
Echoes From the Hills: Ecological Consciousness and Indigenous Resistance in Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*

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Abstract: This paper offers an ecocritical reading of Mamang Dai's Sahitya Akademi-winning novel, *The Black Hill*, highlighting its interweaving of ecological consciousness and indigenous resistance. The study examines 19th-century colonial encounters in Arunachal Pradesh from the perspective of the Adi and Mishmi communities. It embeds their spiritual and ecological worldview within a contested historical moment. The research employs a qualitative textual analysis, grounded in postcolonial ecocriticism and indigenous environmental perspectives. It explores how Dai's narrative reconstructs tribal memory and oral history as forms of cultural and ecological resistance. It analyzes the novel's depiction of land, forests, and rivers not as passive settings, but as sentient agents integral to shaping identity and history. Through characters like Kajinsha and the fictional Gimur, the narrative actively resists colonial silencing and revives indigenous epistemologies rooted in land, ritual, and oral memory. Findings reveal that *The Black Hill* functions as a powerful literary act of reclamation. Indigenous knowledge, language, and story converge in the novel to assert cultural sovereignty and environmental ethics in opposition to the exploitative logic of colonial capitalism. This study positions the novel as a vital eco-cultural archive that foregrounds the ethical entanglement of human and non-human worlds, advocating for justice and resilience among historically marginalized communities.

Keywords: Ecological Consciousness, Indigenous Resistance, Colonial Capitalism, Epistemology, Marginalized

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of Indian English literature, Mamang Dai's voice from Arunachal Pradesh stands out as distinctive and resonant. Her Sahitya Akademi-winning novel, *The Black Hill*, powerfully interweaves colonial history, indigenous cosmology, and ecological awareness. It crafts a narrative that reclaims the land as both a spiritual entity and a site of cultural resistance. As an eminent writer from Northeast India, Dai's work holds particular significance in depicting the unique ethnic identity of the region, often overlooked by mainstream narratives (Chakraborty, 2021). Her contribution is part of a broader trend in Indian English literature that explores "the intricate relationship between humanity and the environment" (Sharma, 2021, p.326).

Set in 19th-century Arunachal Pradesh, *The Black Hill* reimagines colonial encounters from the perspective of the Adi and Mishmi communities, embedding their spiritual and ecological worldview within a contested historical moment. Dai's portrayal of the landscape is not merely as a setting, but as a sentient presence - a repository of memory, grief, and ancestral knowledge. This animistic perspective, deeply rooted in the region's indigenous cultures, contrasts sharply with the instrumental rationality of colonial capitalism (Dash, 2024). Historically, the Northeast of India has

remained peripheral to dominant national and colonial narratives, a region culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct from mainland India (Chakraborty, 2021). Writers like Mamang Dai function as "cultural historians" who re-inscribe the voices of marginalized communities through literature (Baral, 2013, p. 8). They ensure that the dynamic cultural legacy and an acute recognition of cultural fragmentation and renewal are articulated (Misra, 2011).

Consequently, *The Black Hill* functions as both a powerful postcolonial intervention and a vital eco-cultural archive that highlights the ethical entanglement of human and non-human worlds. Dai's work, as seen in her interviews, is deeply interested in the concepts of myth, memory, time, and meaning, often exploring history as a "meeting place" of various possibilities. Her writing is a direct engagement with the region's oral traditions, which she consciously appropriates into print, believing they "hold a lot of ethical views" crucial for understanding community and identity (Prodhani & Kuhad, 2022, p. 3). This deep cultural engagement is also evident in her visual narratives, which serve to keep tribal ways of life recorded (Chowdhury, 2021). Dai asserts a form of resistance that is both ecological and epistemological by refusing colonial naming practices, challenging archival omissions, and reviving oral memory. This resonates with the broader characteristic of Northeast Indian literature, which often draws from a rich legacy of oral narratives to depict ethnic identity and address the impacts of modernization, striving to bring forth a unique sense of place and belonging (Chakraborty, 2021).

This paper critically examines *The Black Hill* through the interrelated frameworks of ecological consciousness and indigenous resistance. Specifically, this study aims to:

- Examine Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* as a narrative that interweaves ecological consciousness with indigenous cosmology and colonial history.
- Analyze the ways in which Dai reconstructs tribal memory and oral history as forms of cultural and ecological resistance.
- Explore how the novel depicts land, forest, and river not as passive elements, but as sentient agents that shape identity and history.
- Investigate the representation of indigenous worldviews that challenge colonial mappings and developmentalist ideologies.
- Contribute to the growing field of postcolonial ecocriticism by highlighting the convergence of ecological ethics and indigenous resistance in Northeast Indian literature.

Through an ecocritical reading, the study also positions the novel within the growing body of postcolonial environmental literature that advocates for justice, recognition, and resilience among historically silenced communities, reflecting a "harmonious discourse with nature" found in much Indian English literature (Sharma, 2021, p. 326).

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative textual analysis grounded in postcolonial ecocriticism and indigenous environmental perspectives. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*, focusing on narrative techniques, ecological motifs, character relationships with the land, and the re-inscription of historical memory. The study aims to provide a layered and intersectional understanding of the novel, interpreting it not only as a literary artifact but as an ecological testimony and a political response to colonial erasure.

This study's theoretical underpinning is situated at the intersection of three critical currents: ecocriticism, postcolonial literary theory, and indigenous epistemology. These approaches collectively illuminate how *The Black Hill* reclaims historical and ecological space through narrative resistance. Ecocriticism, defined as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glottfelty & Fromm, 1996, p. xviii), utilizes frameworks from Greg Garrard (2023). It focuses on themes like wilderness and dwelling, to interpret Dai’s portrayal of nature as a spiritually animated reality. Rob Nixon’s concept of “slow violence” concerns the delayed, often invisible destruction caused by environmental degradation and colonial policies. This concept further contextualizes the gradual erosion of indigenous land and memory within the novel (Nixon, 2011).

Postcolonial theory informs the exploration of how Dai’s narrative subverts dominant historical accounts and reclaims tribal voices. The study employs concepts such as Homi Bhabha’s cultural hybridity (1994) and Edward Said’s critique of Orientalist historiography (1978). These are used to analyse the subversive strategies employed to resist colonial authority. Kailash Baral’s concept of alternative historiography (2013) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s insights into the subaltern voice (1988) are particularly relevant in analyzing characters like Gimur. Finally, the study draws from indigenous knowledge systems that connect ecology with culture, spirituality, and survival. Dai’s depiction of sacred and sentient land reflects Shiva’s (1989) ecofeminist framework that connects women’s knowledge with ecological wisdom, and the work of Mahasweta Devi (2003) and Baral (2013) supports the preservation of tribal memory through literature against colonial erasures.

Secondary research from scholars such as Natarajan and Lakshmi (2019), Mackenzie (2012), and Supriya M. (2023) provides essential historical and literary context. These insights support the interpretation of *The Black Hill* as a decolonial and ecological text.

Results And Discussion

Ecological Consciousness in The Black Hill

Mamang Dai’s *The Black Hill* is deeply rooted in an indigenous worldview that perceives the land as a living, sacred presence, extending far beyond the scope of modern environmentalism. In the novel, the forests, rivers, hills, and valleys of Arunachal Pradesh are not merely static backdrops; they are active, sentient participants in the cultural, spiritual, and political lives of the tribal communities. This sentience is captured in the belief that “the land had a heart of its own, a voice and language that beckoned men” (Dai, 2014, p. 113). This draws attention to the landscape’s continuous and active role in the community’s spiritual existence and history. This perspective aligns with ecocritical thought, which Garrard defines as “the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human throughout human cultural history” (Garrard, 2023, p. 5).

Indeed, literature, serves as a powerful tool. It plays a vital role in raising environmental consciousness and fostering empathy towards the natural world, humanizing complex ecological issues (Sharma, 2021). North-East Indian literature, including Dai’s work, is often characterized as ethno-eco-centric, drawing resources directly from their ecosystems and encapsulating the region’s diverse topography and ecological richness (Sharma, 2020).

Kajinsha, a Mishmi tribesman, vividly embodies this profound ecological consciousness. His knowledge of the terrain is not simply practical; it is deeply ancestral and intuitive. He is depicted as someone who “knew the hidden paths and frozen routes over the mountains that kept the tribes apart”. This innate understanding is further emphasized by the indigenous belief that “all animals and birds have a map. We can follow their path”. (Dai, 2014, p. 35). This deep

connection resonates with discussions in indigenous philosophy, where scholars emphasize how "indigeneity displays a strong association between people and their rootedness to their surroundings, material or emotional connection to the land" (Sofiya, 2023, p. 157). For these communities, reconnecting with the land is fundamental for survival, as humans are an inseparable part of it. This is a perspective endorsed by bioregionalist thinkers.

The novel imbues natural elements with powerful animistic qualities. The river, for instance, emerges as a symbol of both danger and profound mystery, reflecting its dynamic presence in tribal cosmology. Dai portrays it as "terrifying," stating, "The first danger is the river. It is terrifying" (Dai, 2014, p. 59). This imagery speaks to an indigenous worldview where natural forces are spirited, powerful, and worthy of both fear and reverence (Sofiya, 2023). This ecospiritual understanding of nature as a living mother and source of continuity resonates with Vandana Shiva's ecofeminist ethic (Shiva, 1989). The narrative further reveals that the hills hold healing properties, as seen when Father Krick feels "restored in the open space of enormous granite rocks and trees" after anxiety, recognizing that "nothing can compare to the beauty of God's work in these mountains" (Dai, 2014, pp. 94, 135). Even the specific features of the landscape, like the Kumku forest, are sentient entities that draw in characters like Gimur as a "secret place, hidden most of the day behind a thin mist" (Dai, 2014, p. 30), suggesting a mystical, living quality. This deep spiritual connection between humans and the environment is a hallmark of eco-spirituality, where the divine is seen as an ongoing part of creation, constantly interacting with human senses and intuitions (Dash, 2024).

The relationship between land and indigenous identity in *The Black Hill* is portrayed as deeply existential. Dai's narrative consistently reveals the landscape as a sentient presence, intricately woven into the rhythms of daily life, ritual, and remembrance. Kajinsha's upbringing in a "nameless settlement not recorded on any map" (Dai, 2014, p. 6) highlights a way of life intrinsically tied to ecological balance and spiritual intimacy with nature, existing outside colonial cartographic control. As Kajinsha articulates, "We read the land. The land is our book. Everything here on this hill, the grass and rocks and stones is saying something" (Dai, 2014, p. 140). This accentuates the natural world as a living text of ancestral knowledge and wisdom. Indeed, Sharma (2020) contends that the consciousness of these ethnic communities is profoundly structured by nature itself, weaving humans and nonhumans into an interconnected whole. His father's teachings further reinforce this bond: "everything on earth and sky is connected since we are born of the same mother... we belong to the land. The land is a good mother. I only take what I need. Animals and trees offer themselves. We help each other survive" (Dai, 2014, p. 141). This profound, deep-seated belief extends beyond mere respect for nature. It actively reinforces the notion that "human beings belong to the land and the land is mother" (Sofiya, 2023, p. 159), fundamentally defining a core tenet of indigenous epistemologies (Burkhart, 2019). In this worldview, knowledge is not merely acquired through abstract thought but is profoundly embedded in and derived from the land itself, emphasizing a reciprocal and life-sustaining relationship where spiritual and ecological well-being are intrinsically linked.

This spiritual ecology powerfully challenges colonial and developmentalist paradigms that reduce land to a mere resource, seeing it instead "only in terms of prospect" (Sofiya, 2023, p. 160). Nicole Redvers emphasizes that land-based practices are not only cultural traditions but also fundamental for wellness and resilience, forming a core part of Indigenous health and collective continuity (Redvers, 2016). Even in moments of extreme vulnerability, such as during famine, Gimur's profound connection to the earth is evident in her desperate plea: "Mother earth, I know you. Give me food!" (Dai, 2014, p. 260), demonstrating an inherent dependence and trust in nature's enduring provision. The novel affirms this worldview, suggesting that indigenous resistance is not merely political but also ecological and deeply emotional, intrinsically rooted in the rhythms of the land and the stories it holds. In stark contrast, colonial intrusions impose an exploitative, extractive relationship with nature. British attempts to chart, map, and control the landscape fundamentally rupture the indigenous rhythm of coexistence. Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence"

becomes evident in this subtle but persistent degradation of tribal lands and knowledge systems under colonial pressure, eroding the sacred bond between people and their environment (Nixon, 2011). The "black hill" itself, the abode of Kajinsha and Gimur, while offering seclusion and protection, also implicitly carries the burden of future conflicts and the ominous impact of colonial encroachment (Sofiya, 2023).

Indigenous Resistance and Colonial Intrusion

In Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*, indigenous resistance unfolds not merely as dramatic military rebellion, but as a deeper, more enduring force rooted in cultural memory, spiritual resilience, and narrative reclamation. This multi-layered resistance—linguistic, historical, and ecological—reveals the profound ways in which colonized communities assert their alternative worldviews to contest colonial domination. Indeed, a core strength of the novel lies in its meticulous narration of the often-overlooked history of tribal peoples and their determined stand against British colonialism (Gupta, 2021).

The act of naming itself stands out as an early and subtly powerful site of epistemic conflict. Operating within an Orientalist framework, British colonizers imposed the pejorative term "Abor" on these indigenous communities. This Assamese word signifies "savage" or "without religion. Dai, however, immediately challenges this imposed label, asserting with narrative force: "No tribe living there called itself this name" (Dai, 2014, p. 26). This symbolic act of misnaming perfectly exemplifies Edward Said's critique of Orientalism (1978). It illustrates how colonial discourse dictates identities and definitions to establish and maintain authority. Such linguistic domination not only distorts existing cultural realities but actively deprives indigenous peoples of the fundamental right to self-definition. Yet, Dai's narrative powerfully resists this silencing. In a deliberate, restorative gesture, she reclaims indigenous agency by meticulously listing the tribes with their authentic cultural names: "The people of Mebo were the Padam, just as the other Abor groups were known as Bori, Bokar, Minyong, Pasi, Pangi, Tangam, Ashing, Komkar, Shimong and Milang" (Dai, 2014, p. 26). This detailed act of self-naming transcends mere ethnographic curiosity; it becomes a potent act of resistance against colonial erasure and a powerful assertion of cultural sovereignty, aligning directly with postcolonial efforts to destabilize the authority of colonial knowledge systems (Gupta, 2021).

Colonial intrusion, of course, also manifested in overt, often brutal, attempts to control indigenous lands and resources, fundamentally disrupting established lifeways. The British are tellingly depicted as insidiously "creeping deeper and deeper into their land carrying gifts of salt, iron, tobacco and opium," causing tangible disturbance to the hills. While some chiefs, as the narrative observes, "succumbed" to these overtures, Kajinsha's clan notably "remained aloof" (Dai, 2014, p. 8), highlighting the varied and selective nature of indigenous resistance. The deep-seated distrust of foreign motives, quite naturally, set the stage for profound conflict (Bakam, 2025). These tribal communities, fiercely proud of their independent existence and inherent right to self-governance, vehemently protested the foreign invasion. Their collective resolve rings clear: "no one wants the British to come into the hills. The elders have decided, and we, all the tribes, we are together in this. If the migluns wants to use force, just let them try!" (Dai, 2014, p. 24). This powerful declaration captures their fierce, protective stance and deep possessiveness towards their ancestral territory (Gupta, 2021). This indigenous perspective sharply contrasts with the colonizers' "dominance of the ecology" (Sofiya, 2023, p. 158) and their perception of native land as "empty space... that need to be civilized" (p. 157). This colonial mindset, fundamentally driven by economic prospect, devalued indigenous space, viewing it as something to be "dominated or controlled" rather than revered (p. 158).

Kajinsha's execution for the alleged murder of French missionary Father Krick reveals yet another profound layer of colonial injustice, showcasing the deliberate manipulation of truth. Dai intentionally underscores the inherent unreliability of colonial records by highlighting their fundamental gaps. She writes, "According to the records the

bodies of the two priests were never found. The day and date of when and how they were killed is also not certain” (Dai, 2014, p. 251). By focusing on what the records cannot confirm, Dai casts doubt on their authority and suggests they are an unreliable foundation for justice.

Historical accounts, as some scholarly readings confirm, indicate that Kajinsha (often referred to as Kaisha in colonial records) was indeed falsely accused for Krick's death (Supriya, 2023; Gupta, 2021), essentially becoming a scapegoat in a larger colonial agenda. His death, orchestrated under the guise of administering justice, is explicitly framed as a spectacle of power—a “great show of British might and authority” (Dai, 2014, p. 264). This performative violence served as a brutal demonstration through which colonial regimes asserted and maintained control over tribal life and sovereignty. Dai's narrative thus functions as a powerful act of “subverting history”, meticulously resurrecting indigenous voices and challenging the silences imposed by dominant colonial historical accounts (Supriya, 2023; Gupta, 2021).

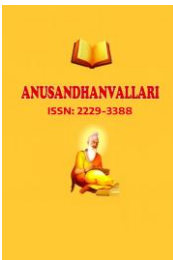
Crucially, the novel actively resurrects acts of resistance through the profound depth of oral memory. It vividly recalls a significant moment of indigenous retaliation through the narrative of Kajinsha's father, who bravely joined a Khampiti-led uprising against British forces in Sadiya. This historical event, wherein 500 armed Khampiti warriors, under Kajinsha's father's leadership, attacked a British station in 1839, leading to a decisive, albeit temporary, British defeat (Gupta, 2021), is dynamically brought to life. The impactful phrase, "I saw the white people running," recounted by Kajinsha's father (Dai, 2014, p. 374), symbolizes a powerful, if momentary, reversal of imperial dominance and a proud assertion of tribal agency. By meticulously preserving this story through oral memory, Dai powerfully affirms that indigenous resistance endures. It exists not within the limited confines of colonial archives, but within the living fabric of landscape, kinship, and continuous storytelling. This cultural preservation is paramount for effective resistance. This idea is supported by the work of Amílcar Cabral (1974), who argued that cultural survival is the essential precondition for any liberation movement. He contended that cultural resistance is the most durable form of opposition, persisting even after politico-military struggles have been suppressed.

Gimur, a fictional character ingeniously crafted by Dai, emerges as a vital narrative counterbalance to both historical and patriarchal silencing (Supriya, 2023; Gupta, 2021). In direct response to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) seminal inquiry into whether the subaltern can truly speak within dominant discourses, Dai empowers Gimur with a resonant voice. This voice articulates the silenced experiences of indigenous women. As Supriya M. (2023) puts it, "Where the story encoded in history ends, or gets enshrouded in enigmatic silence, Dai makes Gimur articulate those silences and proclaim the innocence of Kajinsha, thus subverting a historical narrative" (p. 220).

This transforms Gimur into not only a moral witness but also a potent symbol of indigenous womanhood and enduring cultural strength (Gupta, 2021). By crafting Gimur's character and re-narrating Kajinsha's story through her perspective, Dai effectively re-interprets official history, transforming “an alleged murderer into a saviour figure” (Supriya, 2023, p. 220). This narrative reclamation finds its most poignant expression in Kajinsha's plea to Gimur from his jail cell: "Tell them about us... Tell them we were good. Tell them we also had some things to say. But we cannot read and write. So we tell stories" (Dai, 2014, p. 288). This powerful declaration unequivocally reaffirms that true history for the subaltern resides not in colonial documentation or written archives, but in the living traditions of narrative, collective memory, and the land itself.

The Land as Memory and Identity

In Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*, land transcends its conventional role as a mere physical backdrop; it emerges as visible memory, a living archive imbued with ancestral presence, cultural resilience, and the very essence of collective identity. The novel consistently asserts that for the Adi and Mishmi tribes, the natural world is neither inert nor



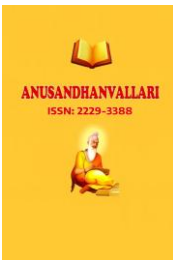
external, but profoundly embedded in their spiritual and historical consciousness. Dai skillfully portrays the hills, rivers, and forests not as passive elements but as active participants in the human story - witnesses to cycles of love, grief, resistance, and survival (Dai, 2014). Indeed, scholarly work on indigeneity affirms this deep bond, highlighting the "strong association between people and their rootedness to their surroundings, [and their] material or emotional connection to the land". For these communities, land is inherently "a home and pride." It represents not merely territory, but the very foundation of their being and cultural survival (Sofiya, 2023, p. 157).

Kajinsha's intimate connection to the land powerfully exemplifies this existential bond between indigenous identity and environment. This innate and ancestral understanding of the terrain is not imposed or academic; rather, it is instinctive. Dai illustrates this through Gimur's perception of his skill, noting how "she believed he carried a map in his head or perhaps he could sniff the air and know which direction to take" (Dai, 2014, p. 155). This resonates profoundly with Keith H. Basso's (1996) foundational work on the Western Apache. His work compellingly illustrates how place-names and intricate stories are inextricably entwined with cultural identity, effectively transforming the physical land itself into a dynamic repository of knowledge and moral instruction. For Dai's characters, the land is not merely occupied; it is actively inhabited by a vibrant tapestry of memory, spirit, and ongoing narrative. The novel emphasizes this through the shaman's profound declaration that "The land belongs to us. It is the soul of our ancestors" (Dai, 2014, p. 70), unequivocally portraying land as an animate, vital entity that transcends Western notions of property.

Moreover, the landscape in *The Black Hill* frequently transforms into a sacred space of both mourning and quiet, yet unyielding, resistance. The narrative of the priest's death, witnessed only by Kajinsha and Gimur, is presented not as a dramatic colonial spectacle but as a moment of immense spiritual and emotional gravity. Dai's lyrical prose profoundly suggests that places possess an inherent capacity to absorb trauma. Unspoken and unarchived memories settle deeply and permanently into the very fabric of the hills and forests. This perspective finds resonance in Rob Nixon's (2011) compelling argument that the degradation of land simultaneously signifies a corrosive erosion of cultural memory embedded in place. In Dai's narrative, when the land suffers, indigenous identity is not simply dislocated; it is profoundly grieved. Conversely, the land also offers solace and healing, as evidenced when Father Krick, despite his colonial background, finds himself "restored in the open space of enormous granite rocks and trees", marvelling at the unparalleled "beauty of God's work in these mountains" (Dai, 2014, pp. 94, 135). Even the mysterious Kumku forest, described as a "secret place" (p. 30) that draws Gimur despite its ominous reputation, highlights nature's pervasive sentient and mystical presence, often beyond human comprehension.

Gimur's arduous journey and her enduring spirit further illuminate the complex spiritual ecology of place within the narrative. Her bond with the land is not merely physical but deeply emotional and existentially defining, shaped profoundly by love, loss, and moral witness. Dai powerfully describes her as "the female warrior who had crossed rivers and mountains carrying a bright banner of love with the man called Kajinsha" (Dai, 2014, pp. 181-182), evoking a figure whose grief and lived experience transcend superficial imperial records. Instead, her story is preserved in the deeper, enduring currents of memory and ritual passed down through generations. Supriya M. (2023) keenly observes that Gimur embodies the silent strength of indigenous womanhood, emerging as a vital moral center of the narrative - her very presence serving as a powerful counter-narrative to the glaring omissions and biases of the colonial archive. This convergence of intensely personal sorrow and collective remembrance reflects Brian Burkhart's (2019) concept of a cosmology rooted in land, where place itself becomes the dynamic text through which identity and spirit are continuously read and understood, offering a decolonizing lens on environmental ethics.

Ultimately, Dai's narrative powerfully positions the landscape as the primary bearer of indigenous memory and the silent chronicler of history. The hills, therefore, are not simply inert sites of conflict; they literally echo with forgotten



voices, ancestral footsteps, and the murmurs of silenced rebellions. Kajinsha, whose profound love for his land defines his very being and is ultimately deemed a "crime" by the encroaching colonial forces, poignantly encapsulates this theme. His deepest desire was to "start his life again in the black hill, his home, as the same person" (Sofiya, 2023, p. 159), highlighting how inextricably linked identity is to place. In a particularly moving moment, Kajinsha imparts to Gimur: "Tell them we were good... But we cannot read and write. So we tell stories" (Dai, 2014, p. 288). This powerful declaration unequivocally reaffirms that true history for the subaltern does not reside in the formal strictures of colonial documentation, which often misrepresent or omit, but in the living, breathing narratives rooted in the land and its vibrant oral traditions. This method of creating identity is a key feature of the novel. As Bakam (2025) notes, "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" (p. 10). The very title, *The Black Hill*, symbolizes not only a specific geographical location, the "abode of Kajinsha and Gimur" - a place of seclusion and protection, but also conveys layers of its "ominous, hideous and mysterious" nature, often witnessing the tragic convergence of indigenous life and colonial imposition. Dai thus emphasizes that the preservation of sacred trees, rivers, and places is critically important, as their loss threatens not only the physical ecology but also the very "rites and rituals that were derived from them" (Sofiya, 2023, p. 160), accentuating the vital, inseparable link between the natural world and indigenous cultural survival.

Thus, in *The Black Hill*, the land functions simultaneously as a sacred, historical, and deeply political entity. It holds the memory of what has been, silently endures what is, and implicitly anticipates what must be passionately defended against ongoing forces of erasure. Dai's novel compellingly invites readers to listen, not only to her characters but to the resonant, enduring echoes emanating from the hills themselves, reminding us that the land holds untold stories and unyielding truths.

Conclusion

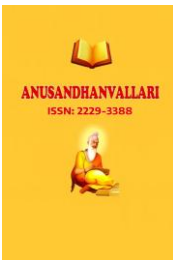
Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* stands as a compelling literary intervention, intricately bridging history, ecology, and profound cultural memory. Through its vivid portrayal of sacred landscapes, deeply rooted spiritual worldviews, and multifaceted narrative resistance, the novel directly challenges dominant colonial discourses and effectively reclaims vital space for indigenous voices and values. Dai's masterful depiction of nature as a sentient and sacred entity reframes the environment not as a passive backdrop to historical events, but as a living, active presence intimately tied to tribal survival and resistance. By illuminating the rich ecological consciousness embedded in the lives of the Adi and Mishmi communities, the novel presents a powerful worldview where land is never merely a commodity but a dynamic repository of ancestral knowledge and profound moral order. Dai's characters do not seek to conquer or dominate the landscape; instead, they dwell within it, guided by a relational ethic that sharply contrasts with the exploitative logic inherent in colonial and developmental ideologies.

Equally significant is the novel's robust engagement with historical silencing. Dai's strategic fictionalization of the colonial encounter actively resists the archival erasure of tribal agency, particularly through the pivotal figures of Kajinsha and Gimur. Their interwoven stories fundamentally challenge official versions of history, replacing them with narratives deeply grounded in rich oral tradition, enduring collective memory, and spiritual resilience. In this powerful act of storytelling, Dai echoes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) call to retrieve the voice of the subaltern, thereby giving profound expression to lives and losses that have long been omitted or misrepresented in dominant historical accounts.

Framed through the intersecting lenses of postcolonial ecocriticism and indigenous epistemology, this study has convincingly demonstrated that *The Black Hill* is not only a novel of meticulous historical reconstruction but also a powerful and urgent ecological text. It profoundly speaks to the ongoing relevance of traditional ecological knowledge, the inherent right to cultural self-definition, and the crucial need to resist various forms of environmental and epistemic violence that regrettably persist in postcolonial contexts. In its lyrical prose and layered narrative, Dai's novel emerges as a collection of powerful echoes - a heartfelt tribute. It celebrates a resilient people, a vibrant land, and an ancient way of knowing that remarkably endures despite centuries of concerted silencing. Ultimately, it serves as a poignant reminder that the hills are not just sites of memory; they are also resonant echoes of survival, unflinching resistance, and enduring hope for the future.

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