhabha sees culture as the defining element of identities. The idea of cultural hybridity defines essentialism of culture and assumes that all cultures are in a continuous process of change. Hybridity is a 'third space' that allows for the acceptance and emergence of other cultural possibilities. (qtd. in Puchmüller, 2021,p.30)

Dentice and Dietert(2015) in their paper 'Liminal Spaces and the Transgender Experience' writes that the concept of liminality represents possibilities from which social change emerges, especially in the case of transgender movement. With the continuous alterations of social constructions like gender and sex, cultural expectations also do evolve with the same. Individuals who challenge gender norms may bring about social change by changing the perception towards gender, which is structured through gender binary arrangements. (2015, p.77) Edward T. Hall an American anthropologist and cross-cultural researcher in his book *The Silent Language*(1959) discuss space as the silent dictated language and hidden dimension for human action. He specifically points out how the presence of space in our daily chores and actions are always ignored or overlooked evaluating that there is always a space everywhere located in a person's living. He illustrated kitchen (domestic sphere) as the space for women and shop (business world) as the space for men. Even language learning is a process that happens over a space of time. Hall writes, on this context that thousands of experiences teach unconsciously that space communicates but this fact "would probably never have been brought to the level of consciousness if it had not been realized that space is organized differently in each culture. (1959, p.190) The feelings and attachments associated with one culture is almost invariably mean something else in another culture. Jasper Balduk(2008) in his master thesis on human geography, "On Liminality Conceptualizing 'in between-ness'" questions the actual state of liminality in the postmodern world thinking that whether the space of exclusion encompass the space of inclusion, comparable to a civilized village surrounded by wilderness or is it the other way round? (2008, p.15)

According to American Religious Studies Scholar Catherine Bell (1992), 'ritualization' is a process in which certain social actions and cultural practices of the dominated strategically distinguish themselves in relation to other actions which mostly are channelized by the power structures of the dominators. Likewise, as Bell writes, "Ritualization is a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane', and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors." (1992, p.74) Edward William Soja (1996) in his book *Third Space*, describes the 'third space' as a creative recombination and extension built out of the presence of 'First space' perspective that is focused on the real material world and a 'Secondspace' perspective that interprets through a conceived world. (1996, p.7) Thus after a close study of these scholars and social scientists, it can be concluded about liminality that it is the process of 'routinization' and 'ritualization' in which there are several series of uncertain or repetitive events that continue to occur in a flow but in between those unstable and floating positions, the way a person seeks their creative freedom, actually pacifies and justifies the true meaning of life.

### **Sense of uprootedness in the indigenous population of Northeast and Arunachal Pradesh**

Northeast India is a discourse of eccentric identity and ecospiritualistic self-expression which majorly got shape in 1980s and 1990s. With emergence of the colonial rule and fear of Christian domination, the writers from Northeast India accepted their dependency on nature and created their writing space representing ethnographic consciousness and reminding people the essence and strength of their ancestral roots. Also, writings from Northeast India especially "poetry" has attained worldwide popularity and found a distinct voice in the platform of Indian writing in English and in larger platform of world literature. (Debnath, 2020,p.110) Kailash C. Baral in his essay "Articulating Marginality: Emerging Literatures from North East India" mentions that Tilottoma Mishra is empathetic in driving home, saying that

[s]ignificantly for mainland India, the region known as 'North East' has never had the privilege of being at the centre of epistemic enunciation...the imagination of the 'mainland' has even today not overgrown those constructs of the mysterious other. (Zama, 2013,p.4)

And to the same context Temsula Ao a writer from Nagaland points that their (Northeast India's) 'otherness' has helped the localities to overcome their isolation after their feelings and thoughts are textualized or inscribed in written form in "forging similarities of world views with other cultures; yet the uniqueness of their cultural differences has not disappeared". (p.5) The North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), presently known as Arunachal Pradesh, is one of the eight daughter states of Northeast India. The state attained the status of a Union Territory on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1972 and was renamed as Arunachal Pradesh which later acquired statehood in 1987. (Ghosh, 2020,p.32) These eight peripheral states are connected with the rest of India which is termed as the mainland India by a narrow piece of land only 21 kilometers wide in parts-a corridor known as the Chicken's Neck or Siliguri Corridor. (Sarkar, 2020,p.108)

Arunachal Pradesh receives the first rays of the millennium sun in mainland India and is also known as the 'Land of Dawn Lit Mountains'. Arunachal is demarcated in a space stretching eastwards from Bhutan in the west to the Patkoi Hills that forms India's boundary with Myanmar. To the north and north-east, the state marks the last frontier of the country with a long international boundary with China along the crest of

the eastern Himalaya. (Dai, 2009, p.1) Padma Shri Awardee Patricia Mukhim elaborates the complexity of the landmass of Northeast India which in a way reflects the liminal intricacy among the inhabitants of the area:

...a landmass which is seven percent of the country's total area. The region shares only two per cent of its boundary with India while the remaining 98 per cent is bordered by other countries...In terms of their physical features, culture, food habits and language, there is closer affinity with people of Southeast Asia than the people of Northeast India. (qtd. in Sarkar & Rai, 2022, p.66)

J.N Chowdhury (1997) in his book *The Tribal Culture and History of Arunachal Pradesh*, mentions about the racial affiliation of the people of Arunachal who has been variously described by the scholars as Mongloid, Paleo-Mongoloid, Proto-Mongoloid, or, an eminently cultural term, Indo-Mongoloid, as they existed within the bounds of greater Indian periphery or hinter-land. The tribal people with Mongoloid affiliation occupied the southern slopes of the great Himalayan range, from the north-west to the north-eastern limits of India. (1997, p.v) In his book, *The Art of North East Frontier of India* (1959), Dr. Verrier Elwin points the predicament of the tribes of Northeast, who despite having rich talents of art and craft, lack proper materials and infrastructure, in the ignored and marginalized land, to prosper successfully in their creativity:

There is much beauty to be found in Indian tribal art, particularly in the art of North-East Frontier, but to appreciate it requires sympathy, imagination and the ability to relate it its human background. It is also necessary to understand the difficulties against which the artist has to struggle, lack of materials, the general psychological demoralization into which many of the people have fallen as a result of contact with the outside world, and the absence of official or private patronage and encouragement with the past. (Elwin, 1959, p.2)

In the 'Author's Note' of *The Black Hill*, Mamang Dai introduces the historical origin of the two tribes- the Adi and the Mishmi- about whom she has penned down the novel capturing the time of 1847 to 1855. Her writing encapsulates the stigma of spatial complexity traced in the location of home and culture:

...the origin of the word Mishmi is unclear. The three Mishmi groups in Arunachal are known as the Kaman (Miju), Taraon (Digaru), and Idu (Chulikata). Similarly, the nomenclature today for the Abor tribe is Adi...many families who once lived, traded and moved freely in the Himalayan borderlands, the demarcation of the border separated the Mishmi people. Today, there are Mishmi families still living in some nine villages located deep in the mountain forests of Chayu County. Although largely outnumbered by the different nationalities and ethnic groups inhabiting the Tibet Autonomous Region, they continue their cultural traditions, surviving on slash-and-burn agriculture and speaking their own language. But they are not known as Mishmi but as Denga... (Dai, 2014, p.291)

In the 'Acknowledgements' section of the novel Dai explicitly exposes a liminal thought that has gripped in her mind that for many reasons this written work turned out to be a complex exercise, "I thought I had the middle, beginning and end; but most of it was in between, a striving for kinship with the past, if only passing, in between the pages of a book." (Dai, 2014, p.295) And that confirms the exact liminality angle that Dai tries to prove through her words.

## 8. Contextualizing the in-between spaces in the text

### The 'Prologue' of the novel, *The Black Hill* begins with the concept of 'transformation':

I once knew a man whose shoulders touched the sky. He was a very brave man. Everything came to him as if he was appointed by the gods to go where no man had gone before. Everyone who met this man wanted to turn someone else. They wanted to exchange their old selves for a new life. (p.ix)

These words are akin to the Horvath et al. (2015) who ignited the thought of liminality as a cultural transformation where lived experiences transform human beings and the larger social circles in which they partake whether cognitively, emotionally and morally and therefore significantly contributes to the transmission of ideas and formation of structures. (2015, p.2) In the same way Dai is talking about the hero of the novel Kajinsha, who after his death has touched the sky as the God himself. Throughout his life on earth Kajinsha has lived with lots of mental uncertainties and inter-tribal wars. But his only motto was to protect his territory from the outsiders or the British villains and to start a revolution, establishing a fresh identity of the tribes in the "bleak", "sad", and "deserted site" of *The Black Hill*. But it is only after his death that the tribal unity rose in power and initiated a new life. Thus, the ritual of Kajinsha's death can be considered a major event for the cultural transformation of the Mishmi and the Adi tribes in Arunachal Pradesh as Van Gennepe (1960) considers death as the rite of not only separation but after a transitional phase of a stage of re-integration.

To analyze the novel, *The Black Hill*, from the very beginning it is very important to jump at the very end of the text where Gimur says, "And I am the earth and Kajinsha is the sky and we have looked at each other and will look at each other like this for a million years". (p.289) Here, Gimur is a character who directly falls into the trap of Arnold van Gennepe's (1960) "rites of separation" and she wants to join Kajinsha (the Sky) after becoming the Earth, so she is about to step into the "rites of incorporation" soon. Thus, Gimur is being clearly spotted standing at the liminal phase. But while this liminal incident marks the ending of the story, unfortunately Gimur, who is one of the central characters of the novel, is seen in the 'in-between state' throughout the narrative of the story.

When Gimur became pregnant and she could sense her pregnancy, she was stuck in the middle of her thoughts whether she should at all give birth to the baby or she should consume medicinal plants and kill the child. Van Gennep (1960) includes "pregnancy" as one of the transitional phases which include separation from society and reintegration after childbirth. (1960, p.41) Thus Gimur is caught in the same category, "She thought of killing the baby-there were herbs and roots that she could take, but she would have to tell someone, and everyone in the village would know. This was what held her back". (p.47) Gimur is scared of her society because she got indulged in an inter-tribal marriage. She is a woman from the Abor tribe and her love Kajinsha was a man from the Mishmi tribe. Thus Gimur is very sure that the village *kebang* (council) would never give verdict in favour of this marriage and Kajinsha is unacceptable, "...in their eyes he was unacceptable." (p.46) So, keeping this dilemma of marriage and pregnancy in her mind, Gimur thought, "There were only two ways to deal with this. It was either war or abduction". (p.46)

Again, it is detected when Gimur is finally planning to leave her village Mebo, leaving behind her mother and her friends where she thinks of starting a fresh and a prosperous domestic life in Kajinsha's village same as van Gennep's initiation rites, she says, "There are people here, families, but I will find new friends and families in the other place too. And Kajinsha and I will be together". (p.50) In this case, Gimur is thus traced in the "territorial passage" or in the boundary line from where she is going to move from one social status to another and start a new life. (Van Gennep, 1960, p.18)

Kajinsha's life is always constructed in a consecutive series of events between "fixed" and "floating worlds" (Turner, 1969, p.vii). From the ritual of his birth to the ritual of his death, he has rarely got any fixed location to spend his life. "Kajinsha has born in a village beyond the Dau River in the Mishmee Hills". (p.6) But that village "is no longer in existence" and "it had been a nameless settlement not recorded on any map" (p.6) From his childhood Kajinsha has grown up in an unsettled ambience or "in an environment of war and death" (p.7), he has heard stories of "a race of white men called the British" forcefully conquering their lands and it arose in him a sense of instability:

Claims over land, possession of rivers and streams and ownership rights to hunt and fish, regularly erupted into bloody, inter-tribal feuds and no one knew when the fighting would end. One summer night Kajinsha had woken to the cries of men and woman fleeing like helpless spirits even as attackers of a neighbouring clan cut them now. (p.7)

Thus, in order to seek peace and planning for a better future, away from these stressful situation, Kajinsha's father decided to settle in a new place "north to the Dagum mountain range on the border with Tibet" (p.8). And this new place again became a liminal zone capturing separation from the old and incorporation with the new. But while on one hand this tensed situation of inter-tribal war and the process of British arrival was creating anxiety, it is perceived on the other hand that "Kajinsha's father had performed rituals for a peaceful existence in the shelter of the snowy mountains" (p.7) which lucidly symbolizes a way to seek liberalization, and this matches exactly the words of Bjorn Thomassen, who says that both freedom and anxiety are condensed in liminal moments. (Thomassen, 2015, p.1) Also, as Catherine Bell (2009) points that ritualization is a powerful tool to act differently declining the orders of the oppressors.

Van Gennep has included "death" as a ritual which defines the "rites of separation". In *The Black Hill*, Father Krick's death is a major ritual in Kajinsha's life, it battered him an existence of a liminal phase, where he was living between two lives- one his own and the other with the death of the priest- as Dai writes, "Everything is now between him and the dead priest". (p.259) War is a ritual in which according to Arnold van Gennep, the entire society is seen as liminal. (qtd. in Jais et al., 2022, p.47) Since his father's death, Kajinsha has always embraced "misfortune and death", (p.10) his life has never been smooth and easy but rather occupied and accompanied by "war, always war". (p.10)

The other central and complex character of the novel is Father Krick, who is a Catholic missionary sent from the Paris Foreign Missions, to spread Christianity in Tibet as it "was the land of reincarnate god kings, the source of great rivers, the destination of caravans, immense riches, magic and miracles". (p.14) But, "it was impossible for any European to enter Tibet through China without the permission of the Emperor". (p.37) So, "the only alternative was to find a southern route across the Himalaya through India". (p.38) Thus, initially Krick was on his way from Paris to Madras, "he had no idea of his new destination, but he was willing to learn" (p.39), then he reaches Calcutta and finally to Guwahati where he

...had entered a strange and desolate place at the end of the earth". (p.41) At this particular juncture, after moving from one place to another, Father Krick embraces a joyous state on one hand as "the only consolation was that they were now within striking distance of Tibet. (p.41)

But on the other hand, there was a fear as "beyond the Assam plain was terra incognita and anyone who went into those wild hills did so at their own risk. It was the land of 'savage mountaineers'". (p.42) So, Krick's liminality is identified through the critical lens of van Gennep's (1960) passage from one social status to another and Thomassen's condensed liminal moment mixed with angst and excitement. (Thomassen, 2014, p.1)

Planting medicinal plants is one of the popular cultures of Arunachal Pradesh, Dai (2009) in her essay 'Oral Narratives and Myths: Glimpses from the North East' writes, "Arunachal tribes have a tremendous knowledge of the use of plants for native medicine and the instructions handed down from generation to generation are contained in stories and myths... (2009, p.2)

Towards the end of Father Krick's journey in the Abor and Mishmi villages, when he was constantly undergoing mental pressures for leaving the Mishmi village and was denied permission to stay in the within the boundary of the tribal villages, he thought of adopting the culture of medicine and learning practice of healing patients because that was the only way left for him to survive with the indigenous population:

I am here a Catholic priest, he thought, but my stay here is permitted only because I am regarded as a healer, a doctor priest. Medicine, it was medicine that had saved him with the Mishmee and it was the same here. What power lies in the hand that cures!" (p.187)

According to critic Victor Turner (1970), in the liminal moment there is complete submission and full unity between the instructors and the neophytes (1970, p.99). Thus, in this case Father Krick's cultural practice of medicine symbolizes unity between the colonizers and the colonized. Again, there is another instance of unity, portrayed between the dominators and the dominated in the novel, when "a group of two hundred Abors went down to the plains to meet the British," (p.21) Moi, the Abor woman, joins this group and seeing a tribal woman in an entire team of tribal men, "the migluns were intrigued by her." (p.21) And out of them one miglun lady "brought out a book and a pencil" (p.22) and handed it over to her. This book and pencil clearly symbolizes the hint towards educational development among the tribes which can ultimately help in removing the barriers between the oppressor and the oppressed.

The novel discerns a 'third space' with the transformation of the character Nago, as in the beginning she is portrayed as the "ponung rutum" (caretaker of the girls) at the "rasheng" or the girls dormitory building. (p.31) helping Gimur to marry Kajinsha, later, the same Nago, secures the position of a "true shaman". (p.191) The ritual of being a shaman started in her life when one night she began chanting words which the ordinary villagers could not comprehend. Later, she had a dream about a tree "standing by small path that suddenly splintered into pieces", (p.190) and she exclaimed that "Moi is dead!" The very next day Nago's dream turned into reality when "Moi has been crashed to death in her hut by a falling tree". (p.190) Thus, Nago perfectly matches Henri Lefebvre's first space where she can be perceived by everyone, the second space where she dreams about Moi's death which is conceived because it takes place only in her mind and it was unseen but ultimately, she contradicted Soja's third space when the journey of imagination is entering into the real world and the death of Moi occurred. So, apart from stepping her presence in the third space, Nago also passes through a threshold or experiences a journey from a normal villager to her turning into a miri as everyone in the village elated her "Nago is turning into a miri". (p.170)

According to Jais et al. (2022) "liminality refers to those moments of transition (in-between) from one stage to another where a person is standing on the threshold of losing the older self and transforming to the next", (2022, p.42). In the case of Augustine Bourry and Father Krick, there is a transformation, observed in their cultural practice, from being French Catholic priests to working in the fields practicing medicine:

They came in the evening after work in the fields and the two priests provided ointments and simple remedies for stomach ailments, flu, skin allergies. Bourry was trained in nursing work from the seminary and the patients could sense his mental ability...Medicine and music. That was the secret of winning hearts and minds". (p.231)

To wind up, liminality in the novel, it is impossible to miss out Edward T. Hall (1959) who declares that space speaks and space is assigned very much with the gender specific routines. (1959, p.190) In Dai's novel it is evaluated that Kajinsha's job is to move from one village to another, planting aconite, gathering with men in the moshup for administration related decisions. But Gimur's work space is limited to fields and kitchen. Although, she delivers "meat and rice beer to the moshup" (p.27), but she is barred to enter for the decision-making space with men.

## Conclusion

To conclude, Dai's characters are placed in the periphery or in the border area, in which they themselves have marked their own presence with their rich folklore, oral traditions, handicrafts and their unique and enigmatic culture which stands different from the mainland India. Separated from the claustrophobic culture of the centre, these tribes have occupied themselves with a sense of eco-spiritualism inhabiting deep rooted environment ethics and maintaining an affectionate bond with nature. Oral narratives have the potential of standing as one of the strongest discourse of literature as it provides a unique identity to the tribal communities. (Banerjee, 2015, p.45) Mamang Dai in the 'Introduction' of the book *The Inheritance of Words* (2021) writes, "The oral tradition has survived with festivals, epic narratives, and the performance of rituals by shamans and rhapsodists who were revered as the guardians of a way of life and custodians of a tribe's collective memory." (Dai, 2021, p.2)

So, after getting pushed in the demarcated boundary, these indigenous tribes have accepted an oral world, surrounded with green living and inscribed their signature identity in a hidden land with the help of shamans, rituals and stories. These marginalized liminal characters in *The Black Hill*, are the reflection of the oppressed and silent villagers present in the unseen spaces of Arunachal, who have kept their seclusion and alienation alive, away from the mainland India, with an aim just to preserve their culture and animistic faiths which are lost with the advent of modernization. This research paper is an earnest attempt to highlight those cultural and transitional spaces that needs the world's immediate attention.

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