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Character Sketch of Father Nicolas Krick of the novel, The Black Hill of Mamang Dai

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Abstract

Father Nicholas Krick was a Christian Catholic Missionary from Paris, the capital of France. He was selected to establish a camp in Tibet from the head office of the Mission from Paris. He travels a vast distance and faces many hindrances. He has to pass through Arunachal Pradesh to enter Tibet. He attempted two times but failed. In the novel, The Black Hill by Mamang Dai, we find about his struggle along with a love story of a couple named Kajinsha and Gimur. Here, in this article the main focus is given only on his iron will, his hindrances and how he conquers all such obstacles. However, he is not able to reach Tibet and he has to give up his life as some people attack him very hard. Here, the trait of his character is analysed.

Main Article:

There is no literature review found by while writing this article. The purpose of this article is to show the determination and zeal of the historical character of the novel viz., Father Nicholas Krick. He is a Catholic priest from Paris, wants to visit Tibet as a mission in the novel. He takes this divine task of setting up a camp in Tibet to preach Christianity there. For that he has to go through Arunachal Pradesh. The task was not assigned by others; it was his will. River transport was the main means of transport to go to Arunachal Pradesh from Assam.

The priest is a dedicated priest, who is endowed with numerous good qualities. His iron will, his dauntlessness, his unshakable faith, his treatment of people, his physical and mental strength, his leadership qualities, his public relation qualities etc. all are manifested in the novel.

As it was a time of mid nineteenth century, so the road communication was not good. People used to travel on foot even for long distance also. The green forests and animals, the sparse houses, made the journey more difficult for people.

The priest at first tries to travel through the Abor territory. He meets Padam Abor tribes, a young man named Lendem. He stays there, for some days and learn the culture and tradition of the tribe. But they refuse to show him the route to Tibet.

Then his colleague, Vetch, who tells that he will accompany the priest till Abor territory, takes him to a man named Chowsa. Chowsa knows a route to Tibet through the Mishmee territory. Vetch is able to persuade Chowsa as he says that the priest will pay him. Then Father Nicholas is helped by some seventeen porters and the British officers also treat him kindly. Vetch presents him a good sextant. They travel through the Chunpura river on 18th December, 1851. Then they reach the Zayul border and meet some Mishmee people. During his journey he enjoys the landscape, learns about the people's culture

and tradition. Then they cross the village of Khrousa and meet the people there, and thereafter they reach the village named Hayuliang. Chowsa helps him to interact with the Mishmee people. On 30th December the priest meets the Mishmee chiefs who have come from Tibet. One of them is Lamet. Lamet asks payment to guide him to Tibet. By then the priest becomes more confident.

He reaches a place named Oualong and after that he reaches Sommeu. In Sommeu he comes to know that, the dzongpon i.e some Tibetan official who comes from a place of Tibet, named Rima, he frequently visits that place. He meets the dzongpon or the governor and seeks permission to visit Tibet. Kajinsha is with him. They stay in Norbou's house.

His spirit is dauntless. When he finds some people of Lamet's village prohibit him to enter the village and they are apprehensive that they may attack him, he remains calm at that time. The line shows it:

“I will defend myself. Death is nothing to me.” (TBH,p-96)

In his meeting with the dzongpon also, the priest does not get permission to go to Tibet. Instead, they suspect him as a spy and order him to leave the Mishmee territory soon. He has no other option; he has to come back to Assam. But he tries once again by going to the Zumsha's house who is the chief of Mishmee. But the chief mistreats him, threatens him and then as his wife suggests gives him the task of curing a man there. But he has to leave the place. Then he is robbed by Lamet and his companion as they guide him to the near Tibet, i.e. the Sommeu territory. When he returns to Assam and reaches Saika Ghat, his physical condition is very poor. He enters the house of Captain Smith. Krick tells his own condition like this:

“Do not come near me... for I am covered in vermin and misery.” (TBH, pp-161,162)

He takes time to recover completely. But he never gives up. He plans to go to the Abor territory once again.

As he determines, Krick tries to travel through Mebo, i.e the Abor territory to reach Tibet. This time, he knows two persons from his first attempt and this time he is accompanied by Augustin Bourry. They are Kajinsha and Gimur. When the priest meets them, like before Kajinsha does, he helps him as much as he can. Gimur too helps him. This time Lendem also welcomes him. He is with them for several days. He cures many people by his medicines and prayers. He serves as a religious doctor. That means he cures people through care and prayer as he is a priest, not a real doctor still, he carries a medicine box with him. In Mebo, in 1853 he visits his patients and treats them in his own way. His possessions are very simple. Here is the example-

“...a white foreigner who only carried his cross, a medicine box, and possessions more modest than their own.” (TBH,p-175)

He is a true friend of people. Kajinsha is his friend, Lamet is also his friend but at the same time he knows what Lamet wants from him. But he has to obey the decision of the village head, Zumsha. It is decided in the meeting that the priest has to be killed and by Kajinsha, Lamet and others. There are two immediate reasons- they consider that for the great fire in the village, the priest is responsible. Secondly, the Zumsha's Mithun has expired. For this also they held the priest liable.

He appreciates the beauty of the place. He finds God in such a superb beauty as if all the beautiful hills are the manifestation of divinity.

He loves everyone and people also love him. He has acquaintances with Gimur and became friend with Kajinsha. And they both think about him. And they helped him during the period of his stay there. But his admiration also invited hostility among some in the social circle and subsequently Kajinsha also becomes a part of it. After his death Gimur blames Kajinsha. He tries to prove his innocence and tells that before he killed the priest, some other person had already killed him hence he was not guilty. However, Kajinsha is blamed by the British and they confide him in the jail, consequently he is shot dead when he escapes from the jail after killing the guard with his wife Gimur. His wife Gimur dies by falling herself from a hill top by thinking that they will meet after death.

The apprehension of the people of Arunachal Pradesh is that after the priest or missionary, military will come and will occupy their land. Therefore, they decide to kill the priest even though he

helps them, treats their people. There is no personal enmity with him. But they never believe the foreigners, which they call as migluns. Even though Kajinsha is a friend of Father Nicholas, yet he is also unable to save the life of this holy man. Their apprehension is not unreal. The British took the matter seriously and came to their village for investigation. But the sacrifice of Father Nicholas is still remembered by some people of Arunachal Pradesh. So, there are names of shops after the priest Nicholas and his companion Bourry's names which become a source of investigation of the author, Mamang Dai. The character is not an imaginary character. It is based on reality. And the author gathers many historical accounts of the past about the priest while writing the novel. But the greater part of the delineation of the character is imaginary but real like.

Bibliography: Dai Mamang, *The Black Hill* Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2014.