RE-NEGOTIATING THE TRADITIONAL ROLE: WOMAN IN THE BLACK HILL OF MAMANG DAI

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Abstract

It is believed that Sexism operates at different levels of social structure to acculturate the inhabitants of the society according to its own ideologies. These rigid norms and rules contribute in the development of stereotypes, taboos and traditions. Sexist social structure propagates women to be inferior to men to serve its functional aspects. Situating within the lexicons and ontology of the women liberationists and feminists, this paper aims to assess The Black Hill of Mamang Dai that portrays the socio-political as well as the cultural status of women of the indigenous Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh. many such instances where we find the female characters either performing some works those are considered to be their duty to maintain the functional structure of the society or else being mere objects or scapegoats in the hands of men. In the novel we also find the association of some adjectives such as "uncontrollable", "daring" and verbs- "whistling", "climbing" as mal-fitted for an Adi girl. These words sharply speak of the sanctified role of a female to be played and which is surely different than the role of the male section of the society. This paper further, attempts to focus on how sisterhood and the active participation of men can contribute in the process of the re-negotiation of the phallus-centric social structure and cultural perceptions of women.

Keywords: Sexism, Women, Culture, Negotiation, Agency

INTRODUCTION

It is assumed that most of the society has been acculturating the ideology that women are inferior to men since the commencement of human civilization. Social structures and norms are those apparatuses which impose certain status to the individual and the groups of the society. Lindsey defines Status as "a category or position a person occupies that is a significant determinant of how she or he will be defined and treated." (Lindsey, 2016, p. 2) By imposing status to the members of a society it creates a "system of social stratification" (ibid). The social status of female in most of the society does not get a higher position than that of male which makes women "vulnerable to social stigma, prejudice and discrimination" (ibid). According to the status that women possess in a society they are expected to make themselves fit in certain roles. Hence, the status of a woman demands her to be submissive and dominated by the man who assumes to possess more power than the woman. Consequently, **social structure, status** and **role** demand us to machinate our lives in a predictable and pre-expected way. These rigid norms and rules contribute in the development of stereotypes, taboos and traditions. We often find women being stereotyped as weak, emotional and unreliable, and hence meant to be dominated by the more powerful, strong, less-emotional and reliable counterpart of the society.

Sexism i.e. consideration of women as inferior to men perpetuated by the Patriarchal system leads to the oppression of women. Through the cycle of 'introduction- repetition' of this socialization

process, the legacy of women being lower in status and objects to be used if needed for the benevolence of men was given a solid ground. With the span of time, it became hegemonic with the consent of women themselves as they started to accept the pre-decided social role and also advocated about the legitimacy of that social standard. Considering the concept of woman being the agent of patriarchy to propagate the role of women being submissive, Toni Morrison states in her article 'What the Black Woman Thinks about Women's Lib' that "somebody's nice black grandmother shoulders the daily responsibility of child-rearing and floor-mopping …" (hooks, 2015, p.51) Here in Morrison's words the 'nice black grandmother' metaphorically appears to refer to the 'woman agent' of the male oriented society. In this process of objectifying women, the desire of this other sex (female sex) gets chocked by piles of dos and don'ts and they instead of getting subject-hood become objects in the hands of the dominating power i.e. patriarchy.

Simon de Beauvoir's argument in her essay *The Second Sex*, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" is not an issue faced merely by the French women anymore; rather it has become a global concern which is not only apparent in the case of the women of western societies but also traceable in the societies of the North-eastern states of India. Within this locus this paper shall analyse the status of women inside the Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh of India as mirrored in *The Black Hill* of Mamang Dai. The present paper shall also assess the possible interpolation of 'Sisterhood' as well as the necessity of the collaboration of the male counterpart to abolish the practice of objectification of women from the phallus centric socio-cultural provinces.

LITERATURE AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Mamang Dai, the author of *The Black Hill,* mostly wrote about the folk literature and culture of the Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh which guide as well as control their daily activities. Arunachal Pradesh is one of the conglomerations of the eight different states situated in the north-eastern region of India. It is an abode of 26 major poly-ethnic and hetero-cultural groups. Literature in Dai's hand seems to be a transformative representation of the source material i. e. the Adi oral tradition and culture.   The women characters in *The Black Hill* appear to be thinly veiled textual representation of the women of her society. In conversation with Jaydeep Sarangi, Mamang Dai while explaining about the idea behind the character portrayal of women like Gimur, conveyed:

> "They are women of the tribe who protect family and clan. They are women who can
> also break tradition and are ready to pay the price. Women have always been doing
> this at different times throughout history."(Sarangi, 2017, p.5)

This focal ethnic community has been patriarchal in nature since the genesis of the human being in accordance to the creation myth of the Adis and they trace their evolution from a male ancestor named Abo Tani. Mamang Dai, the poet, journalist as well as a noted author, herself being an Adi, communicates about the socio-cultural status of women through the fictitious female characters architected on the factual facets of the Adi community and their culture. The present paper shall try to critically appraise the socio-cultural and socio-political status of women inside the indigenous Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh as depicted by Mamang Dai in her novel *The Black Hill.*

DISCUSSION

The novel unfolds a catalogue of the female characters gradually in the course of the development of the narrative. In *The Black Hill* we get many such instances where we find the female characters

either performing some works those are considered to be their duty to maintain the functional structure of the society or else being mere objects or scapegoats in the hands of men to extract desirable outcome in the struggle to be the power holder in the socio-political context. The initial pages of the novel introduced the central female character of the novel, Gimur, a seventeen year old girl of the village named Mebo. This girl learnt all the household-chores and other feminine works taught by her mother and the elder girls of the village in Rasheng. Rasheng is a girls' dormitory built inside an Adi village for the girls of the village to stay, socialize and to acquire traditional knowledge from the elder girls. Here Gimur's mother and the elder girls of the village played the role of the agents of Patriarchy as Morrison metaphorically puts it in the guise of a "nice black Grandmother". In the course of the development of the story we find her mother playing the role of a "mother-educator" (Goodman, 2015, p.13) and complaining about her performing some activities those are not canonized for a female member of the society:

> 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 and climbing trees and getting into scrapes.(Dai 2014, P.2)

The pattern of description of Gimur to be fit to the expectation of the society as well as the association of the adjectives -"uncontrollable", "daring" and verbs- "whistling", "climbing" as mal-fitted for an Adi girl transparently reflects the sharply sanctified role of a female to be played and which is surely different than the role of the male section of the society. Here the Home and Family can be seen playing the role of apparatus of the Andro-centric society. Gimur's mother can be metaphorically compared to a legislator of this institutionalized apparatus who encouraged Gimur to consider the gendered norms of her society. *Rasheng* or the girls' dormitory of the traditional Adi society is another institution that helped to re-impose the similar gendered norms in the name of socialization.

Family and peer groups are the institutions of Patriarchy those work at the micro level of the social structure. The **micro sociological** analysis of the gender role and its imposition on the individuals of the society directs "attention to small groups and the details of gender interactions occurring, for example, between couples and in families and peer groups." (Lindsey, 2016, p. 5) The conversations between Gimur and her mother as well as the conversations along with the other girls of the *Rasheng* discussed above therefore, give an evidence of how the male-centric social structure works at the micro level inside an Adi community.

Further, Lindsey opined that at the macro level such society targets the "large-scale social phenomenon such as labour force, educational, and political trends that are differentiated according to gender."(ibid) In the novel we saw that the society of the Mebo village did not hold back to influence the social structure at the macro-level as well. Each of the members of the society contributes to maintain the functional structure of the society which can be termed as "structural functionalism". (Lindsey, 2016, p. 6) In the novel we saw at several point of the narrative that the Abor and Mishmi societies (Sub-tribes of the Adi community) are constituted of interdependent sections. These functionalist societies made it clear that each separate group of the society perform some predetermined role to satiate the basic functional need of the society. Hence, there are separate and discriminated set of rules which the male and female groups of the society have to follow. For the young girls like Gimur there were very less time to rest throughout the day. They

had to wake up "before daybreak, lit the fire, let out the chickens, threw stick at the pigs" and pounder paddy on the veranda of the house.(Dai, 2014, p.27) The work of grinding grains in mortar and pestle is again a work considered to be the duty of girls. The description of Gimur's mother as an aged widow working "day and night planting, weeding, washing, fetching, digging and her hands to be black with charcoal, wood, fire, paddy, husk, pig, fowl," speaks of the divided and discriminated work of a widow and at the same time, of a woman living inside the Adi society of the Mebo village. (Dai, 2014, p.33)

In such preindustrial societies men were given the task of hunting, gathering and farming, and due to this they had to be away from home for longer periods of time. Therefore, to keep the society functional, the women were assigned the domestic role to keep them near the home. The successive generations as well had to follow the same established rule and the girl children kept being back at home to help in the domestic activities whereas the boys accompanied the older males in hunting. The setting of *The Black Hill* as well speaks about such preindustrial societies where men are the bread winners and the women are the nurturers. On the other hand, education was also never considered to be the field for women; instead they had to stay back in their village to help their parents in household and agricultural activities. Hence, Gimur's mother tried to impose the household works whenever she sat with the book of words handed to her by Moi. She was skeptical about the benefits of education and questioned Gimur about her expectations:

> 'What kind of magic are you expecting by doing this?' She lifted the book and shook it in Gimur's face. 'What are these things? Words! What are words?' She cried. 'Speak the words you mean and say no more. Go out and work!'(Dai, 2014, p. 33)

Though nurtured in a patriarchal society, Gimur turned to be a foil to the expectations of the sexist ideologies and always tried to re-negotiate the traditional set of gendered rules. She unlike other young girls went with Lendem to visit the village warriors and instead of her mother's instruction to hide her face "Gimur was thrusting forward and craning her neck to look at the warriors."(Dai, 2014, p. 3) Another female character of this novel named Moi has also enjoyed few unconsecrated practices those were not meant for a woman. According to the narrative, in 1836 when a group of two hundred Abors went to the plains to meet the British to discuss their claim to settle on the banks of the Dibang River, Moi went along with her husband and other warriors. Moi described it to be an unthinkable move at that time, "for a woman to join what was a mission only for men." (Dai, 2014, p.21)

Gimur could measure out her inevitable fate of being obedient if she remains in her village out of the words of Moi. She states that "If a Woman looks after the house, prepares food and feeds her husband and her children she will be loved and she will be happy."(P.48) This sort of conditioning of 'happiness' that sprouts after fulfilling men's demand speaks of the idealized and legitimized duty of women where her hopes and demands does not find space to flourish. Hence Gimur's desire for a free life compelled her to fly away in a place beyond the treetops with Kajinsha. She chose love and marriage as a way to escape from the barriers of sexist hegemonies into an egalitarian society where she could live 'happily ever after'. When she had a glance at Kajinsha's house on a hill-top, her soul was conflagrated by the sense of liberation; liberation from being coerced to be the stereotyped woman:

"It was a high, faraway place where she could see the sun splintering into bright streaks of light…Her soul was in flight, soaring high above this unknown land and Kajinsha was an eagle, watching her flight, and calling her to enter the freedom of the sky."(P.62)

She found herself to be free, free of those suffocating delimitations and anticipations of 'others' those were present in the society of the Mebo village. Gimur even thought about her mother and other women of her community. She was the one perhaps in the long line of the forefathers who had broken taboos related to marriage system which was a step forward to acquire freedom. The Adis practice customary norms related to marriage such as bride price, choosing the suitable bride and marriage within the same clan. Endogamy is the basic practice of marriage as depicted in *The Black Hill.* The thought of disclosing the relationship of Kajinsha and Gimur to her clan's people compelled Gimur to recall an incident of the past. She recalled that people of her clan chased and looked for "the woman who had run away from the village with a lover so many years ago." (Dai, 2014, p. 45) In her case as well it was impossible to marry Kajinsha as he belonged to a different clan called Mishmee. She knew that the village elders would never agree as inter-tribe marriage was against their custom and "a betrayal to the community". (ibid) Being a girl of such a traditional society "where rules of tradition were never crossed", Gimur broke the customary law of marriage and eloped with Kajinsha in the quest of liberation. (ibid) From the socio-political perspective it is believed, endogamy ensures that property, wealth and power are kept inside a particular clan. Marriage was considered to be an act that could affect the interest of a society in the political context. Socio-political concern gives birth to such cultural perception of women to be bound by customary laws and traditions where their desires do not get any value. Gimur, after realizing the plight of a woman inside such traditional patriarchal society urged to enquire "What they had desired? What secrets had they buried in their hearts?" (P.63) Gimur further sensed that women of this respective ethnic community were anonymous like objects and "forgotten in the story of bloodlines" as if they never existed like a desiring subject.

We can further see that customs, taboos and rituals perceived by the use of language and images succeeded to an extent to delimit the scopes and possibilities of a woman of any society. In the words of Temsula Ao, Women, no matter how daring and bold in nature are "suffer from remnants of this psychological 'trauma' of subordination" and forget to voice out their hopes which "in their grandmothers' times might have seemed perfectly logical but which now appears to be paradoxical within the 'modern, educated' self."(Gill, 2013, p. 130) The negative cultural perceptions and prohibitions imposed on women by customs and taboos of a traditional society affect the psychological 'self-image' of the women. Taboos sometimes decide what are the foods those women can eat, works those women cannot do, how should a woman behave in front of her husband and his family members and so on. The cultural prohibitions imprinted in the psyche in the name of taboos are very much visible in Gimur's refusal to cross streams:

"'Are you mad?' She said, gesticulating wildly. 'No never!'She faced him and shouted into his face, twice. 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."(Dai, 2014, p.64)

On the other hand, taboos related to the birth of twins and custom of inheritance again influenced the conjugal as well as social status of Gimur. After giving birth to twin babies and the death of one

at birth everything changed for Gimur. Such depiction communicates that the birth of twins are considered to be unlucky and studded with negative perception which can affect the social status of a woman of Abor as well as the Mishmee society. Gimur knew that her status in the society will not be same any more as the women of her society will start avoiding her and will stop weaving with her "for fear of giving birth to twins."(Dai, 2014, p. 85)It further appeared out of Marpa's advice to bring another wife to Kajinsha that the birth of a sick child can devastate the marital status of a woman. This argues that without a strong and capable son, no one can inherit the power or lands after the death of a father. Here we can see how the physical capabilities of males mold the notion of inheritance and possession of power. From the functional sociological perspective this custom can be expressed as a strategy to maintain the political structure of the society by possessing power in the hands of the male members of the society. It is again a process of imposing dominance on the subordinated group of the society by the superior others. Hence in case of inheritance also women lose their scope and that vacant space gets fulfilled by the other alternative gender, Men. Marpa even tried to rationalize his advice by saying: "What is a man without sons?" (P.120) Kajinsha even sometimes felt that through Marpa his inner and silenced thoughts are being voiced. It shows that husbands and the other members of this respective society perceive the role of a woman as a child-bearer. Such cultural images of women continuously support the male dominance prevalent in society.

Due to this cultural perception etched in the psyche, Gimur also knew that she has to bear Kajinsha's son again- "a healthy child, a boy" if she wants to maintain her marital status which has been made vulnerable after the birth of Siengbow, the surviving sick child and the death of her other son.(Dai, 2014, p. 128) In their society the marital relationship seems to stand on "No child, no acceptance" strategy and it is a fit case for a man to marry again. This thought of pleasing Kajinsha to save her marital status overshadowed Gimur's hope of a free life that seemed to be fulfilled after her marriage. Hence, gender inequality is a visible practice in the Abor and Mishmee society where the desire, demand, and hope of the subordinate gender never came out in the limelight and women became a means either to produce male heirs or to get power, food and satisfaction.

Sexism even tries to determine women as inferior by attaching negative perception such as weak. The negative feminine perceptions have been used to describe the inabilities of men as well in a sarcastic manner. In *The Black Hill* as well Marpa used the word 'woman' metaphorically to ridicule Kajinsha's father. His father once along with his clan's brothers fought too hard to win the land that Kajinsha owns now. Later on, it is perhaps to avoid ethnic conflict and in search of peace he gave up fighting, hunting and went into the hills in search of medicinal plants. To this act of Kajinsha's father Marpa pretended to feel pity and considered this act as feminine and called him *eunuch*:

> "'Oh! What a pity! He is turning into a woman, hah! Hah!'A rumor spread that his father was losing his power. They called him eunuch; a man who had turned into an effeminate being and had laid down his weapon to collect wild herbs..." (Dai, 2014, p.113)

Through the use of such ironical words and the association of woman with weakness and loss of power, language and words further helped to advance the gender issue inside the socio-cultural sphere. Elizabeth Orchardson-Mazrui while discussing about how language as a cultural apparatus can deepen the gender issue in African societies, argued in her essay *The Impact of Cultural Perceptions on Gender Issues* that "taboos and restrictions are bound to have an effect on the psyche

of women. Language and cultural perceptions or attitudes, can either liberate or dominate women. Language and imagery can be effectively used to perpetuate cultural and ideological values, or, more insidiously, domination."(Creighton and Yieke, 2006, p.148)

This is how negative and positive cultural perceptions influence the power and control structures among traditional Adi societies. It is the negative associations those instigates the patriarchal societies to devalue women and use them as objects to extract desired results. Woman the 'subordinate self' has been used by 'other' as object to fulfill the demand of the 'other' in political arenas as well. In the concerned story of *The Black Hill* Kajinsha married Marpa's niece, Auli just to keep the political alliance intact with Marpa and his clan. This marriage was not based on love or any kind of affection, but it was merely a systematic action to acquire power and peace in a socio-political context:

> "And it was his pursuit of power, his desire to be a stronger and more successful chief that had been the reason why he had agreed to marry Marpa's niece…I took this woman, the sick woman lying upstairs, not for love but to keep my father's pact with her people, Kajinsha thought." (Dai, 2014, p.114)

In this power struggle Auli and her expectation turned to finely grained seeds inside mortar and pestle. Auli, though sick, must have hoped for a joyous conjugal life with Kajinsha, "But it had been a joyless union, everyone could see that."(ibid) Kajinsha and Marpa have used Auli as an object to fulfill their quest for power. This kind of objectification of women is again a result of superiority and inferiority complex that is present between the two discriminated genders.

Later on, Marpa tried to trap Kajinsha again by using Chhomu, the younger sister of Auli. Marpa tried to inflame Kajinsha's desire to have capable healthy sons and often "hinted that Kajinsha should take another wife."(ibid) He even advised Kajinsha to take Chhomu though he was already married to Gimur, his second wife. This reflects the fact that polygamy had been a well appreciated and acceptable custom among the Mishmees of Arunachal Pradesh. In case of Kajinsha his first marital tie was nothing more than a political pact. Though his second marriage with Gimur was based on love but the inability of Gimur to produce healthy and capable male heirs of Kajinsha turned it into a vulnerable marital knot. Further, Marpa could advice Kajinsha for his third marriage with the justifiable notion of getting a male heir which is again led by the cultural perception of woman as a mere child-bearer.

Marpa not only advised, he even made Kajinsha drunk and, locked Chhomu and Kajinsha in a room together. Hence by using women Marpa and Kajinsha tried to get political power as well as to maintain the functional structure of the society. In this process of fulfilling the socio-cultural and socio-political need of the dominating male group these women lost their hope out of life and continued breathing like trees bearing the fruits those their masters desired. In the political context, not only Auli and Chhomu, even Yenjee, a slave woman kept by Lamet who had bought her from the people of Assam or perhaps from the Burmese traders across the border was used to trap and kill Father Krick who was trying to find a route through the Mishmee hills towards Tibet. *The Black Hill* showcases a catalogue of female characters playing the gendered role in accordance to the cultural perception of femininity. At a point of time we find Gimur, Auli, Chhomu, Yenjee, Moi and Other women of this novel living the dreams of the privileged male group which replaced their own dreams of a perfect life. This shows that the everyday reality of the women of Adi society as well

are informed and shaped according to the political interest of ruling class, functional perspective of the society and above all the sexist ideology of patriarchy. Thus, women's experience of oppression, objectification and discrimination automatically aided by ideological and institutional apparatuses such as family, peer groups, traditional education system, marriage and so on.

On the way towards the establishment of an egalitarian social structure first of all women perhaps opt. to acquire the ability to critique or question their own reality tore-negotiate the notion of ideal-self. Bell Hooks argues that the feminist aim towards an egalitarian society is possible only after the internalization of the idea of describing woman's own oppressed self which is "synonymous with developing a critical political consciousness."(hooks, 2015, p.26) Gimur, the central female character of *The Black Hill*, seems to realize her real status which is highly biased by the socio-cultural perception of woman and her role in the Mishmee society. She further broke her silence by negotiating the cultural norms and questioned Kajinsha about her suspicion regarding his being with another woman in the village Sommeu. It is perhaps the gendered norms of the society that obligated Gimur to question Kajinsha "if he had been with a woman in that terrible village but the words would not come."(Dai, 2014, p. 133) The custom of polygamy that a man could practice perhaps hindered Gimur to question Kajinsha's act of being with another woman Chhomu. The long pressed suspicion that Gimur had inside her was ignited again when Kajinsha mentioned about his future visit to Sommeu: ''You want to go there to be with that woman!'… 'People are talking about you and Marpa's niece in Sommeu!'' (Dai, 2014, p. 149)

She could still have been in a happy marital relationship with Kajinsha by simply accepting the custom of her community where a man could have multiple spouses at a time. She also knew about this way to resolute such problem and for that "she had to consent to live here and obey the laws of the land." (Dai. 2014, p. 151) Despite being a woman of a traditional ethno-cultural society she did not choose to be obedient to the sexist ideology that is at the core of polygamy. She denied to say *Yes* to the custom of polygamy and left for her native village Mebo that can be counted as a demurrer to give consent to the ideology of a patriarchal society. Besides acknowledging the oppressed self, Gimur realized her ability to exert control over her own destiny which she featured as "I have no need of priests, of him- Kajinsha. No one…I have strength too."(ibid)

Literature in the hand of Mamang Dai reflects the discrimination practiced on the basis of gender as well as the presence of subordinated, oppressed and objectified female class in the Adi society. In a way, through the narrative of *The Black Hill,* Dai perhaps tried to show the disappointing status of women and their gendered role legitimized by both the Abor and the Mishmee society. Even if the narrative depicts the socio-political and cultural aspects of 1850s, yet it is to be taken under consideration that such cultural aspects still play an influential role in the status of modern women and their development towards gender equality. Few instances of this novel further attempt to imagine how things might be different and women could have a better position in the socio-cultural arena. Other than self-evaluation that Gimur went through, the interpolation of sisterhood perhaps could be another building stone towards the development of an egalitarian society. To eradicate the sexist oppression and discrimination of women perpetuated by socio-cultural institutions and structure women must unlearn the sexist acculturation and come together on the basis of 'common oppression' and 'common interest'. The idea of 'common oppression' for the rise of sisterhood was evoked by the women's liberationists. They argued about the necessity of sisterhood to find proper

solidarity and to establish equalitarianism in the society. bell hooks, while positioning and defining sisterhood in the matrix of feminist theory, opined that "Solidarity strengthens resistance struggle… women must take the initiative and demonstrate the power of solidarity." (Hooks, 2015, p.44)

In *The Black Hill,*Gimur is the starring female figure that emerged as an empowered and liberated individual to ascertain her own destiny. In the process of her re-negotiation of traditional perceptions of society, sisterhood contributed a bit as well. Auli, Kajinsha's first wife, after realising how Chhomu and her life was being ruled by Marpa for certain socio-political purpose, decided to rebel against Marpa by offering her house to the priest Kirk whom Marpa previously tricked to send back from his village. Later, we find Auli ministering Gimur to keep her breathing. After the death of Father Kirk when the British authority attempted a punitive expedition to catch hold of the murderer and raided Kajinsha's house deep into the Mishmee hills, Kajinsha pushed Gimur through the small window of their house to help her escape. At that time of crisis Auli extended her helping hand towards Gimur and these two women fought together for Gimur's survival. Auli tried to bring Gimur back to senses by pressing "something warm into her mouth." (Dai, 2014, p. 266) Later, Gimur realised that Auli brought her back from the brink of death. It is possibly the sense of 'shared victimization' of being treated as objects for several socio-political, socio-cultural as well as structural functionalist intentions Auli and Gimur came together to mirror a true sisterhood and solidarity based on the specific historical and cultural similarities as well as the common context of struggle to rebel against the existing system.

Kumari Jayawardena defines feminism as "embracing movements for equality within the current system and significant struggles that have attempted to change the system."(Mohanty, 2003, p.51) Initially, Feminist movement has been generated solely by the female participants who united together to unlearn and change the sexist ideology and system. Due to several reasons men rarely participated in this struggle such as to maintain the patriarchal structure of the society, due to the insecurity of losing the grasp on power and so on. Women's liberation movement as well was a vociferation to the women to join; they didn't accentuate on the necessity of men to assess the responsibility and struggle to end sexism. They rather argued men to be "all-powerful, misogynist, oppressor - the enemy."(hooks, 2015, p.68) We have to inculcate the notion that the empowerment of women does not necessarily have to be at the expense of men. Though the agent of oppression is male; it is not possible to combat sexism by attacking or overlooking the existence of men.

Although the role that women play in social institutions has been recognised or valued by everyone in the Adi society, yet the establishment of a full-fledged egalitarian social system appears to be a far cry and the path towards equality is still comparatively difficult for women. Being a part of a patriarchal society, Lendem is such a male character who has contributed immensely at different stages of Gimur's life in *The Black Hill*. When Gimur eloped with Kajinsha, it was Lendem who stopped the search party of their village to chase her "that might have ended in bloodshed by saying, 'Let her go. It is of her own will.'"(Dai, 2014, p.173) It was Lendem's synergetic effort to equally value Gimur's 'will' and to ensure that he went against the customs of his community. After that, Lendem as a true friend took all the news of Gimur and Kajinsha from the people he knew. Gimur as well relied on Lendem and considered him to 'be her friend forever.' (ibid) Even after Gimur's return to her village Mebo, Lendem took the initiative to inform the villagers about her return and

the misfortune that had fallen on her. By doing so he actually attempted to shield her from the possible interrogations and imprudent criticisms. He has to an extent tried to oppose and transform the patriarchal setting of his society to contribute in Gimur's struggle to reshuffle the gendered norms. After the punitive expedition and Kajinsha's arrest, Lendem again rushed to support Gimur. His unimpeachable accompaniment to Gimur to the jail of Debrooghur (a city of Assam known as Dibrugarh now) to meet Kajinsha shows his unconditional cooperation and respect towards Gimur's decision. All these efforts of Lendem can be recognised as a shared struggle of man and woman of a society to eradicate sexism. Gimur as well welcomed Lendem as a comrade by unlearning stereotypes those synthesise men as enemies.

Hence, not counting men as co-partners in the struggle for equalitarianism can be an add-on to the hostility that exists between the men and women of sexist social structure. The aim of feminists to establish equality which does not mean the replacement of male supremacy by female supremacy is possible by the participation of men. The character of Lendem in *The Black Hill* appropriately shows how man can be a co-partner to eliminate sexist consciousness from family, peer groups and several other institutions of our society. While arguing about the importance of male comrades in the struggle of black women bell hooks too stressed on such similar ideas and suggested that man can take part in feminist struggle by "exposing, confronting, opposing, and transforming the sexism of their male peers...Women as well should affirm their revolutionary actions by acknowledging them as comrades in struggle." (hooks, 2015, p.83)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper aimed to discuss how the customs, beliefs and tradition practiced by the indigenous Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh partly reflect the global issues voiced by the feminist supporters. Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* has contributed to this world-wide concern regarding the oppression of women and sexism by portraying the rebellious female figures like Gimur, Auli and Moi. Though, one can argue that such sexist social structure can be seen operating only in the lives of the women of the rural areas, but this age old socio-cultural norms may still affect the urban lifestyle to an extent. This paper also advocated the possible solutions to establish an egalitarian social structure. With references to *The Black Hill,* it also focuses on the necessity of the acknowledgement of the real situation of the women, the need of solidarity among women on the basis of shared interestsand beliefs, and also stresses on the active participation of the male members of the society to transform their sexist consciousness and the social structure as a whole.

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