NATIVE VOICES IN THE WORKS OF EASTERINE KIRE AND THOMAS KING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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By

W. MERIBENI PATTON

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Under the Supervision of

Dr. JANO S. LIEGISE

Associate Professor

Department of English

Nagaland University

Department of English

Nagaland University

Campus: Kohima -797001

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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I, W. Meribeni Patton, do hereby declare that the thesis entitled *Native Voices in the Works of Easterine Kire and Thomas King: A Comparative Study* is a bonafide record of research done by me, under the guidance and supervision of Associate Professor Jano S. Liegise, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima during the period of my research **(2013-2016)** at the Department of English, and it has not been submitted either in full or in part to any other University or Institute for the award of any other Degree, Diploma or Title.

Place: Kohima
Date: 5th May 2016

W. MERIBENI PATTON
Research Scholar

COUNTERSIGNED

Dr. NIGAMANANDA DAS
Head
Department of English
Nagaland University
Kohima Campus

COUNTERSIGNED

Dr. JANO S. LIEGISE
Supervisor
Associate Professor
Department of English
Nagaland University

Nagaland University
Department of English
Kohima Campus- 797001

Date: 5th May 2016

SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, *Native Voices in the Works of Easterine Kire and Thomas King: A Comparative Study*, is a bonafide record of research done by Ms. W. Meribeni Patton Regd. No 575/2014 dated, 5th May, 2014. This thesis, submitted to Nagaland University for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree on the same title and that the thesis is an independent and original work on the part of the candidate under my guidance.

Ms. W. Meribeni Patton has successfully completed her research work within the stipulated time and the thesis embodies the record of original investigation conducted during the period she worked as a Ph. D. research scholar.

Dr. JANO S. LIEGISE

Supervisor

Associate Professor

Department of English

Nagaland University

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Place: Kohima **W. MERIBENI PATTON**

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REFERENCE ABBREVIATIONS

All My Relations	:	*All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction*
ANVR	:	*A Naga Village Remembered*
ATM	:	*A Terrible Matriarchy*
BW	:	*Bitter Wormwood*
Folk Elements	:	*Folk Elements in Achebe: A Comparative Study of Ibo Culture and Tenyimia Culture*
GGRW	:	*Green Grass Running Water*
LH	:	*Life on Hold*
MR	:	*Medicine River*
TBW	:	*Truth and Bright Water*
The Inconvenient Indian	:	*The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*
The Native in Literature	:	*The Native in Literature: Canadian and Comparative Perspectives*
The Truth about Stories	:	*The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*
WRS	:	*When the River Sleeps*

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CHAPTER - I

Introduction

1.1. Native Literary Background

Native literature has its beginning from a tradition of storytelling. It is an orally transmitted voice having long, rich and unbroken oral tradition of telling a tale, narrating a myth or singing a song imbibing the history, experience, belief system and consciousness of people. Therefore, it is important to note, here, that when we talk about native literature prior to contact from written culture, it means the 'oral tradition' within which the stories of people are preserved in language by word of mouth, as opposed to writing. Its cultural knowledge are transmitted through vocal utterance paving the possibility for a society to transmit oral history, oral literature, oral law and other knowledge across generations without a script system.

In early native narrative, metaphors embody an emotional force creating ways for people to associate an idea with an object, with visual memory. They invariably make use of metaphors and analogies, because in spoken language they pay more attention to the implication or suggested meaning of their words that are the, "connotative as opposed to the specific or denotative meaning" (Benson and Toye 6). The power of language carries primary importance because "language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of control is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of truth, order, and reality becomes established" (Ashcroft et al. 7). This trend, allows a person with superior oratorical skill to hold higher respect, and leaders were obeyed in proportion to his use of eloquence because his followers had no other law than his voice.

Oral traditions being a chief medium essential to native culture, practitioners of the modern oral history movement enjoy contemplating its ancient origins, sometimes pointing out with delight that all history was oral before the advent of writing. From the Greek, comes the historian Herodotus, who employed first-person interviews in gathering information. Thucydides who interrogated his witnesses to extract information, and, in the Zhou dynasty of China, the emperor appointed scribes to record the saying of the people for the benefit of court historians. Africans point to the griot tradition in recording history, in which oral tradition have been handed down to say that oral stories are commonly shared, constantly changing and have the power to create reality. Until now, oral tradition continues to play its vital role in contemporary society at multifarious levels. For example, Indian cultures molded on epic tradition have strong performance orientation, recitation and storytelling. The spoken word always had an edge over the written word and Vedic epic and Puranic literatures were mainly for oral transmission. The values of the oral tradition are integral for epic modes that even the fixed text is liberated and becomes a part of the oral tradition. Native oral tradition vitally links the past memories with the present in terms of both its didactic function as tribal history and its focus on the community. For native society, oral tradition is the basic human mode of communication and that conversational meanings exist because people mean and others believe they understand what implied word meant. In short, oral tradition is a way of life. Indeed in many ways it is the base of people's literature, social norm, belief and history containing the sum total of human experiences. It expresses self-identity and upholds social associations, religious customs, ethical values and customary laws. While being a rich repository of mythical, legendary, and historical past, it provides life meanings and examples for the sustenance of contemporary social order. It articulates protest and dissent and simultaneously voice concerns of reformation.

Each culture has often responded with its own explanations, say, of oral stories that are unique to that culture. Therefore, interpretation concerning native literary background requires an apt discussion on storytelling because stories are a guiding principle or a living account that generates understanding of the native world. It is also essential because stories of native functions as collective memories of community, history and experiences. For natives, writing only represents speech and is simply a medium to convey ideas in the absence of speakers and listeners or as Ferdinand de Saussure, founder of Modern linguistic writes: "Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs. The second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first. The linguistic object is not both the written and spoken forms of words; the spoken forms alone constitute the object" (23-24). Creative expressions of natives live through verbal folklore as it deals with the known and shared myths, the epic, legends, life stories of deified cultural heroes, stories of romance and battles, of community gods and racial memories. A constantly shared living memory because it is inherited, learnt and renewed by each generation of performers and each individual performer with the help of collective retelling and recitations. Precisely, native people were accustomed to remember their histories and customs through intricate time-proven processes of storytelling. It has always been part of their tradition and only recently, these ways of storytelling have become designated by scholars as 'oral tradition'. Storytelling is perhaps the oldest mode of transmitting knowledge and a common practice among many communities since time immemorial. It is also possible to regard it as an informal means of imparting education. The oral knowledge implanted with socio-cultural traits of a society is repeatedly carried forward from one to the next generation with no change or with very little change in its contents. Thomas King, who writes prominently on native subjects, recorded these supreme techniques in a native storytelling. He says:

> There is a story I know. It is about the earth and how it floats in space on the back of a turtle. I have heard this story many times, and each time someone tells the story, it changes. Sometimes the change is simply in the voice of the storyteller. Sometimes the change is in the details. Sometimes in the order of events. Other times it is the dialogue or the responses of the audience. But in all the telling of all the tellers, the world never leaves the turtle's back and the turtle never swims away (*The Truth about Stories* 30).

Stories like this Canadian native narrative of 'earth floating on a Turtle's back' and another folktale from the native Indian stories of a 'Bird hovering around the mythical forefather of the Nagas guiding them to a place of settlement on earth' is purely an indication of long repository story collections of memories, values and wisdom (Carbo et al. xii). As this legacy passes on, varying changes in a story are inevitable while much remains the same preserving continuity. Each time we read a folktale we become the storyteller, in our own telling we create a conversation. It screens a two way dialogue between what is being told in the story and on the other, the personal human experience. The story itself holds authority that binds people together in shared experience. Narratives connect us to one another, to families, relatives, neighbors, members of the same community or to strangers and the exuberance obtained in a native story extend to all animate and inanimate objects. Storytelling provides a kind of platform to return to the symbols of the tradition that could explain an event to the communities and stories are a practical matter that balances respect with survival. Stories are a living entity to sort out the possibility of ordering unique relationships, memories and an attempt to come to terms with the past, an attempt to find a future as notably heralded by a famous Nigerian storyteller Ben Okri, "We live by stories, we also live in them" (46). There is a spiritual connotation of having thus encircled in the vast expanse of a native universe and that according to Thomas King is a mouthpiece for understanding the territory of contemporary native written literature. Stories enter a new phase of evolution through the very act of writing and, the art of the writer. The reinforced re-telling of native stories

provides a vital link of the people's present with their past and its written orality ensure for itself a kind of permanence in a different form and medium. Also in a certain way, it forms a process of 'self deconstruction' of a people in search of meanings for their existence by retrieving relevant metaphors from the "imaginative experience" of orality to deal with present realities of life (Ao 111).

1.2. Native Literary Narrative: A Progress from Oral to Written Tradition

Human society first formed itself with the aid of oral speech, and the problem with oral tradition is that it is by word of mouth. Without a help of written reference, the message may be forgotten, misinterpreted, misunderstood or embellished especially in a fast changing world. Hence, to maintain permanent historical information, social value, and correct oral records in space and time, the transition from oral to written mores becomes obligatory. Precisely, the progress from oral to written tradition is necessary because writing does not merely introduce a communicative instrument, but also involves an entirely different and invasive orientation to knowledge and interpretation. Writing is a "solipsistic operation" and it provides for consciousness as nothing else does and writing language shields the factors that cause continuous change in the ephemeral spoken language (Ong 100-102).

Natives, the study under discussion has only oral tradition. They did not write down their stories, myths and experiences, it is in later contact with the Europeans, who gave them a writing system, which has resulted in the appropriation of native voices by non-native writers. Among natives under consideration, the first sign of writing appeared because of organized missionary efforts to convert them. Later on, with writing system in hand, the creative native writers began to draw upon oral cultures to unravel the depth of authentic native culture in print. It provided them a forte to retell the story from the perspective of the

native narrators and record such voices in its literary forms of poetry, drama, novel, autobiography and short fiction. This progress from oral to written has facilitated the native to express traditional and contemporary concerns about the world. Written culture provides an avenue into the perceptions of reality for other people across cultures and generations. With a rich storehouse of oral knowledge at hand, native authors offer written or printed views of reality far more complex than the western mode of perception can accommodate. They have access to cultural traditions that have enabled them to survive under extreme conditions, enhancing their lives and instilling them with deep respect for all relationships. A native writer Thomas King calls such 'relations' as: "the web of kinship extending to the animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagine" (*All My Relations* ix). Easterine Kire associates the cooperative existence of man in connection with its natural world. She opines that, "Man is supposed to befriend nature, by taking care of nature" (*Thoughts after Easter* 6).

Native written literature emerged as a new field aiming for a more authentic portrayal of indigenous people. *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* edited by Eugene Benson and William Toye states that native writers regard the oral as 'Native', in conflict with the 'written'. As a result, they have begun to "object strongly the corrupt and intrusive writing process that non-natives have applied to their stories, and particularly to the appropriation of their stories by non-natives" (3). Basil H. Johnson criticizes the misconceptions and misrepresentations surrounding native trickster figure. He opines that, it is only within the context of "tribal customs as commemorated in oral traditions and in ritual" that trickster figure may be more fully understood (qtd. in Benson et al. 3). Lenore Keeshig Tobias affirms native stories as power and "their appropriation is culture theft, the theft of voice" (ibidem). Native writers of modern age transcend from oral to written mores to reclaim their stories, they now apply written language to voice their authentic beliefs,

traditions and values blurring the boundary between the oral and the written, the colonial and the postcolonial. Natives are also willingly trying to integrate oral voices within the written modes to bridge the gap of imperial discourse. Eugene Benson and William Toye pointed out that, the native author's book during 1960's and 1970's revealed five trends:

> (i) A pan-native approach that played down tribal affiliation and focused on a common native identity, while sometimes shifting emphasis from the shared experiences of the group to the single experiences of the individual (ii) a greater diversification of literary genres (iii) inspirational writing intended to provide a sense of historical continuity and making use of ancient beliefs and values and (iv) advocated separation from the dominant society and (v) sought an as-yet-undefined revisionist presence in society (9).

Natives have started writing about their society forcing, at the same time, the non-natives to pay attention to them and acknowledge their presence. Native writings reflect their consciousness, their growing political awareness, and their experience of oppression, exploitation at the hands of the imperialist, their struggle for recognition has finally found a voice in various forms of literature. With the development of recent modern critical theories like 'Marxism', 'Feminism', 'Humanism', the 'Ecological Movement' and the rise of Political and Cultural Movement, natives writers of the twenty first century are breaking the coded subdued silence by writing in English, a literate or a dominant European language accessible for all people. They feel it is crucial to develop their skills in the written English language because it is the universal language serving the purpose of uniting people as well raising the political consciousness preferably of the native community. The use of English to native advantage will, according to Kerrie Charnely, enable native writers to create their own image of who they are, "erase invisibility and proclaim native men and women as distinct and valuable people" (16). Native writers censure the misuse of native voices by non-native writers for they feel that they should be left free to use the cultural creation of the natives,

particularly the oral text, that teaches a way of life and exist within specific cultural parameters. Contemporary native writers of today's era, confidently commune in a characteristic ingenious voice of its own and therefore, writes with an idea to strengthen their own identity as well as exhort the young native groups to bond, unite and stand for themselves. James S. Frideres eminently points native struggle for survival as a struggle for identity and declares that, "If Natives are going to control their destiny they must implement some form of community control immediately", and that the group must voice its past positively and maintain strong links with time-honored customs and beliefs to achieve political equality and look forward to a promising future (3).

1.3. Who are the Natives? : Understanding Native Voices of India and Canada

'Native' refers to a person born in a specified place or associated with a place by birth having a common meaning of the original origin. In simple terms, natives are the original occupant of a land. Its older connected name was a person more or less land-locked bound to his roots and the soil, and who produces something of practical use to his community. These original people under discussion, are communities and nations who claim a historical continuity and cultural affinity with societies predating contact with western culture. While considering their local cultures to be distinctly separate from westernized cultures, they continue to assert their sovereignty towards preserving, reviving and enhancing the cohesion and uniqueness of their traditional social values and customs along with a conscientious effort to transmit this knowledge to future generations and right to cultural self-determination.

Citing general idea on 'Native' derivation is helpful because the present thesis aims to discover the native voices and it examine specific native people, of India and Canada. India

and Canada have always been culturally pluralist nations with natives belonging to several linguistic groups. The similar display of bilingualism, biculturalism and as multicultural countries, India and Canada make vibrant and accessible fields for any scholar intending to undertake a comparative native study of these nations. Even more interesting is a participatory link between these two countries in the longstanding bilateral connections and strong interpersonal relations. Presently there is an "Indian Diaspora of more than one million living in Canada" ("Canada-India." www. canadainternational.gc.ca). Both India and Canada are former colonies of the British Empire and has its due share of related experiences in terms of displacement, colonization, false-projection, misrepresentation or marginality. The natives were exposed and subjected to numerous changes in the last two hundred years and have witnessed drastically not only in natural environments involving ecological changes but also changes in cultural, social, economic and political climates.

When involved in native studies, it becomes obligatory to look into the subject that best represent them and addresses their issues. Colonization being one that effected changes, it is vital to explain native place in society from this stance. From the beginning, the original people did not fashion the name 'Native', it is during the later contact with Europeans who gave them the name, they are now identified with. In a manner, the term 'Native' has its source in primordial European languages after white defines natives as indigenous if they exhibited a certain way of life, or to those individuals who claim to have aboriginal ancestry/origin. Native is related to the appellation 'nativist' under colonial rule, a distinction which first expressed itself in what are called the settler contact zones, where colonist Europeans and indigenous populations came into direct interaction with one another. A critic Elleke Boehmer affirms that: "In using terms such as 'native' or 'creole', it is important to remember that empire constantly invoked racial and cultural categories such as these against the perceived creeping corruptions of mixing and miscegenation" (111). From those

peculiarity and classification attached to native identity, we can well assume that, the conquest of native by colonial power ushered in a new era that pick the consciousness of native groups, with a sensitive question of 'who they actually are' and 'what their rights' are. Definitions of 'who they are' seem to affect all natives, subjected to the control of outsiders in their own land through the assimilationist's tactic of colonizing governments. Their dignity so often stereotyped by others to such a degree that at times their awareness and knowledge of themselves obliterated. Natives of India and Canada are members of this misplaced group chiefly because throughout recorded time, empowered groups have been able to define history and provide an explanation of the present. Instances of which is the confrontations or interpretation of wars between natives and whites. Set by historical facts and existing structural relations, the subjected native people gets misrepresented in the popular history books, for instance, when natives attacked a white fortification and won, the result is a massacre. If white attacked a native village and won, the result is as a straight victory. The reason because the dominant group documented these interpretations and definitions, it is also able to keep others from initiating alternative explanations or definitions. Historians too have tendency to focus on specific complaints and overlook actual issues hence, labeling natives as malcontents, troublemakers and opportunists; labels that conceivably be defended only through reframing the abbreviated view of history. History gives credence and legitimacy to a society's normative structure, and to legitimize its power, the dominant group must therefore reconstruct social history whenever necessary for validation of humans past behavior. No historian is free from bias; no history is capable of presenting only the facts. The native people's duty must then use dominant language available to argue, to claim and to discover their lost sense of self-identity, which is ignored for many years leading to continued native exploitation, misinterpretation, misrepresentation and neglect, perpetuated by the

mainstream culture. In some cases, they must, then, use legal aid to gain compensation and due acknowledgement.

Colonization no doubt has effected an erasure on native culture, values and tradition. One can easily perceive the distinct ways in which colonization has affected India and Canada. As for India, British rulers no doubt has granted independence to India but with political freedom came the trauma of 'partition' from whose ill-effects India has not been able to recover so far. From the very beginning, the history of India is a story of adaptation, absorption and assimilation of continual coming to terms with foreign influences and resistances transformed into responses. All migrated people coming to India from varied countries like the Aryans, Persians, Arab traders, Afghans and Turkish merchants get incorporated and absorbed into larger expanse of India that they actually became its natives. India adapts a multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural and multi-religious society to retain its unity in diversity. However, in such country of variety where diversity prevails, the question of identity remains crucial as remarked by Satya P. Mohanty: "In societies where cultural inequality is pervasive, the identity-based struggle of subordinate cultural groups is often a necessary component of multicultural politics" (239). Multiculturalism may refer to the recognition of the people's ethnicity but in many cases of India, the minority stands mostly dominated in the hands of the mainstream groups. Correspondingly, the position of Canada is one of misplacement. Canada, colonized by the British and the French, originally was the land of the Inuit, Métis, Indians (commonly referred to as First Nations) and other tribal communities inclusive of some others who are now, variously called the Natives and the Aborigines. The natives collectively are also, sometimes referred to as the Indians of Canada, of which names, 'Natives, Indian, First Nations,' are one, that I have used interchangeably in the Thesis. Besides, the natives have now gradually been displaced from the center and have been pushed to the margins, first by the French and then by the English. In Canada, the

process of inventing the Canadian nation has also been a problematic process till today with lots of immigrant Europeans as well as immigrants from other countries such as India, China, Japan, Africa, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and south Asian countries, occupying a major part of its land. The Canadian native minority has, in a way, become exiles in their own land. Additionally, Canada official proclamation of Multiculturalism in October 1971 to accommodate varied immigrant groups and Canada having its two official languages, English and French, create more challenges to Canada's national identity especially the socio-cultural identity of the native. In spite of the many challenges consuming Canadian ideology, there has been a constant effort from the constitution makers to promote national integration. The indulgent scenario of the Canadian situation largely comparable to one in India, yields rich understanding on wide-ranging issues confronting native society.

In the influx of a colonial rule, the native lost their power, land and wealth. The invader had scant regard and no tolerance for the existing owners, particularly when these owners were seen as an inferior people who, because they appeared to make ineffective use of the land, had little claim to it. Natives were led to surrender their land with very little compensations or without any of it. Hence, the notion of human rights includes all claims, inclusive of the snatched away native land. Native people maintain that their right to land starts from original occupancy, and point out that land entitlement has been recognized by the dominant society through various judicial decrees and amendment of the government. Native identity have always been intimately connected with land, a part of their being: "It is in and through the land that they are bound together with their 'relatives' such as trees, animals, rocks etc. and where all their ancestors continue to live in spirit" (Imsong 101-102). Land is an extremely important element of native claims in general. Historically, people had communal ownership of land. It is considered a sacred possession that could not be bought or sold. Native peoples are articulate about their unique relationship to the land both past and

present, and about the meaning it has for them. In their concept the land is seen as a territory, place, homeland, religion, culture, spiritual settings and living beings including animals. They are aware that material standard of living derives ultimately from the land and its resources. Consequently, they seek not only a role in determining the way in which the land and other resources are used but also a just share of benefits derived from their exploitation. A visible form of native 'Land claims' can be exemplified from among the Nagas in Northeastern part of India and among Native North Americans settlers, now called 'Canada'. With the advent of British colonial rule, alienation of the Naga People from the land posed new challenges to Naga identity and as a result, they attempted to reclaim their rightful ownership. The British ruler, and later the Indian Government, sought to create individual proprietorship of land by tagging a monetary value on land. Land in general is a property then, it became saleable, inheritable and transferable. The reservation of forest lands by various Governmental Acts like the Government Forests Act (1865), Indian Forest Act (1878) and by further classifying it as Reserved Forest, Protected Forests and Village Forests, have resulted in the breakdown or alteration of community life and a steady cultural death. "Tribal's are not only becoming rootless but also forced to lead a dehumanized existence without a livelihood, identity, community and culture" (Rongsen 37). Such Acts affected not only the economic project but also the religious rituals that is firmly connected to the forestland. Historically and mythically, lands being indivisible to the native mind, Nagas have resented these Acts because they threatened their ethnic socio-cultural identity, which is intimately attached to their concept of land. As for Canada, native people have come under European control but in law, the native interest in land and other natural resources could not be acquired directly by the newcomers. Nevertheless, when the Federal Government assumed political control over native people, it undertook responsibilities for reserve land and band finances and imposed special limitations on Indians (of Canada) as a feature of Indian status. It adopted a protective

role over Indians and their affairs corresponding to that a guardian or trustee towards a ward or beneficiary. From this relationship flow grievances and claims that pertain to the government's management of Indian resources. Canada's original settlers had to seek legal intervention for establishing their claims over native lands that were transformed into crown or governmental lands. It pushed them to negotiate for rights of recognition of land ownership in their traditional territories. There are two major categories of claims now pursued by the natives in Canada. Comprehensive and Specific claims, the first 'comprehensive or aboriginal rights claim,' deals with the unfinished business of treaty making in Canada. These claims generally arise in areas of Canada where aboriginal rights have not been dealt with by treaty or through other legal means. In these areas, 'modern treaties' are negotiated between the Aboriginal group, Canada and the province or territory. These treaties are implemented through legislation and remain the most comprehensive way of addressing native rights. It takes two different forms, which are to some extent regionally based. In the North, the claims focus on a demand for formal legal recognition of aboriginal land title and all the rights that are derived from it. In the South, this type of claim places more emphasis on the cooperation between natives and the government for "the extinguishment of aboriginal title and the restitution of specific rights" ("Aboriginal Affairs." www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca). Canada remains committed to working with its partners to achieve results at negotiating tables for the benefit of all Canadians and since 2006, they have signed six comprehensive land claims agreements and one self-government agreement.

With these entire unsettled colonial problem looming large in native minds, and the experience of a subdued status imposed by the Europeans or outsiders, forced native society to evaluate their identity. Evaluation being a basic form of social communications that is "subject-relative" and "potentially informative" about whatever it seeks to judge or define, intelligent native society, with creative potential turns to written culture to redefine their

voice, experience and their lost sense of self-identity (Ansari 11). It has led to the growth of a new writing called 'Post-Colonial Literature'. A type of writing that classifies a process of a progressive dismantling of canonical imperial discourses along with their value system. This new expression paves the way for native literature to develop exclusive voice to the targeted audience, and it helps native writer to disentangle themselves from the forces of the imperial centre. Here, the native finds an authentic voice by resorting to an alternative discourse to identify themselves. Native writers center their energies on revising the language, narrative styles and historical representations of the invader. Powerful native subject writers, to name a few, Archie Weller, Kath Walker, Witi Ihimaera, Salman Rushdie, Raja Rao, Patricia Grace, Beatrice Culleton, Easterine Kire and Thomas King, have accentuated on writing as playing an integral part of self-definition, putting emphasis on historical reconstruction. Hence, crafting a way to liberate, unshackle, identify and resurrect native voices from the offensive past, and a future defined from their authentic point of view. A native Canadian critic, Kateri Damm, has rightly announced: "We have not faded into the earth like snow before the summer sun of progress nor have we stagnated in some sort of retrograde time capsule. We have survived and will continue to survive because of, and in spite of the changes" (16).

The textual strategies of native countries like India and Canada involve abrogation and appropriation. Language being a medium of power it demands that post-colonial writing should define itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse adapted to the colonized place. According to Bill Ashcroft et al, "there are two distinct processes by which it does this, first the abrogation or denial of the privilege of 'English' involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication. Second, the appropriation and reconstitution of the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege" (37). The concept of 'criticism' as the modern term will designate, or as it is understood in the Western literary tradition, although does not find a mention in

native culture, the need to acquire such theory of criticism presses an issue if natives are to analyze and critically interpret their own literature. It becomes important for native writers to break silences, dispel lies and stereotypes cluttered on them. Native writers, from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, are now excitedly creating a body of new writing with rich indigenous touch, which has amazing versatility, vitality and commitment. Native writings talk about the Natives dispossession and alienation. The natives write to strengthen their own voice. They write about the suffering and upheavals in their lives. The need to represent them arose out of this need to be heard and to be recognized. They are questioning why they should be expected to conform to the constraints of Eurocentric critical theories, they are using the language of "the enemy", English, to break from a colonized past, bending and stretching mainstream rules of genre, reinventing new ones, and redefining traditional notions of orality and literacy to enrich and expand native literature (Vevaina 40). Since the 1970s the voices of natives have begun to break silence, by narrating from the original perspectives, by dispelling lies and stereotypes and more currently by analyzing and critically interpreting their own literatures. 'Native' a label once derogatory for colonized people have recently been reclaimed to designate those who belong to a particular place by birth. Like any other models, colonization too has its limitation. Consequently, twenty first century has witnessed many changes in the cultural scenario of different countries all over the world. Colonization that has caused stagnation has also initiated a new dimension to postcolonial writing with its decline. People now must construct a portrait that corresponds closely to the real world and must select and incorporate certain variables, discard others as unimportant, and make assumptions about how people behave.

Nativism means a return to the roots, an awareness of self, "an emotional need of the human race" (Seth 103). In all appropriate reading, we now see that native voices carry the evidence of the social and cultural practices of a community in its evaluational history and

play an obvious social role by serving as a selective memory of traditions and ideals. Historical civilization or a recorded oral narrative of ancient settlers teaches us that the human race has a tendency to go far away from its societal and cultural axes and return to its centers. Thereby, in this twenty-first century, we have many native writers, speakers, singers, and folk tellers making their way to express, expand and communicate their ideas, and have been contributing creatively to tribal cultures. Native voices often play a most important role in society as the transmitter of beliefs, ideas, values and community concerns. It offers a new insight into the understanding of the world and remains a defining feature in terms of both its didactic nature and its focus on the community. Voices being part of communal absorption to expressing worldviews, native writers artistically formulate and adapt literary textuality as a tool to express their selves and question the assumptions propagated by the white writers. They articulate the cultural, social and political issues affecting the natives. They also debunk the role played by the dominant white text in diminishing the value of the native culture as well as the native literature. Their "oppositionality is directed against dominant ways of perceiving literature" (Mukherjee vii).

Moreover, the recent shift from the conception of the Third World to that of the Fourth World popularized by George Manuel, a Canadian aboriginal man suggests the refusal of the decolonizing peoples to be shadows of other nations or creatures of other powers. The idea of a Fourth World emerged from the struggle of native peoples to avoid the subordination of their own diverse identities beneath the ongoing conquest and imperialism. "The Fourth World peoples are not immigrants but the original inhabitants of lands that they today form the territories of nation states" (Dyck 1). In the Fourth World, natives refuse to become alienated from their own past. Instead are encouraged to draw on the nutritive energy of humanity's diverse inheritances of language and culture. The philosophy of balance and ecological equilibrium are central to the Fourth World and this quest for balance is expressed

in the need to combine the natural conservation of tradition, inheritance and organic community with the revolutionary energy inherent in all struggles for decolonization. In the Fourth World, the natural and cultural diversity of life is cultivated, celebrated and, if necessary, protected. It invokes a sense of confidence in the capacity of living native cultures to contribute actively to the betterment of all humanity, to generate adaptive strategies for indigenous, national, transnational and global progress. George Manuel has called the Fourth World "a vision of the future history of North America and of the Indian peoples" a vision in which traditional spiritual and cultural values merge with economic self-sufficiency and political self determination to liberate native peoples from colonialist shackles placed upon mind and body (12). It affirms that native people are working and uniting for the purpose of coalition, to form a new group in order to achieve claims on a global scale and to assert greater political influence through greater number. Accordingly, any discussion pertaining to Native voices involves a very broad outlook and a sensitive review or evaluation. It needs a meticulous examination on various issues confronting them, be it the native traditional values, social, economic, political and cultural sphere. As such, the expository understanding of 'Native Voices of India and Canada' is contributory because the present study focuses on the Native Voices in the works of Easterine Kire and Thomas King. Their fictional works have been taken up for study because they offer suitable scope for an examination into the area of my interest, that is, Native Voices, which, it is my belief, gave the writers their distinct mark.

Easterine Kire (born 1959-), and Thomas King (born 1943-) are reciprocally contemporary 'Native subject' writers belonging one each from India and Canada. Both writers use history simply as a story to explicitly voice out opinion in favor of native place and play out the importance of self-representation and self-identification. Easterine Kire and Thomas King imaginative writings spot stories as a creative balance through which the

transformative capacities of language and people are closely knitted and they engagingly try to portray native stories as critical lenses through which other stories may be interpreted. Their collections of short stories and novels are filled with insightful commentary on life, addressing themes ranging from historical events, social, and cultural concerns. They exhibit primal link to storytelling, with styles often penetrating giving the audience a refreshing blend of oration and inscription. It will guide readers to new ways of thinking about the universal world and their roles in it, significantly providing requisite information and context to comprehend native ideology on clearer perspectives. Acclaimed as an important voice coming out of their respective ethnic community and by writing themes drawn from realistic society and from the standpoint of the people who had experience it, Easterine Kire and Thomas King narratives will provide a motivating study on native subjects and an authentic understanding of native voices. Comparative study of the works of Easterine Kire and Thomas King is fruitfully engaging because both their fictional narratives act as political exercises in that they reclaim, readdress, and redefine their native culture and history from misrepresentation. Pointedly, Kire and King are both objective writers and thinkers who articulate the social, political, economic and cultural issues affecting the natives whilst aiming at the self-empowerment of the native society. Overall, the thesis offers an attempt to appreciate native paradigms and understand Native Voices prevalent in the works of Easterine Kire and Thomas King.

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CHAPTER - II

Native Voices in the Fictional Works of Easterine Kire

2.1. The Career and Art of Easterine Kire

Easterine Kire is one amongst pioneer Naga writers and novelists in English. She is a celebrated native writer, born on 29 March 1959 in Kohima the capital of Nagaland, a Northeastern state of India, Kire holds a diploma in Journalism and Ph.D. in English literature. She is the founder-partner of *Barkweaver* publication and has worked as Editor, Department of Publicity, Government of Nagaland (1982-1985); Lecturer in English, Kohima College, Kohima (1985-1988); Lecturer and Reader in English Department, Nagaland University (1988-2005). In March 2005, she took the offer of being put on a program as Tromsø's first Fribyforfatter, and moved to Tromsø, Northern Norway. In 2008 joined UiT, Arctic University of Tromsø, for teaching post-colonial poetry. An established writer in literary field, her poetry and books have been widely translated to German, Croatian, Uzbek, Norwegian and Nepali. She currently lives in Northern Norway where she concentrates on her writing, and performs Jazz poetry with her band, *Jazzpoesi*.

Easterine Kire is a famed storyteller, a poet and a novelist whose works are rooted deeply in Naga society. She has to her credit a number of poetry collections, *Kelhoukevira*, *The Windhover Collection*, *Jazzpoetry*, and other poems. In 1982, Kire published her first volume of poems, *Kelhoukevira*. She has translated over two hundred oral poems from native Tenyidie language, into English. On 27 March 2009, the *Preamble* of *The European Constitution in Verse* has included Kire's poems for its poetic constitution in Verse. *Article* 25: *The Right to Housing* and *Article* 48: *The Right to Dream* features Easterine Kire's

poetry, positioning her as one important voice among *International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN) Guest Writers*. In the literary scene, Kire is best known for her novels and short stories. Her fictional works, *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), *Mari* (2010), *Life on Hold* (2011), *Bitter Wormwood* (2011) *Forest Song* (2011), *Once in a Faraway Dorg* (2011), *When the River Sleeps* (2014), are a realistic read on Naga society that transcendently witnessed large scale changes in cultural, social, religious and political arena. *A Terrible Matriarchy* has been chosen by the Indian Government to be translated into the six UNESCO languages. *Bitter Wormwood* was shortlisted for the prestigious *The Hindu Literary Prize* in 2013. *When the River Sleeps* won *The Hindu Literary Prize* for Best Fiction in 2015. Kire is also a recipient of several awards including *Silver Medal for Best Creative Writing* from the Bertrand Russell Study Forum, Madras, India; *Governor's Award for Excellence* in Naga Literature in 2011; *Catalan PEN International Free Voice* Award in 2013, in recognition of the work she has significantly contributed to literature and society.

Coming to her literary art, it is edifying to categorize Kire as a Naga writer who originally comes from a society of oral culture. The Nagas have rich oral literatures preserved in the form of storytelling, much of which have not been documented as yet. It is pertinent to note that Nagas do not have their own original script. Some Naga folk-tellers say the written script recorded on an animal skin was devoured by a dog due to negligence. Others say that the piece of animal skin was eaten by mistake. Whatever the tales might claim, the fact remains that Nagas do not have a script of their own. In linguistic study, it is experiential that language-dialects get alphabet in two ways. One is through a process of evolution from pictograms, syllables, scripts etc. and standardization through printing. The other method is imposition of an alphabetic script through some social or political agency. Presumably, the dialects of native got their written scripts through the later process, a readymade script with

some additions and alterations to give an accessible rendering of dialect forms. Contact with British and the Americans led to the adoption of a script. With the introduction of an official language recognizably as 'English', today, the Nagas have set off with Roman script introduced by the British and American Baptist missionaries as the mode to enable written communication. Emerging Native writers in English rewrite native culture and heritage by creating a form of counter discourse to assert their spiritual and deep cultural roots. With 'writing' viewed only "as a kind of compliment to oral speech, not as a transformer of verbalization" it is certain that Naga native oral cultures too, will continue although part of society has become literate (Saussure 23). In modern literate form, oral transmission continues and carries with it bulk of a community's tradition, and in line with those impressive carry over, the Nagas have managed to keep originality of their languages in terms of phonetics and oral vocabularies. Kire's adaptation of oral within the written narrative is patently a technique to differentiate her story as one 'voice piece' coming from an original source. What distinguishes Kire's plot is the inclusion of storytelling within story tradition that has a unique purpose to serve. For example, *A Naga Village Remembered* echoes oral storytelling performance. It features the narrator telling his or her personal story, with the writer theoretically informing that these chronicles embody a social document. An eloquent account about the first settlers of Khonoma is revived through the oral storytellers of Merhu clan, Thevo clan, Semo clan. The outline oral narratives of each are cited below:

> *Oral Narratives of the Merhu clan*
>
> **Narrator: Sebi Dolie**
>
> Un quite spirits hover yalho bagei- village of the first settlers, we know of at least one generation who lived there. These were not the same race of people as those who settled the present village of Khwunoria. Who were the first settler? Called the Khwuno after the name of the Khwuno plant that grows so

abundantly in these hills, they were descended from a Burmese tribe, that is all we know... (126).

Oral Narratives of the Thevo clan

Narrator: Niu Francis Whiso

Khwunoria was one of the last Angami village to be settled. Before we settled our village, these villages had already been settled, Kiruphe, Secuma and Zotshuria. After us, the village of Mezoria was settled. The first settlers of Khwunoria came from Kigweria. They came to Kozhu, ancestor of the Thevo... (ibidem 134).

Oral Narratives of the Semo clan

Narrator: Thezavilie Chucha

I am of the Rulho. I have heard our elders say that Kherunomia came and settled here about before we settled our village. They made houses and tilled fields. In the fields of our people and in the water sources, some have found precious necklaces of these people. Some have found the broken remains of their earthen pots. I do not know where they had their village, I have not heard of Yalho bagei. The trouble is, there are too many names given to places here and there, so you may call it by one name and I may know it by another name. It is not possible to remember all the place names… (ibidem 139).

Kire's description exhibit rich oral texture and it provides excellent examples of written orality. In the hands of native author, 'written orality', i.e. a writing style which reads like a conversation between the writer and the reader has become an effective tool of communication. It portrays members of contemporary native community affirming their thriving cultures. Kire is a native author of oral culture and her writings are successfully a recollection and inclusion of people's oral memory and experiences. On the importance of oral voices, she credits her belief:

> I worked with several oral narrators and learnt much from them of native wisdom and lore and native ways of resolving conflicts. Folk wisdom has been greatly ignored in statesmanship but the culture of inter-village friendships that we have had promoted peace and built a strong relationships between villages. This is the kind of knowledge transferred in oral literature. I love how oral narrators use language as a tool of communication: they so naturally and easily use poetic expressions and turns of speech in their everyday language, which we users of the written word struggle for days to produce. This kind of familiarity with the spoken word is an art we are losing and could learn to cultivate again. Because it is also a culture that promotes a courteous way of communicating and that always contributes to peaceful communication ("Kire in Network News." www.icorn.org).

Kire's *Written Orality* explains an existential life of native individual and community predominantly drafted from the backdrop of oral tradition. She applies native orality and historical event simply as story to voice social opinion and addresses herself as a socialist writer thinking of new ways to help people from the many atrocities, native people living within an invisible prison of repression, denial freedom of expression, nationhood and most painfully the basic living including the right to life itself. Just as oral narrators use 'primary orality' (that of persons totally unfamiliar with writing) to interlink messages, Kire as author of written word uses 'secondary orality' embedding the word in visual space more definitely. Writing, according to a literary theorist Walter J. Ong, gives "a grapholect, a power far exceeding that of any purely oral dialect" (8). Ong's treatise *Orality and Literacy* drew attention to radical changes in oral cultures. That, "writing from beginning did not reduce orality but enhanced it, making it possible to organize the 'principles' or constituents of oratory into a scientific 'art', a sequentially ordered body of explanation that showed how and why oratory achieved and could be made to achieve its various specific effects" (9). Kire's written orality has also formulated an authentic representation of native oral traditions. This is justifiably a reason because the 'Native individual' has now moved out from the oral to the

written culture. In short, it is important to give the 'native individual' a voice in written narrative. For Kire, orality has given a powerful voice to native people and "Oral narrators use language as a tool of communication" ("Kire in Network News." www.icorn.org). The shift from primary orality to secondary orality not only implies that cultures are compelled to elaborate new rhetorical styles in order to communicate knowledge by employing a different medium; the shift also involves a major transformation of thought itself. According to Ong, "orally based thought and expression are additive rather than subordinative; aggregative rather than analytic; redundant, conservative, close to the human life world, agonistically toned, empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced; homeostatic and situational rather than abstract" (57). Therefore, Kire has tried to share pieces of native oral histories through storytelling and has devoted a great deal of attention to elucidating how this orality may be linked in a written performance.

Native folklorist identifies 'memory' as something that is more intimate and universal than history. Through memory, the mind carries culture from generation to generation. No one in oral culture doubts that memories can be faithful storehouses, which contain the sum total of past and present human experience. Kire's recollection device in retelling oral tales through use of shared memory not only shows the reputation of native cultures undeniably attached to people's memory, but it also objectifies the meaningful written orality to unfold the accepted message that native oral communicators are still around to retell stories, enlighting the present with oral memories. Kire's artistic ability has recaptured the continual flow of oral culture in intercession terms, through use of dialogues and power of native oral voice. She makes use of the effective native oratory and beliefs in words, rather than a written treaty. Words are not just words. In native oral cultures, words have the power to destroy, to negotiate and the power to create. Words have influence over a conscious say and the speech

imagery in *A Naga Village Remembered*, illustrated in clan chief Pelhu's verbal negotiation with the white man, bestows an effective support to the supremacy of orality:

> As the small band of men approached Mezoma, runners ran ahead to tell General Nation that Pelhu was one of the men. The news pleased the General greatly. "Which one is he?" he wanted to know. "The third man is Pelhu" answered the runner.... Then they sat and talked, two great warriors, each quietly acknowledging the courage of the other.
>
> With the help of an interpreter, the General asked Pelhu "Why did you come?" Pelhu's reply was very straightforward "I came to make peace." He spoke with a calm dignity that the white man found himself admiring. The General asked again "Do you need a written treaty?" Pelhu shook his head and said firmly "No, if we have said there will be peace between us there will be peace. We do not need to write it down." General Nation was suitably impressed by the old warrior's wisdom. He stood to his feet and gripped pelhu's hand firmly. The treaty was concluded between village representatives of Khonoma and the representatives of the British Government at Mezoma on the 27th March 1880 (86).

Viably a master of written orality, Kire constantly resorts to oral voices in order to endorse progressive social or political views. In all telling of individual stories, she proves that orality may be used as a liberating mode of resistance to written narratives because native voice facilitates a complete tradition, be it the collective cultures and manners of society. In her fiction, Kire has given ample evidence of the destabilizing potential of orality to counter colonialist imposition. The plot in the novel *Bitter Wormwood* offers a receptive reading about real native people and their lives; a non-stereotypical book about Naga political history. It gives a closer understanding on the freedom struggle of the Nagas from Indian occupation starting 1947. Kire's written orality probes efficiently into the community psyche that has shared experience of trepidation, fear, terror and silence. The attempts to capture questions of political ideologies and their workable human solutions, act as a sort of

individual emancipation with the fictionist giving a similar statement: “As a Naga writer, it has been cathartic to write about the Naga political conflict. It is something that sits deep within most Nagas of my generation and to be able to catharsizes it in fiction has been a great personal liberation” (“Kire in *The Hindu*.” www.thehindu.com). Kire’s written orality mirror realistic society mostly having communal base. This is possibly because the native society has now shifted from oral culture, and Kire felt the need to capture their voice in written narrative. Each book has its own central idea accounting societal issues. The narrative *Bitter Wormwood* is an attempt to understand Indo-Naga conflict and how it has affected individual lives of ordinary people. *Mari* tells of Native experience during the World War II. We find that each book has a different approach. It grades Kire as a representative author of Nagaland in the literary arena. She is remarkably a microscopic observer of her own society and cautiously writes about the events of actual places and the people she knows best. Calling her a Naga writer in English is supported by the same logic that she best knows the material that she is dealing with, be it the Naga social, political, cultural themes or of identity. Native writers all over the world appear to have enormous task at hand of an added responsibility of showcasing their society, history and polity whenever taken to printed form. Written works in Native hands, take the role of a spokesperson, an artist as well as an activist, a chronicler, because native writes with an aim to recover and reclaim authentic history. Kire, as one native author of repute, is not an exception to such a cause. The military historian Robert Lyman has reviewed thus on her fictional work *Mari*:

> Easterine Kire brings to life for the first time the authentic voice of the Naga people amidst the horror of the war that overwhelmed their mountaintop home in 1944. It is a voice, which has for too long been silent. In her vibrant telling of the story, Easterine shows just what it meant for Nagas to be refugees in their own homeland, their homes and livelihoods around them crushed by the

> weight of conflict and bloodshed, their families split and separated forever (Kire's back cover).

Literally speaking, the present Naga society continues to suffer from the scars of colonial and post-colonial rule of the British and Indians, with no final settlement, although peace process is always doing the rounds. Naga people today, as a result, yearn for a politics of representation and recognition that is trustworthy and inclusive. They urgently feel the need to retain oral tradition for it recreates the tools of life, an ultimate truth of existence. Among contemporary authors of written word, Kire is artistically one of the most powerful voices to come out of Nagaland. Her fictional works carry an effort to make oral narratives visible outside tribal settings. Traditionally, native folklore or the unwritten stories, proverbs, riddles and songs of a culture belong to eras of relative peace in village community. Kire describes how folklore of Nagas are often suppressed during unstable times, and confidently posits that her written orality provides a platform for peaceful retelling of community tales, particularly the native ceremonious folktales that require certain settings in order to be told. Kire's endeavor is described in her latest novel *When the River Sleeps*, a story on the Naga spiritual universe. The written account abundantly made use of native words and idioms to implicate the experience of having heard an authentic story sequence from a real living storyteller. Linguistic theorist assert that, "the world exists as the subject of thought, and the subject of thought, no matter how material it might appear, is still always a subject that is thought" (Holquist 4). Human language is only a system of signs, a medium chosen purely for meanings to communicate, and the skill of narrating a happening as a story is as old as a man's memory, it is a stable rumination on the things of the past. These stories are stored and saved for those who are unfamiliar with them. That which is shared is the story. This happens without any break, so that a memory-store of the story is formed. When this memory-store becomes available to all in a given community, then the story can be said to have obtained a

literary form. Memory, that seemingly most individual of all our faculties is however both private and social. Values and priorities are often implanted in memory descriptions, revealed by the language used or by the generic structure of the recollection embedded through the dominant culture. For instance, the fictionist Kire had made use of such literary craft in *When the River Sleeps*. Primarily, the story takes place inside the colossal mind of Vilie and is narrated to readers through his reminiscence. In his solitary confrontation with a tiger while in the forest, he could very well remember folk story of certain men transforming their spirits into tigers and practically came to mind that the tiger is a weretiger; that it could not be scared off by gunshots. He rapidly thought of solutions by summoning names of those men who had their tiger spirits and called out:

> "Kuovi! Menuoihoulie! Wetsho! Is this the way to treat your clansman? I am Vilie, son of Kedo, your clansman. I am not here to do you harm. Why are you treating me as a stranger? I come in peace. You owe me your hospitality. I am your guest!" He shouted these words out with absolute faith that they were being listened to and heeded (*WRS* 26).

Vilie remembered being told that it was by a long process that the men, whose spirits metamorphosed into tigers, reached their final stage of 'weretigherhood'. This miracle of transformation that he knows astounded him the most. He had heard enough stories and after having experienced closely, he had no doubt it was true. It made him feel certain that there is truth to the whole matter whenever cultural story ends cryptically as a counsel. The elders speak:

> It is not only the tiger that men transform themselves into. There are men in the other tribes who have been known to turn their spirits into giant snakes, and their women's spirits have become monkeys. We do not recommend these practices but we are telling you about them because knowledge is always powerful. That is what the age-group houses are for, to impart knowledge of the natural and the supernatural to you so that you go out into the world with

> knowledge of both and not disrespectful of either world as some people are (ibidem 28).

Innumerable native folk-stories have been born ever since the story became indispensable as a cultural necessity. Folktales always begin with a code preamble 'Once upon a time' which means the incident of the story could have taken place at any point of time including the present. The chronology of a native story is timeless, transcendental and is applicably universal. It therefore liberates itself from the actual chronology in order to gain a mysterious symbolism. Kire's children's book, *Once in a Faraway Dorg* has a style of this conventional structure, an inventive cultural story in the form of oral narratives, it begins:

> Once upon a time, there was a very round planet called Dorg. It looked a lot like earth but it was not earth. It had trees and houses and animals and creatures similar to people. But the trees were a little different from the earth-trees.... The most amazing thing about Dorg was that everything on the planet was round, the flowers, the leaves, the houses and even the eyes of the planet dwellers were rounded (7).

Inspired by a rich personal folklore of native culture, Kire's myth is a wise fable about life on the imaginary planet Dorg. Lives in Dorg represent all perfectness, the dorgels led a happy life, singing and making new songs to sing. They have everything, there is food in abundance they ate the round fruits on the trees with blue and red flowers. They could also eat round eggs laid by white birds that came to the planet once every week for the sole purpose of laying egg-food for the dorgels. Sometimes they ate sweet soss, which was white like clouds and sweet like honey. Most entertainingly, they live a peaceful life and have never heard of violence, things were going well on Dorg until one day a square-faced stranger comes to live with them, and then weird things begin to happen on Dorg. This story is classically for children, but akin to native cultural folktales, Kire narrates with accuracy how human beings

in a society live in an interrelated context. It has moral values, too, and is left to an individual to decide whether or not to put into practice what one learns through stories.

The written voice of Kire's text mostly has tribal settings with a moral purpose to serve. The oral discursive modes of storytelling contains in her fictional works not only brandishes native community persuasively, but her written story have also paved a voice for native communities to express and define worldview based on one's own side rather than those defined and imposed by outsiders who have no knowledge of their socio-cultural origin at all. Native oral traditions, principally the indigenous Naga oral voices, still have a long way to go. The fictionist Kire herself spots: "there are still so many stories in the land waiting to be shared" and of how the whole of it will not find a place in world literature ("Kire in *The Hindu*." www.thehindu.com). Nevertheless, oral narratives being part of the memory heritage of community, it continues to generate a sense of social value, and printed orality like those of Kire's oral texts, provide many opportunities for native to gather and tell stories having communal bearings but which at the same time make it possible to be heard by non-native audiences. Oral voice can never replace the written nor can the written ever drive away the oral. It endures because an ingenious native writers, one like Kire adapts a literary tradition where the written and the oral are totally merged. Once the tale is written down and memorized by a person it too can have oral performances and be rendered orally. Kire's literary stratagem faithfully creates a wider podium to understand present-day concerns and many other topics that still have a bearing on modern native Naga society, be it the biasness of India towards the Naga tribal groups of Nagaland, the subaltern experience that Naga people undergo in India. Political issues that still stick the sleeves of Nagas or the concern about racial discrimination, stereotyping, appropriation of native names, symbols, motifs and so forth, all find a space.

2.2. Native Community and Storytelling Tradition

Stories carry values of community and the natives have found explanation to interconnect the web of life through the use of tradition of storytelling. It has always accompanied the lives of native people as it anchors memories, links generations, places, as well as times. In traditional societies, stories form perhaps the most important available model of instruction. The purpose of telling them is "to integrate, to educate, and to entertain all the peoples. The children and the adults of the human, animal, and mythic peoples all depend on the telling of the myths and tales, for within the stories are what is essential and meaningful, what is real" (Frey 176). It is said that in stories, people discover strength and find healing, and elders help children find their sense of identity and place in this world.

In her novel, *A Naga Village Remembered*, Easterine Kire attempts to share community life through storytelling. Reminiscent of a Native American Storyteller, Leslie Marmon Silko, who views storytelling as something that comes out of an experience, Kire unfolds the community life by describing ordinary experiences of the native elder, Kovi, whose life is undeniably attached to the daily activities of the village. His heart warms at sight of women returning in small groups with their carrying baskets stacked with firewood in the wee hours of morning, Kovi thought proudly of how women keep up to the teaching of their fathers. One can inspect village life of the community through Kovi's thoughtful details on how women would set out before dawn to fetch firewood for the day. But if their households already had firewood, they could be seen fetching water in their water carriers. Not yet dawn, Kovi could also notice smoke curling up from the houses hugging the slopes and the still dark houses in the valley, signaling that the cooking of the morning meal was in progress. While men folk kept up to the expectation of guarding their village from enemy raids, never letting women to doubt their strength. Therefore, talk at the *thehou* often centered on reminiscences

about hunts and battles in the past. It engages *thehou* as a learning place where any youth with a man's heart inside him linger to listen or add his stories as well. Stories shape members in a community by stressing values and ideals. For example, an elder tells stories that transmit cultural knowledge and teaches at the same time, and so if elders were present, they perform as storytellers to instruct younger men on communal living. It became a rule for younger men to listen closely without speaking in order to absorb the teachings and stories of the village. It was good to be called a *thehou no*, a child of the *thehou* because "it meant that such person was well versed in stories and customs of the village" (6).

Native community has 'age groups' and elders closely observe the growth and development of the child in relationship to the age-group he is identified with. The native lives a communal life. Individual interests do not guide members of native communities. Their works are directed by the interest of the community in general. As the goal of action is internal to itself, one does not feel alienated from the act nor from the society:

> Vicha's son, Kelevizo, seventeen and a half years old and an avid wrestler. He had thrown young men from the age-group above his. The elders were eager to see how far he could go. It was not unusual for Levi to be stopped by an elder on the village path with a compliment and with suggestions on what kind of grip would be most effective…. Levi's age-group had gone through the rituals of initiation and were now earning *thekra* by working in other people's fields to be paid in money or grain. Their earnings went to the feast of the age group, a grand feast at harvest (ibidem 7).

Natives are by nature a communal society and every member of the community enjoys equal opportunities and privileges. In Kire's depiction of native community, there are coexistence and co activities in all occupations. For indication, readers are invited to witness the pride for a man to battle and earn ornaments of war, next to battle sport; wrestling was the other man's games so fashionable among the men, old and young, and that everything came

to a standstill when the community season for wrestling came in a year. The village looked forward to the games after the harvest and the young men jostled to prove their agility. Natives are an agriculturist community and one type of communal activity narrativized by Kire is the feast of merit. It reflects the splendor and celebration of communal life. A person initiates the feast of merit or otherwise 'Title taking' ceremony normally after a rich harvest. By custom, the title taker does not immediately declare his intentions. First he 'listens' to his dreams taking heed of unusual and portentous dreams, and makes an assessment of the blessings received and, "then if he feels it is appropriate for him to proceed he will declare that he intends to feast the village in pursuit of title taking" (*Folk Elements* 38). Only married men could give such feast and his wife takes prominent and responsible place during the rituals, which emphasized male-female cooperation and interdependence. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, Kire has meticulously portrayed Keviselie (Viselie) 'feast of merit' in which the entire community participates:

> With the priests departed and the rituals almost completed, the house took on a more festive air. The invitees, thronged outside the house to watch the blessing ritual were called in to the feast. All of Viselie's guests filled his large compound, the children set free to run about and run back to eat at their mother's laps. Husband and wife moved in and out among their guests greeting them and bidding them to eat more (21).

Two months later after completion of all initial sacred ritual, Viselie feasted the whole clan at his *sha*, the first feast of merit. He finishes it by gifting a generous meat share, and his Kinsmen and friends reciprocate his merited gifts with cattle and brew pots. The village spoke of Viselie's first feast of merit for a long time. The person who offers the feast of merit is much respected and honored in the community. Each feast entitles him to social distinctions, not only for himself but also for his family and clans too. Further, community

believes that by acknowledging the creator's blessings in the form of title taking, the entire village yields favor of the spirit and ushers in prosperity among the people.

Native embraces community as vital for humans and it forms the backbone of society. In the exposition of communal understanding among native writers, Kire is conspicuous because her stories advocate core optimism of community values. She promotes communal attachments through the quoted teaching of elders who have moral voices at hand. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, we are exposed to many examples of direct teaching; it is the elder's responsibility to train youngsters to the community life apart from his parent's teaching. For instance, in Kichuki (house where young men learned various practical skills, art, and the oral history of the people) Levi and his age mates were constantly taught about how to behave and live in a community. The elder's counsel suggestively cites:

> If you are at a community feast and take more than two pieces of meat, shame on you. Others will call you glutton, worse, they will think to themselves, 'has no one taught this boy about greed?' This is the key to right living – avoiding excess in anything – be content with your share of land and fields. People who move boundary stones bring death upon themselves.… Never be arrogant, respect yourself sufficiently so that you fulfill the responsibilities of manhood. But it is one thing to be responsible and quite another to be arrogant. A real man does not need to roar to show that he is a man.... Obscenity of speech does not prove anything; keep that in mind (25).

Furthermore, in oral culture, the elders play a unique role of ingraining into the minds of the young one the love for his ancestral village. They commune that every individual has a social obligation to the village. Some will take on the responsibility of guarding the village while others will go to earn a great name for the village, and that each of the roles are different but is important for habitable social order.

Community is indeed an important aspect of native tradition. It carries an awareness of family's history in addition to man's relation to other humans and beyond that, a respect for all living matter. Community life encourages an existence of harmony with one's surrounding which is universally preserved in their native oral traditions. And in the traditional society the role of storytelling is essential for it acts like "a purifier through which the world penetrates to the individual" ("The Influence of folklore." www.folklore.ee.com). Kire's narrative celebrates this variety of community and thus is the suggestive title of the novel, *A Naga Village Remembered*. The village, the main social and political structure that has held people together in close-knit community, is extremely important among natives. The novel exposes a peep into community life that is tied stedfastly to one's personal village. Cultural reading of Native voices confirm the 'Village' or the 'Land' as closely attached to the concept of what Natives called 'Home'. Home is a place where one's village is, and native origins always have been attached to those of the land. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, Levi's bonded feeling "to the village", "to the land" and his metaphorical act of 'impulsively picking up a bit of soil and smelting its earthiness' carries assenting display of Kire's close understanding of Native traditional ethos, possibly the Naga concept of village land (40). When finally Levi returns after six long years from Jail, he felt good to be back in the village, to be among his people. He saw his village with new eyes, "feelings surged up in him that he'd never known before" and his experience creates the meaning for the title 'A Naga Village Remembered' that Kire talks about (ibidem). As such in her latest novel *When the River Sleeps*, Kire's gives more symbolic attribute to the 'village' as a place where one buries a mother: "but you always think of that village where your mother is buried as home, your real home, and you long to go back, at least in your dreams if not in your waking moments" (141). Kire's protagonist Vilie is a seasoned forest dweller who had made forest as his home, but one cannot deny the familial bond he had in the village among his community. The idea of a man

living his life out in the forest, away from the communal life of the village, was so alien to them. The village was the only life they knew and Vilie relishes thoughts of people back at home. He could picture the old women prodding at their hearths to get their fires burning for the evening meal. He could emotionally hear melodious workers approaching from afar, homeward bound, to warm evening meals and a well-earned rest. It is the ordinary things of life that Vilie misses and he contemplates to go home and immerse himself in the regular happiness of the village community.

Kire proves to be equally a good writer of community life in *Bitter Wormwood*. She gives importance to the community right from the beginning of the story by saying: “Mose continued to be a respected elder in the community. Young men sought him out to listen to his stories, his peers desired his counsel when it came to land disputes and other clan disputes. He still had admirers of his fairness and life wisdom” (11). The protagonist Mose asserts his strong connection with the community by joining Naga Freedom Movement. He declares, “No one could want Nagaland to become part of India. Those who are against our freedom struggle must be opportunists” (ibidem 80). The reason for Mose joining the group was to fight for his community land to which he is bonded and help people from the many atrocities of the Indian Army. The community life circles around memories of Mose as he tries to locate ordinary people whose lives were completely overturned by the freedom struggle. He could clearly remember the freedom struggle he had been a part of, and the struggle that the “dead-eyed young man of today” claimed to be part of, had not always been like that at all (ibidem 12). Within this personal narration, Kire furnishes the saga of the common native community living in the throes of insurgency. The Nagas had been fighting against the takeover of their ancestral lands by the new nation of India. In all villages, Naga army who fought for the land had been hailed as heroes. Mose now a seventy year old had his position and he felt so proud to be a soldier back then, a freedom fighter.

Mari is again a dairy novel that mirrors the story of a community experience during the World War II. Kire acknowledges the oral narrators for telling exciting stories about the World War II and the Japanese invasion of Nagaland, which have altered their life completely. She elucidates by saying: "What is so remarkable about World War II, which is still referred to as 'The War' by the Nagas, is that people have very little memory of what they were doing before the war years. I was left with the impression that the war, for us, was almost equivalent to the big bang, the beginning of all life" (intro. viii). Another purpose of storytelling is for healing. Here in Kire's *Mari*, it is used as a remedy to overcome losses in life. Nagas are known for their resilient spirit and the fictionist has drawn inspiration from it. The adage in *Bitter Wormwood*, "If life is hard to you, you simply harden yourself so its griefs are easier to bear. That is the only way to meet it" is reflective of the protagonist Mari's strive to accept life (22).Mari ruminates:

> On such evenings, I would watch that distant beauty, unable to deaden my deep longing for Vic. And I would think that somewhere, maybe, my love was watching me and could perhaps see our child; somewhere, maybe, he was longing to dandle her on his lap and do all the things a father would do for his child. How hard it was. Life had slowly returned to normal for everyone else but I had been changed by the war, never to be the same again (104).

Kire has defined the realistic element of native community. The idea of community encouragement towards one another in *Mari* is more reflective than in any other novel. She keeps the entire community as the focus and presents a particular view where one comes across a strong feeling of community. Mari shares that by the end of 1944, all the inhabitants of Kohima returned home. This included the families that had fled to Shillong during the war years. They returned to find their houses burnt down and uninhabitable so that building of houses became a communal activity. The well-being of community as a whole is constitutive of each person's welfare because each human being is constituted by relationships to others.

This pattern of interrelated relationship is important in underlining the concepts of community in any society. Chiefly in Kire's fiction, community plays a deeper role. It gives a sense of commune values, personal interaction governed by sentiments of trust, cooperation and altruism not just for individual self but for other people in the social order, and it expresses realistically this mode of social behavior when Mari acknowledges: "Neighbors got together and worked on each other's houses. The work proceeded so much faster in this way" (ibid. 104). We also find these pieces of communal feat in Kire's novel, *A Naga Village Remembered*. When the British Government relented and allowed Khonoma warriors to resettle their village, the united community came back and, together, began the task of rebuilding. "They worked on for many weeks until they had built new houses in the places of those burnt down. They returned slowly after a year of dispersion when they had longed for their village unbearably, dreaming of her by night, and able to look at her only from a distance by day" (87-88).

Storytelling develops as the community looks for a recreation of memory in community life. Stories are kept alive to carry the history of a people, its cultural beliefs, warnings and advice, as well as a system of values. Such a thing happens in Kire's close-knit community. In the novel *A Naga Village Remembered*, the protagonist Levi could remember exciting events at the dormitory. The boys had so many stories to swap so they never slept early on dormitory nights. They exchanged stories and were taught by their elders who were chosen to be 'parent' for their age group. One evening, they were told an antique folktale of *Terhuo tsiese*, apparently recollected by the parent as a story reported by his grandfather whose great grandfather saw it. He narrated the strange tale of a night when the villagers of Khonoma had been kept awake by the ululating of men far into the night. Oration keeps the memory of community, just as storytelling prepares one for another retelling. For example, the first-person emphasis in the elder story:

> It cannot be our men observed the elders, people are back in their houses already. It was moonless night. People did not venture out of their homes and, though troubled by sound, they preferred to wait for morning to solve the mystery of the night. When day broke, they found the rock newly erected at the place now known by the name of the stone, Terhuo tsiese Spirit erected stone (26).

Levi's opinion is influenced by the stories of his community and he behaves accordingly. He knows very well that there is truth in every story at hand, a clear truth that protected the people if they had lived their lives protecting those truths. For instance, the reason why no one violates a genna day is evoked through the myth of Khriesenu and his ladylove. Genna was death to those who defied it, but life to those who abided it. The traditional story affirms:

> Khriesenu, yielding to his love, took her to the forest on a genna day. She fell and broke her leg and died and when he carried her home he wept when he was walking in the valley but on every hill he crested he shouted "have killed a stag." But alone, at home, he deeply mourned her death and having relented to her plea to disregard the genna (ibidem 42).

Conformist stories like this allow native voice to enter vibrantly into the vast expanse of shared communal experience. Many stories of oral tradition occur out of historical events, but interestingly, oral tradition is not an attempt to remember exactly what happened, but is rather a return to the symbols of the tradition that could explain an event. In storytelling tradition, Rodney Frey explains the difference between remembering and memorizing:

> In the context of storytelling, stories are always remembered, never memorized. Memorization results in a rigidity that can inhibit participation in the story. Remembering encourages spontaneity and thus greater immediacy with the listener. Remembering has an important additional significance. To remember is to return to, to reunite with the reality within the story, to reestablish membership with the characters of the story. The storyteller seeks the membership for the listeners as well as for himself or herself (153).

Credibly in Kire's, the native characters had grown up on remembering stories. Storytelling occupies a massive place and stories of the past are refreshed and performed at all times by the community through the assistance of native myths. Kire refers to the myth of *tekhu kete*; a ritual of piercing the tiger after its kill. A kill, especially a tiger kill is an excitement for community because it drew out all the village folk, men and women, young and old. Tiger kill involves a ceremonious procedure that required presence of many members of the clan and it is symbolic. A strict ritual concerning simple event such of a tiger kill authenticate the meaning of folk stories in community. Levi remembers that it was done so that when other tigers came to avenge the killer, they would hear only the sound of the waterfalls, which would sound like "*thevo, thevo, thevo*" and tigers would angrily go away and kill the pig believing it had killed their brother (*ANVR* 13). It also verifies the significance of oral stories that teaches real practices as well as formulates native way of life. Levi has been too young to know but he had heard it so frequently and been told and retold it by his grandfather as a very young boy that it had become embedded in his memory, and he never doubted that he had not actually seen the tiger. Kire's storytelling began with Vilau entering the village gate after having killed a huge tiger. For Vilau, this was his first tiger kill, so an elder had to instruct and guide him on the proceedings. Vilau's paternal uncle running to him with grains of soybean and rebuking his nephew saying, "you have killed our elder brother who was kind and gentle. Do not come", is metaphorical (ibidem 12). Kire substantiates reason for such ceremonial practice by sketching the conversation of Levi and his younger brother Lato:

> Do you know why we call the tiger 'elder brother'? Levi asked his younger brother. "Of course" Lato replied, every child of this village knows the answer to that question. It is because man and tiger and spirit were brothers once. When we were hunting two months ago, we heard a tiger growling. Dolhu shouted, 'It is only us, elder brother' and he stopped growling immediately (ibidem 14).

Writing down of native folktales helps dissemination and continuation of oral voice, for in stories the world of values, ethics and beliefs are created. Kire's *Life on Hold* is promptly a symbolic novel that techniques folk legend. The disappointed love of Roko and Nime, the central characters, in Kire's story is communicated through utilization of folklore; a retelling of the folk lover's fable *Tso-u and Terhuopudiu*. It was culturally impossible for them to marry because of the old war between their villagers. Terhuopudiu was from the village of Meriema and Tso-u was from Secuma. One day, as planned, the two of them were to meet up at a prearranged time. Terhuopudiü waited and waited for her beloved to meet her. She had been weeping all the time and her tears had filled a leaf. When Tso-u came, it was already sun down. Being so hurt she left without heeding to his pleas. She refused to look at him. In his turn, he drank her tears gathered in the leaf, after that they never met again. It was not simply a squabble between lovers, but involved a taboo which no one in their right mind disobeys it. Storytelling here signifies the inevitability of cultural myth as Nime's mother has suggestively stated: "Lovers who cannot marry for some reason are often referred to as Tso-u and Terhuopudiu" (45). In Kire's story, Nime and Roko could never marry because of Roko's devoted involvement in Naga independence movement that swept individual and communal life on hold. The conflicted relationship of Nime and Roko is equally the title of the novel because women like Nime have to put life on hold for men like Roko, who has consummated his life to the intense struggle for independence. Her friend Beinuo's summoning words: "You two, I have always known from school days that you were meant for each other. Just like Tso-u and Terhuopudiu", has exhaled finality although Nime resistibly stated; "Do not call us that. Tso-u and Terhuopudiu were star-crossed lovers. They could never marry and they never saw each other again" (ibidem 42).

Native people were accustomed to remember their histories and customs through intricate time-proven processes of storytelling. It has always been part of their tradition and

Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* has recognized stories as practical matter that balances respect with survival. Storytelling helps with the historical backdrop that explains community environment in which grandmother has grown up. The grandmother in the novel belonged to the old era, relatively a very hard age in which only male offsprings are favored and prioritized. Kire's procedure of introducing storytelling within the story reinforces continuity. For example, Neikuo retelling the situation her father had lived in an age "when people cut off the heads of their enemies," brings out the head hunting practice of the past, which made the system give special importance to men, treating them as protector (105). The storytelling of the grandmother accentuates the past actions:

> In my father's day, boys never did any work because they had to look after the village and engage enemy warriors in warfare. The household that did not have a male heir was considered as barren, they were always in constant danger if there was a war. The women would only have one man to protect them. That is why we love our male children so much and we give them the best of food. And we should (ibidem 36).

The grandmother, who represents the terrible matriarch, also perverts the patriarchal structure in a way that it has not been subjected to before. She uses the patriarchal system to show favoritism to her grandsons, and by the same rule mistreats the females in her household. Therefore, in setting off a young-girl coming of age narrative, the story exposes the suppression of the girl child by the women themselves. Dielieno's mother, Nino, and her storytelling explains the behavior of the grandmother. Her account comes closest to an understanding of grandmother's personality as weak, an old woman who tries to secure loyalty of her grandsons by bribing them with good food, money or the fields. Grandmother's personal experience of having a conventional mother who has no brother to claim inheritance has also gone into shaping her opinion and responses to life. Eventually Dielieno, the little

girl of the story, realizes her Grandmother as a pitiable one, not to be hated, and certainly not feared.

Storytelling connects the myth and the reality. There are numerous incidents in *Terrible Matriarchy* supporting the myth. Spirit sighting is frequent and is one form of a myth that moves the story tradition. For example, the myth of a girl who encountered a white man's spirit at the village pond and died after a few days. It endorses old women to still say that it was not a good thing to go too early to the pond to fetch water because the spirit of the white man was often seen there by early risers. Native affirms that spirits of the dead haunt the places they always frequented when they were alive, and they seek out their constant companions because those are the ones who would feel sentimental and would assist them to return. Such Spirits belong to men who have found no rest and returns to trouble people. When Zekuo's spirit is seen at the drinking houses, the story is told and retold and its retelling confirms the spirit sighting phenomenon to the community. The justification of the spirit sighting is also given by saying that Zekuo is an unhappy spirit having died young. Kire's abundant use of native mythical tale is projected mainly to focus on a specific Native context, such of storytelling skills that keep the beliefs alive just as 'spirit' sighting helps the continuance of the story tradition. A native categorically assumes that stories contain embodiment of truths and represent reality. In *A Naga Village Remembered,* the experience is reflective in the episode of Siezo's spirit induced sickness. Siezo had encountered the fury of the spirits from the water spot and warns people to keep away, "but word had spread so fast around the village... that no one dared go by the unclean place where it had occurred. Fear would itself be their protection in this generation. In the next, if some, ignorant of the story should meet with the same sickness, the village would retell the spirit encounter of Siezo" (55). In the novel *When the River Sleeps,* the chronicle turns out to be more creative, with Kire interposing her mythical stories to more humane focus. It details the sad story of Vilie

and Mechuseno (Seno) separated by an untimely demise of Seno, who died a spirit induced death after encountering a spirit "a tall, dark man" (5). For many months, Vilie would leave flowers at the lonely little grave of Seno, but after he left for the forest to make the forest hideout his home, he stops leaving flowers for her. The village members felt his absence and many believed that he had also passed to the other side like Seno who, because of her 'ominous circumstantial' death, could not find a burial spot within the village and is buried outside the village gate. The open-ended reminiscence of these separated lovers becomes meaningful in Kire's plot. It accentuates that native stories often recurs for it is only through retelling stories that some events about the world can be explained and understood. Kire's narrative retains this absorbed memory by disclosing rumors that had circulated about the two lovers meeting each other in their spirit forms in the woods. Through continual retelling the rumors has authenticated itself and the actual events surrounding Seno's peculiar death, and Vilie's departure were soon relegated to village mythology.

Storytelling and community behavior always have a moralizing range. Indeed, from the oral tales, to the myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, and even of epic narrations, native stories always have a teaching to pull, a value to instill. The symbolic meanings coming from these types were used on several plans; on the knowledge of nature, morals, social behavior and to help find a place in community in which everyone has specific role. Kire, by using this "ancient art form" of storytelling tradition, is able to create a realistic native community (Cruikshank 1). Storytelling tradition combined with the information acquired by an individual, watching other people's behavior and remembering the reactions, expressing their evaluations, is said to be the source through which insightful information are acquired about the world outside the borders of one's immediate contact.

2.3. Society and Identity

Nagas are a legitimate Indo-Mongoloid people or indigenous tribal society traditionally known to have centered round a self-reliant independent sovereign village states. Prior to the British invasion, the Nagas were free from foreign control. India being the legal heir of the British India Government having political authority over the Nagas has eventually claimed Nagaland as part of India. Easterine Kire is a creative member of this Naga society and she writes with sensitivity, often voicing out a series of opinion that are constructively communicative.

Any chronological reading of the twentieth and twenty first centuries of the history of Nagaland, will contain a mixed report of development, be it a thought provoking picture of the Naga society, British colonization of Naga Hills, Japanese presence during the Second World War, Insurgency torn Naga society, Statehood, demand for a unification or of the increasing influence of Christianity. No doubt, literature being an artistic record of human experiences, these historical moments all form the backdrop of Kire's works and she seems to participate in the ebb and flow of events that have an impact on her people. Her collections of short stories and novels offer a powerful reading on the Naga society in transition. In the novel *A Naga Village Remembered*, she gives a peep into the motley life of a native society with all its world of taboos, rituals and festivals. Kire also depicts native society in transition, where the conversion from the indigenous religion to Christianity is increasingly felt. Native voices being part of communal assimilation, Kire speculates the dawn of Christianity by highlighting Sato's firm conviction to worship the Christian God. He asserts that there is no quarrel between the old religion and the new religion and he gives a parallel ideology in both religions:

> The creator deity we worship and sanctify ourselves unto at *Sekrenyi*, the one we call *Ukepenuopfu* has another name in the new religion. He is the father of *Isu*. *Isu* is his son and he is our chicken sacrifice - he sacrificed himself for all our ailments and misfortunes so we do not have to make chicken sacrifices again.… the new religion says, do not steal and do not lie, how is it so different from the old religion? (101).

In Kire's *Bitter Wormwood*, the new religion clearly figures prominently with Mose reciting Christian prayers he had learned at school and his family members attending church services in the village. They could acknowledge that they never had a God before who was so close that they could call "*Jisu*" (ibidem 52). The protagonist father in Kire's novel *Mari* is also a representative of neo-converts who dedicatedly work for the spread of Christianity. In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, almost all native families are Christians and take part in Christian rituals devotedly. The protagonist Dielieno's reference of a pastor being specially invited to pray and make a speech on Grandmother's eightieth birthday celebration gives a glimpse on how Christianity has fixed the native society in its grip. Notably, it is not only the new religion of Christianity that has disturbed the social outlook, the emerging modernity through education, too, has its impact on the natives. The society in *A Terrible Matriarchy* is one, making a transition from an agricultural society to modern society. The empowerment of the little girl Dielieno in the story comes with modern education. Dielieno herself looks at the possibilities her college education could give her, "If father agreed I could get a college degree and get a good job like Leto and give father and mother a better house to live in" (189). Leto steps in as her sponsor and gets her father to agree to her college education. The idea of using her education to improve social and economic status is a possibility she has not ignored. She sees her elder brother, Leto, doing it and it inspires her. Kire's protagonist Dielieno is, in essence, a modern woman who sees education as a key to freedom. She is her own person, not opinionated but sympathetic and warm. She has a clear sense of right and wrong no matter

what the cultural interpretation of her grandmother dictates. The little girl in the opening novel who hates her grandmother with vengeance and is frightened of menstruation, has grown into an independent and strong woman who takes on her drunken brother single-handedly "I lost my temper then and with it my fear of him" (ibidem 228). She reprimands Vini of his selfish behavior. She is brave and truthful, and will not put up with Vini's bullying and manipulation, yet spends the night in the hospital nursing him. Self-esteem gained through modern education allows Dielieno to come into fuller play. Education is a decisive factor even in *Bitter Wormwood*. We see Vilau and her mother-in-law Khrienuo as they prepare to send Mose to school. Mose was seven, and he was the smallest in his class at the mission school. That he was a quick learner which pleased his teachers a lot, is an elocution given by Kire to heighten the importance of education. Mose became responsible enough to think of getting a scholarship money to pay his school fees and have actually earned it. He proudly speaks the English language that he learns in his school and nestles thoughts that he might someday teach his mother and grandmother. The advantage that education has created in Mose's life is elevated, when Khrienuo says: "I would never have thought of that. How clever you are my child, it was a good thing to send you to school. Your mother and I are getting educated as well, you should tell your teachers that" (39).

The transition from primitive to modern thinking hold sway among native characters. It focuses on those developments which transferred the political control of possession from indigenous to colonial hands. It was not only by power or by force that the British succeeded in subduing the Nagas, but their supremacy of persuasion, their sense of duty, religion and other welfare activities made their task easier. The character of Dielieno in *A Terrible Matriarchy* cautiously describes the dawn of modern developments as she highlights the installation of electricity. She says, "Many of our neighbors began to use electricity because the government announced that it was going to install it cheaply as it was the first time for

private houses. The town became brighter and our neighborhood was well-lit by the big street light" (112). *Bitter Wormwood* gives an interesting remark on the introduction of Radio, a modern transistor. Village people listening to such an innovation for the first time had thought, "there were some little people inside the box who sang song and read the news" (37). In the school, Mose learned about Radio as a useful mode to receive information from other countries. He convinces his mother to buy it. The radio became part of their evening recreation. After their supper, they turned on the radio for "news at six pm" (39). Mose's delightful contemplation to learn English from the radio unveils an optimistic desire among Native individuals to cope up with a changing modern society. It acts as a mouthpiece that vibrates Kire's understanding of how modernization could help an individual to find a voice of one's own.

In the phase of social transition, it is essential to identify an unambiguous native voice, vibrant of one's worldview because it helps native individuals assemble and gain reliant understanding on views that best represent them. Easterine Kire being an apt promoter of native voice records such knowledge of the native past histories, rituals, customs and traditions. Her artistic stories are often taken in as 'People Stories.' In one of her interviews, she responded:

> The stories that still need telling are what I call the People stories. There are still so many stories in the land waiting to be shared. Not all of them will find a place in world literature, but the telling of individual stories is so important to the teller. It is part of his or her healing and particularly amongst my people who have stories of deep pain and also wonder ("Kire in *The Hindu*." www.thehindu.com).

In all reading of Kire's works of fiction, we find an authentic document, a resonating voice of the Naga society she comes from. The novel *A Naga Village Remembered* reveals the intimate details of a Naga village. It voices the rich socio-cultural life that fostered the spirit

of the warrior village of Khonoma. Social issues being the pivotal theme on which most of her artistic writings are based, Kire's next novel *A Terrible Matriarchy* realistically voices matriarchal hegemony, a particular form of matriarchal power in her society that perpetrates inequalities among gender. It describes the intricacies of a native society. The convictions of the elder generation are best understood in the backdrop of the socio-cultural growth of a society changeover. Kire's *Mari* is a novel based on a diary written by the novelist's aunt, Khrielieviu or Mari O' Leary reminiscing about the war years. It crafted a sensitive retelling of true story that at the same time contains the story of Kohima and its people. The novel *Life on Hold* unravels Naga life, confining the voice of common Naga people who are trapped in the struggle between the state and the Naga Ethnic Insurgency group. The story describes how ordinary people cope with violence, how they negotiate force and power, seek and find safe places so as to achieve the dream of an independent nation. The novel *Bitter Wormwood* tells of an insurgency torn Naga society. The storylines foretell the life and longings of the common people who are to experience the impact of the upheavals acutely. It chronicles the struggle for independence from India by the Naga people, whose life at the brink were completely infested by the freedom struggle. The novels, *Forest Song* and *When the River Sleeps*, draw thought provoking cultural picture of a Naga society with description inviting us into the natural lives and hearts of the people of Nagaland, the rituals, beliefs, their reverence for the land, and their close-knit communities. The richness of themes as structured in Kire's wide-ranging works, offer a resourceful reading to the non-native audience who wishes to have an insight into the Naga society. She gives an authentic voice to her people who have tales to tell and experiences to share, but do not find the desirable medium of expression.

Kire's accentuations of native voices in most of her fictional works are strong and largely authentic. Her native personality for instances, the characters in *A Naga Village Remembered*, *A Terrible Matriarchy*, *Life on Hold* and *Bitter Wormwood*, are all a typical

representation of how a real native habitually is and should be. She has acknowledged, “The ‘native individual’ is my raw material and I can write with confidence about their context because I have lived it too” (Kire. E-Mail Interview. 2 March 2014). It is in this setting that Kire has created identities like Pelhu, Pukahie, Thinocu, Vicha, Kelevizo, in *A Naga Village Remembered*, mainly to objectify the position of who a native is. They were endowed with individual ability and were each assigned a role to fulfill the responsibility of manhood. They are often perceive as ‘warriors’ having obligations to look after the business of the clan. Their clan meetings, as the fictionist Kire locate and portray it, are “all-men Meets” markedly decisive and highly secretive (2). Many men never told their wives about meetings of the clan and the women could only guess at what went on, but it was not a voice of dissent, each man knew his duty and where his obligations lay. The example of which, is the daring battle that an elder warrior Pelhu referred to it in one of their men’s meet, a revitalized memory of an expedition that Khonoma warriors had undertaken against Garipheju, one of the Northern Angami villages sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century. Garipheju was famous for its brave warriors, which was primarily why Khonoma had decided to go on an expedition against the village. Khonoma invaded Gariphe village and completely razed it to the ground, but what remains legendary about the war was the confidence and the trust that women of Garipheju had on their men warriors. Women were unperturbed by the news of approaching enemy warriors: “They continued their weaving, confident that their men would protect them. And protect them they did” (ibidem 3). The following proverb, “A real man does not need to roar to show that he is a man” is insightful and attributive of Kire’s understanding on the receptive native individual or authentic voices that nurtured the spirit of the people (ibidem 25). As such in her fictional work, contextual voices raised regarding the social element and identity, can well be recognized by arranging ideas in the following divisions:

Traditional Family Relationships

The first social unit is the family. Among tribal societies like the Nagas, the family tie is an important integration factor. The traditional Naga family is nuclear and exogamous. Naga society is patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal and thus descent is traced from the father's side. As head of the family, the father is expected to provide for and maintain the position of the family. He represents his family in the clan meetings or any other duties that requires of him. Kire's branded characters too display strong familial bonds towards his family or relations within the society. Family ties among native society being inherently essential, the central protagonist Kovi, a titled member of the village, in Kire's story *A Naga Village Remembered* exhibits it by surrendering himself to familial responsibilities when his pregnant wife took ill. Birthing, he felt, was women's business, nevertheless he waited patiently and as the child squealed into the world, "Kovi quickly smeared saliva on his finger and touched it to his son's forehead with the word, 'first' signifying that the spirits could not claim the child before him" (5). Claiming and naming a 'new born' by family members recurs frequently because it explains the distinction through which native individuals are culturally identified as belonging to or as members of the particular clan. It is also to ensure the ritualistic beliefs of the society. For a Native, identity is determined by birth. As soon as a child is born, she/he becomes identified member of the family clan. In *Bitter Wormwood*, the midwife advised Vilau to think of a name soon for her newborn son, saying, "Our people always name our children as soon as they can, because naming them makes them members of the clan and protects them from being taken by spirits" (17). Natives believe that names always have power over individual destinies, therefore, grandmother Khrienuo named her newborn grandson as Moselie; "It means one-who-will-meet-life-without-guile" and she expresses it as a good name entailing that Moselie will never plot to harm another person (ibidem).

Family is again a basic social institution where one learns to take care of one another. Members of the family join together and share responsibilities. Kire's fictional works has many of it. In *A Naga Village Remembered,* Siezo had cared for his brother's widow and sons providing them large meat shares at all festivals. He repaired their leaking roof and took Levi and Lato to the river to trap birds in winter giving them good memories, while naturally fulfilling their missing father's role. In *A Terrible Matriarchy,* the family cares for the old members: "One afternoon, Neikuo suddenly fell ill. All the grown up's came to her house to discuss how to take care of her and who could be with her" (103). Unmarried women, widows and widowers are the responsibility of the family and never abandoned in old age. Dielieno goes to help Neikuo when she falls sick. Grandmother has many helpers. The extended family rallies around the elderly when they need assistance. Sizo has provided for Bano so that she will get some money from his pension all her life. Family members and close relatives support each other when there is a marriage, and in deaths funeral rituals are to be carried out. Everything is a family affair. Many relatives attended grandmother's birthday, and when Nisano gives birth, the women in her family and husband's family came to help her. After Vini's death, the family takes on their obligation to look after Nisano and Salhou. In *Mari,* the protagonist Mari's baby is taken care by her family, she says, "Father and Mother helped to look after her and my younger sisters were happy to babysit as she grew older… Our female relatives from the village often visited and gave me advice on looking after Marion. I learnt to oil my baby before bathing her" (114). In *Bitter Wormwood,* Vilau received help from her in-laws and male relatives. She is a young widow and though a good worker, it was hard at times to till the fields alone. *Life on Hold* cautiously depicts patriarchal tradition where the eldest son in the family prepares himself to take on the responsibility after the death of his father. Here in the story, Zeu becomes the sacrificial lot. About nine months after Pusalie's death, aunt Salienuo visited Zeu with a marriage proposal for him. Though a

very attractive offer, he turned it down saying he would never marry. He was very clear when he said:

> I have to devote my life to paying off the debts that Father incurred in his life. I will never have enough income left over to provide for a wife and children. If we get stuck in the same situation as our family did, what would happen? I never want any child of mine to go through what my sister and I did. I will not marry, Aunt. I won't change my mind (76).

Kire's byword in *A Terrible Matriarchy*, "there are times in life when you have to sacrifice some things that you really like in order to have peace into the family" is suggestive of Zeu's temperament in sacrificing his happiness for the bliss of his family (73). It stands true for he realized the weight of his father's debts had always been all absorbing. "No way would he have children and let them grow up with the same burden" (*LH* 77).

Clan Elders: The Voice of Authority

The basic social organization of the Naga society is the clan and it plays a major role. A clan is a group of families whose members believe that they are descendants of the same ancestor. A native individual identifies himself in the society, through his clan. All members of a clan use common clan name after their personal names. Therefore, the clan relationship is very strong and members act collectively in all activities, be it in village building, construction of clan member's houses, construction of clan dormitories for various age groups, cooperative support during marriages or funeral of clan members, shared responsibilities during wars, ceremonial events, festivals, and so forth. Clan bonds are very rigid and effective in the Naga society. The clan is powerful and its power is vested in the clan elders, "the custodians of the laws of the land" (*Folk Elements* 17). Clan elders in Kire's

narrative are decision makers and initiator of all rituals. They have duties to instruct and educate younger man on the paths of life. For example, In *A Naga Village Remembered*, elders had instructed Vilau during the five days ritual. He is informed to hoe a new water channel, make fire from split bamboos and many other things to complete his first tiger killing rituals. Again, the clan elders of Thevo and Thepa had initiated the ritual ceremony of Keviselie's feast of merit. It is the elders, who had negotiated the treaty after the war with the British. The elders said, "We have been the ones to kill last since we killed them in Assam so it is alright to talk of peace now" (85). Accordingly, as an obligation towards his village people and to his dead kin, Pelhu, a respected elder of Khonoma, spoke with a calm dignity and thus concluded the peace treaty between village representatives of Khonoma and the representatives of the British Government at Mezoma.

In native societies, clan elders are considered as having paramount power on things that require settlements, be it family property, ancestors lands or fields. They perform, as keeper of people's memory. The need to be told and reminded of certain things to the younger generation, is a bounded duty left only to the elders. The living elders always take care to tell their children what should be done about their belongings when they were dead, because if they did not, there might be disputes over that. Lands and fields were divided according to a clan elder's will and is shared among the heirs. In *Bitter Wormwood* Khrienuo's decision, "When I'm gone, Mose can have my house" is incited by this act of elders (ibidem 75). She promptly says, "It is important to talk of such things. If I do not tell you now when I am alive, someday you may be put into a situation where you will wonder, why did not mother tell me anything about this?" (ibidem). In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, the grandmother makes a similar will by saying:

> I see no reason why I may not call him Vini. I gave his father his name and Vinihoulie means live a good and prosperous life. It is a good name. I am

> happy he has a son to inherit his name and his house. This house will go to the boy when I am gone (237).

Elders also act as custodian of the customary laws of the land or village administrations. The clan's decisions decide any major dispute that comes up before the elders. The elders administer customary laws and ensure proper execution according to accepted laws. Kire's *Mari* is an example. We get a concise experience of elder's law settlement, when Mari says:

> After my baby was born, we went to the village council, as was the custom, and registered the child. After this, both my children were acknowledged as the legal offspring of their fathers. This was how a foreigner was accepted by and adopted into a tribe. Now the children had the right to settle in the land of their birth and own property if they chose to (129).

Societal Conformity of Marriage

Marriage is a socially permitted and accepted union of an adult male and female. In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, the grandmother defines marriage as "a mixing of blood" and the same can be insightful in reference to Nagas exogamy system of marrying outside the family groups (197). The Naga societies perceive marriage as fulfilling a social obligation to obtain heirs for family hierarchy. Marriage in traditional Naga society is a family affairs and it involves numerous rituals. The protagonist Levi's marriage in Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered* gives an interesting observation on how marriage ceremony is conducted. The proposal is brought to the notice of the boy by a female relative as in the episode of the paternal aunt Niseno visiting Levi with marriage offer. She speaks:

> Son, there is a fine woman of the Semo clan, Riatso's sister. I have heard no ill of her from her age mates. She is a good worker and her family is a titled

> family so they are our equals. I want you to consider the matter carefully. It is good to marry it tame a man so that he grows great in the village (47).

Levi carefully thought over his aunt's suggestion and the idea of becoming a householder suddenly seemed attractive to him. He ponders to be a title taker like his father and have many sons to carry his name. Levi has agreed and his aunt took Levi's proposal to the girl's family, as is the custom. Likewise, in *A Terrible Matriarchy*, the marriage proposal is taken to the girl's family by a female relative of the boy. In Vini's marriage, grandmother herself has negotiated the marriage to Nisano's family. She speaks on behalf of Vini so she rubs over his drinking problem and highlights the inheritance he will get from her. "I am settling the Vurie field for him which is the biggest in the area" (208). The boy's family sponsors the marriage feast itself. The negotiation for Vini's marriage is a good example of such a wedding feast, "So Vini had a grand wedding, grand by our standards because they killed five cows and a *gwi* (ibidem 207).

In social custom of marriage, there is personal liberty. A girl has the right to accept or refuse a proposal. Though sometimes her family might insist that she accepts it when the boy's family is better placed in society or is economically well off than theirs. Kire's *Life on Hold* positions this rather perplexing marriage situation. Nime was upset when Abeiu's family came with marriage proposal. She does not like to wed a man thirteen years older and someone that she does not love, but her brother Zeu ascertaining their family enormous debts firmly says:

> Listen to me, Nime, we will never get a chance like this again. Father is in so much debt, I do not know how we will ever pay them off. Aunt says this man, Abeiu, is the only son and has inherited all the property from his father.… If you marry Abeiu, it will save Mother and Father from a lot of disgrace in society" (61).

Native Ideology of Friendship

Friendships are vital for social beings. It is the highest form of socialization. Among native societies the resolutions for friendship is strictly adhered to and the friendship is to last forever. Every village seeks friendship and alliances with its neighboring village because it ensures peace and people learn to conform to the norms of the society by interacting with one's close associate. *A Naga Village Remembered* tells us of the village alliance friendships, in which villagers cluster together to ensure the reputations of the village. *Life on Hold* and *A Terrible Matriarchy* have references of childhood friendships. It is a fact that man is a social being and he needs company to best compliment his existence, and this is what Kire's native societies is all about. In friendship, the individual learns the standard that is necessary in the art of living.

In Kire's depiction of native societies, the meaning of friendship takes a core role. Friends aid and support one another at all times, and the same is true in Kire's *Bitter Wormwood*. Mose and Neituo are portrayed as thick friends who are worthy of each other. As children, they go to school together on their own and are proud that they were able to go unescorted by their parents. Kire's narrative, "Mose was always accompanied by Neituo. Of the two, Mose was more deligent. Neituo was not unintelligent but he was lazy", appeared as a kind of ingredient that complements both their characters, as one having unity (24). Shortly after their school closes down because of the tumultuous freedom movement, Mose and Neituo together joined the Naga Underground soldiers to combat Indian armies for a free Nagaland. Life in the 'underground' was rigorous but they were eager to take it all. They felt exhausted from the unaccustomed harshness of their new lifestyle. Their overworked muscles protested when they lay down in their rough sleeping bags but the reason that keeps them in good spirit is because they have each other's company. They learnt to sincerely believe that if

they both do their best as soldiers of the Underground Naga Army, their land would be free soon. Kire gives a perpetual touch on Mose and Neituo's friendship. When Mose died suddenly, it splintered Neituo's life as well. He sat by the body all throughout the day and his refusal to leave Mose's dead body by pleading, "We only have today, bear with me," is a symbolic evocation painted by Kire to glorify and connote native ideology; the virtue of true friendship (225).

2.4. Tribal Culture and Religious Ethos

For most tribal societies, the term 'culture' is synonymous with religion. Knowledge of a particular culture is obtained through religion because it dominates both conscious and unconscious activities of man. Nagas are a tribal society whose cultural practices are highly religious in nature. They acknowledge the presence of Supreme Being, 'kepenuopfu' in Kire's fictional works. Kepenuopfu is identified as 'birth-spirit' and a creator deity, who is kind and all knowledgeable. Supplication in times of hardship and thanksgiving at times of abundance is made to Kepenuopfu. Spirit's appeasal, are also common, but except for Kepenuopfu the creator, no other spirits are actually worshipped. However, these spirits are quite real to the native mind. Cited words of the elders dictum: "If you honor the spirits, they will bless you, if you defy them, you will learn how mortal man is", offer a viable understanding to such ceremonial credit (*ANVR* 41). The spirits stories of the native Nagas also furnish a glimpse into their spirituality. It voices out some of the rituals and beliefs that exist around the spirit world, which they believe have coexistence with the physical world. Kire's spirits stories are based on native Tenyimia culture and religion whose life, at times, are centered around spirit appeasement and deep consciousness of spirit activity. For example, in *A Naga Village Remembered* Kire's protagonist Levi knew there was some truth

to them. He vividly remembered his father's account of the wiry little spirit, hair covered, whom his father found in one of his porcupine traps:

> Levi's father coming upon him quickly realized that it was no animal, but the guardian of wildlife himself caught in his trap. He pounced on him and held it fast. He had heard of hunters granted game by Chukhieo when they were fortunate enough to catch him. "If you give me a deer to feed my family, I'll set you free". The little man did not speak but nodded his head ever so slightly so the hunter freed him (26).

Spirit encounter sometimes involves people missing for days until a search party finds them again. Vikhwelie's sudden disappearance is declared as being abducted by the spirits. The Thevo elders announce it will not be by the hands of men and, as a clear case of spiriting, they must prepare the search. The older men were familiar with this kind of search. Many men and women had often disappeared in like manner and been found again by community searches. Kire's narration summons the experience of Vikhwelie who came back six days after he went missing, emaciated and near death. He had a terrifying tale of "tall, dark creatures" who had carried him off against his will because his limbs obeyed their will, and "they led him where they would altogether keeping him for days" (ibidem 30). Such assortment of native spirit stories repeatedly find pertinent account in Kire's accumulative native voices. It paves an outlet contact to those non-native readers trying to uncover its intricate native worldviews. Kire's *Forest Song* is a story about the much-reported phenomenon of people being spirited away. We perceive a voice-over of Zeno's mother staking claim on her infant by surreptitiously spitting saliva onto her finger and touching her son's forehead muttering, "He is mine, hear me spirits" a symbolic act validating supernatural reality (19). Akin to this, Kire's novel, *When the River Sleeps* tells the spiritual story of a lonesome man, Vilie, driven by the mysterious pull of a dream. He encounters and fights different spirits, both of man and woman. Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered* retells the

interlinked rituals that involve the mystical world of the spirits. The Tenyimia attribute certain sicknesses as spirits induced work. They believed the sick person has encountered it when crossing an unclean or spirit haunted place. A chicken for a sick man is, hence, made as substitute for his life and is sacrificed to propitiate the spirit whose ill influence he has encountered. The native priest infers: "We refuse to take disease, death or any ill encounter with spirits from any place and therefore we are substituting your life with this unblemished chicken which is greater than your life and we will appease the spirits with it, *kha kenie, dia, pengou, sorou*" (54). A Bitter Wormwood or Ciena is used in the belief that it gives protection against bad spirits. Tenyimia houses are fortified against the entry of spirits by using matchet to ritually make cuts in the wooden doorframe. Plausibly, the wood is well taken in as 'house-guardian' that tells the spirits when they come and try to occupy the house. It is a noticeable fact that the Nagas like any other native groups believe in the existence of spirits. The conceptual belief in the existence of active mystical beings, and the practice of people, through the appearance of rituals, differentiate man from other natural animals. Supernaturalism interprets the religious life of the Naga society which is considered by nature 'Animistic'. Life is sacred and the fear of the supernatural beings and their propitiation, controls the entire activities of a man. They recognized different kinds of spirits, "usually localised" and would interpret every event in light of these spirits (Dozo 76). Rituals are performed for the spirits to ensure good relationship, and it follows that they feared these spirits and would do everything possible to placate them. For example, *Terhase* is a sanctified day of ritual to appease or of making peace with the spirits. The clan priests of Thepa and Thevo, in Kire's story, execute the ritual by each carrying a sacrificial chicken beyond the village gate to solemnize the appointed day. The ritualistic prayer of a Thevo priest states:

> Spirit Vo-o, we were wondering where you were but here you are. We have come to solicit peace between man and spirit. Let there be no destruction and

> calamity, no death and disease and plague. Who is honest, you are honest. Who is honest, I am honest. We will compete with each other in honesty (*ANVR* 11).

The native believes that reverential observation of all rituals ensures the healthy life and survival of the community. 'Genna' days are one respectful ritual observed to propitiate Kepenuopfu, first, and then the spirits, who could cause ill to come upon man, animals, grains, if this propitiation is not offered. Genna days, though slightly a different form of taboo, is a day when no work was allowed. It forbids villagers to perform certain task. They were very important in the old native religion. In *Bitter Wormwood*, Kire transports readers into the cultural world of a native society by explaining the implied meaning of a 'Genna', using a striking conversation between Mose and his mother Vilau:

> What is genna-day mother?
>
> Well it is a day when no one works or goes to the fields, we do that to please the spirits.
>
> What would happen if we work on a genna-day?
>
> Something disastrous. People fear to break a taboo because it always ends badly (31).

Literally, 'Genna' is a derivative word from the Angami word 'Kenna' that means prohibition. It is a native ritual connoting two things. First, it means a holiday from work, a day of rest, and second it means that which is prohibited. Genna as a form of "magico-religious rites", comes in different durations and intensity depending on the significance of the events of each practicing tribes among Nagas (Thong 128). Kire's aim in including such native rituals is particularly for bringing authentication to the native voice, not to be eroded by outsiders confronting the varied sanctity of the native cultural rituals or religion. The custom of genna plays an important part in the cultural and religious life of the Nagas and is

generally observed by all the Naga tribes with a little bit of variation from tribe to tribe, and from village to village. It shows deep moral consciousness, when they say ‘a day of genna’. It indicates that it has to be strictly observed to avoid fearful consequences upon one’s life. “If you break the taboos, you break yourself” is the often-repeated seriousness of the event (*ANVR* 11). The appropriate execution of a genna day is explorative, in Piano’s careful attendance of her unexpected visitor. Fearful of the consequences of disregarding a genna day, she communicates cryptically when her relative married into Zotshuria village, visits her on a day of village *rhoutho* ritual of seed sowing. She acts as if she is unaware of her visitor. “Hei, it is a strict genna day today” she said, seeming to speak to no one in particular and then continued, “I may not speak to sojourners so I am talking to myself and to this rock here” (ibidem 66). She fixed her eyes on the rock and went on:

> My household is well for we have observed the gennas and lived by them. My son Levi has blest me with two grandsons and a fine daughter-in-law, his brother Lato is loved in the village among his mates. Ours was a good harvest and I am fortunate woman well provided for by the spirits. Our visitors will do well to visit us after a week for then we can host them well for there will be no genna days (ibidem).

After she had spoken these words, she turned towards her house, and her visitors who had understood that she was observing the taboo on speaking to sojourners went away. Furthermore, in *Bitter Wormwood*, Khrienuo and Vilau, carried cooked food and went late to the field on a fire-genna day. Though both were Christians, they still obey the dictate of genna days of the non-Christians. It was pointless to get into an argument with the old religion. The line in Kire’s *Mari*, “though we were Christian, we abided by these cultural practices in order to live in harmony with the non-Christian”, is suggestive of Kire’s deliberation on the religious transition that failed to wash away the pre-Christian traits of the native or the Naga cultural society (5). The modern native societies continue to be Christians

without totally shaking off their rich cultural heritage inherited from their non-Christian ancestors.

The belief in supernatural or eschatological elements of nature forms another idiosyncratic voice, through which native cultures, customs, traditions and worldviews may be edifyingly understood. It connotes, as a whole, the baggage that identifies the native as individual, who at the same observes many taboos. Taboo is a social disapproval by norms of behavior. Kire's cultural stories reveal many of these taboos. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, Kovi is deprived to mourn openly for his dead wife because they believe that the strictest of taboos was upon the women dying at birth unable to deliver or 'lashu' death. There was no mourning, and wrapped in a mat the dead was taken out of the house through a new opening in the wall and not the doorway, for it was the most abominable of apotia deaths. Kovi buried his wife hastily, tumbled into the pit and covered up with soil. The grieving only made visible when "Kovi buried his face in his wife's pillow and muffled his cries in it. His heart was as stone, remembering all that he had heard as a child about a lashu death" (5). There is, again, the violent death of Kelevizo (Levi) in a freak accident infrequently occurring on hunts. Levi's destiny of being accidentally killed by his best friend, Penyu, in one of their hunting trips in a forest, is usually confirmed as a taboo. An elder of the clan thus evokes: "This is the way a great man should be buried. He has met death prematurely and it is his fate to be buried beyond the village gate because it is an apotia death. But this is usually so with warriors" (ibidem 111). In *Bitter Wormwood*, Kire describes the incidental death of Luo-o when felling a whole tree ritually selected to celebrate a new gate for the clan. The clansmen abandoned the tree, "even though it had been ritually selected, because it was a taboo to use it after it had claimed a life" (21). Members of the family no doubt mourn death in a family, but once the period of mourning was over, further grieving was discouraged for it entails a taboo. The story in *Mari* identifies the predicament of people losing life, crushed by the weight of

conflict and bloodshed during World War II. It explains native spirit as strong: “if you grieve too much, it will anger the spirits and even greater grief will come to you” (108). The continuity of normal life is, therefore, maintained through mystical fear of those spirits and people observe mourning for their death, but got on with the business of life determinedly.

Taboo is dictated by religion and gives guidance as to how life is to be lived so that the religious and social welfare of the community is protected. Kire’s *Folk Elements* asserts “communal” and “spiritual harmony” as the goal of Tenyimia society which is attainable, it is believed, when all the taboos are carefully observed and the creator is worshipped in the proper reverential manner and the spirits are also properly propitiated (73). All life being sacred or holy in the native worldview, it exposes life as religious. Religious life centers around the taboo, and the taboo factor operates very strongly in the socio-religious life of the native. The worldview of the native is one of acceptance and harmonious blending of the physical with the spiritual reality. Wrong actions, immoral actions, are all actions that incur the displeasure of the spirit world and the taboo operates to ensure that members of the community do not disrupt the life of the society. Kire makes her characters speak: “We grew up learning to respect life. Taboo breakers will come to a terrible end, we all know that” (*BW* 152).

Culture is a mirror that reflects the lives, histories and identities of a nation. Edward Burnett Tylor defines culture as, “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1). Kroeber and Kluckhohn refer to cultures ranging from ‘learned behaviour’ to ‘ideas in the mind’, “culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups” (181). Culture depends upon ability possessed by humans alone, called ‘symboling’

which consists of “assigning to things and events certain meanings that cannot be grasped with the senses alone” (“Culture.” www.Britannica.Com). At the simplest, culture being an accepted social process in which individual participates, it is appropriate to describe Kire’s story as one rewriting authenticity and historicity of native culture. Village shows reflection of unadulterated cultures and Kire has its foundation built strongly on it. In the novel, *A Naga Village Remembered*, the village of Khonoma is the focus and it celebrates a geographical native place and its cultural tradition. She introduces thus:

> Khonoma nestles amid mountains that are as high as 7,000 feet, a little village on a small hillock, cradled by gaunt mountains which form a natural fortress. Hidden from human view by this natural fortress of mountains, Khonoma can be seen from only one direction in the Northern Angami region between Meriema and Chieswema. Though her size of 500 houses was rather average among Angami villages, her fame spread far and wide as a warrior village. Her warriors of the Semo, Thevo and Merhu clans hardly numbered over a thousand at any given time in her history. However, Khonoma’s protectorate extended in every direction, to the Southern, Northern, Eastern, and Western Angami and Naga villages (ix).

The Nagas built their villages on top of the hills and the setting is reflective in Kire’s depiction of Khonoma. It is a natural community and the village, its landscape and its people, delineates a cultural reality. The protagonist Kovi’s house is nestled on the east facing slope on the hill that thrust skyward, regularly the first to be bathed by the rising sun and be washed by its dying light as it sank in the evening. He is an active member of the cultural village and his experiences form a larger element that allows readers to interact and participate wholly. Kovi’s meticulous check over the blessing ceremony of Viselie’s feast of merit, suggests a realistic understanding of the significance of cultural festivals. The ‘feast of merit’ is a native cultural paradigm for sharing of wealth in the community. It is a ceremonial grand feast given by the rich men for the acquisition of status and is accompanied by merrymaking. It involves

a series of rituals and sacrifices in a rising scale of importance and significance. The "good chicken" that Kovi had referred to, was, to do with the genna day set aside to sanctify the brew (ibidem 18). On the 'no work' day, Viselie's household initiates the first day of the feast by offering a chicken sacrifice. He instructed his family to share in the rituals by wearing proper garments. After that, they were to touch the ritualistic chicken as an act of purification. The prayer Viselie says: "May the ceremony I am about to perform take place in the proper manner; may all the food prepared for the ceremony be abundant", validates cultural renewal (ibidem). In the same story, Kire reaffirms the native celebration of *Ngonyi*. To the Nagas, festivals convey much deeper and significant meaning. It implies agricultural season of feasting of meat and brew, accompanied by songs and colorful dances, display of ceremonial dresses and ornaments, community works, games and socialization, ritual sacrifices for fertility of crops and good harvest, observation of genna and transmission of cultural heritage to the young generation. Most festivals rotate around the agriculture year and in tune with it, *Ngonyi* is a festival that initiates the activity of seed sowing. It is a time of community hunting and all the men, except the very old or the uninitiated ones, unanimously go for hunting and fishing, and the better part of the catch is utilized for feasting purposes. The narrative focuses that, "there was a lot of merrymaking in the night. Groups of young men and women sat in age groups singing in unison. They sang late into the night and went home only when the rooster crowed" (ibidem 45). Kire's *The Log-drummer Boy* is once again a story that celebrates the rich cultural traditions. The little boy, Nokcha, loves the log-drum that stood at the entrance of the village. The log drum is certainly not just a piece of wood. It occupies a very important place in the cultural life of the village. It serves many of their purposes; men would beat to announce festivals, wars, dangers, grief, death and so forth. People knew from the way the drum beats, whether there would be a festival in the village or if their warriors were going on the warpath, or other major community activities. Nokcha's

grandfather was one of the log drummers and he had taught his grandson how to beat out various rhythms by using two sticks. He enlightens how elders perform a set of rituals to help them choose the right tree when needed for a new log drum. They converse with the tree to come and be the guardian of the village. He explains: “the carvings that you see on the drum are done in secret in the heart of the forest, away from human eyes. When the carving is finished we drag it to the village with a number of rituals and ceremonies,” identified as a person, the drum is treated as member of the village, and children were warned not to hurt its feelings by being disrespectful to it (20). Henceforth, Nokcha had keenly learnt from his grandfather the traditional art of log drumming, which climaxed in his saving the village. Nokcha anxiously played a warning on the log drum. The enemy warriors heard the drum being tacitly played and were surprised for they thought there was no one in the village. The sound created great fear and it prompted the villagers who were harvesting their fields, to run home and defend their village. Nokcha became a famous hero who saved his village from enemy warriors. Amidst cheers and acknowledgement, a native leader declares: “it is not allowed for anyone other than the appointed drummers to beat on the log drum, but you defied that custom in order to warn the villagers. By doing so you have saved the village and therefore the punishment will not fall on you. Furthermore we will make you an honorary drummer and you may join the other drummers when it is time to play” (ibidem 34). Nokcha’s expertise in the traditional art of log drumming, may be interpreted as the fictionist way of bringing alive new generation to safeguard the cultural tradition of native’s art and the ceremonial traditions of their forefathers.

Natives are great believers of dream. Tribal culture like those of the Nagas believed that the supernatural forces communicate with the living beings through dreams. To the Nagas, dreams afford an unerring presage of the future. Usually, dreams are as substantial and possess the same measure of reality as the facts of their waking vision. When the body is

asleep, the Nagas believe that the spirit leaves the body and establishes contact with other spirits. Thus, they know of the events to come in advance. The effects of dreams however, appear to be more psychological than magical. Dreams are taken seriously and the interpretation varies from person to person, village to village, and tribe to tribe. There are good dreams and bad dreams. In his strange dream, Nokcha was flying over the village on a big black bird. They saw enemy warriors approaching the village, so he requested the bird to fly him close to the surface of the drum. When the bird did that Nokcha played the warning signal on the drum and the whole village heard the drumming. They came running out and chased the enemy warriors away. Nokcha's dream is inferred accurately as a prophetic dream by his grandfather when he says: "Maybe you are meant to save the village someday" (ibidem 23). The novel, *When the River Sleeps* is a mystical story. Dream carried the protagonist Vilie to an enchanted forest in the territory of the sleeping river. It is a dream that initiates Vilie's to find the mysterious river and 'catch it' when it sleeps. He had the same dream every month for the past two years, ever since he had first heard the story of the sleeping river. It became more than a story and Vilie carefully chooses each word to define what meanings it holds:

> When the river is asleep, it is completely still. Yet the enchantment of those minutes or hours when it sleeps is so powerful, that it turns the stones in the middle of the river bed into a charm. If you can wrest a stone from the heart of the sleeping river and take it home, it will grant you whatever it is empowered to grant you. It could be cattle, women, prowess in war, or success in the hunt. That is what is meant by catching the river when it is asleep. That way you can make its magic yours. The retrieved stone is a powerful charm called a heart-stone (3).

Vilie was restless in a way that he had never been before. It made him come to a decision to undertake the wretched journey and get the river out his head. Kire's *Life on Hold* is, again, a

visionary tale that allows the protagonist, Nime, to prophesy the impending death of her lover, Roko. Nime had a dream. She had seen Roko's feet sticking out of the bushes in the woods. Thinking that he was playing a trick on her, she crept round and crawled into the bushes to startle him, but she found his eyes were unseeing. The left side of his face was soaked in blood. As she sat weeping profusely, she woke up to find it a dream. She sighed in relief even as she recalled her grandmother telling her that if two people were very intimate, the one would let the other know when they are in danger of death. She shuddered and prays; "Please God let him be alright, I don't want him to die" (54). Later on, when Roko's dead body was brought home for burial, "Nime saw that he looked the same as he had in her dream" (ibidem 101). In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, incidental dreams are inferred through the storytelling of Vimenuo and Lieno. Vimenuo restates how her grandmother knew that someone in the family would die soon. She dreamt of several men digging a new grave in their courtyard, prior to her father's death. Parallel to it, Lieno spoke in response: "Father said that he saw grandfather waiting outside our house and calling one of the boys out of the house" (143). They found it strange that dreams always come true especially if there are dreams of death in the family. In the epilogue, Grandmother's unquiet spirit makes a violent entry. The first time her spirit passes through her house, it was seen by Lieno as scary, not dangerous. But when Bano is thrown out of the house, Grandmother's spirit goes on a rampage and does not rest until she has chased all the tenants out of the house. Finally, the reason is given to the pastor in a dream: "My house is not for strangers. It is for my family members. How can I be at rest when they have thrown out of my house those who cared for me and tried to make money out of it?" (ibidem 286).

2.5. Historical Narrative and Political Voice

History is humanities' way of recording past behavior, and Easterine Kire uses history as a reliable voice to trace 'People's story' that still have a bearing on human mind. Having been asked about the struggles of the Naga people, Kire is honest enough to point out: "I'd like people to know the truth, unadulterated and ugly though it may be at times. Not my version of the truth but an objective truth that people in their heart of hearts will have to agree with as true, even if it paints an unattractive picture of the conflict and of the people who became its prisoners" ("Kire in Network News." www.icorn.org). Recognizing the 'native individual' as her raw material, Easterine Kire in most of her artistic works, relies popularly on the experience of ordinary people caught in the throes of unpleasant political realities and complexities around the colonial atrocities and discrimination. Her novels *A Naga Village Remembered*, *A Terrible Matriarchy*, *Mari*, *Life on Hold*, *Bitter Wormwood* address the political voice of the native Naga society, its political ideologies, freedom struggle, as also the infighting due to ideological differences within the Naga freedom fighters. Historically, Nagas are often adjudged as a village or tribal society, though it may be observed that each Naga tribe was independent of the other. By tradition, there was no centralized political structure, and is governed by its own chiefs or elders under various customs. Naga village configuration exhibits a community living in a highly organized or a well-established society that is usually divided into khels or sections. Colonization brought with it, challenges not only to conquer the native land but also the minds and discourses of the colonized. In fact, the colonial rule has affected and altered the authentic native voice of the community. A direct result of the colonial presence has been the impingement of native culture and value systems. The encounter generated cross-cultural tension at all levels because of the European new value system. A case of what a critic, Wole Soyinka, has described as "cultural imperialism" had affected native traditions and ethics (51). Therefore, in any proper reading of the native

society, it is also relevant to dissect and analyze native voices from this standpoint because the impact of colonized experience on native consciousness is large.

Naga political history proves that since time immemorial the Naga territory remained independent and unadministered by any outside power and Naga villages existed in isolation from generation to generation, until its first known encounter with the British in nineteenth century. “The Nagas did not know where they came from and what they wanted, but they did not like what they saw”, therefore they put a strong resistance to these strangers who were passing through their land (Thong 28). For Nagas, an ancestral land is considered a link to one’s identity and has very special affinity to the mind, so that the need to prove himself worthy of defending, it can drive a man to battle. Land confers membership to an individual mainly because the patrilineage segment of a Naga society is anchored by a subdivision of the territory within the clan territory. Any infringement on those land rights, therefore, poses serious challenges. It demarcates the ingrained sense of honor and deep love of independence bred by it, which drove its men to repulse any invasion of its cultural practices and its lands. The Naga territory is inhabited by sixteen major native tribes namely Ao, Angami, Chang, Konyak, Lotha, Sumi, Chakhesang, Khiamniungan, Bodo-Kachari, Phom, Rengma, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Thadou people, Zeliang, and Pochury as well as a number of sub-tribes. History relates that the first Naga tribes, which came in direct confrontation with the British, were those of the Angami people. Fearing British invasion, they resisted and fought with whatever primitive weapons they had. The historical battle of Khonoma (1879) documented in Kire’s *A Naga Village Remembered*, offers a brilliant example of such an encounter. Khonoma, a Naga village, distinctively inhabited by the Angami tribe had long been considered to be the most powerful and feared in the Naga Hills. Dreaded by other smaller villages for its barbaric and ferocious attacks, the tradition of warfare continued to colonial times when Khonoma stubbornly and valiantly resisted the British advent into the Naga Hills. The village of

Khonoma has played a significant and unparalleled role in history by nurturing the growth of the Naga struggle for independence. Khonoma's victory stirred those Angami villages of Viswema, Chedema, Secuma, Jakhama, Zotshuma and the Tsutuonuoma clan of Kohima village to rise against the white man. On the other hand, the spirit of nationalism and patriotism among the Naga warriors was sown to oust the control of colonial rule from their land. Kire chooses powerful Naga villages to restate people's story because it communes strategically the expressive native voice through which those unclaimed historical, cultural, political and social spheres of native existence can be generously explained. Writing about her own Naga society, Kire tactically employs in her narratives the ideology that binds the native world. In truth, until the British occupation of Kohima in 1832, the Nagas appear to have been completely unaware of the nature of colonial culture that the British have exerted all over. Even the villages which surrendered during the occupation of Kohima did not know the British intention of making Kohima a permanent British seat. However, gradually, when the British officials assumed their real colonial character and laid out their future schemes for collecting taxes from the villages, they realized how seriously it was going to affect the indigenous social fabric which was fully managed and controlled by the chiefs, clans elders and village councils. Kire's novel, *A Naga Village Remembered* objectified this native consciousness. It asserts:

> The feeling of mistrust of the white man and his Government had continued to grow in the village. Headquartered at Kohima, the white man came down with a heavy hand on Khonoma for the raids that her men would suddenly go off on. So the tension grew between the two till some of the men of Khonoma were saying, "Let us stop this. We cannot continue like this, we'll not be under the turbaned ones." There was great bitterness against the white man from their experiences of punitive raids on their village, imprisonment and forced labour (67).

The people of Khonoma were determined to defend their land. Elders explained that raid on a British occupied territory and their subjects were necessary because the men of Khonoma were culturally bound to avenge their fallen men. Kire's narrative records the event of how younger men of the village were taught the rituals of war or of man's role on the battlefield. The preparation for the fiercest battle on a Naga Hills gripped the village bringing out the worst and the best in men: "And it ran its course like a fever round the village, this urge to go to war" (ibidem 68). They fought bravely to thwart British rule in their land, but the well-organized British forces with the latest and superior fighting weapons finally succeeded by subduing their retaliation. Khonoma was razed to the ground, its inhabitants dispersed. It was historically impossible for them to resist the British colonization, which had by then enveloped the whole Asia. Thereafter, a peace treaty was negotiated between village representatives of Khonoma and the representatives of the British Government at Mezoma on 27 March 1880, acceding British domination over part of the Naga Hills.

The historical fabric through which Easterine Kire presents her own society, stands out dominatingly as one promoting a reliable native voice. The famous Battle of Kohima (1944) which halted the Japanese westward advancement during World War II, is another event that is etched out in Kire's narratives. It picks a war that changed the entire course of native harmonious socio-cultural life, and for many Nagas, these were the first sights of what war could do to humanity. Kohima lay at the border of India and Burma and is also the headquarter for the British administrative office in the Naga Hills. Besides Kohima, they controlled Dimapur and Imphal, the former being a railhead and the latter, a military centre with airfields nearest to Burma. When the Japanese invaded Naga Hills in November 1944, the entire Naga territory was affected even though Nagas did not participate in the war directly. Kohima became the battlefield for nearly sixty four decisive days when the Japanese

and the British troopes fought the bloodiest battle during the Second World War. The author's note on 'The Battle of Kohima' provides:

> It is hard to imagine present-day Kohima as the site of the most decisive battlefield of the Burma Campaign. Never as famous as the storming of Normandy or the siege of Tobruk, the Battle of Kohima came to be called 'the forgotten battle' and its veterans the 'forgotten heroes'. This was the first British victory over the Japanese, and the first stop on their journey eastwards and towards Japan's final surrender. War historians who became aware of its significance have called the battle the 'Stalingrad of the East.' It was fought from 4 April to 22 June 1944 (*Mari* x)

Kire's *Mari* brings out the true voice of the Naga people by accounting the displacement people experienced during the course of World War II. The narrative pensively underlines; "The war became a reality that sank in as more and more of our young men left home to join the army, the RAF and the navy. Uneducated men were recruited to work as coolies in Moreh and Tamu, carrying ammunition and supplies for the army… Even grown girls left home to join the military nursing service" (18). Mari, the protagonist in the story, relates the constant fear and uncertainties of the Naga society, living as refugees in their own homeland and carrying on with the process of living no matter how bleak life felt to them. It becomes paradoxical that the native villagers who had offered refuge to others are now worrying about seeking shelter, refuge and protection itself. Their own land became unsafe for the Nagas. The subaltern suffering takes scene in the novel. The two great imperial powers, England and Japan in pursuit for military supremacy, was making life difficult for a race far removed from them. The native 'homeland' was no more a metaphor for security and comfort. Their land was a war zone where one side ascertained the absence of the other by destroying the Naga villages where they might be hiding. Whichever side suffered setback, was not alone in its suffering for the helpless native were always there to suffer in one form or the other. It was

not England or Japan that had to be rebuilt after the siege of Kohima, but a land far away from their shores where people were not even aware of the reasons propelling the war:

> How shocked we were to see the whole of Kohima ablaze and covered with thick black smoke. We could not believe our eyes. The peaceful and charming little town that had been our home all these years was going up in smoke! We stood there, transfixed (ibidem 56).
>
> Again:
>
> As a last resort, the British army bombed the surrounding areas in order to starve out the Japanese.… they heavily bombed the villages… Kohima, Viswema, Khuzama, Phesama and Jakhama were all bombed (ibidem 91).

However, at such difficult times tragedies seem to lose their personal shade and get transformed into a minute shred in the greater social collective tragedy. Kire's dominant native characters are strong in the face of oppression but they are also fallible in an endearing way. They portray real-life ordinary men and women living without any fabricated eccentricities, and Mari's loss was just one of the numerous personal losses that ultimately determined the nature of collective affliction of the native people and their collective efforts to rebuild themselves.

The Battle of Kohima has stimulated the political growth of the Nagas. It brought a sense of belonging and unity among the different Naga tribes. They became aware of their identity and their historical roots. They decided to settle their own political future, which ultimately led to the formation of Naga National Council (NNC), an organization to achieve political aspirations. "The Nagas made it clear that once the British left India, they would like to be left undisturbed politically as they were before" (Sanyu 128). By 1946, NNC became a formidable force through the Naga Insurgent Movement. However, a few years after India's independence, Indian armed forces moved into Nagaland in a bid to integrate the Nagas into

the Indian Union by force. The suffering and disruption was more than the Nagas had faced in the Second World War. It created a reign of terror, and led to political unrest and violence. Kire's novel *Bitter Wormwood* voices a stirring insight on the Indo-Naga conflict. A Naga political history linking seventy years of long freedom struggle, had altogether transformed the lives of the ordinary native community in Nagaland. It paints an evocative picture of a traditional peaceful life that has long vanished or misplaced, connecting them to a wider world of partition, independence, in-house rivalry and ideological differences. The onslaught depicted is also an attempt to understand the Indo-Naga conflict, how it has eroded individual lives of ordinary native people, generally residing in a confined village community. It notes the character Moselie, living his life under constant threat. He becomes involved in the Naga struggle for independence and is caught drastically in a maelstrom of violence that ends up ripping their community apart. Telepathically weighing his time he "sometimes felt his life was passing him by, particularly when he found himself wandering alone" (11). *A Terrible Matriarchy* recounts the unresolved conflict in Nagaland, the frustrations over the political suppression of Naga rights by the Indian government. Kire's character, Vini, defends alcohol abuse as interrelated to the political climate of the state. He blurbs out to his brother Leto, when he questions him of his drinking disorder that is destroying him and his family:

> Do you want to know why I drink, why all of us drink and brawl? Because life here in Kohima is so meaningless. Do you know why Rocky was hitting the other guy? Well, they were arguing about politics… Rocky said that he would rather die than give over his country to another nation… Do you know what it does to your insides when you hear about the people tortured and killed by the army and you can't do anything about it? (226).

A note from the author puts forth similar answers:

> The cases of Indian army occupation of Nagaland and the army's rapes and tortures of Naga's are cited as affecting the population adversely. Some of the

> consequences can be seen in alcoholic deaths and breakdown of cultural life in towns. This abiding sense of helplessness and suppressed anger at the forcible occupation exists across a wide spectrum of Naga society. The fallout of the occupation is visible in many of the social events rampant today in Naga society: Corruption and nepotism, factional killings, sexual crimes and economic instability. It is a partial explanation for the deep violence seen in the street – brawling that spills over into domestic violence (x).

The Nagas claimed to have no social affinity with Hindus and Muslims of India and, therefore, demanded independence after the British departure. They declared themselves independent on the 14 August 1947, a day earlier than the Indian independence. Negotiations took a tipsy twist for British crown had granted independence to India without a clear political vision. It has a direct impact on the Naga people, resulting in the creation of Nagaland as the 16th state of India on 1 December 1963. But this granting of Statehood to the Nagas was strongly opposed by the Naga Freedom Fighters and they condemned it. Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* accentuates this native voice. The character Dielieno voices her understanding of what her Father's friend had said; "We are not fighting an unjust war. We were independent before India became a nation. We are fighting for our freedom because it is right" (161). Hence, fighting continued with greater intensity between the Naga army and the Indian army. Not only that, the Naga Insurgent leadership cast its diplomatic and military net wider, engendering a serious political upsurge which is still continuing today. In 1988, Insurgent groups called the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) further splits into two groups, namely, NSCN (K) and NSCN (IM) because of the power struggle and tribal politics. Another novel *Life on Hold*, set in the turbulent milieu of the 1980's, narrates primarily the individual life trapped in this freedom struggle between the state and the Naga Ethnic Insurgency group in Nagaland. It recounts the sacrificial relationship of childhood friends, Nime and Roko, who forfeit their love in order to partake in the strife that inflicts the society. The children grew up and lived amidst the insurgency, violence and crime. One

morning, as Nime and her brother Zeu were walking to school, they were shocked to see the body of a young man lying in the wood near the school site. At first, they took him for a drunkard, but on close observation, they detected his shirt to be soaked in blood. In shock, they ran off and did not dare to walk that way for many weeks. Nime was curious to know why they killed him. When she inquired about it from her mother, she told her:

> Don't talk of these things in public,… Don't let others hear you mentioning it… Because we are seeing something we have never seen before. These men are different. They are ruthless and kill readily (19).

At school, her friends shared with her all that they knew of the factional rivalry in the wake of the freedom struggle in Nagaland. While fighting for freedom, they were killing fellow Nagas in factional clashes. The young man who was killed was a victim of such a factional enmity. He was one victim in a vicious cycle of killing and counter killing.

Roko and Setuo exchanged more information on the matter, while Nime listened to them avidly. For Nime, her attitude changed. It seemed as though her childhood had been distorted after having seen the dead body of the young man in the woods and hearing of the fear perpetrated by the national workers. She had no interest for their cause. When she turned fourteen, Nime had a very different outlook while Roko was obsessed by the stories of the national workers. He still talked about the freedom struggle, resulting in his decision to work for his uncle Pelekho-u, a Major in the National Socialist Council of Nagaland. It was a shocking bit of news to her. She remonstrated saying: "Don't be ridiculous, I won't tell anyone. But I really wish you wouldn't, Roko. You'd only get yourself killed, or be forced to kill someone" (ibidem 25). Nime only hoped that he would change his mind. Just when Roko was about to leave within two days for joining the factional group, Setuo and Nime took on a mission to convince Roko to withdraw his plan but Roko was adamant and he only spoke in a cold voice: "There's really nothing much to say, is there?" (ibidem 29). On their way back

home, Nime felt that she should try for other means to prevent Roko instead of being mad at his stubborn decision. Setuo could only respond: “No, no, it was not that… he has already made up his mind. Nothing we say would have changed anything. Do not brood over it, go home and pray for him that is the only thing to do now” (ibidem).

Nime received her college degree at the age of eighteen but the possibility of getting a regular job was bleak. Her brother, Zeu, who works as a sales representative for an insurance company with low prospects, told her about an interview he had attended along with other one hundred fifty applicants for barely two vacancies. Zeu told her that their friends, Shekato and Neituo, got jobs by bribing the Minister with one lakh each. He reminded her not to be shocked at how huge gap arises between the poor and the rich. Furthermore, he teased Nime to be grateful being a girl, for she can save herself and the whole family by marrying a rich person who would do everything. That, she can have a similar fairy tale life. Nime recalled how Roko used to be angry with the ruling government for perpetrating corruption. He was sure that the state would only listen to guns, and have actually implemented it by joining the NSCN without even informing his dear parents. When his family discovered his act, his father was so upset that he shouted: “I have no son now, my son is dead!” (ibidem 34). Nime kept wondering what was Roko’s hopes, in the midst of bribery in the government that had led many young men to join the Naga underground movement. She thought of how the factions extorting from businesses led to fear psychosis in everyone, and could analyze, retrospectively, how these young men were slowly becoming embittered, frustrated and disillusioned. The great national cause had been partially destroyed by a difference in ideology between the breakaway group, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland and the original organization, the Naga National Council. This was accompanied by killings and counter killings. To make matters worse, the NSCN had further broken up into two factions NSCN (K) named after their leader Khaplang, and NSCN (IM) named after Isak and Muivah,

the other two leaders. The feuding between the three groups sharply brought up the number of killings. Nime could remember Uncle Milto's sharp comment: "We fought a different war, we had only one enemy that was the Indian army. Today, they have more than one enemy the worst is that brothers are killing each other, that has made the war so complex. When you are fighting the Indian army one night, but being shot at by your own people the next night it does not make sense anymore" (ibidem 35). He was referring to all the factional killings that had been going on. Nime was now sure that Roko was a fugitive hunted by assassins. He is a condemned man in danger of being killed by the Indian army as well as the rival faction. One day Nime spotted Roko and pleaded him to give up his madness and return to her. Calling her a little dreamer, Roko spoke of the danger, he was in. He was secure as long as he was a soldier. The day he quit, that would be the end. He made it clear to her as he refused: "there is no room for a woman in my life, there never will be, that's the choice I have had to make… I'm leaving tomorrow, don't try to meet me. Let's say goodbye here", telling her never to pursue him, he dropped her hand expressing his coldness (ibidem 41).

Despite the fact that Nime went on with life, she reserved her love for Roko. As a young girl, she had thought of a future with Roko. But now married to a man whom she hardly knew, it felt like living someone else life. Her children were her only source of happiness. It shocked her once, Zotuo came shouting after school, "Mother! Buy me a gun, I'm going to join the IM!" (ibidem 95). When questioned, the boy simply said his friend Akietuo told him having a gun brings all the money one wants. When Nime tried to convince her little son that those who have guns shoot and kill people. He quickly retorted that those who do not have guns are only sissies and the others laugh at them. Nime was shocked to learn that even children were picking up gun-culture at a tender age. She felt like their innocence was being robbed, and could not imagine her son telling her that one day that he would become a Nationalist worker. Not surprisingly, Roko, met a cruel fate like any other

factionalist soldier. He was put to death for organizing a coup in the faction. About four days before his execution, Setuo received a cryptic message: "Wrestling at midnight" (ibidem 101). He understood it as a note from Roko and went to the wrestling spot of their childhood days. In the moonlight, he could see Roko. Roko looked so sapped on his face. He began to speak out:

> I've been wrong, Setuo, I've been very wrong. The cause is dead. Most of us don't even remember what it was anymore. It has become a contest for power and money, you know. Such a waste…such a waste (ibidem 103).

He had come to realize that violence is no solution to all the problems and discloses their plan to take on the higher-ups. He delivers his vital message through Setuo, and took out an envelope from his breast pocket and asked him to give it to Nime. While leaving, he told him to tell her that he was sorry. Nime's final gift for her dearly loved Roko lies in cleansing him for a good burial. She cleaned the blood on his face with hot water and a soft cloth. She dressed him in a new shirt and suit. For Nime, "being able to bathe his body and prepare him for burial was an act deeply healing" (ibidem 101). Kire's protagonist, Nime, becomes a helpless victim whose happy life is wrecked by insurgency. Her longing and prayer for peace in her land so that her children could live in peace and be spared from all the cruel experiences she had undergone, underlines the universal expectation of all people in achieving political harmony.

Summarizing all of the above subjects, it is enlightening to define Easterine Kire as a tribal writer of oral cultures. Her writings imaginatively promote native voices, via oral folklores, myths, traditions, legends, and historical events that still have a bearing on individual minds. Tribal society considers oral knowledge as essential part of their life. They transliterate the present into future by recreating the past and gathering strength from it. In this sense, it is a reworking of the past with the consciousness of the present, while aiming for

a purposeful act of retrieving and safeguarding identity. It is true that the ethnic people have always showed a tendency to follow the traditions of their communities. As an outcome, commendable writers like Thomas King and Easterine Kire, unravel the depth of Native culture. They make use of native ethnicity and all other oral knowledge of their ancestral people to show the traditional bond, to revive and assert their unique native voice in the present. Native writers are rediscovering their tribal past, and are attempting to sort out their identity. They write with an aim to strengthen and re-establish their own distinct identity. They are keen to develop a positive self-concept and a group identity that can provide a reference point for them. Easterine Kire is one author, who artistically advocates and promotes tribal cultures and literatures for the rest of the world to see, appreciate and understand tribal life.

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CHAPTER - III

Native Voices in the Fictional Works of Thomas King

3.1. The Career and Art of Thomas King

Thomas King is Canada's eminent native author of Cherokee, of German and Greek parentage. He was born on 24 April 1943, in Sacramento California and raised in Roseville. King primarily regards himself as a Canadian. He grew up mostly in a female-dominated household because his father abandoned his mother and their two sons when King was still a child. This might explain why independent and strong female characters often feature in his novels and short stories. His mother raised King and his brother on her own in a warehouse that housed both her beauty shop and the family living quarters. In his Massey Lectures published as *The Truth about Stories*, King talks about his early life:

> My mother raised my brother and me by herself, in an era when women were not welcome in the workforce, when their proper place was out of sight in the home. It was supposed to be a luxury granted women by men. But having misplaced her man, or more properly having had him misplace himself, she had no such luxury and was caught between what she was supposed to be – invisible and female – and what circumstances dictated she become – visible and, well, not male. Self-supporting perhaps. That was it. Visible and self-supporting. As a child and as a young man, I watched her make her way from doing hair in a converted garage to designing tools for the aerospace industry (2-3).

The opening letter in his first published novel *Medicine River* also has autobiographical element that specify his absent father:

> Dear Rose,
>
> I'll bet you never thought you'd hear from me again. I have thought about calling or writing, but you know how it is. How are you and the boys? Bet they're getting big. Bet you're probably mad at me, and I don't blame you. I'm going to be in Calgary for a rodeo. Thought I might drop in and see you (1).

The description, along with some letters of the father to his mother, inform us of the fact that the protagonist Will's father had left the two brothers and their mother on the reserve, and though he displayed a wish to return to his family, he never came back. Every time he mentioned in his letters of coming back, all he actually talked about was, "drop in" and "see you and the boys, may take you out to dinner and a show" (ibidem 2). The idea of settling down with her and the children, it seems, never crossed his mind.

At the age of twenty-one, King took a tramp steamer to Australia and New Zealand where he worked as a Photojournalist. After he returned to the United States, he worked at Boeing Aircraft as a Tool Designer. He subsequently entered California State University, Chico, where he earned his B.A. in English in 1970 and his M.A. in English in 1972. Other positions he has held includes Director of Native Studies at the University of Utah (1971-73); Associate Dean for Student Service at California State University, Humboldt (1973-77); Coordinator of the History of the Indians of the American Program University of Utah (1977-79); Chair of Native Studies from (1979-1989). King received his Ph.D. in American Studies and English from the University of Utah in 1986 and, since 1989, King has been Associate Professor of American Studies and Native Studies at the University of Minnesota (Wiget 439). A Canadian citizen, he returned home in the 1980's to accept a position as Professor of Native Studies at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada. He is currently a Professor of English at the University of Guelph, Ontario in Canada, where he teaches Native Literature and Creative Writing.

King seriously embarked on a literary career at the age of forty and in the eighties, his creative and critical writings were widely published and appeared in many journals, including *World Literatures* written in English, *The Hungry Mind Review* and *The Journal of American Folklore*. As for poetry, he has published fifteen poems in journals and anthologies to date, but has not compiled it in a book form. King is mainly regarded as a novelist and short story writer. With his first novel *Medicine River*, King came into literary acclaim. He won the Alberta Writers Guild Best First Novel Award, received the Pen/Josephine Miles Award, and is nominated for a Commonwealth Writers Prize. The novel was again adapted into a television movie and radio play in 1993, with King scripting both adaptations. King's second novel *Green Grass Running Water* won the Canadian Authors Award for Fiction and was named The Quill and the Quire's Best Canadian Fiction of the Century List. It was further nominated for the Governor's General Award in 1993. His latest novel, *The Back of the Turtle*, won the Governor General's Award for English language fiction in 2014. *One Good Story that One, Truth and Bright Water*, followed and were received with great success. He also made a name for himself as a successful Children's writer with works like *A Coyote Columbus Story, Coyote Sings to the Moon, Coyote's New Suit* etc. The short story collection, *A Short History of Indian's in Canada* appeared in 2005 and won the 2006 McNally Robinson Aboriginal Book of the year Award. In 2012, King was awarded a Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*, won the 2014 B. C. National Award for Canadian Non- Fiction, as well as, the prestigious RBC Taylor Prize. King's major work also includes edited books like, *The Native in Literature: Canadian and Comparative Perspective. An Anthology of Short Fiction by Native Writers in Canada*, a special issue of C*anadian Fiction Magazine* (1988). A*ll My Relations: An Anthology* of *Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction* (1990). In 2003, King was chosen to deliver the prestigious Massey Lectures which was published as *The Truth*

about Stories: A Native Narrative. A year later in 2004, he was made a member of the Order of Canada. Today, Thomas King has become one of Canada's highly admired authors. He is an Award winning novelist, short storywriter, children's writer, editor, radio host, scriptwriter, political leader and a photographer.

Coming to his literary art, Thomas King writes by telling stories about native oral cultures. A culture that deals with known and shared myths and is orally learnt, inherited and renewed by each generation of performers and each individual performer. King is an acclaimed native author and a gifted 'Storyteller of the first order' whose creative works have provided an excellent example of written orality. Intrinsic reading of King's popular fictional works, *Medicine River, Green Grass Running Water, One Good Story that One, Truth and Bright Water, A Coyote Columbus Story*, and *Coyote's New Suit*, conveys an idea that oral voices is not merely the antithesis of writing, and that both oral and written communication are entwined rather than separate. Writing does not extinguish oral cultural transmission, in other words, "writing from the beginning did not reduce orality but enhanced it" (Ong 9). Orality has helped King state the thematic focus of representing native people appropriately through storytelling, and has ensured 'oral literature' not as artifact, not a relic of the past but as living entity to portray members of today's native community. In *The Truth about Stories*, King declares his belief that storytellers are not alone but in close relationship with their responsive listeners, or readers, upon whom they must make an impact. He speaks in confirmation: "Perhaps I could frame such a bibliography as a eulogy to remind myself of where stories come from, a chance to remember that I stand in a circle of storytellers, most of whom will never published, who have only their imaginations and their voices" (101). He identifies the circles of storytellers and argues that the advent of native written literature did not in any way mark the passing of native oral cultural voice. In fact, they occupy the same

space, the same time. King states: “And, if you know where to stand, you can hear the two of them talking to each other” (ibidem 102).

Thomas King is one chief native writer whose works can be deliberated as one having a powerfully grounded spoken source. He employs orality in the sense that he likes, ‘to hear his characters talking’, ‘to hear their voices.’ In his 2003, Massey lectures, *The Truth about Stories*, King declares:

> The printed word, once set on a page has no master, no voice, no sense of time or place… written stories can be performed orally… oral stories can be stuck in a book. But for the most part, I think of oral stories as public stories and written stories as private stories (154).

His storytelling performance surveys a range of native oral stories, arguing that these narratives collectively offer another feasible way to look at the world. King’s narrative carries a well-noted originality. His imaginative ideas and playful story structures have a strong hold on the native oral tradition that frequently survive along with the universal passage of time. It provides a continual retelling of creation myth, community story, customs, rituals, and the commonly shared pieces of native oral history. King retells native history through an almost light-hearted circular storytelling style, and constructs an honest opinion that there is a difference of narrative strategies between native and non-native writers. Non-native who writes about the Indian usually writes about the ‘historical Indian’ with settings drawn from the native past that has no regular relevance, but King approves that when natives write, they bring out a pragmatic native material, and by using historical mode of conversational narration, the native creates a genuine society, reflective of the whole native nation. King himself has stated that the thematic focuses of his storytelling are, “about broken treaties, residential schools, culturally offensive movies, the appropriation of native names, symbols, and motifs” (ibidem 63). The exclusion of natives from white society, history and culture

remains a prevalent theme in much of King's storytelling. It explores what it means to be a native in a predominantly white culture. The presence of irony, colonial experience of natives, its assimilation and the role of oral tradition also centers King's perceptive attempts at historical revisionism because we find most Canadian literary sources emerging and developing along the lines of historical and geographical exigencies. Native authors actually got down to recording their own history and commentating on society. Native writings have subjects concentrating itself primarily with social, political and economic history because it navigates between issues of right and wrong, truth and fiction, men and nature, asserting the symbiotic relation of man and his natural universe. The contextual basis of this historical writing is a mixture of the ritualistic, the ancient and the contemporary. Native storytelling always have a political dimension inherent in it because it voices the persecution, betrayal and resistance that emanates from oppression meted out to natives since the advent of white man. For example, the ideological conception of King's *Medicine River* makes non-native readers meditate longer and harder about the lives of the first people. *Green Grass Running Water* written as a story cycle in the vein of an aboriginal oral tradition is an elaborated signification on the experience of native community. *Truth and Bright Water*, a coming of age novel depicts the life of native people living in a reserve and in a border crossing, and the tragedies confronting their existence. Discovery of self, their socio-economic and cultural configurations, their individual identity especially in cross boundaries, occupy a characteristic feature, not only of the individual but of all mankind. King's thematic storytelling in *Truth and Bright Water* has brought out such border issues. Borders are important 'thresholds', full of contradiction and ambivalence. They both separate and join different places, and "they are intermediate locations where one contemplates moving beyond a barrier" (McLeod 217). Homi K Bhabha addresses 'border lives' as a place where, "conventional patterns of thought are disturbed, and can be disrupted, by the possibility of crossing. At the border, past and

present, inside and outside no longer remain separated as binary opposites but instead commingle and conflict. From this, emerge new shifting complex forms of representation that deny binary pattering" (qtd. in McLeod 217). The same idiom 'borders' found ingenious expression in King's short story *Borders*. The story comically interprets the irony of constructed boundaries by narrating the experience of a Blackfoot mother and son, of Indian heritage, trapped between the Canadian and United States borders, only because the mother does not declare herself to be American or Canadian insisting, instead, that she be identified as Blackfoot. The comic dimensions of King's rendering of the border from a native perspective are precisely what make his works palatable and subversive, entertaining and disturbing. We notice that in King's artistic stories, natives are no longer conformist figures but unique individuals whose voices demand rights for recognition. King's edited book, *The Native in Literature* explores depiction of natives in Canadian texts. He states that, "the traditional assumption has been that a discussion of the native in literature means simply an examination of how the presence of the native has influenced white literature" (13). In *Godzilla Vs Postcolonial*, King argues that native writing is not postcolonial and should be described on its own terms. King cautions against reading Native Literature as postcolonial, precisely because such a designation focuses on the colonial moment which has virtually nothing to do with the oral native cultural traditions that preceded it. Likewise, King in his anthologies pay careful attention to the uniqueness of Native literature with all its diversity. He explains that most Canadians have only seen natives through the eyes of non-native writers and yet Native written literature, has opened up new worlds of imagination for non-native audiences because "it occupies that 'in-between' space within and without the borders" (12). His works emphasize the importance of oral heritage shared across tribes, and explain the struggles involved to find a working definition of a native writer:

> And when we talk about Native writer, we talk as if we have a process for determining who is a Native writer and who is not… there are a great many difficulties in trying to squeeze definition out of what we currently have... perhaps our simple definition that Native literature is literature produced by nations will suffice for, while providing we resist the temptation of trying to define a Native (*The Native in Literature* 9).

Although King often shuns the role of representative for native people, he is widely celebrated as one. King himself confesses, "I do feel an affinity with other Aboriginal people… we seem to be concerned about the same things… and many of the storytelling techniques, the characters and the voices are familiar" ("Written Orality" www.Jsee.revues.org). He aligns himself with those who emphasize continuity and blending of oral and written culture. Intriguingly an adequate amount of King's chief influence comes not from actually listening to spoken words, but from reading a transcription, a printed text. In an interview, King explained that he "was blown away" when he became acquainted with the stories of Harry Robinson, an Okanagan elder skilled both in English and in his mother tongue (Gzowski 72). In his foreword to the anthology, *All My Relations,* King remarks: "Harry Robinson's story, *An Okanagan Indian becomes a Captive Circus Showpiece in England* is a fine example of interfusional literature, a literature that blends the oral and the written. In a traditional oral story, you have the stories, the gestures, the performance, the music, as well as the storyteller. In a written story, you have only the word on the page, yet Robinson is able to make the written word become the spoken word by insisting, through his use of rhythms, patterns, syntax and sounds that his story be read out loud and in so doing the reader becomes the storyteller" (xii-xiii). Likewise, in his article *Godzilla Vs Post-colonial* King praises Robinson for being successful in creating an "oral voice, something he does in a rather ingenious way, for he develops an oral syntax that defeats readers efforts to read the stories silently to themselves, a syntax that encourages readers to read the stories out loud"

(244). King commends Robinson's prose for avoiding the loss of what is generally omitted when oral literature is translated, and for "re-creating at once the storyteller and the performance" (ibidem). King concludes the essay with the following statement about Robinson: "his prose has become a source of inspiration and influence for other Native writers such as Jeannette Armstrong and myself" (ibidem 245). Hence, *One Good Story that One*, King's short story collection has a mimicked oral voice produced out of this kind of inspiration. Narrated in first person singular narrator 'I', King has resorted to imitating the narrative voices of traditional storytellers. However, he has been careful not to exploit this artifice too often or for too long to avoid monotony that a homogenous distinctive voice might have caused. For example, out of the ten short stories he included in his collection *One Good Story that One*, only four are told by a narrative voice which evokes those of such storytellers. These four stories are executed as if they were transcription, stories exactly as told, avoiding all quotation marks found in a conventional text:

> Alright. You know, I hear this story up north. Maybe Yellowknife, that one, somewhere, I hear it maybe a long time. Old story this one. One hundred years, maybe more. Maybe not so long either, this story. So you know, they come to my place (*One Good Story that One*).
>
> This one is about Granny. Reserve Story. Everyone knows this story. Wilma knows it. Ambrose knows it. My friend, Napioa, Lionel James. Billy Frank knows it, too... Boy, he tells me here comes that story again... The way I tell it is this way and I tell it this way all the time (*Magpies*).
>
> This one is about Coyote. She is going west. Visiting her relations. That's what she said. You got to watch that one. Tricky one. Full of bad business. No, no, no, no, that one says. I'm just visiting. Going to see Raven. Boy, I says. That's another tricky one (*The One about Coyote Going West*).
>
> It was Coyote who fixed up this world, you know. She is the one who did it. She made rainbows and flowers and clouds and rivers. And she made prune

> juice and afternoon naps and toe-nail polish and television commercials (*A Coyote Columbus Story*).

One Good Story that One offers an excellent reading of oral story. It has ideas drawn from a wealth of oral tradition. These stories have both humor and humility. They challenge the idea of universal truths and shed light on the way the communities behave and treat one another. The first person narrator of the title story recounts how a friend brought three young anthropologists to see him so that they could record his stories. In *Magpies* the narrator is called 'old one' by one of the native characters, while the narrator of *The One about Coyote Going West* is called 'Grandmother' and 'Grandfather'. These narrators function on two levels. Although not deemed to be really characters, they take the role of a storyteller and interacts with his or her narratee. Secondly, such a storyteller, in turn, not only commissions and listens to the story but also participates in it. In *A Coyote Columbus Story*, King's storytelling strategy compresses the time and the space. It fuses the oral story of creation with the arrival of Christopher Columbus on the shores of North America. Bored because the Indians refuse to play with her anymore, Coyote makes three ships and soon these men 'in silly clothes' arrive looking for things to sell. It parodies stories of Columbus discovery of Americans from a native own point of view. The oral discursive devices used throughout *One Good Story that One*, are not simply decorative but performs an important functions, of both characterizing its narrator as a real traditional native storyteller and highlighting some of the most polemic matters of contention in the debates about native oral literature. On closer inspection, King's mock creation in *One Good Story that One* bears on the problems of authority posed by the oral and the written modes of expressing worldviews. The Biblical story in 'Genesis' is irreverently challenged by King, as a corrective measure to curb the misrepresentation of native modes of orality. King's native narrator departs from the written version of creation by changing the well-known plot, introducing anachronisms and

mispronouncing the names of Adam and Eve, which he renders as 'Ahdamn' and 'Evening'. Here, the strategy of King's questioning of authority is not gratuitous, but aimed to make non-native readers understand, why native communities feel offended whenever a story they hold as sacred is treated with the same kind of carelessness, lack of respect or ineptitude by curious strangers. King classifies native oratory as having an appropriate metaphor and vocabulary, a syntax that allowed him to formulate complex relationships between ideas, as well as employing a vivid imagination and literary inventiveness. In *The Truth about Stories*, King conveys the different storytelling strategies he had employed, to tell two creation stories; the story of the crazy woman who fell from the Sky and that of the biblical characters of Adam and Eve. One is 'Native', the other is 'Christian', as King explains:

> Okay. Two creation stories. One Native, one Christian. The first thing you probably noticed was that I spent more time with the Woman who fell from the Sky than I did with Genesis. I'm assuming that most of you have heard of Adam and Eve, but few, I imagine, have ever met charm. I also used different strategies in the telling of these stories. In the Native story, I tried to recreate an oral storytelling voice... In the Christian story, I tried to maintain a sense of rhetorical distance and decorum... These strategies color the stories and suggest values that may be neither inherent nor warranted. In the Native story, the conversational voice tends to highlight the exuberance of the story but diminishes its authority, while the sober voice in the Christian story makes for formal recitation but creates a sense of veracity (22-23).

With King developing the trickster discourse in native stories, a multiplicity of conversational voices are introduced that highlight the exuberance of his stories, avoid solemnity and challenge monolithic authority. This trickster content in native stories is important for it aids speculation about recurrent patterns and motifs that occur in native oral traditions, transcending geographical and linguistic barriers. King's stories begin abruptly and are considered as "genuine voice pieces that is, fusion texts which have undergone the process of

transforming oral or aural speech into the visual figuration that readers see when eyed at the printed text" ("Written Orality" www.Jsee.revues.org). As a result, such stories emphasize the acoustic dimension of language which makes the audience aware of the fact that sounds have been captured in print form and call for a conscious "phonemic reading" which, according to Garrett Stewart, "has not to do with reading orally but with aural reading" (2). In *Green Grass Running Water*, there is an emphasis:

> "Gha!" said the Lone Ranger. "Higayv:lige:i."
>
> "That's better," said Hawkeye. "Tsane:hlanv:hi."
>
> "Listen," said Robinson Crusoe. "Hade:loho:sgi."
>
> "It is beginning," said Ishmael. "Dagvya:dhv:dv:hni."
>
> "Okay" (12).

Oral features function as narrative techniques. It is chosen consciously to promote communal ways of listening and reading. There is a channel of communication existing between storyteller and audience, between theories of postcoloniality and native modes of narration, and between traditional stories and popular culture in expressive written orality of King. Speech is the dominant narrative mode and usages of direct speeches are common. For instance, Harlen's chatty tone in *Medicine River*: "You know, Will, I don't really mind that Louise doesn't give out free pens" "Hmmmmmmm" (27). Also in *Green Grass Running Water*, King adopts a style of presentation, which is meant to render on the page the specific nuances of Native verbal rhythms. He uses a lot of mimicking, rhetorical digressions and expressive words such as "Okay." "Maybe. Maybe not. Can't say." "hee-hee. Hmmm. La, la la, la", echoing a storytelling cadences (ibidem 253-56). King's intention is to spot his reliance on native oral tradition and on dialogue, in his fiction. He shares this strategy with Jace Weaver: "I like to hear my characters talking. I like to hear their voices" (56-7).

Demonstratives are also significant in transcribed oral texts. Its features give a sense of the oral performance in a written device. King applies it in order to present his writing as if it were performative of oral traditions. It has oral demonstrative, the "oral lightly assumed in the written text" (Lee 462). More thoughtfully, King applies this demonstrative rhetorical device in the narrative, *Green Grass Running Water*, and *The One about Coyote Going West*. References of both are cited below:

> So
>
> In the beginning, there was nothing. Just the water.
>
> Coyote was there but Coyote was asleep. That Coyote was asleep and that Coyote was dreaming. When that Coyote dreams, anything can happen.
>
> I can tell you that
>
> So, that Coyote is dreaming and pretty soon, one of those dreams gets loose and runs around. Makes a lot of noise
>
> Hooray, says that silly dream... that Dream sees all that water
>
> Oh, oh, says that noisy Dream (*GGRW* 1).

> Tell me grandmother, says Coyote. What does the clever one make first?
>
> Well, I says. Maybe she makes that tree grows by the river.
>
> Maybe she makes the buffalo. Maybe she makes that mountain.
>
> Maybe she makes them clouds.
>
> May be she makes that beautiful rainbow, says Coyote.
>
> No, I says. She don't make that thing. Mink makes that.
>
> Maybe she makes that beautiful moon, says Coyote.

> No, I says. She don't do that either. Otter finds that moon in a pond later on (*All My Relations* 97).

Critical assessment of King's short stories and novels demonstrate that his own writing is, both, interfusional and associational. He draws upon oral traditions of multiple native communities, bringing in various trickster traditions to challenge entrenched stereotypes, and to create a sense of spoken language which is laconic but effective. King's associational stories also show native communities living their lives with "a matter-of-fact quirkiness, wrapped up in each other" ("King Thomas" www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com). For instance, the narrative in *Green Grass Running Water* is both interfusional and associational. It gives a popular merger between oral and written tradition, the story has a dualism that is present throughout, starting with Coyote and Dog. In king's storytelling, Coyote is the trickster figure in native tradition, whereas the Dog thinks that he is 'God' but is merely a dream of Coyote:

> I am god, says that Dog Dream. "Isn't that cute," says Coyote. "That Dog Dream is a contrary. That Dog Dream has everything backward." But why am I a little God? shouts that god (2).

Green Grass Running Water defines King's storytelling strategy. It features a unique manner of recounting a story, with King poetically weaving two plots. The first story is a mythical one based on oral indigenous storytelling, and the second is a realistic story based on western written text. King's written orality employs an unnamed narrator and a popular trickster figure, Coyote, to tell and preside over this two interwoven story. Coyote is a significant trickster figure in native mythology and no oral storytelling is complete without it. Interestingly, enacting a central role in King's story, Coyote is a link metaphor and is virtually a bridge that connects the mythic and the real world. The mythic story starts with a series of creation stories. Coyote and the four old Indians primarily belong to this mythic

story, but sometimes leap into the real story and interact with the characters. The mythical Indians take over literary names. They are changed to western figures, First Woman to Lone Ranger, Changing Woman to Ishmael, Thought Woman to Robinson Crusoe, and Old Woman to Hawkeye. They explain real events that have happened to the ordinary citizens of the town of Blossom, and inform readers of their interpersonal relationships, their attempt to making a living in the white world, and their ongoing debates over a proposal to build a hydroelectric dam in the native region.

King's performative phrase, "Forget the book, we have got a story to tell", is emblematic of native belief that stories and no fixed truths, enact retelling (ibidem 387). The psychoanalytic approach of language also implies that words exists as a structure, and that "language is a system already complete and in existence before we enter into it" (Barry 113). Such form of linguistic claim in storytelling, lends support to the co-evolution of the word and the word being believed as sacred, native people associate an idea with an object, with visual memory. It has been pointed out that according to native themselves, much of the dramatic power and fun of their mythology and folklore emerge only when their stories are told in the original language, that they tend to pay more attention to the implications or suggested meanings of their words and their "metaphors embody an emotional force" (Benson, and Toye 2). Hence, in *Green Grass Running Water*, King's oral form of narrating stories is more abundant than the written one, with respect to understanding and interpretation of the story. Only a person who has specific knowledge about storytelling conventions takes the role of a narrator. King aptly notes the fact that if unskilled narrator tells a story, it can be dangerous and because of this, the four Indians does not allow Coyote to tell the story: "Wait, wait," says Coyote. "When's my turn?" "Coyotes don't get a turn," (365). It also resorts to repetition and pauses such as, "oh, oh," ... "hey, hey," ... "hey, hey, hey. What are those two doing?" "Swimming," I says. "Oh. . ." says Coyote, that in turn, helps the listener to

understand and follow the narration as well as establish a bond between the narrator and the listener (ibidem 248).

Retaining a conversational bicultural oral tone in the story, King also gives his audience a sense of what it is like to experience the authentic storytelling tradition from a Native American point of view. He reconstructs some of his creation passages in a style that is imitative of preserved, transcribed and translated texts from various oral traditions. The presence of goddesses such as First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman and Old Woman, validate an integration of stories from various oral traditions. In King's story, First Woman is comparable to Clark's story of a woman who fell from the sky; each has a divine deity falling out of the sky and is intercepted by Ducks, placed on a Turtle's back, upon which earth is created by using mud. The other deities, Changing Woman, Thought Woman, and Old Woman, follow comparable beginnings. Each figure falls out of the sky but the events leading up to, and following the fall, are taken from Navajo, Pueblo and Blackfoot traditions. In King's narrative, Changing Woman falls from the sky and lands on a big white canoe with full of animals. Thought Woman converses with a river, gets into the river believably for a bath, and then when that river starts flowing again, she finds herself drifting and "floats off the edge of the world and into the sky" (ibidem 297). This beginning is alike to Silko's story and the integration of Reed Woman from the Pueblo tradition "who bathes and creates rain for the world" (13-14). Likewise, Old Woman looking for tasty things to eat digs up a 'Tender Root' and while digging, "Old Woman digs and digs and that one chases that Tender Root under the Tree and around the Tree and pretty soon that one has dug a big hole. Oops, says Old Woman and she fall through that hole into the sky" (*GGRW* 366-367). The narrative of Old Woman is similar with the 'Poia' legend and the Cherokee story. In the poia legend, "Feather Woman digs up a giant turnip" (Welch 350-351). In the Cherokee story, "Star Maiden/Woman digs up a root that creates a hole where this deity looks down

from the Spirit world into the world of People" (Flick 161). King alludes to the oral traditions by incorporating these stories and having them interact with stories from the dominant literate culture. King is, in fact, replicating these stories, much as an oral performer would in an actual storytelling performance. Jennifer Andrews confirms how, "the flexibility of oral transmission means that stories can be revised to suit the immediate needs of the community" (93). In the Judeo-Christian Biblical stories, First Woman meets "Ahdamn" who is busy "naming everything" (*GGRW* 41). Changing Woman meets Noah in a "Christian ship" (ibidem 160). We see that both Ahdamn and Noah are figures from Christian stories. Thought Woman meets A.A. Gabriel who is named from the Biblical figure, "the angel Gabriel" (Flick 159); Old Woman meets "Young man walking on water" (*GGRW* 387) who is the Biblical figure "Jesus Christ" (Flick 161). King's purpose behind the juxtaposition of native and non-native creation stories is to show that native creation stories were present within the oral traditions, long before the colonizers came to North America and proceeded to impose their religious belief upon the native people. His lone objective in mixing up oral stories, is to further give his audience a sense of what it is like to experience the storytelling tradition from a native point of view, and their link to mythical world. Both human character of the anonymous narrator 'I', and omniscient character 'Coyote' converse:

> "Earthquake! Earthquake!" yells Coyote
>
> "Calm down," I says.
>
> "But it's another earthquake," says Coyote.
>
> "Yes," I says. "These things happen."
>
> But we've already had one earthquake in this story," says Coyote.
>
> "And you never know when something like this is going to happen again," I says.
>
> "Wow!" says Coyote. "Wow!" (*GGRW* 458).

In addition to the existing storytelling tradition, King creates the real sense of time, and retells a tale of modern Indians who are struggling to find proper recognition while still fighting white cultural absorption. The real time story explores individual's effort to fit oneself, both within his community and heritage. Lionel, the central protagonist, searches for his identity in a world that is pulling him in two different directions. Not only does he have the familial pressure to stay true to his heritage, he also has the societal pressure. Lionel Red Dog is a disaffected Blackfoot on the eve of his fortieth birthday. He sells televisions in a rural part of Southern Alberta but tells himself that one day he will go back to college to get his Ph.D. like his uncle Eli. Meanwhile, his relationship with his girlfriend, Alberta, lacks certainty, since he has to share her with his lawyer cousin, Charlie. She also resists the mere mention of marriage, preferring to have a child by artificial insemination than be saddled with any man. A unique interpretation of King's *Green Grass Running Water* shows an interrogation into what is real and magical. King situates the real alongside the magic, combining within the stories a realistic and fantastic or bizarre skilful time shift, making it fall into the category of Magic Realism. King writes for a native community and poetically weaves the traditional storytelling with Western written text. The two narratives form, apparently, different structural patterns, which distinguish the writing styles in the story. While the two interwoven texts appear to contrast and contradict each other, the mythical text forms a frame upon which the real text sits. The mythic text sets the real text up, joining the two texts in a cohesive narrative. In the realistic plot, King uses many flashbacks explaining certain character's past, wherein the stories of mythical characters like First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman, and Old Woman move in an undefined time and space. When Changing Woman meets Moby Jane, they "swim around like that for a month. Maybe it is three weeks. Maybe not" (249). Time is unnecessary and unstated as the text repeats itself; the exact time becomes irrelevant, making the events universal and eternal. The real

time text must be defined, so when beginning a memory for the real characters, King defines the time. He writes, “When Alberta was thirteen, the family went across the line to Browning. Just South of Cardston” (ibidem 282). Therefore, the real-time histories fit into the real-time narrative as precise events, relying on the character’s authority to be proven correct.

King’s recurring structure in the mythical text defies western notions of literature. It evolves from an oral tradition keeping many oral conventions. The text is repetitive in retellings and in phrases and words. When First Woman falls from the ‘sky world’ the Ducks put First Woman on grandmother Turtle’s back: “Ho, says grandmother Turtle when she sees that woman on her back. You are on my back” (ibidem 39). That the First Woman is on grandmother Turtle’s back, is stated repeatedly. To western audience this reiteration appears redundant but in an oral telling this technique emphasizes the point, clarifying and distinguishing it as important. Mythic stories are also, told as conversations and appear more interactive due to Coyote’s interruptions and questions:

> “Was it like that wonderful, misty water in California,” says Coyote…
>
> “No,” I says, “this water is clear.”
>
> “Was it like that lovely red water in Oklahoma,” says Coyote…
>
> “No,” I says, “this water is blue.”
>
> “Was it like that water in Toronto…”
>
> “Pay attention,” I says, “or we’ll have to do this again” (ibidem 112).

With Coyote’s constant interjections the readers actively participate, and King expands the audience from a solitary reader to ‘that reader’ and Coyote. Furthermore, he reminds the reader that there are other readers. This expanded audience recalls the oral tale. King uses different grammatical structures with the cyclical magic passages, and the four parts tell the same story but from different perspectives. They all begin in the ‘Sky World’ and end up at

'Fort Marion'. All the stories are told to teach the reader that there is more to the story than first appears. The mythical figures and the real-time characters socialize actively in the native healing rituals, like those of the traditional Blackfoot ceremony of the 'Sun Dance' or 'Medicine Lodge ceremony.' The native community believes that their prayers would be carried up to the creator, who would bless them with well being. Symbolically, it is during the 'Sun Dance' ritual that King unites the mythical story and the realistic story with a little help from Coyote. Coyote brought about an earthquake which changes the entire course of shifting and healing adjustments. Lionel is brought back to his tribal roots by a unique intervention from Coyote, while Eli, finally, wins his one-man stand against the Government Corporation that built a massive dam just upriver from his mother's log cabin with a little help from trickster Coyote, whose dancing summons an earthquake and Alberta receive Coyote's blessing of immaculate conception. Through this performance of healing rituals, King's stories try to send out the idea that native storytelling still exist and maintain their power. He considers orality as storytelling strategies to resurrect a native past and to imagine a native future. A constant running dialogue, 'fix up the world', instituted in almost all fictional narrative of King, offers a tricky discourse, which is an effort to bridge the symbolic meaning contained in native stories. In King's *Medicine River*, the character, Harlen Bigbear, is rationally depicted as a Modern day trickster figure: "he was like a spider web. Every so often, someone would come along and tear off a piece of the web or poke a hole in it, and Harlen would come scuttling along and throw out filament after filament until the damage was repaired" (29). In *Green Grass Running Water*, the four old Indians offer to "fix up the world" and their constant involvement makes the Blackfoot events meaningful (133). In *Truth and Bright Water*, the trickster figure 'Coyote' is connoted as a good luck figure and "a medicine bag isn't complete without one" (231). King's storytelling technique to engage mythic/trickster figures, is to explore and reinvent cultural myths, to resist and challenge

cultural stereotyping and to unsettle reader's conventional assumption about identity. King himself says, "The trickster is an important figure for native writers for it allows us to create a particular kind of world in which the Judeo-Christian concern with good and evil, order and disorder is replaced with the more native concern for balance and harmony" (*The Native in Literature* 13). The trickster is a comic redeemer in a narrative. In King's curative storytelling, it functions on two levels. One is to incorporate into the written text, the key feature of native oral storytelling. Secondly, it succeeds in recovering a certain balance, amid the apparent chaos of most situations by means of a type of humor that they believe to be integral to all kinds of life on this earth. It is the spirit of the versatile trickster creator that keeps native alive and vital in all phase of life. The native cultural hero or trickster-transformer figure shields King as a trickster storyteller who aimed at restoring the physical and psychological harm inflicted by the dominant European culture.

3.2. Conscious Resistance of Eurocentric Parody

Canada's constitution identifies the natives into three specific categories; Indians commonly referred to as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. According to the 2011Canadian census the population of the original peoples or the natives consist of, First Nations-851,560; Inuit-59,445; Métis-451,795, which stands at 4.3 percent of the country's total population ("Population of Canada" www.en.wikipedia.org). The aboriginal peoples in Canada exhibit unique histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. Reflectively, King's fictional work offers a judicious study on the First Nations or Indian bands, generally inhabiting lands called reserves. It shows a strong tendency to recapture native voices that were once misinterpreted and ransacked by the white colonialism, who maintained power by

writing its own history, systematically ignoring and silencing other competing histories of the places and cultures, they came into contact.

King's popular novels *Medicine River* (1989), *A Coyote Columbus Story* (1992), *Green Grass Running Water* (1993), *Truth and Bright Water* (1999) trend a positive portrait of Native presence that reflects a consciousness of, and resistance to, a long history of Eurocentric misrepresentation. It has helped create a new literary image of the native. The story in *Medicine River*, universalized the main native protagonist who comes home to his Blackfoot society. It reclaims voices of native people from stereotyping by the dominant culture. A Native campaigner interested in promoting native origins are particularly keen on the return of the native, and King, as one twenty first century native author and an advocate for a First Nation cause, also normatively brings home his native character, Will Horse Capture, mainly to serve as a critical standpoint through which all other stories can be interpreted. These dutiful returns often precipitate a quest, an attempt, a discovery or a journey, and in King's story, the return of Will involves a sorting out, an ordering of relationships, memories and possibilities, an attempt to come to terms with the past, an attempt to find a native future. Acknowledging the Blackfoot native to be his primary audience, King tells typical stories of Blackfoot descent, the Indians residing in the Great Plains of Montana and the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. The Blackfoot started as 'woodland people' but as they progressively made their way over to the Plains, they had adapted to the new ways of life. They established themselves as "one of the most powerful Indian tribes on the Plains, in the late eighteen century. Their stories traced their residence and possession of their territory to time immemorial" ("Blackfoot." www.en.wikipedia.org). Anthropologists also believe that the Blackfoot originally coalesced, as a group, while living in the forests of what became known as Northeastern United States. They were mostly located around the Maine and Canadian border. By 1600, the Blackfoot

had decided to relocate in search of more land. Eventually, they settled in wide north of the Great Lakes, in present day Canada. Today, many of the Blackfoot live on reserves in Canada. About 8,500 live on the Montana reservation of 1,500,000 acres. King's native story carries constructive opinions that are often associated with the authentic native voice of this Blackfoot community. One could hear and identify groups according to political, cultural and racial ideology, especially the ethnic voices in Canada. Native voices being a product of individual interactions, history and geography, it thematically sought to explore native experiences, beliefs, perspectives on human relationships, the spiritual world and the nature of the world of the modern Indians. In *A Coyote Columbus Story*, the story mixes history and fiction. It brings out the native cultural voice by retelling the historical tale of Columbus's journey to the Americas from a Native North American point of view. A story of Coyote, who fixed up this world, controlled all events to her advantage until a funny looking red-haired, named Columbus, changes her plan. In its typical story, Thomas King uses a list of thematic activities to play upon imperialist discourse. By removing stereotypes surrounding Columbus's voyage, King reframes Columbus' glory to the advantage of the native people. King's second novel *Green Grass Running Water*, also evokes aspects of native history, mythology, and culture. King draws a multi-layered text and once again, the figure of the native trickster is central. Coyote belongs primarily to the frame story and King's absorbing narrative ensures a viable identification of native presence. The story aims at redefining the negative portrayal of natives. King has said of *Green Grass Running Water*, that it is, "directed at non-native readers, reflecting the need to engage those readers in a mutual decolonization" (270). It seeks to challenge their potentially stereotyped and undifferentiated understandings of native cultures. King's subsequent novel, *Truth and Bright Water* is a realistic retelling of people's story. Set in the border of American and Canadian towns, the story captures the essence of reservation life with dark humor and cutting satire. Tecumseh

and Lum, coming of age story, is representative of the sometimes sad and tragic lives of the real natives in their struggle for recognitions.

An added novelty in which King shows a conscious resistance and Eurocentric parody, is in his use of native humor. King's objective of humor is to explain the seriousness of issues confronting native society. He rewrites historical event with healing laughter. This is because humor has capacity to provide an essential optimism and it can bridge an understanding between Canada's Native and Euro-Canadian population. Overall, humor in relations, between native people and non-natives, tends to play a didactic logic and to some extent, diplomatic role. It lures readers into a space in which confrontational issues can be addressed in a manner that does not foreclose further intercultural dialogue. By laughing, non-native readers are often unwittingly tricked into assuming new perspectives, into acknowledging the validity of native viewpoints and, possibly, even into questioning their own. King goes on to explain about his use of comedy:

> I think of myself as a dead serious writer. Comedy is simply my strategy. I don't want to whack somebody over the head, because I don't think it accomplishes much at all. There's a fine line to comedy. You have to be funny enough to get them laughing so they don't feel how hard you hit them. And the best kind of comedy is where you start off laughing and end up crying, because you realize just what is happening halfway through the emotion. If I can accomplish that, then I succeed as a storyteller ("King in Canton." www.CollectionsCanada. gc.ca/obj/com).

The novel's title *Green Grass Running Water* is a running ridicule on the white man's failure to relieve natives of their civil rights. Insightfully, *Green Grass Running Water* radically explores what it means to be native, in a chiefly white culture. By means of humor, King rewrites native culture and delineates an essence of historical accountability. For example, Latisha's role of running and owning a successful restaurant in the name of 'Dead Dog Cafe'

that bilks thrill-seeking white tourists by purporting to serve them authentic Indian dog meat, is a successive mockery on outsider's view of native culture, it states:

> "People come from all over the world to eat at the Dead Dog Cafe."
>
> "She sells hamburger and tells everyone that it's dog meat."
>
> "Germany, Japan, Russia, Italy, Brazil, England, France, Toronto. Everybody comes to the Dead Dog."
>
> "The Blackfoot didn't eat dog."
>
> "It's for the tourists" (59).

The 'Dead Dog Cafe' is advertised as Indian, yet it depicts cultures the white tourists would like to believe, rather than the way it truly is. King uses his humor to express the ludicrousness of what people views native cultural voice to be. His humor is, sharpest in the depiction of Portland, a native artist who goes to Hollywood to become a western actor, but who must wear a fake nose because he does not look 'Indian enough' to perform an Indian role:

> Portland's nose was not the right shape. As long as he had been in the background, a part of the faceless mob of Indians falling off their ponies in the middle of rivers or hiding in box canyons or dying outside the walls of forts, things had been okay. But, now a center stage playing chiefs and the occasional renegade, the nose became a problem. The matter came to a head when Portland auditioned for the Indian lead in *The Sand Creek Massacre* starring John Wayne, John Chivington, and Richard Widmark. The director, a slight man with a sparse blond mustache that made his upper lip look as if it caked with snot, told Portland that he could have the part but that he would have to wear a rubber nose. Portland thought that the man was kidding and told him that the only professionals he knew who wore rubber noses were clowns (168).

The above passage roughly exposes white man's falsification of native identity, perhaps, written with humor as a weapon. In King's *A Short History of Indians in Canada*, the humor chiefly proves to be disruptive, not only in the conventions of realism and causality, but also of the expectations arising from its title. The text requires readers to decode a puzzle that mixes concepts and terminologies from two vastly dissimilar fields- ornithology and the stereotypical ideas about native cultures. The story tacitly revolves around Bob Haynie, a businessman visiting Toronto for the first time. Unable to sleep, he leaves his hotel and walks towards Bay Street. He sees, "a flock of Indians fly into the side of a building. Smack! Smack!" (62). Bill and Rudy, two birdwatchers whom Bob Haynie encounters, are busy categorizing the stranded 'Indians':

> Mohawk, says Bill.
>
> Whup! Whup!
>
> Couple of Cree over here, says Rudy.
>
> Amazing, says Bob. How can you tell?
>
> By the feathers says Bill. We got a book…
>
> Holy! Says Bill. Holy! Says Rudy. Check the book, says Bill. Just to be sure.
>
> Flip, flip, flip.
>
> Navajo!
>
> Bill and Rudy put their arms around Bob. A Navajo! Don't normally sees Navajos this far north. Don't normally see Navajos this far east (2-3).

King's dissimilar blend of birds and Indians and the comical idea of telling Indians by their feathers evoke surprise laughter. Yet the story also lures readers into pondering further into the underlying connections, an effect enhanced by the kind of conversation in which the birdwatchers frame their observations on the Indians. They tell Bob that he is lucky to

witness the spectacle: “A family from Alberta came through last week and didn’t even see an Ojibway” (ibidem 4). Further, Bob is informed that Indians are ‘nomadic’, ‘migratory’, and fly into skyscrapers because “Toronto’s in the middle of the flyway… The lights attract them” (ibidem 3). The birdwatchers policy is to bag the dead ones and tag the live ones, “take them to the shelter. Nurse them back to health. Release them in the wild” (ibidem). Haunting parallels emerge between ‘wild birds’ and ‘savage Indians’. The inference shows that native people are kept under control, reducing them to only as exotic objects of entertainment. The logicality in King’s stories is to open a reevaluation of the Eurocentric version of history. It is to banish the pain inflicted by centuries of misrepresentation and helps to envision a more self-determined native voice, a distinct future for Canada’s native people.

3.3. Historical Issues and Political Voice

Thomas King uses history as a source of evidence to expose injustices, inequality, and inferior social positions of native people. Historical accounts reflect societal experiences and provides authentic device, by which King can respond to a past. It helps to delineate the political voice of the native society. King’s debut novel, *Medicine River*, deals with the complex history of native’s struggle. The problem to acquire lawful Indian status to confirm identity within native community is expressed, using the historical issue of the terms ‘legal’, ‘registered’ and ‘status’ created by the *Indian Act*. According to the original *Indian Act (1876)*, “Indians are a permitted name given to only those registered person as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as Indian” (Frideres 11). Registered or ‘status Indians’ are allowed with certain privileges, whereas non-status Indians are denied many rights. King’s objective in *Medicine River* is to censure such anonymous laws that categorize Indians in the white man’s legal sense. The story recounts the traumatic experiences of Will Horse Capture as a

non-status Indian. Will has an absent white father identified as Bob, and is only visible through private letters to his wife. The letter notes:

> Dear Rose,
>
> …Thanks for the pictures of the boys. Good-looking boys. I didn't know I had such good-looking boys. Well, you had something to do with it, too, chick. Maybe you should send me one of our wedding pictures (5).

The actual problem starts with a white father who has left and ignored his family. The protagonist Will was about four years old, when his father left them in the Indian reserve and is unknown since then. He relates his lonely story of growing up knowing just his mother and brother James as family, apart from the occasional visit from his maternal granny, Pete, who tells them of the relations they have with Uncle Tony, Uncle Rupert and Uncle Frank. Will's contented idea of having one's relation with his uncles takes a distressing turn, on the day he actually met them. His hopeful uncles came to their place to help them move from Calgary, i.e. a native reserve place for Indians, because the Indian law says that they are not status Indians. The running action of Uncle Frank offering a cigarette, which is assumedly an adult provision, and advising Will to take charge as man of the house is a symbolic gesture that enables Will to comprehend his real identity crisis. The conversation between Will, James and Uncle Tonys' boy, Maxwell, has the following emphasis:

> "We going back to the reserve?" James asked.
>
> "Maybe," I said.
>
> "No" said Maxwell, "you can't. You guys have to live in town cause you're not Indian anymore."
>
> "Sure we are," I said. "Same as you."
>
> "Your mother married a white."
>
> "Our father's dead."

> "Doesn't matter."
>
> I could feel my face hot. "We can go to the reserve whenever we want. We can get in a car and go right out to Standoff."
>
> "Sure," said Maxwell. "You can do that. But you can't stay. It's the law" (8-9).

The narrative highlights the plight of mixed breed and miscegenation. When Will responds with an affirmative answer of going back to the reserve, he is snubbed by his own cousin Maxwell: 'you can't… you're not Indian anymore.' During this episode, the fictionist King has exposed the politicizing of native identity by the whites. He deliberately addresses one of the most dramatic changes, of native losing Indian status through intermarriage. The 'Indian Act' has a criterion, which states: "any legally Indian female who married a non-Indian male lost Indian status for herself and for her children. On the other hand, if an Indian male married a non-Indian female, the female became legally Indian, as did any offspring that may have resulted" (Frideres 11). Thus by decree, Will's Indian mother Rose Horse Capture, by marrying a non-Indian male identified only as 'Bob', has lost Indian status for herself and for her children. They became outcasts within their own inherent community. The narrative accentuates the fact, that is, Will's alienation within his circle of family and friends is a stereotype output perpetuated by outsiders. His subsequent quest for an identity in a new place, Medicine River, suggestive of the title *Medicine River*, is a symbolic Indian struggle to repossess their identity usurped by the white society with their erroneous laws. The identity of Will as an Indian photographer, especially to provide pictures for Indians who do not wish the white people to click their intimate pictures, helps Will to appreciate the larger expanse of native community. He is a contributing native member and a 'family' living in Medicine River, as Harlen remarks: "you got a lot of relatives... You think they'd go to a stranger for their photography needs when they can go to family?" (*MR* 91). Will's act of inventing a new

personality to describe his absent father in life, is an allegorical act of coming to terms with his own identity. At one point, he actually gives out his own profession as a photographer to be the profession of his absent father. He says:

> I was at least twenty-five when I told that woman on the plane that my father was a senior engineer. And there was no reason to do that. I didn't miss him. I didn't even think about him. I had never known the man.
>
> So, I began to invent him.
>
> "My father's a pilot. He flies the big jets for Air Canada.
>
> Dad's in stock and bonds.
>
> He's a career diplomat.
>
> He's a photographer.
>
> He's a doctor.
>
> He's a lawyer" (ibidem 76).

Thinking up new professions for his father every time, and his deficiency to furnish his father's profession, is an intentional negotiation by King, to reclaim the political voice of the native Indians. The final sublimation of Will's identity comes from his mother Rose, who sends him a photograph of his father as his twenty-seventh birthday gift:

> The photograph was of my father. He was leaning against a fence with four men. He had a pair of jeans, a work shirt and a hat that was pulled down over much of his face. There was a short letter from my mother with the photograph that said, "Happy Birthday. Found this picture. Third from the right. That's him."… My mother had drawn a circle around him with an arrow pointing at the side of his head…
>
> She had pinned the photograph to the shirt pocket. "That's him," the letter said, as if knowing was an important thing for me to have (ibidem 82-84).

This acknowledgement is also a mark that allegorizes Will to reconcile with his family roots. It is remarkable because Will's mother, at first, hides the father's letter in a wooden chest in her closet and prevents her children to read it. She was upset on finding Will reading his father's letters which she kept it as private and does not want Will to ever go into her chest again. She always tells stories to Will and his brother James about the times they were children, and often about their childhood, but intentionally dismisses their father to 'someone' when she comes across the father's part in her storytelling. Nevertheless, the last act of Rose sending her son the photograph of his father with arrow pointing at the side of his head, is a symbolic act of uniting absent father with his son. Knowing the father's identity was an important thing, hence, the mother fulfills the duty of providing what his missing father fails to do. It gives a desirable preparation and completion of Will's discovery of self.

Colonized and subjugated people do not write their own history, which led to the appropriation, distortion, and misrepresentation of facts about native by the dominant groups. Therefore, Thomas King, as an advocate writer for First-Nation voice, has tried to present authentic, non-stereotypical historical rights of native society. Racism, social prejudices, and falsification of natives in movies, literature and popular culture of dominant group are prominent historical clashes in the initial relationship formations between native and non-native society. Racism, that is the real and practical side of native life, emerged as a subjective theme in King's fictional works. *Medicine River* gives a practical reading on the mistreatment of native people by white society. Clyde Whiteman is a typical character. He is always in and out of jail for many wrong reasons. No matter how hard he tried, the disappointment of Indians in jail is a fact that remains in record. Hence, Will draws attention to the existing racist attitude of white government, and he pacified Clyde by giving his remarks: "Hell, Clyde, there isn't a man on the team hasn't been in jail… Floyd's been arrested… So has Elwood and Frankie. Just like you" (120). As an Indian photographer in

Medicine River, Will wishes to establish his Medicine River Photography studio with a portion of loan from government establishment. However, the incident of Will's inability to get a small-business loan processed even after meeting sixty or seventy people, also lies in the fact that most of the bank belongs to the white people and they resist helping Indians.

In *Green Grass Running Water*, racism is set in the forefront through the appearance of two intermarriages in the novel. Eli Stands Alone is a University professor. He has met a white woman Karen and has married her. However, the idea that Eli is an Indian does not exit out of Karen's fascination. She lures Eli to move into her house and gives him the name 'Mystic Warrior' to substantiate the characters she has read of Indians in Eurocentric western books. Even after living with an Indian, Eli, for two years, Karen is still ashamed and apprehensive of exposing her love in front of her progressive white parents. She is fond of the false Eli that often appears in literatures and movies, and not the Indian husband she married. On the day Eli introduces Indian cultural festival to Karen, she apathetically remarks: "The Sun Dance!" said Karen. "I didn't even know you guys still practiced that. Is it true?" (225). The ignorance of Karen towards Indian cultural rituals is visible when she proposes to borrow her father's camera and has overlooked a lone Vulture bird for an Eagle in a native town of Alberta. Her first expression on seeing the tepees and lodges, was like a movie or any of the curious white historians, when they accidentally stumble upon Indians for the first time: "My God," she said. "That's beautiful. It's like right out of a movie" (ibidem 227). After a long trip to Eli's native place, it was just casual for Karen to remember only all those tepees that attract her in a filmy way, but for Eli, it is the people he mostly remembered. Again, racism is more clearly inferred in the marriage between George Morningstar and Latisha. Though married to a Canadian woman, George could not put off the distinct label of his race, Americans, as being a superior race. Early on in their marriage, George began to look down upon Latisha as one belonging to traditionalist family and point out the essential differences

between Canadians and Americans. For him, Americans are independent but Canadians are dependent. Even the name 'Country', given to Latisha, is evocative of his stereotype ideas. Through the character of George, the author has emphasized the historical representation of 'Indians as inferior.' There is a veiled prejudice in his pointed thoughts:

> "It's all observation, Country," George continued. Empirical evidence. In sociological terms, the United States is an Independent sovereign nation and Canada is a domestic dependent nation. Put fifty Canadians in a room with one American and the American will be in charge in no time" (ibidem 172).

For George, it was a statement of fact, an unassailable truth, a matter akin to genetics or instinct. Nevertheless, the real irony lies beneath George prejudices because Latisha could recognize that the reason George wondered so much about the world, was that he did not have a clue about life. Thus, King's historical narratives are mostly therapeutic exercises in which he conveys real stories to protect native political voice, and his racial stories are directed mainly to prevent further exploitation of natives.

Green Grass Running Water is a contributory study that provides historical facts like stories, to delineate native experience in the hands of white governments. For example, the title, 'Green Grass Running Water' carries a political baggage. It expresses the disappointment of natives in dealing with white man's policies. In most treaty procedures, the government assures the native that all native land and resources will belong originally to them 'as long as the grass is green and the waters run', or the world stands. However, the truth, always, is that 'treaties' are white man's weapon to acquire native land. The significance of the title 'Green Grass Running Water' hence is a parody on the land snatching policies of the white people. King remarks:

> Treaties, after all, were not vehicles for protecting land or even sharing land. They were vehicles for acquiring land. Almost without fail, throughout the

> history of North America, every time Indians signed a treaty with whites, Indians lost land. I can't think of a single treaty whereby Native people came away with more land than when they started. Such an idea, from a non-Native point of view, would have been dangerously absurd… In fact, treaties have been so successful in separating Indians from their land that I'm surprised there isn't a national holiday to honor their good work (*The Inconvenient Indian* 224-225).

It exposes the empty promises of white governments and social discrimination committed against natives. The native mythical character 'Changing Woman' getting trapped on the island, for not obeying western Biblical 'Noah' rules, while in his Christian ship, as narrativized in *Green Grass Running Water*, is King's way of explaining the unwanted positions of natives under White man's rule. It infers:

> No point in having rules if some people don't obey them, says Noah. And he loads all the animals back in the canoe and sails away.
>
> This is a Christian ship, he shouts. I am a Christian man. This is a Christian journey. And if you can't follow our Christian rules, then you're not wanted on the voyage (163).

'…you're not wanted on the voyage' can be explored, allegorically, in terms of Indians having rights of occupancy but did not hold legal title to their land. Treaties are negotiated with natives, but the powers to execute land use are in the manipulative hands of white governments. For example, the episode of constructing a governmental dam on native land in spite of resistance from native populace of Alberta as depicted by King's *Green Grass Running Water*, is a premeditated disclosure of this political truth. The inference noted in 'Young Man Walking on Water' and the Old Woman. Credibly, 'Young Man' is the biblical Jesus Christ and 'Old Woman' is the native mythical figure. Here, King's narrative ridicules the white man's superior desires, to set all the rules. The 'Young Man Walking on Water', a reference to the *Bible*, when Christ walked on Water, is irritated with the interference of 'Old

Woman' floating in the water, a reference to native myths, when she offers him help. She wants to help 'Young Man' look for a boat filled with men, who need to be rescued, and he remarks that she is not aware of the Christian rules:

> Christian rules, says Young Man Walking on Water. And the first rule is that no one can help me. The second rule is that no one can tell me anything. Third, no one is allowed to be in two places at once. Except me (388).

Here, the rules are under the control of biblical figure 'Jesus Christ', which is metaphorical of subjugation by the white government over natives land policies. Furthermore, *Green Grass Running Water* brings to life the tragic history of the native people. It shows natives fighting for recognition and their desire to reclaim their voice. Hence, the return of native Eli to the Indian lands after leaving all privileges in the world of the European invaders, is effectuated in King's stories to give an unfailing political voice to the native community. Eli is a University professor in a white intellectual world. He comes as defender and protector of his traditional roots and he establishes himself in the comfort of his Indian community in Alberta. It explains King's way of reconstructing the Eurocentric views, and to afford historical arena to protect the natural route of Indian cultural values. The Indian resistance and blocking of the proposed spillway for the Grand Baleen Dam, illegally built by white government to serve their stake, can be symbolic in identifying native realization of their civil liberties. Eli's victory to withhold white government's unlawful progress, although with a modest help from Coyote, a trickster cultural hero, and providing a natural water flow to the native river, is representational of the power struggle that natives will eventually succeed.

In *Truth and Bright Water*, King concentrates on the historical issues of borders, colonialism, authenticity, internal racism and commercialization of native cultures. The story takes place in the small reserve in Canada, which is a border divide, 'Truth' on the American side with 'Bright Water' on the Canadian side. The term 'border' is a political and mental

divide that separates individuals from one another, and King's narrative has dealt with this conflict in native society. It engages with the artificiality of the border for North America native people, many of whom do not recognize the American-Canadian border as a legitimate divide, but as a European construction that they transcend. The novel depicts life on the Bright Water next to the small town of Truth. The narrator is a fifteen-year-old Indian boy, Tecumseh, and he relates the daily life of his relatives and other community members, all of whom are preparing for the approaching Indian Days festivals. Within the colossal story of Tecumseh, the fictionist also embeds a symbolic composition with allusions to historical heroes and the arrival of Cherokee figures from the imperial past. These symbols and allusions permit King to evoke on specific ethnic history as well as reach a wider context by interfusing several cultural traditions, colonial conflicts, and historical tragedies. For instance, Tecumseh is an imitative name of a historical Shawnee resistant leader, who helped defend Canada during the war of 1812 and attempted to establish an independent Indian nation. Rebecca Neugin is a historical character from the Cherokee Trail of Tears. She appears in the novel as the representative survivor of removals, looking for the same 'Duck' she left behind during colonial dislocation. The character, Lum, is symbolic of the historical leader Geronimo, one of the last unifying forces to stand against the aggressive colonial power. In King's story, all these historical characters are interspersed and get a new lease of life during the Indian Days festival. Furthermore, through the figure of Monroe Swimmer, the fictionist King has revealed political, religious, and aesthetic troubles that the colonial legacy has left behind for native communities. Monroe is an Indian artist and a restorer of nineteenth-century landscape paintings in museums. He is hired by Smithsonian to restore difficult painting because images of Indians keep bleeding through into the land, picturesquely featured in the painting. He painted the Indian landscapes back to its original form. However, Monroe steals Indian bones from many museums and returns home to bury them to their ancestral lands. In

the midst of all these illusions, King again integrates the issue of authenticity and commercialization of traditional cultural forms. Inside the story, the enduring colonialism has also introduced a sense of global tourism. The narrator Tecumseh's pensively states, "When Indian Days came around… the crowds of tourist were everywhere" (25). King satirically describes the native community's reinstatement of their traditional customs as a theme park, filled with popular stereotypes. The character, Lucy, says with derision, "Indian Days are the only time we make any money without having to fill in a form" (ibidem 22). Elvin, too comments on the situation: "Everybody's going crazy over traditional Indian stuff. I figure I can sell these for fifty bucks as fast as I can make them" (ibidem 32). Further, Elvin signed his name to ensure it as saleable cultural objects. He urges, "Sign (your) name" "so they know it's authentic… A lot of this stuff comes out of Japan and Taiwan, so it's hard to tell unless you got a (name) card" (ibidem 32). Authenticity relates to the restoration and recovery of the past, but has become a misappropriated product in the modern world. It expresses:

> The tourists who show up for Indian Days would get almost anything they want. Beaded belt buckles, acrylic paintings of the mountains, drawings of old-time Indians on horseback, deer-horn knives, bone chokers, T-shirts that say things like "Indian and Proud," and "Indian Affairs are the best". And all of it, according to the signs that everyone puts up, is "authentic" and "Traditional" (ibidem 209).

King has defined authenticity as a phrase that can be "slippery" and "limiting", and the same is true in the depiction of modern Indian cultures (*All My Relations* xv). In the narrative, King portrays 'Indian-ness' and the view of authenticity with the description of the modern assimilation of native identity into the Hollywood image. The characters in *Truth and Bright Water* continually compare themselves and the world through movies and popular culture. For example, Carol is scheduling a motion picture, "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*!" but

with Indians “instead of dwarfs” (21). Monroe Swimmer’s hair reminds the narrator of “Graham Greene’s hair in *Dances with Wolves*” (ibidem 45). When Lum cuts his hair, “short and uneven” and painted himself, the narrator comments how he, “looks like the Indians you see at the Saturday matinee” (ibidem 225). Lucy Rabbit carries an old magazine picture of a famous Hollywood actor, Marilyn Monroe, in her purse. She wants a “blonde hair” to look like Marilyn Monroe. Lucy has an assumption that the whites adopted Marilyn Monroe. She believes that Marilyn was “really Indian” because “She died young, of drugs. Sounds like an Indian to me” (ibidem 200). Retrieving biographical information from internet sources, Lucy has developed a full theory that Marilyn’s father also had a son, Elvis Presley: “Elvis actually played an Indian in one of his movies” (ibidem 202). Lucy also attempts to bleach her hair to resemble Marilyn, for reason the narrator explains: “Marilyn was ashamed of being Indian,’ she said. “That’s why she bleached her hair.” (ibidem 201). Although the conjecture is absurd, Lucy makes a point; she bleaches her hair, “So Marilyn can see that bleaching your hair doesn’t change a thing” (ibidem). On one hand, Lucy’s act of changing her appearance is an attempt to erase the ‘Indian-ness’ from her identity. Nonetheless as, King has pointed out, the concept of ‘Indian-ness,’ is a “nebulous term.”, and is itself a dubious stereotype and identity cannot truly be erased, a point reinforced by the fact that Lucy never succeeds in turning her hair blond (*All My Relations* xv). Thus, Lucy’s inability to turn herself into Hollywood icon, reviews mainstream stereotypes of the figure. Ultimately, replication, hyper-realty, image saturation, simulation and simulacra seem more powerful than the ‘real’ images and the entire native world becomes overtaken by the image. The narrator frequently clarifies how the world around him appears as if it is from a magazine picture. In the climax scene on the bridge, i.e. right before Lum’s incidental jump to death, the narrator remarks that, “Movies are a lot better at this. In the movies, when something goes off the top of a building or off a cliff, you get to watch it fall all the way to the bottom. In real life, the skull only falls

a few feet before it disappears between the girders, and all that's left is Lum standing there, his head down, his arms at his side" (*TBW* 257). Finally, the hyper-real Hollywood image has fabricated the native community. It is evocative as the narrator makes a poignant observation after Lum's funeral: "There are more people at the theatre than were at the funeral, but that doesn't surprise me. Dying on stage can be funny, and most people would rather laugh than cry" (ibid. 265). Hence, King's story demonstrates how the authentic as characterized in the Hollywood media representation, has overshadowed the authenticity of traditional native cultures.

In the storyline of *Truth and Bright Water*, King also has engaged the concern of internal racism. For example, the repeated abuse Franklin imposes on his son, Lum, is normally ignored, and overlooked by the community. The bodily harm and beating he endures from his violent father are not hidden, his bruises are "the color of blood, dark purple and black" (152). Lum is diligently training himself to participate in "The Indian Days long-distance champion" and the most obstructing injury Lum receives from his father is a limp, destroying his goal of competing in the annual race (ibidem 4). Lum is a victim of physical abuse. He poses as the most absurd and tragic character and his disappearance over the edge to a signified death in the river, is symbolic of the scars inflicted upon many native Indian communities owing to the issue of internalized racism.

3.4. Social Ethos and Cultural Identity

Essentially, a voice drawn from the native Blackfoot society, King's insightful novels, *Medicine River* and *Green Grass Running Water* trend an optimistic presence of native society. Social ethos in King's stories are strong. He consciously selects names in relation to the identity of the native people. In *Medicine River*, 'Calgary Restaurant' is a steady place

always filled up by the Indians. 'The American' was the Indian bar. 'Medicine River Friendship Centre' was the meeting place for Indians to gather and discuss their problems. 'Medicine River Photography' set up by Will is primarily a place meant for those Indians in the reserves. Lastly, the 'River Friendship Centre Warriors' was an all-native basketball team. Percy Walton argues that, "In *Medicine River*, a positive native presence is generated through its difference from the negative attributes that the native has been made to signify within English-Canadian discourse" (78). Another unique feature is that King's characters exhibits deep social attachment. For example, there is the episode shown in *Medicine River* where Harlen Bigbear and Will Horseshoe drive back at night from a basketball tournament in Utah and pass the Custer National Monument in Wyoming. Their decision to stop and visit the Monument is guided by social affiliation. It is in this very place that all those Indians came riding out of the hills and defeated Custer during the battle of Little Bighorn. Indians had a moment of victory over whites and Harlen says, "It's part of our history" (102). The reason for Harlen's insistence to visit the historical Monument is because he wanted to see in real and get a clear picture of him and Will standing over Custer's grave. Again, Harlen's choice to pick out only Indian place for supper is because local spots are beneficial, they got the best food, and good food that will cheer them up. By visiting Indian place called the Casper Café, he, too, wishes to get hold of the book on the Little Bighorn as knowledgable help for the proposed visit to the National Monument. Harlen is also particular in choosing places run by natives because he nurtures a belief in helping out relations whenever possible. He voices, "Got to help each other out when we can" (110). Will substantiate this habit of Harlen's as they rested by, in another Indian restaurant, he remarks, "We got a room at the Big Chief Motel. It had a neon sign that flashed Vacancy and You Like-um. Harlen chose it because he figured that, since we were near the Crow reservation, the tribe probably owned it" (ibidem). In *Green Grass Running Water*, there is, the constant interjection from the

mythical characters to, “Mind your relations” (39). It serves a social purpose in unifying natives under one common code. Norma is the classic promoter. She wishes for a secure lifestyle and throws an advisory talk as she converse with her nephew Lionel. She counsels Lionel to get a real job that will pay well and provide free trips all over the place and cites an example of success where his sister Latisha made her own luck by establishing her restaurant. She quips, “That restaurant of hers is going to make her a rich woman” (59). Norma also does not forget to point out the comfort it brought when one settles in life and in turn contributes socially, she relishes that it is, “Nice to have a real Indian restaurant in town” (ibidem). To encourage Lionel to seek for a stable job, Norma again considers Lionel to try running for council that will allow him to do good and become famous. There is a purpose as she states:

> If you ran for council, you’d be on the reserve and you could see your parents before they die…. They don’t have that many more years left. Your father just set up his lodge at the Sun Dance. Said he hoped he would see you there this year (ibidem 66).

To keep Lionel socially rooted within the native community, Norma formally brought in Eli’s way of life. Eli is Lionel’s uncle who went to Toronto, studied in white man’s University and got a merited job as Professor. He came back to his own native town as protector of native traditional society. In Norma’s words, he is now “a hero” defending the Blackfoot river which sustains the cultural life of the natives living in Alberta (ibidem 67). According to Norma, Eli at the beginning is rootless, willing to pass off as whites by wearing white shirt, slacks, and fancy shoes and married a white woman brought her out to the Sun Dance. But what actually strengthened Eli right out was his participation during Sun Dance and the inspiring moment is that he had not left the reserve even after ten years of being at home. Lionel reminds her of Eli, and she declares proudly of Eli’s efficacy: “He came home, nephew. That’s the important part. He came home.” (ibidem).

Cultural identity is another appealing premise in which King portrays native society. Various cultural and social theorists investigate cultural identity in terms of content values as guiding principle to meaningful symbols and to life-styles that individuals share with others. According to Stuart Hall, cultural identity is viewed in two different ways. The first position examines cultural identity in terms of one's communal culture reflecting typical historical experiences and shared cultural codes. Further, such cultural codes and common historical experiences provide us, as 'one people' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning. The second view relies heavily on the individuals' experience of their culture. Through this view, culture is always changing, "far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power" (Hall 393-394). Thomas King's fictional narratives are suggestive of this type of cultural identity. His debut novel *Medicine River* is a native homecoming story, similar, in trend, to native writers bringing back their native heroes at home. It recounts the story of Will Horse Capture, who returns to his hometown, only to attend his mother's funeral, however in the course of time, he finds his own cultural identity in the native community of Medicine River. Will lives as a photographer in the city of Toronto but moves back home to establish 'Medicine River Photography', which is specially a studio to serve photography needs to Indian family and relatives residing in Medicine River. Will's character precipitates a change right after the death of his mother. The town 'Medicine River' is a chosen place of Will's mother after she is forcefully dislodged from a native reserve 'Calgary' for marrying a non-Indian man. Eventually, Will occupies the same spot his mother once occupied as member, which is symbolical in underlining the continuity of native cultural tenacity. Will becomes an Indian and Medicine River is very much his own, that is the reason why his photography service belongs purely for Indians. In the course of his flashback to childhood experience with his mother, Will relates of how he is a son of an Indian mother, who is dismissed by her

family from the day she married the non-native man. Rose's marriage to Will's father alienated her from her community who disowned her of her native status. Even after her husband has abandoned her, the relatives never accepted her nor with her children. They finally settled in Medicine River, a native town, because it was a matter of cultural pride for Will's mother to be in close proximity to the native reserve. Will notes of his mother's pride in Indian cultural identity: "It wasn't so much the law as it was pride, I think, that let my mother go as far as the town and no farther" (9). He also describes an occasion, when she refuses to accept the nylons as a gift from her best friend, Erleen, saying, "friends don't need to get each other presents" (ibidem 56). Like Rose, native characters in King's stories exhibit a certain pride, just as Will, too, experiences such a pride within him. He got to witness a quarrel between Eddie Weasel and Big John. Both has a pride, and does not want to give in to the stereotype name. The trouble began when Eddie threw a knife at Big John who called him 'a pretend Indian'. After a long drawn quarrel which turned into a serious one, the two did get reconciled through Harlen's intervening philosophy that, "being related was more important than some small difference of opinion or a little name calling" (ibidem 68). The cultural pride of an Indian is visibly shown in the character, Bertha Morely. She is an independent, "thick, handsome woman with a talent for rescuing the truth from falsehoods and flights of fancy" (ibidem 168). When Bertha Morley decides to join a Calgary dating service, her Indian pride can clearly be noticed in the way she fills up her form. She filled up carefully, avoiding any mistakes, but under weight, height and date of birth, she had printed 'NOYB'. She later explains to Will that it means, "It's none of their business", for they got her picture and would be able to see what she looks like and "the rest of that stuff is just nosy" (ibidem 169-70). King skillfully notes Bertha's character to show her pride inspite of the position she is in. Though it becomes evident that she has had a troubling, and even abusive, relationship in her past, this does not stop her from expressing herself confidently:

> I'm a Blood Indian woman in good health with lots of friends who say I'm good-looking. I'm not a skinny woman, and I graduated from high school. I got a good job and I've raised four kids and have no objection to a couple more. I got my own car. I like to go fishing and hunting and I play bingo every Thursday (ibidem 170).

King's overdramatization of a scene, at its core, has so much to relate on the idealistic aspects of cultural life. It allows one to relate to the identity of Bertha, down on her luck but not desperate and damaged, perhaps not in need of any rescue.

In *Borders,* the mother reveals cultural pride in her Indian heritage. She is a member of Blackfoot tribe and when asked to declare her citizenship at the Canadian-American border, she resolutely identified herself as 'Blackfoot' and never faltered in her attitude:

> "Purpose of your visit"
>
> "Visit my Daughter"
>
> "Citizenship?"
>
> "Blackfoot" …
>
> "Canadian side or American side?"
>
> "Blackfoot side," she said (169-170).

She strongly believes that she is neither Canadian nor American and obstinately keeps replying with the same answer: "Canadian side or American side?" asked the guard. "Blackfoot side," she said (ibidem 170). The mother is proud to be a Blackfoot and she keeps coming back to the border to confirm her Blackfoot identity. The narrator hence recounts his mother's pride when he says, "Pride is a good thing to have, you know, Laetitia had a lot of pride and so did my mother. I figured that someday, I'd have it too" (ibidem 172). It means that cultural identity is a thing that distinguishes one's perception about culture in any societal coordination.

In *Green Grass Running Water*, there are two parallel stories, one mythological and magical, and the other contemporary and realistic. King's intention is to explain the popular cultural presence in a native world, hence employs a central performer, Coyote, who is a cultural trickster hero. Coyote is a link to these two plots, by which the magical characters adapt to the real world and freely intermingle with the realistic characters. In their interactions, the magical 'Four old Indians' fixes the conventional Indian's role, where white actors defeat Indian's at all times in Hollywood movies. The magical Indians on a mission to 'fix up the world' has rewritten Hollywood history by colorizing old black and white westerns. They transform the plot by allowing the Indian 'savages' to triumph over James Wayne and the United States Calvary. The revised westerns are now in favor of Portland, an Indian actor, who acts minor Indian roles in western movies. The narrative gives:

> Portland and the rest of the Indians began to shoot back, and soldiers began falling over. Sometimes two or three soldiers would drop at once… John Wayne looked down and stared stupidly at the arrow in his thigh, shaking his head in amazement and disbelief as two bullets ripped through his chest and out the back of his jacket. Richard Widmark collapsed face down in the sand, his hands clutching at an arrow buried in his throat.
>
> The cavalry came riding over the hill again, and just as they got to where the Indians were waiting in the river, they disappeared. The Indians charged out of the river and massacred John Wayne and Richard Widmark (358-367).

Western artifacts have drastically ruined the original Indian cultures. Hence, the accepted change of Indian victory over whites in westerns', can be articulated as a source of seizing dominant cultures and initiating in it, the cultural identity of natives.

King's storyline in *Truth and Bright Water* is affirmed mainly to understand cultural identity amongst native and non-native community. The action of Monroe Swimmer dumping Indian skulls into the river, and Lum racing off the river, are all symbolical contents that

explain cultural rebirth as 'water' signifies renewal of native cultural identity. Every character placed in King's *Truth and Bright Water*, hopes for a new start which will grant them fulfillment in life. For example, Helen is a self-willed character. She yearns to leave Bright Water and move to a big city and turn into an actress. But her dream of becoming an actress remains at the surface, for in reality she is professionally a native beautician and is strongly attached to her cultural roots in Bright Water Reserve. However, she has real moments of living her acting dreams, when she gets to play the Queen's role in the political satire *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, put up by a community theatre group. Cassie here, is a new mysterious character. She travels around the world, but always comes back to her cultural hometown of Bright Water Reserve, mainly to atone her secret guilt. The tattoo on her hand with the letters 'AIM' on "the knuckles pulled tight and stand out against the skin" provides a kind of obscurity that is never disclosed (56). The narrator Tecumseh guesses it as AIM- MIA, which could imply Cassie's lost or abandoned daughter, or Cassie's membership of the American Indian Movement (AIM), or else she just got the tattoo to be cool. Like Cassie, there is another mysterious character, Monroe Swimmer, a 'famous Indian artist'. King allows Monroe to take a major role in the unveiling of the theme of native cultural identity. Monroe is a specialist in restoring paintings. He buys the abandoned Methodist missionary church building and proceeds to paint it 'out of' the landscape; he paints the church into Prairie landscape, to such an extent that not even he can find its door, giving a cultural affiliation to Magic Realism that makes use of "convoluted plots or even labyrinthine narrative" (Murfin and Ray 242). There is miscellaneous use of dreams, myth and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description, arcane erudition, the element of surprise or the mysterious, and King's cultural narratives employ it, to note the presence of "surrealistic elements in native cultural identity" and its beliefs in a certain socio-cultural identification (ibidem 43). Monroe proposes, "to save the world", and he not only restored

nineteenth-century Indians landscape paintings, when he worked for museums around the world, but, has also painted Indians 'back into' the paintings and has stolen native bones collected in these museums (*TBW* 131). His idea to steal skulls from museums around the world, has a basis: "Oh," says Monroe, "I stole them from lots of museums. Toronto, New York, Paris, London, Berlin. You name the museum, I've probably been there", is intended to retrieve Indians back to their respective land or to honor cultural identity (ibidem 250). By tying red ribbon around each skull, Monroe identifies the missing Indians and executes the ceremony of traditional burial by "putting the bones in the river" (ibidem 251). This particular deed is Monroe's attempt to obliterate all colonial symbols from the community. Another feat of Monroe is his grand giveaway festival. He invites the whole town and gives away his possession, and these gifts are symbolical with unique meanings. Each gift has something to relate to the identity of the receiver. For instance, Cassie receives an 'Inuit Sculpture of a woman with a child' on her back which is symbolical of her own past, and Tecumseh receives a Piano which is symbolical of inner comfort and support. Monroe has done all these deeds during the cultural celebration of Indians, because their coming together for the great Indian Days Festivals signifies a cultural unification.

The One about Coyote Going West is a cultural trickster narrative that reaffirms the power of native voices. It defies Euro-centered cultural supremacy and ridicules western literary canon by focusing on the issue of the creation of Indians. The narrative operates on history and myth. Here, Coyote is visiting her relatives, so she could, "tell those stories. Fix this world. Straighten it up" (95).The anonymous narrator 'I' asks Coyote for a good story. Since Coyote has been reading about history of how the Indians were found by various explorers, she relates:

> Maybe I tell you the one about Eric the Lucky and the Vikings play hockey for the Old-timers, find us Indians in Newfoundland, she says. Maybe I tell you

> the one about Christopher Cartier looking for something good to eat. Find us Indians in a restaurant in Montreal. Maybe I tell you the one about Jacques Columbus come along that river, Indians waiting for him. We all wave and say, here we are, here we are (ibidem 96).

However, the narrator corrects Coyote's old book stories by recounting a native version of how the explores were lost and the Indians help them survive:

> Ho, I says. You are trying to bite my toes. Everyone knows who found us Indians. Eric the lucky and that Christopher Cartier and that Jacques Columbus come along later. Those ones get lost. Float about. Walk around. Get mixed up. Ho, ho, ho, ho, those ones cry, we are lost. So we got to find them. Help them out. Feed them. Show them around. Boy, I says. Bad mistake that one (ibidem).

Thus, the native cultural stories continue, and it participates by dismantling historical discourse and western conventional notion of culture. It also parodies colonial history about emergence of native cultural identity. Furthermore, cultural identity in Thomas King's fictional works can be studied under the following sub points:

Traditional Family Relationship

Family Relationship plays a distinguishing role in the formation of cultural identity in King's fiction. It is of great importance to respect the ancestral history, the value of family ties and the elders, as it shapes the lives of individuals in their ethnic cultural community. Evidently seen in *Green Grass Running Water* where Norma, Lionel's Aunt, emphasizes the importance of keeping in touch with roots, like attending the Sun Dance and meeting regularly with family on the reserve. There is, on the other hand, the mythical character

giving importance of one's own family relationship. They insist that there is nothing like having one's family around:

> "We got the best," said Bursum. "Lionel show your uncle the radios. I'm going to show your other relations how The Map works"...
>
> "Ah, they're not really relations," said Lionel.
>
> "Everyone's related, grandson," said the Lone Ranger.
>
> "That's right," said Bursum. "That the way things are with Indians" (330).

Primarily, King's story knits the web of identity and native cultural kinship through family and cultural lineage. The characters in *Green Grass Running Water* and *Medicine River* frequently remind each other to 'mind your relations'. This perception of 'minding your relations', connects with Paula Gunn Allen's statement of "concept-in-relation" (43). That if you 'mind your relations', you have the autonomous responsibility of thinking both for yourself and for your cultural community at the same time. The Blackfoot idea of autonomy is a sense of self which accrue only within the context of a cultural community, a "nativistic" understanding of autonomy which is an "individualized" not "individualistic" sense of self (*Borders* 314). The concepts of 'minding your relations' in King's fiction means, looking after the relationship shared between all living and non-living beings. It would offend native values to transpose or overthrow anyone or anything. So in it, Lionel, the protagonist, is identified as someone who is "more than a friend, he's family", a partaker in the native cultural kinship (*GGRW* 44). It examines the entire range of social beliefs, institutions and communicative practices, for "culture is the study of perfection" conceived through harmonious order, which is development of all sides of humanity (Arnold 11). In *Medicine River*, we find native characters repeatedly saying, "Nothing more important than the family", and that being related was more important than some small differences of opinion (26). The native idiom: "You are acting as if you have no relations", works as a kind of

moralizing agent to preserve the sanctity of one's name in societal configuration (*GGRW* 73). It is also this fear of losing face within the family, which helps maintain one's decency in a society. For instance, the protagonist in *Medicine River* often makes a list of professions to create his absent father. On one occasion, he told his co-passenger on an airplane that his father was "a senior engineer with Petro Canada", then sometimes, a Pilot, a Career Diplomat, a Photographer, a doctor, a lawyer, and so forth (75). Yet, he is fearful of being caught and does not want to embarrass himself and his relations. Again, when Will's mother married the white man, the blame is laid over the native relation, George, who has introduced the couple. Granny Pete blamed George for the marriage because he got them together: "Damn bottle Indian," she said. "Just got to show off his relations to whites. No more sense than a horseshoe" (ibidem 7). Granny Pete's blame words are symbolically a method of managing bad times within the native family.

Community and the Function of Elders

Native cultural identity comes from community. It is a factual concept for native peoples, that their tribe is an important source of identity. A culture takes its shape on ideas of humanity, where relations are vital and the symbolical bondage of being within the community, is attached to those communications with the nature and landscapes. In *Medicine River*, Harlen's symbolic reference to 'Chief Mountain' is to encourage Will to move from Toronto to Medicine River. He showed the bondage between an Indian and the landscape when he tells Will: "You could see Chief Mountain clearly, its top chiseled back at a slant, its sides rising straight off the prairie floor" (15). Ninastiko or Chief Mountain is a spiritual centre of the Blackfoot confederacy, and so, he further notes, "You see over there... Ninastiko...Chief Mountain. That is how we know where we are. When we can see the

mountain, we know we're home" (ibidem 90). Will must identify himself as part of the community, and his eventual acceptance sets off the native concept of home and the importance of cultural identity. Community 'elders' play an important role. Elders need to invite misplaced natives and initiate them into the community. Hence, the elder Lionel does his job by introducing Will into the close-knit native society: "You… were raised up in Calgary, so maybe you don't know everyone. Maybe you should greet everyone, so you know the people" (ibidem 199). Will's alienation and isolation, indeed, had been great.The absence of a father has created a sense of rejection in Will. He remembers negotiating his hatred for his father, perhaps, because of sheer want of having a father. He admits:

> I did not miss him. I did not even think about him. I had never known the man.
>
> So, I began to invent him…
>
> Sometimes I'd sit in my apartment and try to think up new professions for my father (ibidem 76).

Amusingly, his list of professions for his father ran out, and instead of discontinuing, he began to imagine long and elaborate stories that he could retell adding to those ones, as he went along. Will's thoughts of his father becomes so real that he imagines his physical appearance and starts building stories around him, thereby, creating a sense of having a complete family. It is now replaced by a very satisfying and ideal father, because most of all, Will likes to point out that his father loved his family, and that he, "was getting postcards and letters with pictures of him standing against some famous place or helping women and children take sacks of rice off the back of trucks" (ibidem 80). His imaginary father is always helping some people, thereby most of the time belonging to the side of the 'privileged'. Considering the privileged group to be the whites, once again, one cannot help feeling that Will wants to be with the privileged group. Disowned by the father and outcasted by the mother's community, left Will alienated and full of dejection. Thus, alienation followed by

isolation, became a part of Will's life. He is indifferent towards identity, and has no passion to be a member, neither with the native community nor with the non-native community. Will is almost a non-entity for the community of Medicine River, though we get some glimpses of a hidden wish. He is consciously and unconsciously, pushed back into non-existence, but the strong cultural tenacity of native community keeps Will going until, both, he and the community, accepts each other. King communicates that in a native society, it is the elders, who guide back the drifted native person. The denoted meaning is reached when Floyd's grandmother invites Will to join in the family photo. She has adopted Will, and it is a symbolic gesture of Will's final compliance to native community. The elders in King's stories are attributed with special functions; they preserve cultural knowledge and acts as harbinger of native stories to younger members of the native society. For example, Lionel James is a famous storyteller, who goes all over the world to relate stories. His stories are mostly Indians stories of how they live, their past and present, to the curious audience. He is also a respected elder of the reserve, who tries himself to cope up with the changing Modern world while, at the same time, aims to preserve the native cultural stories. Lionel James wanted to have a credit card, which would allow him to be "a modern Indian" and help him travel all over the place (ibidem 164). While in his own heart he felt unnecessary to have a credit card because he loves to stay back at home and tell stories to his grandchildren that will help them gain cultural knowledge, there is the need to travel to promote native stories. King presented a personal belief that it is the elders of the community who possess a true perception of native cultural identity.

In *Green Grass Running Water*, elders have a dual role of protecting the native community from the destruction of White man's governmental projects on native lands. They need to 'fix up the world' in order to allow the continual flow of native cultural river, which is a source of native pride and a reservoir of native cultural rituals of 'Sun Dance'. The elders

also need to ‘fix up’ fragmented personal lives. Lionel is a mediocre television salesman, he is indecisive about his goals on the eve of his fortieth birthday. Alberta lives in Calgary and works as a teacher. She does not intend to make a marriage commitment to either Lionel or Charlie. However, she wants a child and is prepared to go out and sleep with a stranger in order to get pregnant. Her reason for not desiring a father for her child is because she feels that men are not to be relied on or to be trusted. Lionel and Charlie are only in the way, always demanding and wanting. She too has cruel experiences from her childhood. Her father who was a drunkard disappeared one night, never to return. Charlie is another character who is working as a lawyer to the advantage of white people against natives. His values lie in money and prestige, as is shown by his negative and arrogant attitude towards Alberta’s work as a teacher and Lionel’s work as a television salesman. Charlie’s father is a famous western movie actor living in Hollywood, but Charlie is embarrassed to be recognized because of his resemblance to his father, or his father’s occupation which requires him to wear a fake nose in the movies to indicate his native origin. Charlie has difficulty in identifying himself with his native values and background. Hence, to solve it all to a native advantage, the ‘Four old Indians’, who are also the elders in *Green Grass Running Water* guide Lionel in his decision to attain University degree, which will also assist him to serve the native community. He obtains the position of his uncle Eli, as the protector of traditional native cultures. As for Alberta, she gets an immaculate conception. She gets impregnated through symbolic water, as the trickster ‘Coyote’ dances and sings around. With Charlie, he is finally able to connect with his father in Los Angeles, for he has no future work with white man. In *Green Grass Running Water*, the elders have trickster roles, together with their human sides and godly sides. The trickster’s earthquake shattered the spillway hydroelectric dam. Coyote’s flood and earthquake sequence, provided a natural course to the obstructed river, and the native community gets back their traditional river, where they can continue their cultural ‘Sun

Dance' rituals. Like several other trickster creator tales, the trickster characters of King's stories serve the human world with a promise of equilibrium.

In King's *Joe the Painter and the Deer Island Massacre*, though a whiteman, Joe is a supportive elder of the native community. The fictionist King is a good delineator of community lives and he gives importance to the community, right from the beginning of the story, by saying, "Joe the painter knew almost everyone in town and everyone knew Joe" (97). In this manner, Joe mingles with the crowd, representing an ideal human being. He is an honest man full of civic spirit: "He'd even stand when they played the National Anthem" (ibidem 100). Motivated by this civic spirit, Joe decides to stage a pageant in the competition that was to be a part of the centennial celebration of their town. He says, "I live here. And it's going to have a birthday, you know.... This is my town", which is a reason enough for him to stage the pageant (ibidem 102). After a lot of running about which includes, getting an approval from the Mayor, collecting historical data, writing a script, gathering a group of thirty to forty Indians, Joe finally stages the pageant in a highly appealing manner. After making his actors enact the blood-spattered event, boldly and truthfully, Joe soliloquizes about the hypocrisy of the white man, Larson. Impersonating Larson, he says: "I abhor taking of a human life, but civilization needs a strong arm to open the frontier. Farewell, Redman" (ibidem 116). Along with the Mayor, the audience is abashed by Joe's pageant. This was not what they had expected. It had mentioned something which was deemed unmentionable, indicative of Joe's usual habit. The Mayor does not definitely accept Joe's pageant. Joe does not win the coveted prize because he sees to it that the historical event presented, does not lose its truthfulness.

King conveys some major ideas through the character of Joe. Joe, the painter, is an honest white man whose white skin does not stop him from admitting the true face of community history: "You cannot muck around with history. It is not always the way we'd

like it to be but there it is. Can't change it" (ibidem 106). He is fully aware that it is a native issue and decides to present it as the same. He does not care if his pageant very openly showed the treachery of Matthew Larson and his brothers who 'encroached' on the lands of the natives living there. He also presented very clearly a scene, where the Indian Redbird invites Larson to his camp, offered him gifts of skins and got iron kettles and a *Bible*, in return, from Larson. He did not hesitate to perform the scene where Larson started claiming the land from the native instead of sharing it. Very honestly, Joe makes the narrator say in his monologue to the audience, "The white man takes more than he needs. He is greedy like a bear in the spring" (ibidem 113). Echoing a hypocritical justification of the whites, with Joe himself playing the role of Larson, he made his accomplices forcibly win the island: "spread out and let none escape. It's God's work... there'll be no peace with Redbird and his people for there can be no peace between Christians and heathens. Steel your hearts to the cries of the Indians... Who goes with me to bring the light of civilization to this dark land" (ibidem 115). With this, Joe has his actors perform an enactment of the massacre. Joe, thus, in his own way re-creates history and in the process, reminds his audience of the community tradition of dancing, wearing long hair, in particular. Another feature presented here, is the Indian community's appreciation of honesty, even if it concerned a white man. The story begins with an emphasis on the friendship between the Whiteman Joe and the Indian narrator. And it also ends with "all the people who knew Joe as well as I knew Joe didn't like him. I like Joe" (ibidem 118). The real reason for liking Joe is because Joe was an honest man. Just as Joe appreciates Indian cultural community and insists on calling the narrator 'Chief', so does the narrator appreciate Joe's honesty. He does not romanticize the slaughtered Indians. He deals with it as simply a fact, just like blowing his nose. He does not feel any pious guilt, either. He lays the actions out in the open and lets them speak for themselves. However, for these very reasons many people do not like Joe, as "most people can't manage honesty"

(ibidem 98). Thus, in King's stories, the elders are ingenuous and decent figures who function, chiefly, as upholders of all communal truths. In the process, they are not scared of any consequences as long as it protects the community they intend to defend. Joe, the elder of Deer Island, is a conscientious man, who firmly holds the belief that all humans, whether white or Indians, have the same blood and are equal, as long as they reside on Deer Island. It promotes general benevolence, and King's narrative offers an attempt to revive and retell a tradition with a hope to help the native society to identify and reconnect with their community roots. It has universal truths concerning both natives and non-natives relationship in a communal world.

Ceremonial Events and Native Festivity

Ceremonial events and native festivity connote historical events and continuity in cultures. Specifically in King's stories, he describes the Blackfoot traditions. The Blackfoot carry on many cultural traditions of the past and hope to extend their ancestor's tradition to their coming generations. One of the biggest cultural celebrations that King talks about, is the North American Indian Days lasting four days. His novel, *Truth and Bright Water*, offers an involved reading of such native festivity. It has many activities which occupy native minds and keep them away from all other interests. When it comes to Indian Days celebration, the Blackfoot community mingles together to display their vibrant strengths and cultures. For instance, Lum, the narrator's cousin, is preparing hard for a race competition which is to take place during Indian Days, and Monroe Swimmer organizes a 'giveaway' event during the Indian Days. The narrator, Tecumseh recounts that 'Indian Days' are the happiest times where you get to see all sorts of people from over the world. He remarks that, when Indian Days came around the crowds of tourists were everywhere. Tecumseh likes to see the gaiety

of tourists, especially the Germans who were “so keen on dressing up like Indians (25). He relates how ‘Indian Days’ are always great,that it is a time of building new friendship. He talks about an event of how his dog, Soldier, goes over to extend friendship to the three German guys dressed up as Indians. Tourists prefer to dress up as Indians when they arrive at the booth, because they wanted to show solidarity as they participate in Indian cultural rituals. Tourists get almost anything they want, and it is more of a cultural exchange event, where artists take part in unison:

> Other artists come in from places like Red Deer, Medicine River, Hobbema, or from across the line, Browning, Missoula, Flathead Lake. Some of them rent the booths that the band puts up just below the big tent, and some of them sell off the back of their pickup trucks. A few just spread their blankets on the grass and wait for the tourists to wander around (ibidem 209).

The activities of the Indian Days have depictions of active participation of characters:

> Fenton Bull Runner and his wife Maureen make dream catchers out of willow shoots and fishing line. Edna Baton runs a fry bread stand. Lucille Rain and her sister Teresa do bead work. Jimmy Hunt and his family sell cassettes of old-time powwow songs (ibidem 209).

Monroe’s input in the festival is more of a symbolic Kind. He relinquishes his entire wealth and presented it as gifts to the people of Bright Water Reserve. The narrator says of Monroe:

> Monroe begins passing out all the stuff, and I help him. Skee gets a really nice painting of a woman on a beach for his café. Lucy gets a poster of Marilyn Monroe, and Lucille and Teresa get one of the big rugs. Monroe gives my grandmother a Navajo rug, and he lets Sherman and Wilfred and Eddie pick out turquoise and silver rings from a carved wooden box. Wally gets one of the two suits of Japanese armor, and Gabriel Tucker gets the other (ibidem 244).

All of these gifts have something to relate to the life of the receiver and Monroe, as a mouthpiece of King's cultural stories, promotes the native norms of cooperative sharing. It identifies native cultural society, from the rest of other cultural worldview.

In *Green Grass Running Water*, King describes the 'Sun Dance' event, which lasts for eight days. The Blackfoot natives observe this festival as a time for prayers, dancing, singing, and offerings to honour the creator. They will set up "tepees and lodges" and will camp for days until the completion of all rituals (ibidem 228). King's native character, Eli Stands Alone, could trace his mother's lodge easily because it "had always been on the eastern side of the circle" (ibidem). Eli is also aware of the sanctity entailing native 'Sun Dance' rituals, and prohibits his white wife, Karen, to take cameras; he warns her that photos are strictly forbidden. A conversation is noted between Karen and her parents:

> "Did you get any pictures?" said Karen's mother.
>
> "Mom" said Karen, "they don't allow photographs."
>
> "That's probably wise," said her mother.
>
> "Sounds like one hell of a vacation," said her father (ibidem 291).

All native sacred ceremonies and festivity provide an opportunity for the Blackfoot to get together and share views and ideas with each other. King also relates these native cultural ceremonies, realistically, through the experience of Eli and his participation in the 'Sun Dance'. While Eli was growing up, his mother would close the cabin every July and move the family to the Sun Dance. They would ride horses and chase each other across the prairies, their freedom interrupted only by the ceremonies of Sun Dance. Eli liked the men's dancing best of all. He describes how the women would dance for four days and then there would be a day of rest and the men would begin. Each afternoon, towards evening, the men would dance and just before sunset, one of the dancers would pick up a rifle and lead the other men to the

edge of the camp, where the children waited. Then, there will be a communal feasting. Varieties of foodstuffs, bread, macaroni, canned soup, sardines, coffee, etc, piled around the flagpole, will be distributed and shared. The food sharing is symbolic of harmony and cultural oneness. In *Green Grass Running Water*, Latisha implicates the role of cultural sharing. She said, "I take food out for the dancers and their families every year" (395). Latisha worked her way as she distributes food with relatives and friends. She will often stay for coffee and conversation while passing along. She loved to watch people set their chairs and blankets in a circle, getting ready for the dancers. The gathering people charmed her, and it was beautiful to watch it all.

To summarize the discussion, it is inspiring to point out that Thomas King's fictional works are remarkable in promoting native voices. The multiplicity of names for native people flows out of the efforts of writers like King to crack open the monolithic experience of the native, to deconstruct white European's racist image of the 'Indian' which has dominated Western culture since Columbus' discovery. King is trying to reclaim native people's right to name themselves, to define their own voice, rights and images from within their own culture, communities and traditions. In *Truth and Bright Water*, King's reclamation of native voice is directed through the character of Monroe Swimmer; an artist who brings back native remains collected in museums around the world and had also painted Indians 'back into' the paintings to its original form. His claims of "going to save the world", echoes King's noted view that Indians will be back in their own place, though uprooted by white man's imperialism (131). In *Green Grass Running Water*, there is a modern native character, Eli Stands Alone, who uses the knowledge he gained in the 'white world' to strengthen his position as the 'anti-stereotype.' Eli stands for the connection between the traditional and the modern. He defends his modern lifestyle and intellectual career in the conversations with his offensively traditional sister, Norma: "Nothing wrong with getting away from the reserve." "We've been

here thousands of years." "Tourist talk, Norma." (318) On the other hand, Eli stands up for his Native roots whenever he talks to Clifford Sifton. He argues that being native does not prevent anyone from getting an education: "That's my profession. Being Indian is not a profession." (ibidem 155). Although Eli dies in the end, the family tradition of living in the log cabin is kept alive, as Norma begins to rebuild the cabin and announces that she is going to live in it. In *Medicine River*, King's characters pave a way for more representation of Indian in the outside world. Joe Bigbear has been to many places, showing Indian ways to people, and he laughs at Will who "shakes hands like a damn Indian" (141). There is Lionel James, an elder on the Reserve, who visited Will to ask his help in getting a credit card for his regular visits all over: "Boy hard to keep track of this world.... So I figure I better get a credit card, be a modern Indian" (ibidem 164). He exemplifies as to how a native has to blend into the modern world, while preserving their past. He says. "So, I go all over the world now, and talk about Indian ways and how my grandparents lived, and sometimes I sing a little. I used to dance too.... Most of the time I tell stories" (ibidem 162-63). Through Lionel James, a realization draws that the world is getting more and more curious about, and interested in Indian ways of life. Lionel seems to be satisfied as a native storyteller. Surely, as he shares with the world, the stories of Coyote and Raven, the mythological world of the Indian is gaining ground. He is pleased that the art of native storytelling, which had no place in the white world, is gaining due recognition. On the other hand, Lionel says that he did not wish to continue his travels for he had another very important job to do, that is, to tell his grandchildren those stories and teach them to understand those stories as their own, and not as distant fairy tales. Here, King touches a significant fact, of the arrival of a new native generation with its changing modern worldviews, of superficial views of outsiders, and the need to remind themselves of their past experience, as much as the rest of world. That there is

the need to define their experience, now, and the need for a better understanding of natives, through their voices, which is the pertinent approach.

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CHAPTER – IV

Comparative Study of Easterine Kire and Thomas King as Native Writers

4.1. Approaches in Comparative Literature

Comparative study of literature is essentially a study of similarities and in many parts of the world, the discipline of comparative literature is now defined as cultural studies indicating the broadening of its scope. It deals with the study of literature and cultural expression across linguistic, cultural and national boundaries. Susan Bassnett in her book, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* confirms emphatically that, "Comparative literature involves the study of texts across cultures, that is interdisciplinary and that is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space" (1). Furthermore, the characteristically intercultural and transnational field of comparative literature concerns itself with the relation between literature, and other spheres of human activity, including history, politics, science and philosophy.

Comparative literature transcends the borders of single languages and national literatures. It calls for "a voice of finitude, for the spell between orality and writing, for a dialogue while maintaining the individuality of cultures, for differences to keep the dialogue going and hopes what is human in one culture will be transmitted to the other" (Jones 464). Hence, it is significant to have this source of comparative approach because the present chapter, *Comparative Study of Easterine Kire and Thomas King as Native Writers* gives focal attention to comparative literature highlighting Native voices in the works of Easterine Kire and Thomas King. The objective of comparative study in Kire and King is to portray the similarities in both writers, how they use written orality to retain native language through the

use of native idioms and phrases and, how they exhibit social, historical, political and cultural backgrounds to provide authentic voices of native society. The study intends to describe the constant interplay of similarity and difference that gives meaning to lived experience, and a lived experience that is shaped by multiple historical, traditional and contemporary frameworks which is being explored in myriad ways in native writings. Based on the given findings in the separate two chapters on Easterine Kire and Thomas King, a comparative analysis will now be made under the following captions:

4.2. Orality and the Significance of Storytelling

Orality is a carefully crafted oral presentation. It continues to play its part and is neither old nor obsolete. Oral tales belong to the modern society, figuratively presenting societal values. It deals with known and shared myths and is learnt, inherited and renewed by each generation of performers and each individual performer. Natives make use of this oral mode liberally as a significant literary device to establish discourses that are more authentic and more appropriate to the cultural backgrounds. Native critics and writers are of the view that writing could not exist without orality because of the undeniable movement from oral to written speech. According to the expertist linguist, Walter J Ong, “our understanding of the differences between orality and literacy developed only in the electronic age”, and adds that the relations of orality and literacy and the implications of the relations is not a matter of instant psychohistory or instant phenomenology (2). It calls for a wide, even vast learning, painstaking thought and careful statement. Not only are the issues deep and complex, but they also “engage our biases” (ibidem). Native subject writers, Easterine Kire and Thomas King, are partakers of this oral genre. Both authors, by and large, composed simple language narratives and short sentence structure which imitate ordinary conversations and are

frequently repetitive in their fictional oral tales. For instance, Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered* is a collective narration of a cultural village, Khonoma, an Angami village of warriors who fought the British from the moment of their entry till 1880. King's *Medicine River* is a simple homecoming novel with a flat narrative line depicting ordinary Blackfoot community rather than individuals and it focuses on activities of everyday life instead of a heroic story. King defines this form of narrative by the term 'interfusional literature', a kind of text that demonstrates "the relationship between oral and written literature" (*All My Relations* xii). Another newly developed term by Thomas King is 'associational literature', which refers to the body of literature created by contemporary native writers who share certain features, i.e., the depiction of "the relationship between native people and the idea of community" (ibidem).

Orality is accepted as storytelling and in native literatures, most writers employ features that combine written and oral art. This means native writers like Kire and King consciously manipulate, both, oral and written traditions to frame the literary space, challenging the reader to proceed beyond the confines of the printed page. Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered* has multiple oral approaches in narrating her tale. She goes on with a typical Native voice of an intriguing storyteller:

> I could write my story in three different ways.
> Like this:
> This is the story of our village. Before the white man came, there were wars, my daughter, but these were wars fought with spears and daos. Our men were brave and fearless and they did not like to sit at home, crouched over like old women, but they hungered to prove that they were men…
>
> Or like this:

> When I was younger, I heard them tell this tale of a man who climbed up a tree but left his spirit behind him. So then he came home but his spirit did not follow him home And he ailed. So the village people went to the forest…
>
> .
>
> But I suppose the heart must yield to the head and so.
>
> "Tonight's the meeting," hissed the messenger to Kovi as he stood in his compound close by the gate. "The upper thehou after supper" added the man in a conspiratorial whisper before he went off on his errand of informing the rest of his clansmen about the meeting… (xvi -1).

In doing so, Kire encourages the readers to reconsider the traditional conflict of orality and literacy as mutually exclusive terms of both textual and cultural signification. In King's *Green Grass Running Water*, the shift starts with a mythical figure 'Coyote', one which is based on oral indigenous storytelling. It has multi-layered narrations but the primal story belongs to the traditional trickster figure. Coyote was present at the creation time, but was sleeping, and he had a dream. When Coyote dreams, anything can happen, his dream mixed up the whole thing. The narrative "I can tell you that" draws the audience mindset into an orally based thought process (1). Coyote calls his dream to be a 'dog' but his 'Dog Dreams' wants to be a 'big god':

> Where did all that water come from? Shouts that GOD.
>
> "Take it easy," says Coyote. "Sit down. Relax. Watch some television."
>
> But there is water everywhere, says that GOD.
>
> "Hmmmm," says Coyote. "So there is."
>
> "That's true," I says. "And here's how it happened." (ibidem 3)

King's narration do not only emulate orality but has also initiated the involvement of the audience and make them part of the mythical story. It can be understood that the application

of oral structure enables King to perform a postcolonial act of working against stereotypical assumptions and, instead, to establish a form of discourse that is more authentic and more relevant to their own cultural tradition. As Helen Gilbert in her article, *Describing Orality: Performance and Recuperation of Voice* argues, "orality is practice and a knowledge, a strategic device potentially present in recuperating indigenous voices, potentially effective in describing empire" (101). Kire and King's narrative largely contains oral dialogues, which facilitate storytellers and readers to take part in oral storytelling performances. In Kire, the emphasis is highlighted in Keviselie's title taking ceremony. The priests walked out of the first room, paused at the door, and fixed his eyes on Viselie's house. In a low voice he called, "Keviselie" Viselie was ready and he responded "we-e" in a low voice, the priest called again "Keviselie" in a louder voice getting the same response from the head of the house, "We-e" (*ANVR* 21). In King, the performances and demonstrations are created through an oral syntax which encourages readers to read the stories aloud or to have an aural reading, as the following quote in *Medicine River* and *Green Grass Running Water* illustrates:

> "Johnnnnnnnnnnieeeeeee!"
>
> "Geooooooooooorggeeeee!"
>
> "Frrrrrrrrrrrred!" (*MR* 200).

> "oh, oh,"... "hey, hey," says Coyote. "That's not what I thought was going to happen. Hey, hey, hey. What are those two doing?"
>
> "Swimming," I says.
>
> "Oh . . ." says Coyote (*GGRW* 248-249).

> "Look, Look," says Coyote. "It's Old Coyote."

"Hmmmm," I says. "So it is."

"Hmmmm," says Coyote. "I don't like the sound of that" (ibidem 300).

Such immediacy in Kire and King's oral retelling exemplify that Native literature suggests performative storytelling, the "oral lightly assumed in the written" (Lee 462).

Orality is fully natural, in the sense, that every human being in every culture who is not physiologically or psychologically impaired, learns to talk. An African novelist, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, rightly claims that: "Language carries culture and culture carries particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (16). Hence, native literature is "blending together the individual and the communal, the commonplace and the spiritual" which reflects a circular rather than a linear way of thinking (Eigenbrod 98). The statement validates Kire and King's narrative. Their Plots as well as the character developments of the protagonists are cyclic rather than linear. Kire's novels *A Naga Village Remembered*, *A Terrible Matriarchy*, *Bitter Wormwood*, and *When the River Sleeps* are typical examples of such narratives as the central focus lies on community activities. The individual character though present in Kire, act and are active only as a participant within the sway of the traditional community. The first novel, *A Naga Village Remembered* voices the indefeasible spirits of a pre-Christian world of rituals, taboos and festivals and the cultural life that sustained the village in spite of European Christian intrusion in later years. *A Terrible Matriarchy* echoes the socio-cultural fabric of community and the concentrated matriarchal domination in traditional society. *Bitter Wormwood* is a collective voice of native communal fight for autonomy, sovereignty and survival. *When the River Sleeps* has abundant supernatural and figurative elements. Kire has adapted cultural analogies, symbols and metaphors from native oral literatures to fit into the cyclic story and so, the narrative in *When the River Sleeps* starts with a mystical dream of the

protagonist, Vilie. Ever since he had first heard the story of the sleeping river, he had the same dream every month for the past two years. Ate explains:

> Vilie kept dreaming repeatedly that he was at the sleeping river plucking the stone from the river water. He felt sure he was designed to get the stone, and that is why he went on the journey and he did find the river and the heart stone. The wisdom of the stone is more spiritual than physical. It helps us discover the spiritual identity that is within us, so we can use it to combat the dark forces that are always trying to control and suppress us (238).

Kire's orality is understood more broadly as a form of knowledge production encompassing community practices and process of meaning making. It insists on a close link between the corporeal aspects of life and survival. Comparatively, the novel of King's *Green Grass Running Water* is structured heavily on some important tribal features, orality and is cyclical. The story has a dualism that is present throughout, starting with Coyote and Dog. In *Green Grass Running Water*, Coyote is the trickster of Native American tradition, whereas Dog thinks that he is "God" but is merely a dream of Coyote's (2). King's use of a broken and discontinuous narrative creates a sense of movement and the effects of oral storytelling. The rapid interpolation of different storyline does succeed in keeping the reader's attention. *Green Grass Running Water* has four different strands. Each story being only obliquely related, as told by four timeless American Indian women or gods. In each of these retellings, the four originally starts with a mythical figure from Native American oral tradition. They then encounter Dog posing as 'God' and take names after Biblical characters: First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman and Old Woman. They also come across a Western literary figure and each takes new names: Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, and Hawkeye respectively. Interestingly, all these characters and storylines converge in two climatic events at the end of the story, a Sun Dance Ceremony and the bursting of Grand Baleen Dam, giving unity to the matrix of native oral discourse.

Storytelling is particularly significant among native community because it contains history usually of a communal event and it illustrates the sense of collectivity and shared property. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, Kire does not only insert stories from everyday life, but mainly of stories which have been passed on from generation to generation and, hence, carry cultural specific meaning. For instance, the elder tells a story about Khriesenu and his ladylove by way of warning to those who dare to disregard a genna. Khriesenu took her to the forest on a genna day. She accidently broke her leg and died. This story is clearly an example of the use of stories for didactic purposes. In another novel, *When the River Sleeps*, Kire introduces stories from her tribal background. However, she changes them to make them fit into modern society. For example, she includes the story about the sleeping river, a lone hunter, Vilie, who sets out to find the river and wrest from its sleeping waters a stone that will give him whatever it is empowered to grant. It could be cattle, women, prowess in war, or success in the hunt, "the retrieved stone is a powerful charm called a heart-stone" (3). Likewise, Lionel, a character in King's *Medicine River* transforms a story about Coyote to fit a contemporary context. He recounts how Coyote went over to the west coast to get some fire because he was cold. Coyote ran along until his feet hurts, and pretty soon he was in the trees and the prairies were behind when he felt sleepy and decided to lie down for a while. Raven saw Coyote, she flew down, and sat on a limb near where Coyote was trying to go to sleep, and she said, "You can't sleep here unless you got a credit card" (165). King also inserts episodes of the protagonist Will's childhood experience, recounted by his mother when she would get in a storytelling mood. Most of the stories were about when he was a little child. Each time she tells her stories: "they got larger and better" (ibidem 124). King, here, uses stories to reflect on the past and, at the same time, to compare it with events happening in the present which constitute a comment on the relatedness of story and history. By inclusion of such stories, the fictionists point out that there is "no distinction

between past and present, history and story" (Eigenbrod 93). According to a native belief system, history is only a story. It is often stated that a native perceives tradition to be flexible and adaptable. Nevertheless, traditions are modified according to the changing circumstances in society, which is essential for survival as a cultural group. According to Gail Valaskakis, reviving cultural traditions is "not a case of retrieving recollections; it is a process of transforming memory" (245). This interest in "relearning and rediscovering" is a necessary step in the struggle to regain the historical consciousness that is vital for establishing ethnic identity (Karrer and Lutz 34). In King's *Medicine River*, Harlen Bigbear's storytelling and relentless gossiping have the role of taking care of the members of the community. Right from the introduction of Harlen's character, King has attributed him as having a "strong sense of survival, not just for himself but for other people as well" (2). Like the spider, he repairs the web of community wherever it is damaged because of his constant awareness that, "People are fragile" (ibidem 29). He takes great care with how he talks to people, and he move towards truth with careful consideration. He always circles slowly around his point because he is "temperate in his insistence on the whole truth all at once" (ibidem 168). Harlen explains that, "the truth's like a green-broke horse," and developing the simile, advises caution because the truth can harm and hurt others, "you never know which way it's going to run or who it's going to kick" (ibidem). While he is cautious about how he says things, Harlen is also open. Will finds him to be, "more concerned with the free flow of information than with something as greedy as personal privacy" (ibidem 173). Harlen's storytelling involves multi-layered meanings. He establishes with his listeners, including Will, the kind of interaction that the orally influenced narrative establishes with the reader. Reminiscent of the character of Harlen Bigbear in King's *Medicine River*, Kire in *A Naga Village Remembered*, has also cast her character Levi in a colossal mould. He is a strong member of the village community, a householder with children after his name and has communal responsibility. He

symbolizes the courage with which a man could meet the arrows of misfortune and still contribute to the life of the village. As the membership of Christian converts grew in numbers and the little band continued to be the subject of sharp ridicule and persecution by the mother village. Kovi was one man who pondered deeply over the teachings of the new religion. He saw there was goodness in it. However, considering the influential cultural weightage of his community, he did not feel it was appropriate for a man like him, an elder and a titled member of the village to embrace the new religion. But he often watched the ostracism of the converts and wondered how things could have so changed in his lifetime. Kire and King's short stories are, once more, comparable in their cultural retelling. In Kire's *Once in a Faraway Dorg*, the dorgels led a happy life, singing and making new songs to sing. They ate the round fruits on the trees with blue and red flowers. They could also eat round eggs laid by white birds that came to the planet once every week for the sole purpose of laying egg food for the dorgels. Things were going very well and King Dorgot reminiscent of origin stories, spent his time thinking of new animals to create that would give joy to people. King's *Coyote New Suit* is another entertaining story set at the beginning of time when animals and human beings are still said to converse with each other. Thomas King has drawn ideas on native own cultural tradition that is popularly based on oral storytelling regarding their myths, legends and tales. Inspired by the rich folklore of native cultures, King's myth is a wise fable and entertaining look at the consequences of wanting more than needed. Coyote who becomes obsessive in stealing other suits because Raven had told him that his, "tan isn't a very exciting color" (3). The story began in the form of cultural oral narratives:

> A long time ago when animals and human beings still talked to each other, Coyote had a wonderful suit that he wore everywhere he went.
>
> Each morning Coyote would walk down to the pond. "Look at my suit," Coyote told everyone he saw, stopping only to hug himself and blow kisses at

> his reflection in the water. “Isn’t it the finest suit you’ve ever seen? I must be the best-dressed creature in the entire world”.
>
> One day when Coyote got to the pond, he found Raven sitting on a branch.
>
> “Good morning,” he said. “What are you doing here?”
>
> “Oh, I thought I’d come by to see if anyone needed my help,” said Raven.
>
> “As a matter of fact,” said Coyote, “you could be very helpful. What do you think of my suit? Isn’t it the most excellent suit you’ve ever seen?”
>
> Raven flapped her wings and stretched her neck. It’s okay, I guess,” she said.
>
> “Okay?” said Coyote. “It is certainly more than okay.”
>
> “Actually,” said Raven, “it’s pretty ordinary. And tan isn’t a very exciting color” (ibidem 1-2).

The cultural story thus continues with Coyote noticing suits wherever he looks, Bear’s is certainly impressive, Porcupine’s is sporty, Raccoon’s is positively chic and Skunk’s is perfect for formal occasions. Then Coyote had an idea. It was not a good idea but then most of the Coyote’s ideas were not, “Perhaps,” thought Coyote, “I should borrow this suit for a while” (ibidem 4). Soon, the forest is in an uproar. When the situation threatens to get completely out of hand, only Raven is made to set things right giving its pride to cultural attachment. Stories deeply capture attention and help to reflect back upon one’s reactions and actions. As a form, it is no wonder that narrative is the primary means for passing knowledge within tribal traditions, for it suits the fluidity and interpretative nature of ancestral ways of knowing. The addition of storytelling such as these is, seen as a trait of native literature because native writers have a broader and more inclusive conception of literature, which stems from a long-lasting oral heritage. They aim at an inclusion of the readers, who need to listen and respond to the texts in order to contribute to a communal storytelling experience, or to respond to an orality that understands native voice and its wider cultural worldview.

4.3. Evocative Writers of Cultural Tradition, Community and Land

Cultural tradition is the inherited or learned portion of human behavior. In other words, culture is a concept that lies at the core of all human understanding, inherited and nurtured. Cultural formations are determined as much as by socio-economic factors, political systems, as they are by the inherited tradition of creativity in each society. Frantz Fanon observes that: "National culture can discover the people's true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself its existence" (69). Kire and King are both evocative writers of this cultural tradition and their fictional works carry an interesting voices on the cultural life of the native folks. Comparably, Kire perceptively writes about place and people that she knows well and brings to the cultural storytelling a lyrical beauty that inhabits the hills and valleys of Nagaland. Kire's popular novels *A Naga Village Remembered*, *Mari*, *Bitter Wormwood,* and *When the River Sleeps*, all have rural settings and each has an account that depicts the everyday life of common natives. *A Naga Village Remembered* is a typical example. It takes us into the interior of the house of the protagonist, Kovi, enjoying his morning meal in a wide wooden plate with "separate spaces carved for meat and tathu. Its wooden legs were convenient, one could carry hot food about and not burn one's fingers by using this facility" (2). And within this focus, the cultural tradition of the village community is unveiled. There is the ritual of child birth, and claiming the newborn before the spirits, the ritual of death, reminiscent of hunts, battles and ornaments of war, the rituals of initiation and learning the basic necessity of life. There are various activities like fieldwork, firewood dragging or cutting logs for new houses, and basket weaving that give a peep into the cultural life as well. The whole idea of this form of existence can be amassed through the careful dictates of Piano to her sons:

> There'll be enough time later for bird shooting after the field is done. Son, when our granaries are filled you may feel free to trap or shoot all the birds you want but remember, a household is not worthy of its name if its granaries are empty. The sun and the rain are the Creator's blessings. They rain and shine in turn for us to make our fields and get our harvests. War is a part of village's life but if we have grain, we can withstand war. If we do not have grain, a few days of war will overcome us (ibidem 10).

The need to trace the life pattern of the ancestors becomes necessary to understand fully the traditional culture of the natives and it is amazing that Kire as an attentive writer has given encompassing presentation to this intricacy of cultural output. Likewise in King's novels, *Medicine River* and *Green Grass Running Water*, the cultural traditions of native community are exhibited in the forefront. For example, *Medicine River* begins with a description of the landscape or cultural town of Medicine River: "Medicine River sat on the broad back of the prairies. It was an unpretentious community of buildings banked low against the weather that slid off the eastern face of the Rockies" (1). Such an emphasis is, directed to communicate a strong cultural attachment of natives to nature and to their natural environment. The story offers an understanding of one's individuality in relationship to the ecology of the place and the community. Native concept of nature is that of a holistic one, being close to nature give natives the feeling that they are at home. *Medicine River* encourages sensitivity towards cultural make-up. The presence of Native American cultural hero or trickster figure, 'either good or bad', confirms King's tryst in the understanding of cultural worldviews of the natives. He has introduced Harlen Bigbear, a modern figure, to display the typical cultural ambivalence of a trickster. It is said of him that, "nothing happened on the reserve or in town that Harlen didn't know about" (ibidem 26). Harlen highlights the importance of getting back to the roots, and family. His dictum, "Nothing more important than the family", serves as a didactic feature in defining the nature of native cultural structuring, tribal history and cultural existence (ibidem). There is the presence of non-native characters in King's writing, unlike

Kire, who has only native persons as her main characters. But what is similar with both writers, is of how culture is basically shared through family lineage and relationships that extends even to all animate and inanimate forms. King's introduction to *All My Relations* elucidates this point:

> 'All my relations' is at first a reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and relatives. It also reminds us of the extended relationship we share with all human beings. But the relationship that Native people see go further, the web of kinship extending to the animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined. More than that, 'all my relations' is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have within this universal family by living our lives in harmonious and moral manners (a common admonishment is to say of someone that they act as if they have no relations) (ix-xvi).

Such declaration by King generates an idea that natives are, by nature, a cooperative communal society. Community is a central factor that moves cultural tradition forward. Among natives, the relationship between community and land is closely and synonymously tied to each other. The reference to one invokes the reference to the other as well. Land is an inextricable part of native identity, deeply rooted in moral and spiritual values. Hence, in King's *Medicine River*, the native community and the land influence the protagonist, Will Horse Capture, in a way that he can finally accept his identity. He gets a better picture of the community through fragmented photographs of his childhood and the accounts of his native friends. He eventually feels closer to people around him. Will realizes that there is nothing more important than the family. Here, the family may not mean the sharing of direct blood ties but it rationally means the ties within community. Will is, accordingly, portrayed as "always helping someone, takes pictures of all the weddings" (159). Harlen is one, "who sees the good in everyone and is always trying to help" (ibidem 25). Lionel James as one storyteller who travels all over and "knows everyone" (ibidem 161). The centrality of the

story lies on community rather than individual welfare. *Medicine River* describes a close-knit community in which people are familiar with each other's intimate family lineage:

> Big John Yellow Rabbit was Evelyn Firstrunner's blood nephew. Her father had married Rachel Weaselhead, which made Harley Weaselhead, Big John's great grandfather on his grandmother's side, which meant that Eddie Weaswlhead, whose grandfather was Rachel's brother, was blood kin to Big John (ibidem 50).

There is, again, the Native Friendship Centre Warriors and its basketball team, which builds up the intimacy of the native community. The native Friendship Centre is a communal meeting place where all activities like dances, bingo games, weddings and funerals take place. Harlen, the driving force of this community web talks about the significance of the basketball team and, indirectly, about the native community as follows: "The team gives the boys something to belong to, something they can be proud of (ibidem 22). By supporting the team and by taking part in several competitions, Will becomes a member of a group in which he plays a vital role as a father figure for some of the boys.

As pointed out earlier, the strong attachment of the people to the native land is exemplified by their connection to the Chief Mountain of how when they can see the mountain, they know they are home. Will lived in Toronto for the major phase of his adult life, but the place does not bond him as Medicine River does. The identification of Will within the cultural community comes symbolically at Christmas time, when Will has established a close relationship with Louise and his friends. There is a mood of happiness as Will walks outdoor and enjoys nature: "the day had started out overcast, but standing at the kitchen window, I could see that the winter sun was out now and lying low on Medicine River. Later that afternoon, I went for a long walk in the snow" (ibidem 249). These lines represent the new connection Will has established with his friends, family and with natural

world around him, anchoring himself as an individual within the cultural community and the natural land giving him a feeling of comfort and belongingness. As Mackie writes, "Will eventually finds his vocation in life and in the process finds the sustenance and enrichment that he needs in the community of Medicine River, in the shadow of Ninastiko" (65-71).

In Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered*, Levi strongly identifies himself with the community and the land. He is a pillar of community, a titled member who had earned a name and ornaments of war at the battle of Khonoma. Kire attributes him with a power that is muscular and ranked him as one of the bravest warriors of the Merhu clan who fought the mighty British colonial power. Kire explains the significance of village land through the perceptive emotions of Levi. When, finally, Levi returns after six long years from Jail, he felt good to be back in the village, to be among his people. He saw his village with new eyes, a bonding so deep that he muse the ancestral land to be his 'mistress'. What is noteworthy is the fact that for natives, land does not only mean possessions but also connotes a spiritual and cultural site. Levi reflects: "That was what this village did to her men; she bonded them to her so strongly that they were always striving to prove themselves men enough for her. Perhaps, that was the explanation for the thirst that drove them out onto the battlefield soul-thirsty for the danger, and the thrill of coming so close to death" (40). Levi was touched by the way imprisonment had affected the village. He could not get over the transformation of his carefree young companions into households getting ready for the next phase of their lives, shouldering the burdens of the clan as 'tsudamia'. He took in everything that he saw and heard willingly, if this process was to be part of life, then, he was more than happy to absorb it and start all over again.

Reverence for land is so deeply ingrained that natives regard nature with utmost respect. The native community maintains 'Land' as 'Mother' and calls it "Mother Earth", and trace their origin back to it and claim harmonic belongingness with the land (Imsong 199). In

King's *Medicine River*, Harlen also says; "You are standing on Mother Earth" (15). As such in *When the River Sleeps*, as earlier shown Kire gives more symbolic attribute to the 'village' as a place where one buries a mother. The term 'Village' and 'land' has same connotation. It is thus, applied interchangeably in Kire's fiction. Land is not only the source of sustenance for them, but also at the heart of their existential consciousness. Therefore, the puritan sensation of one's attachment to the village is drawn once more through the explanations of Subale:

> She explained that more and more of the young people were moving away to the towns like Dimapur or Peren. They found it too difficult to live as their parents did walking back and forth. The village had approached the government to construct a road, but the politicians told them the government did not have the money to make a road to the village.
>
> "This is our home, do you understand? We cannot abandon and try to live in another place. Our umbilical cords are buried here, and we would always be restless if we tried to settle elsewhere" (87-88).

Kire's protagonist, Vilie, is a seasoned forest dweller who had made forest as his home for twenty-five years as though wedded to it. The portrayal of Vilie as guardian of the gwi and official protector of the rare Tragopan is a stirring insight that captures a native's close association with nature. The forest is seen as a protective haven that provided Vilie with almost all necessities and often content, he utters, "The forest is my wife", and he felt truly wedded to her (ibidem 9).

Kire is very conscious in her tribal understanding of land as sacred. She attributes the same awareness in Vilie as he deliberates on a child's prospect of education: "What could school possibly teach him that his parents could not improve upon? They were rich in their knowledge of the ways of the forest, the herbs one could use for food, the animals and birds one could trap and the bitter herbs to counteract the sting of a poisonous snake" (ibidem 15).

In the novel, Kire portrays the close relation of the land and the people to show the communion between the two. Native communities view traditional land as the "heartland of their culture", supporting a distinct way of life, traditions and people (Ross and Smith 2). They wish to gain and exercise control over forest in such a way that the growth of the forest resources conforms to their own values and knowledge systems and is not economically but also ecologically and culturally sustainable. In Kire's hand, the very glimpse of Nettle forest that grew very high, some as tall as trees in the heart of the forest, or the unclean Rainforest dark and dank attracts our attention with a touch of realism. The Rainforest is mysterious and people diligently shun coming near the forest. Those who accidentally wandered into the '*Rarhuria'* get unexpected fever and label the Rainforest as 'unclean area' in village terminology. However, for Vilie this scary '*Rarhuria'* becomes his guardian as he runs for safety when chased by assassin. For Vilie this forest was a boon, it provided him with the safest sanctuary when he most needed it and offered him food when his rations were inadequate. The forest also protected him from the evil in the heart of man. Vilie felt the forest was "his wife indeed" (*WRS* 51). One has to be careful of the ways of the forest, as a character, Krishna, tells Vilie: "Saab, the forest is dangerous to those who do not know it, but it can be kind to those who befriend it" (ibidem 20). This communication also acts like a kind of counsel to a non-native or an outsider who is unaware of native traditional culture because native people affirmed their cultural, social, political, and religious voice based on their concept of land. Consequently, their labour is not one of plunder and exploitation, forcing the land to be productive, but to work with care and partake of what she provides. The traditional people's abstention from work itself is a symbolic sign of their cooperation with the creative activity of land. The observations of genna (no work days) in the traditional culture of the native community as reflected in Kire's novels, show the intensity of the natives attachment to the land. 'Genna' is a respectful ritual observed to propitiate Kepenuopfu (Creator) first

and, then, the spirits who could cause ill to come upon man, animals, grains, if this propitiation is not offered. In *Bitter Wormwood,* Khrienuo and Vilau, carried cooked food and went late to the field on a fire-genna day. Though both are convert Christians, they still obey the dictate of genna days of the non-Christians. The modern native societies continue to be Christians without totally shaking off their rich cultural heritage inherited from their non-Christian ancestors.

King's *Green Grass Running Water* represents 'Land' as the base of all unity. It tells a creation story, the beginning of time, when all creatures, humankind and animals, are symbiotically connected. For example, Coyote, the trickster God, and the Four Mythical Indians in King's novel freely interact with the real characters. The mythical figures' repeated mention of "fixing up the world" and participation in the affairs of the Blackfoot citizens in Alberta is a kind of cultural contest that explains the native and non-native people's attitude towards land (428). Land treaties regarding, "as long as the grass is green and the water runs" is a sort of agreement that would only be considered legal for a limited period and then jettisoned (ibidem 296). In other words, treaties were signed when it was in the interest of the colonial powers, and once those interests were met, there was no incentive to meet the conditions of the treaties. But whatever the matter, King says: "as long as there are Indians, there will be a plethora of 'Indian things' 'Indian land' 'Indian rights' 'Indian resources' and 'Indian claims'" (*The Truth about Stories* 129-130). Hence, the struggles by native communities for obtaining their land rights goes down in history as one of the systematically fought battles for native land rights. This struggle stems from the fact that native people consider that their land ownership comes from "having lived upon and used the land when the world was new" (Indira 70-71). King's technique of using humorous derision in his novels is also a kind of remedy to correct exoticisation and stereotyping of Indians or First Nations of Canada. The western figures cannot accept native autonomy and seek to reclassify

the Old Indians according to their own ideologies. For instance, in Hawkeye stories, when Old Woman encounters Young Man walking on Water, he tries to cast her as a witness to one of his miracles. He fails to perform the miracle and she has to do it for him. In another story, Thought Woman meets A.A Gabriel, Heavenly Host, whose business card sings a parodic version of the national anthem: "Hosanna da, our home on Natives land" (*GGRW* 299). Gabriel asks Thought Woman, whom he addresses as Mary, to sign a 'Virgin Verification Form'. Gabriel's insistence that she sign the paper points to the inextricable interconnection in the history of land. In *Green Grass Running Water*, Eli Stands Alone begins to understand the possibilities of resistance to racist stereotyping and injustices against native. He returns to the reservation land, moves into his family home, and obtains an injunction to prevent it from being demolished to allow a newly built dam to go into operation, which, in turn, would allow lakefront developments on native land. He opposes the building of modern dam on native land because this natural course of waterway is important to Blackfoot tradition. Eventually, the water is restored to its natural course due to the involvement of Coyote. Clifford Sifton dam bursts, because an earthquake throws three cars into it. The cars are controlled by Coyote, who also causes the earthquake which destroys them, thus enacting a seizure of power from the colonists. Coyote's power and that of the native goddesses, viz, First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman and Old Woman, far outstrips that of the Christian God, who features in the interspersed creation story but has no influence outside them. 'Coyote' is a comic liberator in a narrative. It is the spirit of the trickster creator that keeps Indians alive and vital. In King, it is used to find a balance between cultural traditions by exposing the truth and falsity in all of them. The multiple story of *Green Grass Running Water* is, accordingly, aimed to engage readers in mutual decolonization and "seeks to challenge their potentially stereotyped and undifferentiated understandings of native cultural tradition" (Hammill 56).

4.4. Political and Socio-Religious Concerns

The idea that literature is an expression of society in large measure, is undeniably true of native literature because a native author writes with an aim to represent a particular social reality. Easterine Kire and Thomas King are two examples of such native writers who expediently bring out the social documents of natives for the rest of the world to see. For Kire, it would mean honest depiction of social truth. Not her "version of the truth but an objective truth" even if it paints an "unattractive picture of the conflict and of the people who became its prisoners" ("Kire in Network News." www.icorn.org). As such, with King it implies the honest portrayal of day-to-day life of native society in a predominantly white culture. His works act as a normalizing corrective to the image of native society.

To understand the expanse of native society, it is also important to include their religion because religion captures and dominates the structure of society. Knowledge of a society can be obtained through its religion as it controls both conscious and unconscious activities of man. In traditional society, religion necessarily has a social dimension and it contains prescriptions for man's social behavior. For instance, Kire's native person belongs to agricultural society, and they believed that the sun and rain are the creator's blessings for good harvests because He is pleased. The chief livelihood of the native in Kire's society is farming and thus they always try to please *Ukepenuopfu* (the creator deity) for abundant harvest. Besides sacrifices and prayers, one must have good conduct towards his fellow human beings, creatures, objects and things in nature to please the creator deity. Such teaching of native Elders in Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered* has this ethical value attached to it when one hears the admonishing voice that the key to right living is to avoid excess in anything. To be content with one's share of land and fields and that to move boundary stones bring tragic consequences, never to be arrogant but respect oneself

sufficiently and fulfill the responsibilities of manhood. The natives also believe in the existence of a super power in nature, hence they appease many localized spirits both benevolent and malevolent. For instance, on the decline of the full moon, *Terhase,* a ritual of making peace with the spirits is held. The genna days consist of seven days against the field's failure to bear grain and failure to ripen. Elders make a kind of petition or of obtaining a pact with the spirit for goodwill. Instances, have been pointed out where elder offers chicken sacrifice to appease the spirits, like when Siezo suffers a spirit-induced sickness. As the native customs and cultures are directly or indirectly connected with agriculture, it is the centre of all their social activities. In another sense, all social activities are rooted in religion and vice-versa.

The religious dimension in Kire's society can also be traced through various festivals, and ceremonies like, *Ngonyi* which is a festival of rest from fieldwork, festival of community hunting and fishing, feast of merit for titled family, initiation ceremony of young age groups etc. In Thomas King's works, the religious element has also been observed in the native rituals and festivals. It slightly differs from the native rituals of Kire's society because of King's intermixture presence of white society. During Sun Dance rituals, native societies congregate, their freedom interrupted only by the ceremonies. King's protagonist, Eli, in *Green Grass Running Water* vividly remembers how his mother would close the cabin every July and move the family to the Sun Dance. He gives an elaborate interpretation of the Native Sun Dance through his active participation. Eli helps other men set up the tepee, and rides horses with some kids in the camp, but of all, he liked the men's dancing. In another novel *Truth and Bright Water*, King mentions the native festival of Indian Days, a festival of giving and socialization. Tecumseh talks about it of how tourists who show up for Indian Days would get almost anything they want from beaded belt buckles to acrylic paintings of the

mountains, drawings of old-time Indians on horseback, deer-horn knives, bone chokers etc. Its authenticity in a modern setting is established thus:

> And all of it, according to the signs that everyone puts up, is 'authentic' and 'Traditional.' Fenton Bull Runner and his wife Maureen make dream catchers out of willow shoots and fishing line. Edna Baton runs a fry bread stand. Lucille Rain and her sister Teresa do bead work. Jimmy Hunt and his family sell cassettes of old-time powwow songs.…
>
> Other artist come in from places like Red Deer, Medicine River, Hobbema, or from across the line, Browning, Missoula, Flathead Lake. Some of them rent the booths that the bands puts up just below the big tent, and some of them sell off the back of their pickup trucks. A few just spread their blankets on the grass and wait for the tourists to wander over (209).

Another premise in which native society can be explained is through the communal structure. Firstly, the basic social unit among native is the family. It has been taken up how Kire shows that family is an important cementing factor. Her stories give many examples of it. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, we see how a brother's widow and the sons are always provided with large meat shares at all festivals, and care taken to fulfill a missing father's role. In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, the family cares for the old members. The extended family rallies around the elderly when they need assistance. Sizo is said to have provided for Bano so that she will get some money from his pension all her life. Family members and close relatives support each other when there is a marriage, or death and funeral rituals are to carry out. Everything is a family affair. In *Mari*, the protagonist Mari's baby is taken care by her family who also advice the new mother down to the last details of nursing an infant. In *Bitter Wormwood*, Vilau received help from her in-laws and male relatives when she is a young widow found it difficult at times to till the fields alone. *Life on Hold* cautiously depicts patriarchal tradition where the eldest son in the family prepares himself to take on the responsibility after the death of his father. Traditional wisdom on collective welfare which

entails personal sacrifice is seen in the way Zeu sacrifices his own happiness for the bliss of his family in *Life on Hold*, when he finds the weight of his father's debts to be always all-absorbing, and decides that in no way would he have children and "let them grow up with the same burden" (77). In King's story, too, we find native characters repeatedly saying, "Nothing more important than the family" and that being related was more important than some small differences of opinion (*MR* 26). In *Green Grass Running Water*, Lionel, the protagonist, is identified to be someone more than a friend, "he's family" (44). Likewise, in *Truth and Bright Water* King shares the attachment of two cousins, Tecumseh and Lum, striving to live up to the expectations of their dreams. Lum who is preparing for a race to be held during Indian Days festival is also a kind of symbolic unification that protected all native family together.

The second social unit is the community. Here the role of elders as storytellers to guide and educate the younger members in the society is paramount. They imbibe knowledge on communal living and act as keeper of people's memories and performers of rituals. In Kire and King's narrative, elders play an active role and closely observe the growth and development of individuals within the social settings. Elders in Kire's narrative are decision makers and initiator of all rituals. They have duties to instruct and train younger man on the paths of life. For example, In *A Naga Village Remembered*, elders had instructed Vilau during the ritual that lasted for five days. They have assisted him to complete his first tiger kill rituals. Again, the clan elders of Thevo and Thepa had initiated the ritual ceremony of Keviselie's feast of merit. It is the elders who had negotiated the treaty after the war with the British. Pelhu, a respected elder of Khonoma offered a male tragopan. The British General took from Pelhu his bird, 'a token of peace'. Then they sat and talked, "the treaty was concluded between village representatives of Khonoma and representatives of the British Government at Mezoma on the 27th March 1880" (86). In *Bitter Wormwood* Khrienuo's

decision to allow her grandson inherit her house, is the empowered voice of an elder who is required to settle family property, ancestors lands or fields. Elders also act as custodian of the customary laws of the land or village administrations. Kire's *Mari* offers a concise manner of such elders' law settlement. Mari, goes to the to the village council, as was the custom, and registered her two children, following which, they were legally accepted by and adopted into a tribe. In King's narrative, the elders act as harbingers of native stories. They tell stories of the native past and present, and try to rectify the misconceptions about natives. In *Medicine River*, Lionel is considered to be a good storyteller, who tells stories about how Indians used to be. He is happy that Indian stories are getting its due recognition in the outside world. King's narrative, too, reveals that in a native community it is the elders who guide a wayward native person back to his social roots. So also, Floyd's grandmother replaces her dead son by adopting Will as her son. She invites Will to join the family photograph, paving the way for Will's acceptance and recognition within the native society.

Kire and King also emphasized the political issues concerning the native society. In Kire, it is the ideological differences that existed between the native Nagas and the British colonizer, and in later years with the Indian government. There is, yet again, the ideological difference that surfaced within the Naga society and vied for political sovereignty. Kire's, *A Naga Village Remembered* chronicles the advent of British colonization into Nagaland and their disruption of the social and cultural life of the Nagas. The introduction of formal education and Christian religion by the colonial ruler and white missionaries weakened the traditional pattern of Naga society. Kire has given the paradigm of it, in *A Naga Village Remembered*, there is the conversion of natives and ostracism meted out to the new converts of Christianity. Sato is the vivid example of a native warrior's son who has attended the Mission school run by the white man and is influenced by their religion, the tenets of Christianity. Being a warrior's son, Sato's decision to follow the new religion is not accepted.

His father, who sees it as a betrayal by a son, disowns him. Religion being the nucleus of all human activities, the slow conversion of native people to Christianity (a new religion) has altered the pattern of native living. The colonial contact has set off the self-governance and self-rule policy because the natives of Nagaland have existed independently, free from any outside interference before the arrival of the British into their village territories. At first, the natives tried to fight the domination of the foreign rule but the white proved too powerful for resistance, this resulted in the white man's entrenchment until the period 1947 when India got its independence from British Rule. The political issue of Naga independence commenced again with the taking over of power by the Indian government. The British left without settling the political claim of the Nagas and so its political ideal of self-government resumed with greater force. The Nagas identified as ethnic people see Indian society as completely different from them. They were strangers in matters of culture, food, habits, language, religious beliefs etc. Failure to accept each other is clearly voiced out by Kire in *Bitter Wormwood*, in the words of Neibou:

> I know that, I am Indian on paper because when I fill up a form and they ask for my nationality, I have to write Indian. But many of my Northeastern friends believe that they are ethnically Indians, and when they meet this kind of treatment, they are so traumatized by it. It's deep rooted racism and its very ugly. The name-calling, the stereotyping of our girls and the way the police refuse to protect the victim, it just makes me feel very hopeless about the rights we have been promised by the Indian constitution. Becoming a state in India did not really change anything much. Now we keep encountering maltreatment from the civilian population in place of what we faced earlier at the hands of the army. I doubt things will ever change. In Mumbai, a man attacked and killed a Naga girl. In Pune, five Naga boys were beaten badly by a mob. Yet the government still insists we are all Indians and tries to ignore the racism (208).

It voices the intolerable militaranism who kills innocent civilians and create a reign of terror, first by the Indian army and, later, the infighting of factionalist groups in Nagaland. There is a running mockery of one feeling frustrated at the way things are. Neilhounuo utters sadly: “I mean, we have had the war with India hanging over our heads all our lives. But to have our own men killing each other, and terrorizing us is unbearable” (ibidem 164). The conversation between Mose and Neituo reflects the dilemma of the people on all fronts:

> First, we were fighting Indian occupation from 1947 and doing a good job of it until factionalism entered in 1975. Then we were plagued by infighting that made everyone think we were quite mad because the factionalism made Naga kill their fellow Nagas. Then the Indian government used the lure of money to destroy our integrity and impose Indian citizenship on us. Now we have all sorts of complications. Naga children are being taught they are Indians but when they go to the Indian cities they are completely alienated by the Indian populations. Another problem is home grown state terrorism. We have seen the growth of the Indian Reserve Battalions and their fearfully abusive conduct, and now we have almost come full circle because people today fear the Indian army less than they fear their own men! As for the Indian army, they don’t have it so good either.… some of the Indian soldiers of yesterday are victims of extreme angst, traumatized by what they had experienced in the Naga Hills (ibidem 212).

In spite of all these unresolved conflicts and worries, Kire’s native society are found to have tough spirits and they try to cope up with the political turmoil that still haunts them. Neibou, a character, in *Bitter Wormwood* declares: “We have to find human solutions to all these problems that have been engendered by political conflicts. After all, it is people who matter and not some stupid political theory” (ibidem 209).

In King’s writings the political concerns of the native society springs out from varied issues of representation and misrepresentation. There are the border issues, land rights and the stereotypical portrayal in western literary canon. Border plays an ambiguous role in the

lives of contemporary native society. King's story tends to focus on the problematic legacy of border. His short-story *Borders* is about a native woman who refuses to align herself with either Canada or the United States. Similarly, *Truth and Bright Water* is set on the boundary between two towns, one in the United States and the other in Canada and engages a variety of significant refiguring of this national divide. We live in a world obsessed with national pride and rampant with boundary wars, with nationalism on the banner of countless parties, no matter how conflicting their place or destination. Homi K. Bhabha in introduction of *Narrating the Nation* says; "Nations like narratives lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eyes" (44). That image of the nation or narration might seem impossibly idealistic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea, an idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force. According to Arnold E. Davidson et al, King shows the 49th parallel to be "a figment of someone else's imagination", and thereby explores the relationship of national borders to identify politics (13). The storyline of *Truth and Bright Water* gives the symbolical idea of what living in a border could really mean, and in the process, King's texts "implicate both Canada and the United States in the destruction of the Native North American Population" (ibidem 156).

The one about Coyote and the Ducks in *The Truth about Stories* is a burlesque on the treaties for land. That the ducks gave up their lovely feathers to Coyote, who claims to be a protector who protect them from human beings, is an allegorical reference to the making of treaty between the natives and white government.With native people, land base was drastically reduced in the early years of treaty making. Treaties were a poor deal for the native lands. The title *Green Grass Running Water,* refers to such a poor deal and is a sarcastic reminder on the white government's policy on land rights. Historically, the Indian

Act was evolved to protect the small share of Canada's land base which remained as aboriginal domain, but this agreement was repeatedly broken, often in return for nominal consideration or no consideration at all. The Indian Act was an official treaty made with natives of Reserved land, and the promise was supposed to last "as long as the grass was green and the waters run" (234). Treaties were hardly sacred documents. It failed to deliver justice to natives who were legalized out of existence. Lionel exemplifies how the white man tends to regard everything in writing as if carved in stone. The earliest experience happens when he is accidentally swapped with another boy who has a heart condition in hospital. It seems impossible for him to correct the numerous mistakes because he remains identified by the system as a heart patient, despite the fact that he is physically fit. The same thing happens when he gets arrested and is imprisoned in a chanced encounter with a group of native activists. Lionel is trapped with repetitive mishaps without being able to correct them which are symbolic of the real situation of native society. The white man's attempt to understand a native religion in relation to Christianity in *Green Grass Running Water* is a kind of direct confrontation by King to those subversive ideas on native religion. Latisha tried to think of ways to explain exactly what the 'Sun Dance' was, how the people felt about it, why it was important. Ann only stood there smiling while Latisha searched for words and does not listen to Latisha's answer, instead details Catholic practice to her. The novel also delineates the fact that native figures are wrongly romanticized in Hollywood movies and western books as artifact. The character of Portland is a mimic image created by King to contradict Western literary symbols that fantasize natives as exotic beings for entertainment. Portland is an Indian movie actor in Hollywood but regardless of his Indian status, he is compelled to wear a false nose to have a lead role in westerns. His normal nose was not the right shape and he does not look 'Indian enough' to act for Indian roles as chiefs and the occasional renegade. When Portland auditioned for the Indian lead in the movie, the director, a slight man with a

sparse blond mustache that made his upper lip look as if it caked with snot, told Portland that he could have the part but that he would have to wear a rubber nose. Portland's role to don a fake nose and entertain western audience is an intentional exposition by King to correct white man's Eurocentric misrepresentation, appropriation and prejudice of native figures.

4.5. Historical Basis of the Chronicle of Native Voices

Easterine Kire and Thomas King employ real history of the native people to tell their stories. History of a people reflects the worldview of those who keep and transmit it. Kire and King are writers who utilize actual historical records to imaginatively narrativize people's voice and experience. For Kire, the method of using real history is a necessity because without it, there would be no authentic documenting of Naga society. About the existence of true historical records in her novels, Kire has positively responded: "I have always used the real history of my people when I write historical fiction" (Kire. E-Mail Interview. 2 March 2014). In Kire's debut novel, *A Naga Village Remembered* there are political accounts of the first expedition and the commencement of British rule in the Naga Hills. It recounts the historical chronicles of the Battle of Khonoma in 1879-1880. The fight to overthrow British intrusion gets fierce and bloody that the day's battle was considered to be the fiercest battle of the Naga Hills. Historical evidence states that in April 1879, the people of Khonoma had been planning to fight the white man but they were also aware of the strength of the British. At this decisive hour, Pfuchasa Chase of Khonoma Village killed a tiger. A tiger kill calls for elaborate cultural rituals involving all the village warriors in a war dance, displaying their weapons including guns. Fascinatingly, to their own surprise, they found out that the village was in possession of many guns. The discovery of this fact and the realization of their strength gave them much courage. It was soon after that the people of Khonoma decided to

send back the white man to his own country. They were determined to defend their land. Kire reflects this event as she voices out the native peoples resentment towards British invasion on Naga territorial land. There is, again, the substantial record of religious conversion from the indigenous religion to Christianity and the activities of the American Baptist mission and the first converts. It is true that the early converts faced great ostracism in the villages and the fictionist has given accurate details of the somber beginning of a phenomenon that was to win the entire native community in its grip within the next few decades. In Kire's *Mari*, there are factual records of British and Japanese forces, the imperial powers of the mid-twentieth century that fought the Second World War in Naga soil. From the perspective of Second World War: "the battle of Kohima and Imphal was the largest single defeat of the Japanese on land" (Dept. of Art & Culture 8). In 2013, the battle of Kohima-Imphal during the World War-II was voted as the greatest battle in the poll conducted by UK National Army Museum on Britain's greatest battle in the last four hundred years. The war memorial has an epigram, 'When you go home tell them of us and say for your tomorrow we gave our today'. Kire quotes this famous line from an inscription on the war memorial of the 2 division at the Kohima War Cemetery. Her intention is possibly to integrate personal stories into public stories that impel an idea of sacrifices of human life. For the Nagas, the battle had dramatically affected their lives. Apart from the devastation and casualties of the battle, "villages were razed down and villagers temporarily abandoned their homes to take refuge in the fields and jungles" (ibidem 10). The history of the Battle of Kohima 1944 underlines the harsh realities of what war can do to the peaceful and charming little village and its people. Ordinary people with very little knowledge of war were mercilessly forced to suffer, and Kire's protagonist, Mari, acts as envoy by explaining the psychological turmoil and displacement that war has wrought on people's mind:

> We all felt terribly lonely and the beautiful golden sunset made me even more miserable. The whining of plane engines overhead, the incessant sound of shelling, these were the sounds that had become a part of our lives now. If there was a lull in the firing, we will all stop working and strain our ears, waiting anxiously for it to begin again. The shelling felt normal to us, the silence abnormal (73).

The bleakness of life during war is exposed when Mari further discloses: "I felt nauseated at the sight of fresh blood on wounded men, their bandages soaked through. We had seen much in such little time" (ibidem 81).

Kire's *Bitter Wormwood* and *Life on Hold* unfolds the candid history of the political struggle for independence and the internal strife of the factionalist groups in Nagaland. *Bitter Wormwood* furnishes the historical documents, like, Simon Commission 1929, the declaration of Naga Independence on 14 August 1947. It also has the plebiscite movement of 1951. The Nagas naturally voted for complete independence and separation from India. Kire is watchful as she enables Mose to delve into minute details. Mose is aware of the unusual presence of soldiers and the narrative builds up the uneasiness in Mose's psyche as he felt fearful of the future. He reflects on how the village assembled on an appointed day where a man carefully explained that they were collecting signatures and thumbprints of those who wanted a free Nagaland. The people were very pleased to have participated in the plebiscite. They reluctantly washed the ink stains off and were informed that their signatures had been collected by men in every village of Nagaland and were taken to the Prime Minister of India. The political histories has facts that A.Z. Phizo, a leader of Naga National Council extremists, had sent copies of the plebiscite result to the president of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, and the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and other dignitaries. But the Government of India refused to acknowledge the Naga plebiscite and it came to nothing. There are other historical

materials regarding the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) 1953; the declaration of Statehood in 1963; Naga Freedom Movement etc.

In *Life on Hold*, the game of wrestling played by childhood friends, Nime and Roko, serves as a symbolic imagery that describes the contestation of power by the factionalist groups in Nagaland. Kire delineates the sad fate of Pusalie, who is a struggling businessman. He attributes his failure to the feuding factions between the NSCN (K) and NSCN (IM) as they disturb the business flow due to their unreasonable taxation. Pusalie complained of how the taxes had doubled when both the underground parties wanted their share of what they called commercial tax. Kire's narrative pensively releases the intimidating reality that native people experience in the hands of their own Naga freedom fighters. The underground groups liked to consider themselves as the rightful government of Nagaland. Shopkeepers and businesspersons paid as high as twenty five percent to the groups. To refuse to pay was unheard of, for fear that they would be killed if they fail to abide by their dictates. The extortions were running the tradesmen, and Pusalie becomes a typical victim ruined by nationalist workers. Men who had earlier been successful at their business were forced to borrow money to keep their business going. 'Tax collections' as the extortions were politely called took away their profits leaving them poorer than when they had started out. The real presence of troubling historical, political, and social truths broadens the ideas of Kire's stories.

With Thomas King, the actual history of the native people is employed to explain the position of natives in white society. Throughout the history of Indian-White relations in North America, there has always been extermination and assimilation. In his critical and meditative book, *The Inconvenient Indian*, he tells a richly packed native history. There is the history of Indian-White relations in North America since their initial contact, and in which he based the identity of Indian as Indians. He emphasized that Indians were, "sometimes

Mohawks or Cherokees or Crees or Blackfoot or Tlingits or Seminoles. But mostly they were Indians" (xii). The term 'Indian' is a misnomer derived from Christopher Columbus's mistaken belief that he had reach India. King has allegorized Columbus' mistakes in his novel, *Green Grass Running Water*. He gives a picture of such a repeated metaphor in the story. There is the episode of Lionel and his aunt Norma who does not want to make a mistake with carpet. She says, "You make a mistake with carpet, and you got to live with it a long time" (*GGRW* 8). King has pushed the narrative into the present in order to consider the lives of contemporary people and events. The reply of Lionel that, "everybody makes mistake" is an open commentary to make matters right (ibidem). Again, there is the incident where the mythical figure, Lone Ranger, repeatedly get confused and chooses wrong beginnings of the biblical Genesis. He is asked to get it right for it is "best not to make them (mistakes) with stories" (ibidem 11). King's intention is to incorporate the fact that natives are not static and their cultures are dynamic, adaptive, and flexible. It draws attention to the genuine historical fact that the term 'Indians' for native people of Canada starts from a mistake. Columbus was mistaken, but as time went on, various folks and institutions reframed the name and Indians became Amerindians, Aboriginal, Indigenous people and American Indians. Lately, Indians have become 'First Nations' in Canada and 'Native Americans' in the United States. Thus, King has used the three official aboriginal groups; Indians (First Nations), Inuit and Métis to reaffirm his people's stories.

Native people had been confined, reduced and relegated to reserves and reservations. King uses this realistic affair in his novel, *Truth and Bright Water*, principally to express the details of the poignant life of native society living in a reserve and in crossing boundaries. The fictional town, Truth and Bright Water, is separated only by a small river, the railroad town on the American side and the reserve in Canada, which figuratively draws one to the idea of what border crossing actually mean. It is a geographical divide that separates people

from one's nation, locality, or of mental divide. The novel is attentive in its presentation of Indian roles into two categories. One is the historical Indians, which is collected by Monroe, a famous Indian painter, who retrieves Indians back from the Europeans museums from all over the world. Back at home in native land, Monroe gives a ceremonial burial with red ribbons tied around the yellow skulls, which, in a way, emblematically explains that Indians are back in its original place. Of how a native person does not, in any way, lose their land and that native land remains in native ownership. The other category is the contemporary Indians, living, breathing individuals that King wants to preserve through the life of the protagonist, Tecumseh, in the story. An everyman's character, who is sensitive and is at times prone to failure, tragedy, reconciliations and love. It develops the message that even after all the tribes had been moved out of that metaphorical house and into that metaphorical shed, Indians were still in the way. Worst, they were still Indians. While many natives speak English, while many converted to Christianity, and while many were small business entrepreneurs, native culture remained alive and well in North America. Removal and relocation had been effective in displacing and disrupting the lives of native people and their lands taken. These policies and practices had not been the answer to the Indian problem. Here is the reality, native people have never been resistant to education and by the beginning of the nineteenth century, natives and whites have been living together. The European mind worked in such a manner that it permits natives to set aside the missteps of history and offers a covenant with the future.The fact is that natives live modern lives, informed by traditional values and contemporary realities, and they wish to live those lives in their own terms. For instance, in *Truth and Bright Water*, Tecumseh's father preserves a Coyote as a good luck figure and he still believes that a medicine bag is never complete without Coyote in it. Monroe Swimmer believes that there is a lot more to do in the world, and his grand gifts especially a piano to Tecumseh is an indication of inner peace.

King has authenticated historical facts to discuss the serious issues of 'status' confronting native society. His book, *The Inconvenient Indian*, argues that Indians come in all sorts of social and historical configurations. North American popular culture is littered with savage nobles and dying Indians. While in real life there is, "Dead Indians, Live Indians and Legal Indians" (53). According to Thomas King, "Dead Indians are the stereotypes and clichés that North America has conjured up out of their own experience and out of its collective imaginings and fears. Live Indians are all native people living in North America. Legal Indians are those Indians who are recognized as being Indians by the Canadian and U.S. Governments. In Canada, Legal Indians are officially known as Status Indians, Indians who are registered with the federal government as Indians under the terms of the Indian Act" (ibidem 68). Legal Indians are entitled to certain rights and privileges called treaty rights. In Canada, the Indian Act 1876 does more than just define Legal Indians. It has been the main mechanism for controlling the lives and destinies of Legal Indians in Canada, and throughout the life of the act, amendments have been made to the original document to fine-tune this control. In Canada, loss of status has been an individual matter and this issue of who is and who is not a status Indians finds its trace in King's novel *Medicine River* and *Green Grass Running Water*. He explains Bill C-31, through the occurrence of intermarriages betweens natives and whites. *Medicine River* is a non-stereotypical novel rephrased from the viewpoint of native characters. In it, King questions the irrelevant and inapplicability of natives need for attending legal status and registration to prove their identity. The protagonist Will's family had to leave the reserve and relocate somewhere else because the law says that they are 'non-status' and are not Indians anymore. Will Horse Capture, is a replicate victim of such erroneous Act. In novel, *Green Grass Running Water,* the focus shows the marriage between a Native Indian Eli Stands Alone to a White woman Karen. Eli went to Toronto, taught in University. He had married a white woman, and brought her out to the Sun Dance one year.

King has narrated these incidents to bring a realistic emphasis on the destabilizating political Acts of the Government. King's concentration in both stories is to point out the actual historical breaches. Prior to 1985 and Bill C-31, when native men with status married non-status native or non-native, the women and any children gained status. However, when native women with status married non-status men, or non-native, they and their children lost status. In this regard, the Indian Act was clearly discriminatory and "blatantly sexist" (ibidem 167). In 1985 Bill C-31 was passed, native women who had lost status because of marriage were able to apply to have status reinstated. The bill also closed the loophole of non-native women gaining status through marriage by legislating that no one could gain or lose status through marriage. *Medicine River* reflectively elucidated all sides of this act with the frequent quest for identity by Will. His migration to Toronto and back to the reserve of Medicine River, a town for the Indians is decent imagery for native status relocation. Will, a mixed Blackfoot search for recognition within his own society is identical of native experience of alienation as well as the stereotypes projected on and at times perpetuated by outsiders. His shifting position directs readers in understanding the laws that hinders non-status to have an ingenious life. Early as a child, his own mother's family treats Will as an outcast. When he desires to return back to the reserve he is admonished by his cousin Maxwell against it because of the law. He is denied a governmental loan for setting up his photography studio because the law does not permit such facilities for mixed breeds. His endless search for an identity within the community is, at last, successful when Flyod's grandmother invites Will to join the family photograph as a replacement of her deceased son. This incident, too, serves a purpose that diplomatically explains the amending of the Indian Act to allow for more local autonomy.

In King's *Green Grass Running Water*, he utilizes the real historical event of the American Indian Movement (AIM) founded in the late 1968 by Dennis Bank, George Mitchell and Clyde Bellecourt. Talking about the movement of AIM in his critical essay, *The*

Inconvenient Indian, King states that there is no precise way to describe AIM and that the original organization was formed to "deal with police brutality against native people" (145). This is a political radical movement and it lobbies for native sovereignty, treaty rights, and to call attention to the problems of poverty on reserves and reservations. Initially, its aim was purely to ease the transition from reserve to urban life, but through this work they became aware of the depths of the social problems their people faced. The organization turned militant, and its spokesmen called for the restoration of tribal lands, for better social welfare programs and for more vigilance in the protection of the civil rights of Indian people. AIM and its groups were involved in political demonstrations, such as, the Broken Treaties Caravan in 1972, and the occupation of the village of Wounded Knee in 1973. Canadian native organization, while seldom militant, could not help but be influenced by the struggle of Indian people and the same is described in King's *Green Grass Running Water*, through the unexpected participation of Lionel in one of the AIM assembly. The police just outside Green River seized him, when he mistakenly hooked a wing tip through the sling of one of the rifles and pitched forward into the policeman. Though it might be a funny mistake, it causes injury and unnecessary harassment to Lionel. He is forced to verify his identity and is wrongly accused as a leader of AIM when he does not know a thing about AIM. Hence, King's depiction of AIM movements in the story is mainly to orient native concern because AIM was the only native organization that got most of the media attention and it was this organization, who took the brunt of law enforcement.

The real history of 'land treaties' between Indian and White people are also discussed elaborately by King. Indian-White relations were originally constructed around the concerns of commerce and military alliances. In these matters, native people understood themselves to be sovereign, independent nations, and in early land and treaty negotiations, they were treated as such. But by the late 1700s as European military forces gained the upper hand, Whites

began to reimagine the place of Indian nations in North America. The real problems start off, when the Federal Government gave itself the exclusive right to regulate the trade and manage all affairs of the Indians. King has noted in his book, *The Inconvenient Indian*, the three visible decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court beginning in 1823: "*-Johnson v. McIntosh, Cherokee v. Georgia, Worcester v. Georgia-* that would confirm the powers, U.S. government had unilaterally taken upon itself and spell out the legal arrangement that tribes were to be allowed" (81). A treaty is bargained in which natives were forced to give up lands and would be moved elsewhere to a location called reserves. White treaties were never long-standing agreements. King's title, 'Green Grass Running Water' is a borrowed phrase from the historical documentation of land treaty discourse. Where the term 'as long as the grass is green and the water run' was commonly used by government officials to lend a sense of honesty to their promises to native leaders. In fact, native lands were exploited and utilized for white man's expansion and purpose. The episode of constructing a Grand Baleen Dam to create electricity on Indian land and hiring a native Blackfoot lawyer, Charlie, to repel the protestations coming from among native society in King's *Green Grass Running Water*, is a relevant examination on the insensitive conduct of white society towards native land rights.

4.6. Effects of Colonial Impact and Negative Native Stereotypes

The 'Native' society of Easterine Kire and Thomas King are people who have come under colonial influence in multifarious ways. Nowhere has native life been entirely unaffected by the advent of the European settlers and the domination of territory that was once the exclusive domain of native people. From an early period, the uneasy interaction between natives and the colonizing society has taken many forms, specifically the interest in land. The cultural attachment of natives toward land being primal, the new comers'

intervention into native lands for natural resources and other strategic developments created serious challenges to the traditional ways of native life.

In Easterine Kire, colonial contact and its resistance commenced from nineteenth century onwards. The British desire to have political control over every part of Indian subcontinent to project their colonial power led to the occupation of Naga Hills. *A Naga Village Remembered* retells the battle of Khonoma (1879-1880) and recorded the conflict, resistance and the impact of the colonial ruler. The Nagas hated the British ruler for having occupied their lands, cut down their forest, taxed them and forced them into labour, which pricked them to battle the white man and his government. Kire's story offers an adept study on the feeling of mistrust that natives have on this intruding ruler and soldiers: "Let us stop this. We cannot continue like this, we'll not be under the turbaned ones"; "We are not going to be coolies anymore for the white man" (67, 69). It was not only territory and political control, but the colonial rulers have also dominated the vast social, religious and cultural life of the Nagas, as it was historically impossible for them to resist the British colonization, which had, by then, enveloped the whole of Asia. In Kire's works, these developments are traced through the natives' involvement in the changing process that overwhelmed them. For example, the social life among natives before the advent of colonization is village state, but the British has succeeded in forming urban units. In religious sphere, the religion of the Nagas before colonization is labeled as 'animism' and they believed in numerous localized spirits, but with British advent into the Naga Hills, 'Christianity' was ushered in and transformed the animistic tradition to a more modern society. The culture of the natives was oral, and storytelling kept their memory alive, the Christian missionaries gave them the writing system with the introduction of formal education. Colonization has also brought in many developmental works that influenced the social standings of the people. *Mari* gives a precise reading through the various wartime construction activities. *Bitter Wormwood* gives

the highlight on the coming of communication technology when Mose talks about the 'Radio' that could transmit news, and they could learn about other countries and happenings around the world. *A Terrible Matriarchy* gives information on the installation of electricity and the utilization of colonial leftovers. An example of colonial leftover is the ammunition box Lieno refers to: "Mother baked a cake in one of the ammunition boxes that had been left behind by British troops after the war. Almost every house had one of these" (53).

The impact of colonization in Kire's society cannot be denied when one examines her novels intently. There is the growing dependence on Government, the impact on religion which means the loss of native religion, which also go to imply the loss of culture because religion is all pervasive in native societies like those of Kire's. Again, there is the growth of economic class, and the distinction between the rich and the poor. For example, in *A Terrible Matriarchy* Dielieno's family is poor and her grandmother is rich because she gets the pension of her dead husband. Dielieno's aunt is rich because she married an officer, and Leto gets a government job at the D.C office, through his influential aunt whose husband is a bureaucrat in government office. In novel *Life on Hold*, Pusalie ventured into business for its rich prospect, but this chase drives him to insanity due to surmounting loans and debts. Nime marries Abeiu because he is rich and is economically independent. In Zeu's story, readers are made to be aware of the fact that rich people's children could easily get a job because they bribe the minister: "Shekato and Neituo got appointed because they bribed the Minister with one lakh each" (36). Zeu was quite matter of fact about it, but Nime was horrified. He further tells Nime not to be shocked of how it is now, the rich get richer and the poor gets poorer. For Nime, life cannot go on with this blunder and bribery and that has to be changed. To which Zeu sadly replies, "Oh, you're so innocent still", and he finished with a cold laugh (ibidem). Another ugly change that can be witnessed is that, the life of a human being is treated like a game. It held to be decadently true that the death of a civil man in factionalist clash could

easily be compensated by government with money. When Pusalie was premeditatedly murdered, the government gave Pusalie's family one lakh rupees as compensation and the "bank stopped the interest on the loans due to them from Pusalie" (ibidem 70). Hence, Kire's works address all these unpleasant realities of life and the complexities around the daunting atrocities and discriminations. Native people, no doubt, suffered the pangs of political and social unrest, but underneath all these painful struggles, there is a spark of hope. The fictionist has framed her native society in a resilient manner to define the view that there is much more than just another political conflict. There is the challenge that describes how ordinary people cope with violence, how they negotiate force and power, how they seek and find safe places so as to achieve the dream of an independent native nation. The native characters in Kire's novels exhibit strong spirits and they are undeterred by the surrounding conflicts. They evoke a comparable reminder to American author Ernest Hemingway's character 'Santiago' the novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. There is the honor in struggle, defeat and death. Hemingway's character 'Santiago' struggles against defeat and has gone eight-four days without catching a fish. But the old man refuses defeat at every turn, and he resolves to sail out beyond the other fisherman to where the biggest fish promises to be. He lands the 18 feet 'Marlin' fish and then endures a long and grueling struggle with the Marlin only to see his big catch destroyed by Sharks. Yet, the destruction enables Santiago to undergo a remarkable transformation, and he wrest triumph and renewed life from seeming defeat. Akin to 'Santiago', Kire's native characters like Mari, Nime and Mose refuse defeat. In Kire's *Mari*, the protagonist, Mari, has to make a decision of choosing life and death after she is confronted with a situation where her lover, Vic, is killed in war and she is pregnant with his child. She confesses:

> At one point, I had wanted to die with Vic… But when I saw the grave and his name. I had to accept that Vic would never come back…

> And then I felt my baby move inside me, in tiny quivering movement, even when it was the slightest, was like the tugging of life. I decided then to live, not pine away (102).

The central crux lies in Mari choosing to live for her child and discovering a way to prolong her life, which, though harsh is at times peaceful. In *Life on Hold*, Nime's blissful life is snatched away by violent insurgency struggle when her childhood friend and lover, Roko, chooses to join the Naga Army and shatters her entire. He said coldly that there is no room for a woman in his life. Roko made up his mind and asked Nime to forget him. Nevertheless, in spite of every other harsh thing that she endures in her life, she wanted to accept life for her children's sake and exclaims: "Girls cry, mothers cannot afford to. Not over every puny – loser wrestler!" (104). In *Bitter Wormwood*, Mose's entire life is shadowed by war. He joins the Naga Freedom Movement as a soldier to protect his homeland, but is eventually killed by the same Movement while trying to save a Bihari boy. Yet, Mose's death and defeat leads to a more significant spiritual triumph. Mose achieves a miraculous feat and the readers are assured that Mose's teachings will persist through his grandson Neibou, who utters:

> I put my trust in my grandfather's teachings. I realized if I did anything violent, my action would actually hurt Grandfather, instead of honoring him. It hasn't been easy. But now I have peace in the decision. How would it help if we had killed his killers? It wouldn't bring Grandfather back to life, and there would only be more dead to avenge (237).

Such a statement convinces that Neibou will make use of Mose's valuable teachings. That every man is born with a willpower to survive and Santiago's philosophical line: "But man is not made for defeat… man can be destroyed but not defeated", can be symbolic in explaining the undefeatable spirit of Kire's native society, a people who will continue to live a determined life as peaceful and optimistic as possible (Hemingway 29).

In Thomas King's reading, the impact of colonization is more exposed. Under colonialism, "Native/First Nation cultures were and continued to be devalued, and symbols of culture, e.g. sacred sites are destroyed and usurped for the purpose of the majority society. In the past, religious, health, and legal system have been denigrated and criminalized by the colonial powers, and the cultural productions of First Nations, such as art, music, and spiritual ceremonies, have been exploited for private profit" (Frideres *First Nations* 22). King is an advocate for First Nation cause and most often writes about Canada's First Nation. He voices against the negative native stereotype that were imposed by white people and against the suppression of their cultural rights. The social, cultural position of native Canada today is unquestionably a direct result of the colonization process and, therefore, King's short stories and novels are an endeavor that provides non-stereotypical readings of native characters. It gives a platform for addressing the marginalization of natives and attempts to abolish frequent stereotypes. According to Herb Wylie, "King's work reclaims images of native people from stereotyping by the dominant culture and while doing so reasserts and privileges a native perspective" (106). Wylie further notes, "King's work quite clearly reflects a consciousness of and a resistance to a long history of Eurocentric misrepresentation" (118). His first novel *Medicine River*, is a positive reading of a native community's struggle for equality and respectable existence in a place where they find it difficult to survive due to perpetrations and atrocities by the white people or the irresponsibility of the government. It describes the difficulties faced by the native people and underscores their solidarity in creating a habitable world of their own. The story is fashioned on a simple homecoming theme popular among native writers, who locate native ancestry through their characters. Percy Walton categorize King's works, as "metadiscursive" in that, "rather than trying to refer to a reality outside of language it refers to a discourse constructed about the native. It is a discourse about discourse" (78). Will and Harlen, in King's *Medicine River* are two good

examples of King's new way of constructing the literary native. Walton points out the attack King makes on cliché Indian images in mainstream media discourse, when Harlen imitates a television Indian by making funny noises:

> *Hey-uh*. Saw Will Sampson on television. It was a movie about him being a sheriff. That's what he said all the time. *Hey-uh.* He's a real Indian, too. What do you think?
>
> I couldn't help it. I started to laugh. Harlen, I said, "it sounds dumb as hell." The two of us sat there laughing (10).

Here, the native standpoint represented by Will and Harlen divulges the outsiders' patronizing cliché. As Walton points out, "Metadiscursively, King's representations of native, laugh at the representations of natives in the media, and the text draws a distinction between the two. The constructed native of the past shares little in common with King's representations of the native of the present" (81). Will and Harlen differ from the media image of natives, but they are confronted with the Indian cliché. For instance, at the hospital Will is mistaken for the father of Louise Heavyman's newborn daughter. Will is asked for a name for the child and he answers with a joke about the girl being born in South Wing of the hospital and maybe they would call her that. The non-native nurse answers, "Is that a traditional name?" and writes it down on the official form (*MR* 40). Another incident is the one about the funeral of Jake Pretty Weasel, a former teammate of Will and Harlen from the Medicine River Friendship centre basketball team. Harlen, being the team coach delivers the funeral eulogy. Will describes the service as short. The priest refused to come on the report of Jack's suicide. So a substitute is called from Mormon Church and Harlen used a metaphor from mainstream sports culture in order to honour Jack. Leslie Monkman, in his study *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English Canadian Literature*, affirms that, "Native religious traditions are not recognized and acknowledged by non-native writers" (21). This

unawareness of native religious traditions is being mocked. King has assigned Harlen to create an alternative to Euro-Canadian funeral rites, profane as it may be. The speech given by Harlen, the coach of the 'Medicine River Friendship Centre Warriors' has nothing to do with Blackfoot religious tradition, but it is still much more personal than the short service held by a nameless "fellow from Mormon Church" (*MR* 45). As such, the character of Portland Looking Bear in *Green Grass Running Water,* is an indirect attack on Eurocentric caricature. Portland assuming a pseudonym "Iron Eyes Screeching Eagle" to get a lead role, is King's way of censoring non-native way of identifying native as being authentic or non-authentic (165). Portland's duration as actor in Hollywood is significant in several ways. The fact that he gets only minor roles until he changes his name to something more 'authentically Indian' is a good illustration of the unofficial rules that govern Hollywood. So also, the names of the chiefs that Portland portrays are absurd. King ridicules the screenplays of Hollywood westerns, most of which are written by authors of European descent. The native stereotyped produced by Hollywood culture is self referential and as described by Goldie, is a "see through construct" (67). For example, Charlie sees the dressed up strip dancers for what they are, and Lilian, laughs at the fake nose Portland has to wear in order to look more Indian for the camera. Even Portland who loves Hollywood, has to admit that his background dancing is a "dumb routine" (*GGRW* 239).

Another reconstructive native character of King is Eli Stands Alone. He is a native man, but is modern and educated. He has left the reservation to get a degree and a job in Toronto. Initially, Eli has problems accepting his origin and his Blackfoot tradition, and he does not keep in touch with his family once he arrives in Toronto, until his return to Alberta to live in the cabin of his dead mother. Eli's life history does, indeed, fulfill the stereotypes of the assimilated Native. Eli, being a well-educated man, notices this:

> The Indian who couldn't go home.

> It was a common enough theme in novels and movies. Indian leaves the traditional world of reserve, goes to the city and is destroyed. Indian leaves the traditional world of the reserve, is exposed to white culture, and becomes trapped between the two worlds. Indian leaves the traditional world of the reserve, gets an education, and is shunned by his own tribe (ibidem 317).

However, by coming back to Alberta, and by fighting for his mother's land, Eli resists the stereotype in what Arnold E. Davidson et al, calls "an act that subverts the generic white authored narratives about Natives who leave the reserve never to return again" (139). Eli's introspection of his own situation seems humble as he looked about the house and at what he had become:

> Ph.D. in literature. Professor emeritus from the University of Toronto. A book on William Shakespeare. Another on Francis Bacon. Teacher of the year. Twice. Indian. In the end, he had become what he had always been. An Indian. Not a particularly successful one at that. (*GGRW* 289).

But behind Eli's understatement lies a great success, he has had a career which can be ranked equally with mainland Canadian standards. He was named teacher of the year and has published two books on important minds in European intellectual history, his English is better than that of Anglo-Canadian Clifford Sifton, but he still manages to remain 'Indian'. Furthermore, Eli uses the knowledge he gained in the white world to strengthen his position as the anti-stereotyped. When Shifton says, "My dam is part of the twentieth century. Your house is part of the nineteenth," Eli simply answers, "Maybe I should look into putting it on the historical register" (ibidem 155). It shows that Eli is capable of tackling Shifton, if Shifton does not accept native traditions. Eli considers the option of making his house part of non-native written history. Eli, is King's unperturbed character that stands for the connection between the traditional and modern. He can defend his modern lifestyle and intellectual career with his offensively traditional sister Norma. On the other, Eli stands up for his native

roots whenever he talks to Clifford Sifton. He argues that being native does not prevent anyone from getting education, and a well-merited profession. Otherwise, a progressive character, Eli also endures the Indian cliché with his marriage to a white woman Karen. Their relationship developed with Karen bringing books for Eli to read. She says, "these are about Indians… you should read them" (ibidem 179). The fact that Eli is an Indian always draws Karen's interest. Karen opinion on, Eli, as her 'Mystic Warrior', and their relationship is noted by Arnold E. Davidson et al, as a strategic alliance of some sort: "Eli's desire to pass as white is facilitated by a partnership that validates his choice. Concomitantly, Eli offers Karen access to the culture of the indigenous other, whose ties to the land precede the claims of colonial settlers; through this association, she can play at being Indian" (138). Karen's query "you know what you are?" creates space for the assumption that Eli does not know what or who he is (*GGRW* 182). The Eurocentric perspective of Karen becomes more real when Eli takes her with him to the native 'Sun Dance' of Albertan community. Karen's first impression on Sun Dance was one of ignorance. The scene is, 'like right out of a movie', and she does not recognize contemporary native life. For her, the participation in Sun Dance is a trip "back in time" (ibidem 228). After their return to Toronto, Karen remembers only superficial features of the Sun Dance: "You know what I remember the most?" "All those tepees. That's what I remember" (ibidem 287). While Eli remembers his relatives, friends and people, he had not seen in years. Karen's efforts to understand Eli and his native roots are definitely vain. Her imaginations results from books about native people written by non-native authors, "Karen reads the ceremony through her previous knowledge of westerns and commercialized representations of Indian traditions" (Davidson et al. 138). Although she married a Native man, she only sees the stereotyped 'Mystic Warrior', and romanticizes Eli's Indianess.

A very noteworthy aspect of King's novels, *Medicine River* and *Green Grass Running Water,* is his clear refusal to depict native as victims. Negativity being a prominent feature of Canadian literary constructions, when he writes about natives, King does not intend to do the same and tries to move away from those portrayals of natives as victims or disadvantaged in his fictional works. His narratives are, seen as harbingers of new native image in the light of victorious postions. For example, the experience of Will and Harlen's visit to the Custer National Monument in *Medicine River*. While Harlen proposes for a visit to the National Monument, Will's answer is cynical: "You think they let Indians in?" "Why would they keep us out?" (102).The tour however does not happen because Harlen and Will lose their way, and when they finally make it to the monument, the guard is about to lock the gate:

> Harlen came back to the car. "It's closed for the night, Will."
>
> "What?"
>
> "Young fellow, friendly enough. Told us to come back tomorrow."
>
> "We won't be here tomorrow."
>
> "I told him that."
>
> "Did you tell him we drove all this way just to see the monument?"
>
> "I told him that."…
>
> "He said he was sorry."
>
> "Did you tell him," … we're Indians!"
>
> "I told him that, too, Will. He said he was sorry."
>
> I got out and stood by the car and imagined I could see that kid hiding in the dark, hunkered down behind the fender of the Bronco, his hands shaking around his rifle, waiting for us to come screaming and whooping and crashing through the gate (ibidem 107-108).

On a surface level reading of the above lines, Harlen and Will, the two native men, might be seen as, being barred of visit, a way that the dominant culture deprived native from visiting a historical site that is important for them. But, credibly, in King's storyline, this missed event is simply about bad timing and the real reason for the guard to lock up early, is neither racism nor denial, but game seven in hockey finals. Harlen confirms, "Said he'd let us in but the hockey playoffs are on tonight. Series is lied at three games all" (ibidem 109). Will blurbs in correctly: "The Blackfoot didn't fight Custer" (ibidem 102). Will and Harlen are therefore the dominant culture here, and the young non-native guard is the victim. The ironic mood of the passage is echoed in the guard's answer, "I'm sorry", to Harlen's statement, "But we're Indians" (ibidem 108). According to Wylie, King's characters, "do foreground the struggles and hardships of being native in a racist society, they do so in a way that resists depicting Native people as victims and resist defining them exclusively in relation to the dominant culture according to its expectations" (118). In *Green Grass Running Water*, the idea of King's recreated native figure is more detailed. The character, Latisha Red Dog, resists the typical native victim position. Early in the novel, the reader gets the fact that Latisha is married to a non-native ,George Morningstar, who is 'no-good' and "used to beat hell out of her" (59). While in the beginning, Latisha is the victim of George's violent assault that suggests a historic dimension to the incidents of domestic violence and stands as a metaphor for non-native racist attitude and violence against native people. Subsequently, she emancipates herself and gets a divorce. George leaves his family before the birth of their third child. The most evident sign of Latisha's successful emancipation starts from the moment she stops reading George's letters altogether. She became the emancipated native. Towards the end of the novel, George is forced to leave the site of the Sun Dance after he tries to take press photographs of the native sacred ceremony. This triggers the final step in Latisha's emancipation process. Supported by her family, she commits a successful act of resistance

against attempts by the mainstream media to exploit Native cultures. Latisha's character is perceptive. Her problems, though true to life, are not necessarily and exclusively native problems. Although a single mother of three children, she is independent, successful, hardworking and confidently runs her own business and organizes her family. This undercuts the hoard image of the dependent or economically poor native woman. The type of business she manages is yet another strike on the victim cliché. She owns the 'Dead Dog Café' where non-native tourists are led to believe that they are served dog meat.The conventional model of a native as weak and powerless is reversibly changed in King and the tourists becomes a susceptible victim. Latisha knows her metadiscourse that there is nothing wrong when one serves traditional foods. She explains to her customers that it was a treaty right, by referring to non-native written law or history, she gives them the proof they wanted. One might accuse Latisha of sham exhibitions of native cultures but certainly, here, it is the native woman, Latisha, who sets the rules and values of the competition. King's fictional works has been active in breaking up dominant stereotypes of the 'Indian' in history. He has managed to modernize the image of the native and in the process sets off the de-victimization of his characters. Popular native characters, Will, Latisha and Eli Stands Alone, are not marginalized victims but rather strong members who contribute to modern communities. King has done it by normalizing the relationship between his native characters and their non-native surroundings. Most of King's characters, as far as their social positions are concerned, do not differ from their native counterparts. Will, Eli, and Latisha resist being victims, they are modern Canadian citizens who work in modern normal professions which make them a part of strong communities. This clearly differentiates natives from Eurocentric literary interpretations of the past centuries. King, by reconstructing stereotypes attached to native people, changes the role from marginalized, exotic, dependent figures to characters with productive agency, without neglecting their ethnic native features. His native characters differ

from non-natives in their distinct awareness of their history. This consciousness however does not prevent them from adapting modern lives as shown in the conversation between Eli and Clifford Sifton:

> Besides, you guys aren't real Indians anyway. I mean, you drive cars, watch television, go to hockey games. Look at you. You're a university professor.
>
> That's my profession. Being Indian isn't a profession
>
> And you speak as good English as me
>
> Better, said Eli. And I speak Blackfoot too. My sisters speak Blackfoot. So do my niece and nephew
>
> That's what I mean. Latisha runs a restaurant and Lionel sells television. Not exactly traditionalist, are they?
>
> It's not exactly the nineteenth century, either (ibidem 155).

Eli's absorption of non-native lifestyles with enviable professions as censured by Sifton's is a contestation that approves the competence of natives. Furthermore, by mixing and pairing up his native characters with non-native characters, Eli/Karen and Latisha/George into marriage, King shows that balancing out traditional or modern lifestyles and the hybridism or assimilations of cultures is only a problem for non-native, not for native people. For instance, the overbearing expectations of non-native characters on native culture represented by Latisha's dog meat service, Sifton's outdated view of natives as traditionalist Indian, Portland's endeavor as Hollywood lead actor or the distorted media discourse on native appearances in movies. None of these have reliable facts and, thus, readers are compelled by King to watch out and revise their views of the native and their real culture. His purpose in all of these narratives is to correct non-native misperceptions relating to native ethnicity.

Thus, effects of colonial impact, the stereotyping of natives by non-natives and the need to deconstruct and reassess natives on their own terms, as they are, have been creatively represented by both Easterine Kire and Thomas King.

4.7. Ethnicity and the Native Identity

The long spell of colonial rule has effected and altered the native ways of spiritual, political, economic and social context that contributes to the formulation of self. This raises the issue of the identity of the native people. Definitions of 'who they are' seem to affect all natives because their 'nativeness' had often been defined by others to such an extent that at times their knowledge and consciousness of themselves had been vitiated, if not obliterated. They had repeatedly been subjected to the control and authority of the white man and outsiders through the assimilationist tactics of the dominant government. Notwithstanding the bleak scenario, literatures have been inspired to take up the issue of native identity to ensure them voice and representation and at the same time, create space for their own questioning critical voice. Easterine Kire and Thomas King are two such native writers, who avidly write about their ethnic communities and the question of their identity. The term 'identity' being a complex issue when confronted from all aspects, the topic will be examined under the following sub headings:

Quest for Native Identity

The quest for identity is 'a fate' natives share with all post-colonial or new nations. Easterine Kire and Thomas King's ethnic societies are not an exception in their search for ethnic identity. Native literatures all over the world bring in a certain measure of reaction to

colonization. It is through efforts of native writers that struggle for recognition finds a voice when images of the natives are presented through their own eyes. They articulate the political and social issues affecting the natives and unmask the role played by dominant literature in diminishing the value of the native culture. A native writer not only record tales of the past but also write history of the people to train the focus on the authentic identity of who they actually are, apart from the dominant stereotypes. Kire's novel, *Bitter Wormwood* explores the native quest for political Naga identity. It draws attention to the political turmoil that has trapped the native community and their struggle to find a place of their own identity. The societal aspiration to have political identity of their own is reflected through the struggle of the fictional characters, Mose and Neituo, in the Naga Freedom movement. They learned that Naga leaders had organized the Naga National Council and were fighting for freedom from India. Mose and Neituo joined the movement in protest against the killings and tortures meted out to the innocent villagers. "We are not animals that they can shoot us when they will" is a direct resentment felt by the natives when their precious lives are put at stake mindlessly (59). Mose's task to hoist the Naga Flag at Kohima stadium under the reeling darkness of the night is a patriotic effort that nurtures one's hope to unite all natives together under one identity. Such a hope finds echo in the words of the Naga army officer, when he trains the young recruits:

> "This is not an ordinary war,"… this is a test of who has the stronger heart. The Indians may have more men and more guns, but this is our ancestral land to which we are bonded. The Indian soldier does not feel for the land as we do. Sooner or later we will defeat them. One day, they will have to retreat and admit that we were right (ibidem 95).

For natives, the loss of land is the loss of existence. Landlessness is non-existence and creates an identity crisis. For an ethnic society, land is always linked to one's identity and the outsider's intrusion to native land is, therefore, an unacceptable offence. *Bitter Wormwood*

also offers an unreserved depiction of the problem of identity for the ethnic Nagas. The novelist shows how ethnic natives are discriminated and segregated in urban cities because their identity and physical features are completely different from those exhibited by dominant social groups. Through the experience of Neibou, an eighteen year old boy, who leaves home for higher studies in Delhi, Kire exposes the unequal treatment of natives rampant in Indian mainland. Neibou spells out:

> What disgusts me is that we are always alienated and picked on. Today it's rape, another day it is a stabbing, how are we expected to believe that we are Indians when all this racism goes on? We are served last in a restaurant and cheated by taxis and autos and even rickshaw pullers. Why do they treat us different from other Indians? (ibidem 208).

The question 'why do they treat us different' may be a deep rooted racism based on ethnic identity but within that disparity what more can be said is open-ended because identity being fundamental it entails plurality of composition as Neibou's liberal friend Rakesh says:

> "You are right about all that." But we can't give in to them, do you see? If we allow ourselves to be depressed by the racists, we will lose the impulse to fight them. If we give up, they will be proved right and they are far from right. We have to help others understand that racism is evil. And if we don't make an effort, the consequences would be reverse racism like what you told me about Indian-hating in Naga circles. That is just as bad. I'm sorry to bring up this comparison but if we are to be honest, giving in to hatred is just as evil and it sets off an ugly cycle (ibidem 208-9).

Identity being not something solely acquired at birth. Which is then, shaped and reshaped differently, that as well varies with situational and political factors, Neibou, a character with a highly sensitive identity, thus has to submit to his ethnic acceptance by saying: "They have no ability to accept that we are human beings like any of them… but not everyone in the

society is like that. We have to appeal to the good sense of the ones who are more broad-minded and compassionate" (ibidem 209).

In *Medicine River* and *Green Grass Running Water*, King discusses the natives' search for identity in a white dominated world. With colonization, the self-sufficiency of the native inhabitants of Canada, gradually weaken in economic, social, political, demographic, religious and cultural spheres. Their positions deteriorated from being collaborators and partners to dependents. Their rank changed from being at the centre of Canada, "they were pushed to margins… relegated to the back seat periphery in economic, political and cultural spheres, through complex historical and cultural processes. The extensive contact between the Indians of Canada and the whites also fostered the appearance of a mixed Indian-White ancestry" (Kanwar 11). King gives representation of this native circumstance in *Medicine River* through the character of a mixed breed, Will Horse Capture, who struggles in his search for identity. His native mother, Rose Horse Capture, married a non-native from Edmonton and the day she married the non-native Bob, her family abandoned her as an outcast. Her children were never accepted in totality for it is the white verdict that prevents them from being an identified Indian member. As pointed out earlier, the discussion carried out between Will, James and their cousin Maxwell shows the denied status and its threatening position of being born a mixed breed in law. While, Will optimistically tends to the prospect of 'going back to the reserve', he is limited by Maxwell hint that they are not Indians anymore and have to live in town. Further, Maxwell words "But you can't stay. It's the law" shows the irrationality of white man in indentifying native people based on law rather than on human grounds (9). It also shows the discriminating attitude of white towards the natives basing on their categorical ethnic identity.

The endeavor to find a name to identify the native people and, indeed, a name to describe non-native people as well is not just a question of semantics but reflects the attempt

to redress the marginalization of natives, abolish common stereotypes, eliminate racism and offer positive new identities for native individuals and communities. King's writings reflect this effort to redress, rename and recreate native identities. In *Green Grass Running Water*, King has reviewed the appropriation of native's identity in media and Hollywood movies. Before Portland can act in the movies, he must go through an initiation into Hollywood culture by dancing in a strip show. He dances an almost pornographic dance with Pocahontas, during which a cowboy dancer comes on stage and defeats him, the Indian. In the end, however, Portland has a moment of triumph, he is transformed into a 'chief' who leads the Indians into victory over the cowboys in the revised Western film. Summarily, King's story is about natives' transcending the narrow confines of deficiencies.

Communal or Social Identity

Communal or social identities are "representations of/or are otherwise connected to social structure", and form a basis of life that retells affection, relationship, memory, kinship, place, community, emotional fulfillment, intellectual enjoyment and a sense of intimate meaning (Dasan 14). Easterine Kire and Thomas King, writes to strengthen their own ethnic identity. They unravel the depth of Native ethnicity, knowledge, trauma, wisdom, their tradition and point of view. Generally, native writings exhort the young natives to be united and be identified so that they can rightfully stand for themselves. James S. Frideres astutely points out: "Natives today are rediscovering their past and are attempting to sort out their identity. They are trying to develop a positive self-concept and a group identity that can provide a reference point for them" (276). It is true that the native people have always showed a strong tendency to follow the traditions of their communities. Thus, native writers make use of myths, legends and all other oral knowledge of their ancestral people to show the

traditional bond as well as to revive and assert their ethnic social identity. Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* and King's *Medicine River* give a universal touch by questioning the very basic social problems of human life such as male dominance, patriarchal identity and gender issues. The opening line of Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* states emphatically:

> My grandmother did not like me. I knew this when I was about four and a half. I was sitting in her kitchen with my brother Bulie, older to me by two years, when she served us food. Hot rice and chicken broth.
>
> "What meat do you want"… I quickly piped up, "I want the leg, Grandmother, give me the leg."
>
> "I wasn't asking you, silly girl," she said as she swiftly put the chicken leg into my brother's plate, "that portion is always for boys. Girls must eat the other portions" I didn't understand why and I didn't care to ask why not (1).

The utterance in the passage, 'I didn't understand why and I didn't care to ask why not' shows the silent position of a female social identity. The grandmother, here, uses the patriarchal construct of society to show preference to her grandson and by the same rule, abuses the females in her household. Kire decisively has asserted that women have their controlling methods and draws awareness to "a particular form of matriarchal control in her society that perpetrates gender inequality" (Sebastian 148). The story runs smoothly to underline the patriarchal system of Naga society, how a male child is always favored and counted, with ancestral inheritance following him. He inherits property and is given a social identity as soon as he is born but the female child's role is undermined. The position is fairly explained by the fictionist in the character portrayal of Zekuo. He got three daughters but was angry his wife had given birth only to daughters. He wanted a boy to carry on his name because "girl-children are never considered real members of the family… they would always be known as somebody's wife or somebody's mother and never somebody's daughter. That way they could not carry on their father's name" (*ATM* 24-25). This patriarchal arrangement

perpetrated by society, has led to gender inequality. Dielieno, the female protagonist finds out that girls are denied many things in life. The literal meaning of her name Dielieno is "errand girl" (ibidem 4). She is without individual identity and her grandmother always referred her as 'The girl' implying her to be a non-status among her four brothers. Feminist sees the mechanism of patriarchy as a "cultural mind-set in men and women, which perpetrated gender inequality" (Barry 122). Sexist oppression is wrong, and so Dielieno, in her search for identity seeks to overthrow this patriarchal position. She finds a way out to change her situation, no matter what the social system is. She becomes a survivor, educating herself and finally finding for herself a job, a modern girl in that sense giving identity to her own person, within her own family and community as well. Kire, in this way, show the changing trends that native society is going through because woman has fought hard to find her identity and a place in the society. Similarly, *Medicine River* exposes the towering presence of male dominance through the episode of Jake and January's relationships. That Jake beats up January is no secret for January was regularly, admitted in the hospital emergency ward, but her failure to file domestic violence charges against Jack's abuses gives a peep into the social intricacies of gender bias.

In *Truth and Bright Water*, King narrates the experience of natives living in border crossings, and within it, he frames the story of two cousins, Tecumseh and Lum, and their search for an identity. Many of King's character portrayal gives a theme of social identification. Lum's struggle and his tragedy reflects the unreachable efforts of human in attaining every self-need, but his tragic death in the unfinished bridge and in the river, is a symbolical explanation given by King for cultural regeneration as water signifies revival in Native social identities. King classifies the insights of social identity by characterizing Monroe Swimmer, who refers to himself as 'Famous Indian artist.' Monroe has not only restored nineteenth-century landscape paintings when he worked for museums around the

world, but has also painted Indians back into the paintings. In the route of his works, Monroe steals 'Indian children' that he claims he has, "found them in drawers and boxes and stuck away on dusty shelves", who are probably native relics collected for the museums of Toronto, New York, Paris, London, Berlin (250). His intention is to retrieve the Indians back to their original place. Monroe tying the skull up ceremoniously with a red ribbon before putting the bones in the Indian River is a symbolic act of restoring native social identity from colonial obliteration.

Personal Identity

Personal identity usually have a reference to that which a person feels attachment for or ownership of. It provides people with meaningful life experience. Easterine Kire and Thomas King's writings portray personal identity as a defining quality that makes up the society. In Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, the little girl, Dielieno's personal search for identity guides readers to the understanding of the traditional fabric of the Naga society. Her grandmother, as one who lived through a "very hard age" of exclusion from many aspects of social life, provides Dielieno a base to reflect over the social existence that made up her grandmother's identity of being a terrible matriarch (250). It also made her to understand her own position and, eventually, her own identity. She says, "I felt a new sense of worth. I was not unfortunate to have been born a girl… I was proud of my domestic skills" (ibidem 253). In King's *Medicine River*, Will Horse Capture's search for a personal identity, provides a reference point for native and non-native social identity. His personal relationship with Harlen Bigbear established him to a man with social identity. Harlen's wish to settle Will in Medicine River for something intimate like a picture proves a secure homecoming as he says, "I looked around Toronto for a few months, took the occasional free-lance job, but nothing

seemed to settle... So that's the way it happened (93). In both novels of Kire and King, photography or snapshots contribute as an arch element towards a better understanding of the self and others. It is the photograph that allows their characters to identify their relations, and be an entity. Dielieno in *A Terrible Matriarchy* talks of having family photos that is a treasured possession in each house. She mentions about one photo of her dead grandfather who was squinting in the sunlight and grandmother looking solemnly into the camera. It is through the photograph that Dielieno, again, shares a personal story of her unmarried grandmother, Neikuo, who was engaged to be married to a student of theology. Of how the man died before they could marry so that she never married and still keeps a photograph of the young theologian in her bedroom. In King's *Medicine River*, photographs kept by his mother enabled Will to learn about his family relations. On an earlier occassion, granny Pete showed his grandfather's photo to him. Later, the reason for Will to set up 'Medicine River Photography' is to take family pictures. Will also finds an identification through Flyod's grandmother who invites him to join in the family photograph. Lionel talks of this symbolic picture: "Granny… says maybe she should adopt you" (202). Again, in another incident, Will and Harlen's desire to visit the Custer National monument is to get a picture of it, Harlen points out: "I want to get a picture of us standing over Custer's grave. Maybe send it to the *Kainai News*. Put a big caption under it says, 'Custer Died for Your Sins'" (ibidem 106). The reason for Harlen's need to have a picture of the monument is that it has historical identity related to the natives. Hence, in Kire and King's, the purpose of photograph serves as private identity and historical evidence to unveil human relationships.

A comparative study of the art and cultural experience of Easterine Kire and Thomas King, as this chapter bears out reveals a connection of similar features that grow out of a written orality, in a field that is intercultural and transnational.

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CHAPTER – V

Conclusion

Native voices literally imply the 'right to be heard' and its associated term operates as a symbolic mode for the understanding of historical and personal experiences. It can also be a medium to interpret social, political and cultural relationship in an existent community because every community, be it literate or illiterate, relate and relive their past through memories and the interconnections between memory, cognition and history helps one to shape and identify their individuality. A significant aspect of native voices also resides in the way they lead to comparative studies of people, across lines of unequal power and juxtapose situations of common socio historical conditions. This interrelated outcome finds applicable narrations in Easterine Kire and Thomas King's creative works. Both authors are serious writers on 'Native subject'. They bring situations of their own community and tables it as a mouthpiece for others to understand. Kire and King are both unique in their way of writing about their native communities. Kire sets her 'people stories' in the present epoch, with reflections upon historical past through powerful use of native supernatural stories and reminiscences. She considers herself as an objective writer and writes in a more serious tone using significant facts of historical events, rituals, customs, and beliefs alluring in it the readers into the world of the native cultural community. On the other hand, King writes in a very comical and humorous manner to drive across his serious message. His humor can also be highly satirical and weighty. About King's use of dark humor, W. H. New, writes:

> They ambush the reader. They get the knife in, not by whacking you over the head with their moral righteousness, but by being funny. Humor can be aggressive and oppressive, as in keep them in their sexist and racist jokes. But it can also be a subversive weapon, as it has often been for people who find themselves in a fairly tight spot without other, more physical weapons (244).

Humor acts as a medium and its treatment constitutes an opportunity for renegotiation and reassessment, not only of Native-Western history but also of the very structure of reference. King's poem, *Coyote Sees the Prime Minister* illustrates this derision:

> Coyote went east to see the
>
> PRIME Minister.
>
> I wouldn't make this up.
>
> And the PRIME Minister was so HAPPY
>
> To see Coyote
>
> That he made HIM a member of
>
> Cabinet.
>
> Maybe you can HELP us solve the
>
> Indian problem.
>
> Sure, says that Coyote,
>
> WHAT'S the problem? (252).

The poem manages to put across to its readers the powerful working of discourse, as Coyote trips readers into stumbling over the often heard, yet unchallenged expression the 'Indian problem.' It rationalized governmental agendas from a native perspective and it does so not only in a culturally specific but also in a very funny and apologetic manner. King uses elements from native myths and mixes them with modern or western stories specifically to correspond the interlinking values that bind native community in the vast expanse of a native universe. His narrative strategy invents, not just a new slant on an old story but an innovative kind of narrative voice. For instance, the 'Chief' in his short story *Joe the Painter and the Deer Island Massacre*, lived in a white folk's town and was familiar with its vocabulary and ways. In *Green Grass Running Water*, the mythical old Indians know very well how to

interrelate but, at the same time, can be explosive in their words. In both of the novels of Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered* and King's *Green Grass Running Water,* it is the history, the value of family ties and respect for elders that is of great importance and shapes the wellbeing of the characters in their respective native community. In Kire, it is reinforced using native pride to share communal responsibility:

> Reminiscing about hunts and battles in the past made the *thehou* a place where any youth with a man's heart inside him linger to listen or add his stories as well.
>
> But if the elders were there, the younger men listened closely without speaking much. They came to learn the stories of the village. It was good to be called a *thehou no,* a child of the *thehou* (*ANVR* 6)
>
> But it was a matter of honour. A man is not a man if you let another man kill your kin and torch your houses and you do nothing about it. We have a name for such men- Thenumia!"… "That is what drives a man to battle, the need to prove himself worthy of defending his village and his womenfolk, and to earn ornaments of war" (ibidem 7).

It is also noticeable in King's *Green Grass Running Water* when Norma, Lionel's Aunt, emphasizes the responsibility of keeping in touch with roots by attending the Sun Dance and meeting regularly with the family on the reserve. It projects native people's solidarity in community living. In fact, the close-knitted mythical Old Indians considers the community to be relations, and that to be "the way things are with Indians" (330). King knits the basic web of native identity through family and cultural lineage. Further, the mythical character's frequent reminder to mind 'relations' commune closely with the depth of King's nativist ideology of an extended relationship humans share with all animate and inanimate forms. Levi and Eli, in Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered* and King's *Green Grass Running Water,* respectively, are comparable in their exhibitory attachment towards native land and cultural values. In both readings of Kire and King's works, we find writings about their respective

native communities and in both narratives the central community has to fight for its rights and respect from the dominant society. Native voices express collective opinion of any society, here the narrative underlines the concept of a cultural recognition demanded by native society. It is the native's wish to keep their own culture, originality separate from colonial control, and to be recognized as a separate nation with their own traditions, laws, and land.

Thematic representation of native people in Kire and King's fictions involves cross-cultural comparison because of the national milieu in which each author writes. It becomes vital to compare because the experience of Indian-Canadian analogous history of colonization has left its mark subduing native voices. The presence of the Europeans as well as their colonial activities exposed the natives to subjugation and sporadic hostilities. The native cultures were eroded, stereotyped, objectified by colonial discourse and the white man's appropriation of the native voice through translation has changed their story and their genuine experiences. Therefore, native narratives in the hands of postcolonial writers like Kire and King present a non-stereotypical story about native history which reflect a strong empathy to recapture their original voices. Native authors primarily comment and actually got down to recording their own history because it navigates between issues of right and wrong, truth and fiction, men and nature, inclusive of the symbiotic relation of man and his natural universe. The contextual basis of this historical writing is a mixture of the ritualistic, the ancient and the contemporary. There is always a political dimension inherent in it because it voices the persecution, betrayal and resistance that emanates from oppression meted out to natives since the advent of white man. Kire's narrative in *A Naga Village Remembered, Mari, Bitter Wormwood, Life on Hold* reflect the obnoxious emerging realities of native life in Nagaland and the complexities around the colonial violence and discrimination. Conspicuously, Statehood for Nagaland in 1963 was an agreement between a small group of Naga leaders

and the Indian government. Under statehood, Indian citizenship was imposed on the Nagas. The *Armed Forces Special Powers Act* and the *Disturbed Areas Act* took away the fundamental native voice and rights of Nagas and continued to put them at the mercy of the armed forces. As a sensitive critic of native voices, Kire addresses these issues by objectivising the long-term damage and inflictions on Naga society. As such in King's *Medicine River, Green Grass Running Water, Truth and Bright Water,* there is a parallel native experience of discrimination in the hands of white government. The exclusion of natives from dominant society, history and culture remains a prevalent theme in much of King's writings. It explores what it means to be a native in a predominant culture. The presence of irony, colonial experience, its assimilation and the role of oral tradition also take center stage in King's perceptive attempts at historical revisionism. He addresses historical issues confronting the native and presents an honest portrayal of daily life of the natives. *Green Grass Running Water,* written in a funny, engaging and dynamic manner brings to life the tragic history of the native people's experience, fighting for recognition amid the prejudices and discriminations. He highlights the violation of the people's right to native land, law, culture and equality where the interaction between the Native and Canadian society has entailed constant debate over the native lands, independence and their right to self-government. King in his fictions also attempts an endeavor to subvert misperceptions about natives, often addressing the marginalization of the Indians. King's realistic portrayal of his characters living the daily and seasonal life is what makes it so powerful.

The ability of Kire and King to communicate reliable native voice through the use of native art of storytelling is admirable. Storytelling or otherwise oral tradition included all types of folklore, legends, myths and tales. Easterine Kire and Thomas King are apt storytellers, who used text to portray native oral tradition. This is because, they felt that forced colonization and assimilation is erasing a worldview that is, embedded in native oral

tradition. It becomes necessary for native subject writers like Kire and King to turn to native orality because oral tradition carries the consciousness of the native people. They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values and the vision of people as a whole, and that remembering the stories is important not only for continuing the oral tradition but also to help one live an authentic live:

> Take it. It's yours. Do with it what you will. Tell it to your children. Turn it into play. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story.
>
> You have heard it now (*The Truth about Stories* 151).

Native storytelling was originally an oral mode, its content only written down recently. As such, it actively constructed an audience and was a communal enterprise. Oral telling requires speaker and listener. It differs from contemporary reading practice, taking place as they do between reader and book. An oral story is inherently performative, for it is an "overtly interactive" type of production (Davidson et al. 110). That is, oral narratives involves a speaker addressing an audience, an audience that can, if it wishes, interrupt the speaker, influence the story through body language and effect the shape the story will take. Kire and King's stories recreate the sense of an oral voice in written form keeping into context the emphasis of the native acoustic dimensions of language. Orality has turned out to be a precious heritage for the native and is believed that much of their dramatic power and essence of their mythology and folklore emerge only when their stories are told in performance in the original language. The multiple techniques of storytelling using adaptation of an oral storyteller performance, is one way of continuing the survival for native oral traditions. In *Green Grass, Running Water* King's use of transliterations and demonstratives in his writings are meant to give a sense of what it may be like to listen to the oral storyteller. The original way of storytelling is in weaving multiple storylines, yet bringing all together to form a fitting

conclusion. He introduces native culture to non-native society, while pointing out the problems that native people must deal with in a dominant white society. Each of the four parts of this novel has a different narrator. Each story starts out the same with the creation theme and events unfold in varying ways. This flexibility is part of the fluctuating nature of oral traditions. The story is never repeated in the same way with exactly the same words from an oral storyteller and this variance is what King emphasizes in his four versions of his creation stories. However, putting these stories in print inevitably fixes the text as a literary form. By bringing together the use of oral techniques such as the use of demonstratives in the four versions of the creation story, King allows for an allusion and reference to oral performance in a written context.

In native oral traditions, 'nation' or 'country' originally meant simply the people and the environment they inhabited without legislated boundaries. Ethnic imaginations remain a vital part of native self-conception and provide a starting point for natives to re-conceptualize themselves and their identities, beyond the confines of non-native lines. In oral cultures, words are not just words; they have the power to destroy and the power to create. Easterine Kire puts it best when she states: "If words can change destiny, should we not exert caution over what we say? Our ancestors, like other indigenous cultures, had implicit faith in the power of the blessing and the power of the curse. If your words can destroy someone or something, they can do the opposite too. They can create and nurture and bring into existence that which does not yet exist" (*Thoughts after Easter* 35). Similarly, King's *The Truth about Stories* explores how stories change who we are and how we interact with other people. He universally taught the wisdom of stories in native context: "The truth about stories is that that's all we are… They are not just entertainment… You don't have anything, if you don't have the stories" (92). Each story originates with the community as a whole and each retelling reinforces the values of a native community. Native writers appreciate literature as

transmission of cultural memory and memory being a thought process that contains stable rumination of life, they conceptualized literature as a form of knowledge production, allowing for and emphasizing a variety of categories of 'knowing' that exceed and challenge the categories of rationality. In native context, the understanding of literature encompasses the oral forms of storytelling which resulted in the transformation of screening literature as having healing power that addresses and helps deal with historical trauma that may have inflicted them.

Easterine Kire and Thomas King are major figures in contemporary native writing. There are significant parallels in their dealing with native voices and concerns. Nevertheless, it is an acceptable fact that no two individual authors write the same. Easterine Kire is a tribal writer of her own Naga society and Thomas King is a native subject writer of Canada. If we examine both their ethnic atmosphere closely taking into consideration the geographical, social, political, and cultural divide of a nation, there are visible differences and dissimilarity, and it appears in the development of their artistic and national literatures. Every nation has its own story, myths and collective culture, not only because of their colonial past but because of their multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual makeup, Kire and King are comprehensive writers who are influenced by all these elements and they both try to portray it in their respective works. Kire's reliance on writing is objectified mainly to bring out the cultural voice of her own Naga society to be heard by others outside of her community. Her literary output promotes tribal cultures and literatures and she exhibits it to the rest of the world to appreciate and understand tribal life. At the same time for Kire, the preservation of oral culture of a tribal society is essential and she aims to endorse it through the use of oral folklores, myths, traditions, legends, and historical truths. Her primary objective is expressed thus:

> We are moving out of an oral culture into a written culture. Therefore, the task of writing down our cultural practices is important because it helps younger generations to understand our beautiful cultures, even though they might not see some aspects of it practiced. Even if oral culture dies out, if we have a written representation of our culture, it helps us preserve our identity for our children. And of course, it is very important because knowing who we are gives us a sense of roots and good pride in our way of living (Kire. E-Mail Interview. 2 March 2014).

While in contrast, Thomas King writes native oral stories, cultures and historical truths more to reclaim native peoples' name from misrepresentation and appropriation by Europeans or white society. Unaware of native cultures, language and unique characteristics, whites portray natives as savages, troublemakers, malcontents, exotic enough to be kept only as entertainment or showpieces in museums. As a result, King's dependence on writing is to eradicate and to prevent native stereotyping in popular culture, literature, media, and history of the white society. King techniques a voice that is consciously aboriginal and in his address to the colonizer or non-native, he demonstrates the aboriginals' rights, recognition, and respect. Some points of dissimilarity in the artistic details of Kire and King's writings will be examined below because the contrasts that stems from the basic similarities of the larger picture go to show the richness and the possibilities that native literature offers. I wish to point out, at this juncture that the scope for further research in native writings is vast and aspiring scholars must take the plunge in this direction.

Proverbial Expression vs. Humor

Easterine Kire and Thomas King are native authors who write stories within the context of their respective community, but what differentiates them is the style of their

writings and the dexterity they apply to put their thoughts and message forward. Kire writes in a proverbial manner, and uses direct speech or simple languages that are representative of what normal native habitually use in everyday speech. Whereas King writes with humor as a weapon to drive his serious communication. King uses comical elements and humorous technique to celebrate native culture, to critique the erosion of that culture through white policies and assimilations or to deconstruct the stereotypical image in which a native has been represented in European portraits. For instance, in *Bitter Wormwood,* although grandmother Khrienuo and her daughter-in-law Vilau, were shown as very intimate and live alongside each other, the fictionist Kire explains that women do not share the same kitchen and that these two were wise enough to maintain their separate kitchens because "sharing a hearth breaks up a friendship," as elders used to say (27). For instance, in King's novel *Medicine River,* the name 'South Wing' for Louise's daughter is supposed to be a joke given out to the non-native nurse. Again, in *Green Grass Running Water*, Latisha naming her restaurant as Dead Dog Café and serving beef stew to her customers masquerading it as native authentic dog meat is a comical trap for white tourists.

Supernaturalism vs. Magic Realism

A further noticeable difference between the style of Easterine Kire and Thomas King is in their technique of supernaturalism and magic realism. Easterine Kire's narratives are native folk stories and mythic pieces with lots of supernatural aspects surrounding the plot. The novel, *A terrible Matriarchy* takes us into a world of traditional beliefs of spirits and dead persons appearing freely as ghosts into the living world. Lieno is scared of going so early to fetch water from the village pond because she is fearful of the story of a ghost who appears before young woman. She could visualize the story about a girl who encountered a

man by the pond and instantly fell in love with him. He turned out to be a ghost who is so beautiful: “his ankle was very well turned, almost like a girl’s but there was nothing girlish about him. And he was fair, so much, more fair than Neizo… Neizo’s father was a white man, one of the soldiers that came during the war, married Neizo’s mother and had Neizo by her but he was killed in the war” (32). The girl who spoke with the ghost told her that he was there “to take a bride”, died shortly after six days with her eyes wide open, a sign of being carried away as bride by that spirit (ibidem). It was a collective story that the whole neighborhood knew, and the old women still said that it was not a good thing to go too early to the pond. Early risers often saw the spirit by the pond. In the years that he was sighted, some young unmarried women always died. This form of supernaturalism is stirred up and is brought alive every time individuals try to give realism to those spirits and made them live among them, just as Kire has done it in Lieno’s fear. She says:

> I remember every detail of this story whenever I went to fetch water early. Sometimes I heard hard breathing behind me when my water pitcher was full and heavy, and I could not turn round to look. Another time, I was sure someone had tugged at my basket… I tried not to dread the early morning trips, and would sing and did everything to keep my mind off the stories when I went to fetch water… Some mornings drunks would be staggering home. I welcome the sight of these men and blessed them for going home so late. A real man, even if he were dead drunk, was preferable any day to spirit (ibidem 33).

There are other things to do with the spirits both good and evil. At times, it is beyond human nature to think of the ways of spirits, and Kire has concretized those supernatural features on natives’ mind. For instance, the phenomenon of Pete’s spirit appearing after death to console his mother, the fussy stories of people, seeing the dead Zekuo’s spirit wearing the same flannel checked shirt that was his favorite when he was alive. The stories of a Bangladeshi man who was haunting the village after he had hanged himself. There were so many who

testified that they saw him carrying his water pot and singing to himself on the road and a young girl, actually said that, “he even slapped her on the bottom” (ibidem 87). There is a moving account of the grandmother appearing after her death as an unquiet spirit to claim over her house which was, selfishly put for rent. She appears before a pastor who is invited specially to pray for the unquiet spirit. In a mystical dream, she communicates: “My house is not for strangers. It is for my family members. How can I be at rest when they have thrown out of my house those who care for me and tried to make money out of it?” (ibidem 286). Similarly, Kire’s latest novel, *When the River Sleeps*, is a supernatural story. Vilie wanted more than anything to find the mysterious river which he constantly dreams every month for the past two years. In his mystical dream, Vilie plunged his hand into the river. It was freezing cold and perfectly still. The river had gone to sleep. Everything was as the soothsayer had told him, “When the river sleep, it is completely still. Yet the enchantment of those minutes or hours when it sleeps is so powerful, that it turns the stones in the middle of the river bed into… a powerful charm called heart-stone” (3). Almost imperceptibly, he slid forward, entered the water, and plucked a smooth stone from underneath the river. In a parallel motion, he pulled his arm out of the water and stood still, but it was too late and the force of the water splashed him with fury. The river had come alive and Vilie’s struggles were feeble against the force of rushing water. His movements grew frantic. A deep guttural sound escaped his throat. He flung out his hand and it hit the edge of the bed. It dawned on him that he had been dreaming again. He decided to go on the wretched journey, to wrest from its sleeping waters a stone that will give him untold power and to break his disturbing dream forever. The narrative follows the spiritual journey of this lone man Vilie. He must overcome the weretiger, numerous angry spirits as real as man, terrible widow-women spirits, river spirits, and tiger spirits to achieve his dream. Enriched with the wisdom of the elder’s stories, Vilie could remember that his spirit is the greater spirit, and he fights back all evils to

reach the territory of the sleeping river. Undeterred, he reached down and grabbed a stone from the middle of the river. The river was almost human as it pushed him down, rushed at him as though it would strangle him. This was as real as it could be. Then, he stopped struggling and concentrated instead on the spirit words he had learnt: "Sky is my father, Earth is my mother, stand aside death! I claim the wealth of the river because mine is the greater spirit. To him who has the greater spirit belongs the stone!" (ibidem 103). Subsequently, Vilie wins the 'heart stone.' A heart stone is used for both good and deceitful purposes, although Vilie does not know fully about the powers it gives. He only adds:

> It is a charm that grants wealth if you ask for wealth. It grants abundant cattle, or prowess in war. It can also grant success with women if you want that. The reason why so many want it is because it grants success in battle. Can you imagine how unequal the fight would be if one party had the heart-stone with them?" (ibidem 111).

The referral answer, "Fortunately, it is only a human who can enter the sleeping river to catch the river," spoken by Subale is a kind of justification to Vilie's success (ibidem). Subale confirms, "Spirits cannot do that. They cannot touch water, certainly not the water of the sleeping river because that is a spirit too" (ibidem). Later on, Vilie uses the heart stone to defeat evils. In one encounter with vicious daemons, he has invoked the magical powers of the heart stone to bring back the human life of Ate. He fought for the two of them, Ate's fear as well, knowing that the slightest sign of fear would make the spirit gain ground. Vilie is philosophical enough to figure out that, at times, the struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual powers. When Ate slips away from life due to the injury caused by the spirit-tiger, Vilie realized that it would be humanly impossible to bring her back. He rushed to his bag and retrieved the heart-stone. As he squeezed it with all his strength, his fury was directed at the spirit-tiger who had killed her. Vilie summoned all his knowledge of the supernatural in a last effort to battle her back to life. The battling was vicious, neither side

giving in. Vilie used words, "*Kepenuopfu Zanu tsie tuomhatalie*!", to bind them, while they used incoherent noise to terrify him (ibidem 195). Some of the spirits were "red-eyed and bloodied with long claws. While others were figures like the widow-women" (ibidem). He recounts this event when Ate insists on hearing the truth from him:

> Actually, you slipped away for some time, maybe a few hours. It feels as though it was a terrible dream, but I battled spirits that came initially as a hissing sound from the forest. I could see them in their horrible shapes, and they were wrestling with me over your life. I held the heart-stone in my hand, and it gave me strength. I shouted to the spirits using – His name. There were so many of them. I think they were emboldened by their numbers. First, I was completely terrified and my heart felt like stone, but I also felt so much anger at your death that I began to fight back in a rage. I think I may have gone little crazy, actually. But I know He helped me, the creator deity helped me. His name was my weapon (ibidem 197).

Vilie's voice muffled at the last sentence, which facilitate Ate to understand supernatural command on human self. She could see Vilie's physical and spiritual exhaustion in his effort to save her. The imagery of Ate's wound completely healing before Vilie's eyes creates a surreal outcome in the story. Kire's narrative cites, "He looked at the puncture marks, but they had closed over… It was as though the whole encounter had never happened. A waking nightmare that anyone might have trouble believing, themselves included, except for the two silver scars on Ate's left shoulder" (ibidem 199). Supernaturalism such as of these stories are abundant in native minds, so much so that one cannot deny a belief that there is always a supernatural power at work in all things. It helps in understanding peculiar codes of a native worldview and allows native people to verify their morals. Kire's natural style of including rich supernatural elements in her native stories is, thus, intended to explain the normal effects in a native mind.

Thomas King's native trickster stories have magic realism as its basis. Magic realism is the supernatural incorporated in reality, and King's trickster figure is cast as a liberator in an ingenious way. King is a supportive writer of the First-nation cause, and he makes use of the popular Native American trickster figure in his stories, specifically with an aim to find a balance between cultures by exposing the truth and the falsity in them. In *Green Grass Running Water*, the novel starts with Coyote, a trickster that interferes in almost everything. He messes up things and brings confusions, but also brings solutions to the other characters. Coyote dominates two stories in the novel. The realistic story of a Blackfoot Indians, and the magical story of the four old Indians who escape every springtime from Dr Hovaugh's Hospital in Florida. The four old Indians strive to 'fix up the world', likewise Coyote, is entrusted with a mission to reformulate the truth about the world or the right story that will set everything in its place. Coyote collaborated with the four old Indians in their attempts to save the world:

> "Fixing up the world is hard work," said Ishmael.
>
> "Even fixing up the little things is tough," said Robinson Crusoe
>
> "Try not to mess up your life again," said Hawkeye. "We are not as young as we use to be."
>
> "Let's fix up some more things," says Coyote. "I have lots of good ideas." (428).

Coyote's 'lots of good ideas' does help protect the authentic Indian culture. His enchanting song brings the sudden earthquake and the subsequent flood, which demolishes the white man's Grand Baleen Dam and helps the natural flow of the Indian Blackfoot traditional river. The only thing that Coyote wants to do is to help in fixing up the world, that is why he yells: "Earthquake earthquake!". "Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee" (ibidem 451). The magical 'earthquake' and the flood created by Coyote symbolizes the balance between community

expectations and individual conviction. It looks like after the flood both nature, and people get to start a new life and it has brought in the magic realistic effect in the novel. For instance, there is Alberta, who gets an immaculate conception with a little help from Coyote, as Coyote explains to the four old Indians: Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, Hawkeye, and Lone Ranger, that he didn't do anything but "sang a little, danced a little and helped that woman who wanted a baby," (ibidem 456). Moreover, the trickster Coyote's actions help resolves the characters problems from both plots- the mythic and the realistic one. The four old Indians finally get to help the world, because their main concern was Lionel, who will not be any longer a television salesman but will follow the footstep of his uncle Eli in getting a university education and will continue his uncle's mission, which is to fight for the solving of the Indian problems. As well, Alberta gets what she wants too, because she is pregnant. As a consequence of Eli's death in the water flood, the Duplessis do not need lawyer Charlie assistance any longer, so he quits his job and is free to start his life anew, heading west to California to reunite with his father. All of these details strengthen the idea of King's trickster 'Coyote' as a symbol of change. His trickster wishes to fix the world and put everything right in the lives of the native Indian community.

In *Truth and Bright Water*, King's narrative integrates the real with the magical story. Two central characters, Tecumseh and Lum, represent the realistic story. It traces their growth and struggles to live in an adult world, branching out to touch the stories of other characters connected to them. In the magical story, the famous Indian artist, Monroe Swimmer, is the central figure. He symbolizes the real and the supernatural, time and space, life and death, giving the novel an affiliation to magic realism. Monroe is actually the enigmatic figure, the boys saw disappearing into the night. The boys, Tecumseh and Lum chased the enigmatic figure that appears to them as a woman floating "on the air, her body stretched out and arched… but nothing more than illusion" is a running imagery that exposes

impending conflicts in the novel (10). The trickster, as with Monroe Swimmer brings back Indian's skull to their original land. It is the same skull "soft yellow and shiny and smaller" that Tecumseh and Lum retrieved back from the river which lead them to discover their own identity (ibidem 13). Monroe Swimmer is an unidentified Indian in Toronto city who has accumulated enormous wealth, though no one knows exactly how he got so rich. Back in Truth and Bright Water, he is the richest man. He buys the old church notoriously known as the church built by the Methodist as a mission to the Indians. Monroe bought the church in the fall, and painted it to invisibility. Tecumseh relates the mystifying act of Monroe's brush on the church, he says:

> There's no sign of Monroe, but you can see where he's been at work with his paints and brushes. The entire east side of the church is gone. Or at least it looks gone. I don't know how Monroe has done it, but he's painted this side so that it blends in with the prairies and the sky, and he's done such a good job that it looks as if part of the church has been chewed off (ibidem 43).

The mystery unsolved by Tecumseh, further deepens when Monroe the painter himself noticed that he had actually lost its door, making the church disappear altogether (ibidem). The disappearance of the church is a puzzle even to the creator Monroe, highlighting a touch of magical element in King's narrative:

> "I finished painting the church," says Monroe. "What do you think?"
>
> I know where the church used to be. Across the river and on the bluff above Truth. But even from this distance, I can see that it is not there anymore. No roof, no steeple, no door. No church…
>
> "So," says Monroe, "You think you can help?"…
>
> "Finding the church" he says…
>
> I just lost track of it (ibidem 217-18).

Losing ‘track’ of the church, as Monroe has put it, looks like a pastiche, but that is in line with all magic realist writers work. King’s story has done it as convincingly as required by allowing the narrator Tecumseh to say, “Yesterday, when Monroe told me he had lost the church, I thought he might be kidding, fooling around. But when he says it this time, I can see that he’s telling the truth” (ibidem 238). Like Monroe, there is Lum, whose life is shrouded in mystifying progression. The “time-me” shouted by Lum as he hands over his training stopwatch to Tecumseh, when they search for the mysterious woman in the depth of the river, recurs when Lum races time and to certain death in the river (ibidem10). It is significant that he literally races off the bridge, repeating the form of his normal running sessions:

> “Here.” Lum smiles and hands me his stopwatch. “Time me.” He turns and faces Bright Water. “You know what I’m going to do when I hit the finish line?”
>
> “Come on, Lum.”
>
> Lum starts across the planks, his arms against his side, his body leaning forward slightly at the hips. “I’m going to keep on going until I feel like stopping!”
>
> “Lum!” (ibidem 257-58).

The climax in this event questions the boundaries between life and death, often a thematic concern of magic realist novelists. It also questions the boundaries around time and space. Here in King’s, Lum races time, he jumps out of time and into the mist, he refuses to stop at any ‘finishing line’ and keeps on going. These links show the way in which King’s narrative celebrates the ability of a story to move fluidly through time and space as those in a well plotted magic realist text.

Portrayal of Women

Another factor that differentiates Easterine Kire from Thomas King is in their portrayal of women characters. Even though women in the works of both writers stay within patriarchal society, Kire's female characters are mostly docile, economically dependent and passively live under the shadows of the menfolk. King's female characters, on the other hand, are independent and economically strong. They have independent lives and resist living under the domination of men. A study of the female characters in both writings of Kire and King will show the marked difference. In Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered*, a woman submits to the authority of man as depicted in the conversation of Kovi and his wife: "Doniu came by last evening to ask for you. Is something up?" she asked. "It's a man-talk. Don't ask after the business of the clan" was his short reply (2). His wife knew better than to ask further. Many men never told their wives about the meetings of the clan and the women could only guess at what went on in the highly secretive all-men meets. It shows man as the sole custodian of all social matters in Kire. Whereas, in King's *Medicine River*, women are the trendsetters, they are even vocal about their intimate choices and preferences as reflected in Bertha Morley's description of an ideal or potential partner: "No drinkers or cigar smokers. Whites are okay. Should have his own job and not be married. I'd like someone tall so I can wear heels when we got out, but short is okay, too" (170). Kire's female characters are mostly weak and economically dependent and even face discrimination. In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, women occupy the passive role. They are overshadowed by the patriarchal set up of a society. So much so that eating a chicken leg by a girl, is almost taboo. That prized portion "is always for boys. Girl's must eat the other portions" (1). The portrayal of Dielieno's mother as a nervous and worried person gives a picture of the subservient position of female. When women themselves propagates such a mindset it leads to 'a terrible Matriarchy'. In *Life on Hold*, the protagonist Nime's mother have no source of economic income to relief the family of its

debt. Like many women of her age, she stayed home, did the housework, and looked after her children. They managed to live on what her husband earned. In contrast, King's female characters are independent and financially strong. In *Green Grass Running Water*, the female character, Alberta Frank, is a professor who likes having two men in her life, especially when they were both over two hundred kilometers away. She likes to get pregnant and have a child of her own without being married to either Lionel or Charlie. She wants to continue to live not only as a single woman, but as a single mother, too, who can provide for her family. She enjoys the idea of being alone. This is evident from the following lines:

> Alberta liked to drive. She liked to drive her own car, and she liked to drive alone. She didn't like the idea of a trip, but once she was on her way, once the light of the city were behind her and the road narrowed into the night, a feeling of calm always came over her, and the world outside the car disappeared… Marriage was like that (90-91).

The decision to have control over the four-wheel car is a metaphor of Alberta's desire to govern her own life. King's female lead is very emancipated. She likes her freedom, and she could survive without a male companion to protect her. Likewise, the native woman, Latish, is a self-sufficient woman and is a proud owner of a profitable restaurant and she takes care of her children's need single-handedly. In *Truth and Bright Water*, Helen owns a beauty parlor and takes care of her son independently. King's women are assertive, holding professional and leadership positions within dominant culture and native community. In *Medicine River*, Louise is an accountant, Bertha runs the friendship centre and Martha Oldcrow is the community councilor and medicine woman. In *Green Grass Running Water*, Alberta is a university professor, Latisha is a restaurant owner, and Norma is a community elder. In *Truth and Bright Water*, Helen is a beautician and she owns a beauty parlor. King is very responsive in depicting his woman's character within a positive framework. He expresses, "The women in my books don't take things for granted. They work pretty hard to

get what they want and have to make specific decisions to make their lives come together" (qtd. in Canton 4). In Kire's novels, marriage is important for females because it defines the social position of woman and "marriage gives children" (*ATM* 107). However, for King's female characters, marriage is not an absolute necessity. For example, Louise in *Medicine River* and Alberta in *Green Grass Running Water*, wanted to have a baby but did not want to get married. It is interesting to note how the anti-patriarchal attitudes of such characters perform King's attempt to empower native women, while Kire's strategic portrayal of women is largely to sensitively record the position and the attitude of not only the men, but women themselves, regarding the female gender.

Responsibility of Native Elders

The responsibilities of elders in the novels of Easterine Kire and Thomas King have different purposes to serve. In Kire's, elders are the decision makers, guardians of native ways and teachings, and the law keepers. They are the initiators of all cultural rituals and participate as priest during festivals, tiger-kill rituals, title-taking ceremony and the rest. Primarily, the elder's role is to teach the age group, they act as parents and teachers to disseminate communal and cultural living to the young ones who are waiting to be initiated into the adult world. Sometimes, they act as storytellers and their storytelling are directed to teach cultural or traditional values, to inculcate skills of right living. For instance, in *A Naga Village Remembered*, Levi is educated at a very young age by elders to love his native land, in these words: "Every individual has a social obligation to the village. When you are a few years older and your hearts are strong within you, you will take on the responsibility of guarding the village while others will go to earn a great name for our village. Your roles are different but each is important as the other" (25). Receptively, elder's voice guides Levi in

his warrior's venture and he grew to be the image of his father who once mightily defended the village of Khonoma. In the novel, *When the River Sleep*, the elders counsel help Vilie's passage to the sleeping river to get the magical heart-stone. Beneath, elders cryptic words, he could also understand the closely guarded weretiger ritual. When he was growing up in the village, the elders who looked after the age-group houses would tell him and his companions:

> It is not only the tiger that men transform themselves into. There are men in the other tribes who have been known to turn their spirits into giant snakes, and their women's spirits have become monkeys. We do not recommend these practices but we are telling you about them because knowledge is powerful. That is what the age-group houses are for, to impart knowledge of the natural and the supernatural to you so that you go out into the world with knowledge of both, and not disrespectful of either world…
>
> "Can you turn back into a human when you get tired of being a tiger?" one of the young men had asked.
>
> The elder replied, "Only with great difficulty, and as though you were going through a living death. The spirit is tormented so greatly that the pain itself is a deterrent to those who want to stop being tigers" (ibidem 28).

Later, Vilie's encounter with a real roaring weretiger "as though it were in pain" reminds him of the elders' stories and it prepared him to meet the challenge before him (ibidem). He had enough stories to help him fight back the werertiger and the way the tiger left him unhurt when he challenged his lack of courtesy, made him feel certain that there was some truth to the whole matter.

In Thomas King's novels, the role of elders is chiefly to initiate and invite misplaced natives back into the community. The novel *Medicine River* is a homecoming story of the protagonist who is of mixed blood. He is a photographer and lives in Toronto city but comes to Medicine River, a native town, partially due to the constant nagging of Harlen Bigbear

inviting him to set up a photography business. “Run a family-portrait special,” Harlen said, “Something like that will bring in a lot of people from the reserve” (ibidem 193). To make Will settle down, Harlen again reasons out with Will on the issue of the importance of family. He introduces Will to the closely bonded native group and to individuals, especially to an elder man who sincerely guided him. Recognizing one’s family is an important thing in native society, and by making sure that Will is able to identify with the people within the community, Lionel has done the task of an elder and by doing so, he has given a place to Will within the family group. The elders also perform their duty as storytellers. They tell creation/mythic stories of native past, real life stories of contemporary natives and stories about native way of life to younger members of their group, as well to non-natives or outsiders who are curious about them. Their aim is to preserve as well as promote authentic stories that will represent them to the rest of the world. King’s character, Lionel James, is a famous Indian storyteller who travels all over and knows everyone. Lionel was one of the elders on the reserve and the narrator, Will, concludes:

> I didn’t know Lionel James very well, but I had heard stories. Harlen said he was almost one hundred years old. Bertha said he was about sixty-nine. Harlen said Lionel had been a great athlete when he was young, could run for miles. Bertha said he had a bad drinking problem, spent some time in jail. Harlen said Lionel had been to some of the old-time Sun Dance and had the scars on his chest to prove it. Bertha said he got those in a car crash. But whatever he had been in his youth, he was one of the most respected men on the reserve (ibidem 160).

Lionel is an interesting storyteller, who could tell all stories with relative ease. He is an elderly man, who lives in a modern world that is fast changing and his stories catches the flow of it all. At one time, he tells his own stories of being frisked by a police:

> "Boy," he said, it's good to talk about things like this. You know, first time I went to fly somewhere, I had to walk through this fence, and the police made me do it again, and then I had to take off my belt buckle. You know what? There was this woman who waved this stick all around me. She waved it around my arms and down around my boots. She even waved it up between my legs. Said she was looking for metal. I was real embarrassed, you know. I had hold my pants up. It's real bad over in those European places (ibidem 162).

Another story is his experience of being asked to fill a form and get reservation done in a hotel using credit card. The reason for Lionel's visit to Will is to get help. He wanted Will to make his credit card done, so that he could continue his travel around the world, telling Coyote and Raven stories, reserve stories, and stories of Old Man and Old Woman. At the same time, Lionel is a multifaceted storyteller and his fancy of not needing a credit card, after all, so that he could stay back at home and tell stories to his own grandkids is a lovable confirmation by King. It advocates the need for elders to be present as carriers of history, of native stories and the need to teach life skills, to younger generations.

Theme of Conflict

Two major forms of conflicts: 'ethnic conflict' and 'relationship conflict' prominently feature in Easterine Kire and Thomas King's writings. In Easterine Kire's works, it is ethnic conflict. She addresses the political conflict of her own ethnic society in her novels. It is pertinent to note, here, that the Naga struggle for independence has now been considered as the longest struggle of its kind in the world. In the novel, *A Terrible Matriarchy*, she takes the unresolved political conflict in Nagaland, that is, the homegrown discord arising within Indian union and within members of Nationalist groups. The ripple effects leading to

frustration, disillusionment, unemployment are seen to be major reasons for alcoholism. After the 1950s' frustration over the political suppression of Naga independence movement by the Indian government, many native men took to excessive drinking. Kire further mentions the increase of unemployment among youths that added to the frustration, which many tried to deaden with drink. The fictionist interposes this conflict in her character Vini's drunkard waywardness in the novel. Vini is portrayed as a troubled character who has changed so much because he got into bad company of "tough street boys who knew more about human cruelty than kindness" (149). The narrative states:

> Vini was sixteen… He was in his last year in school but he did badly in his exams and the teachers reported… that he had become very difficult. He was rude to the male teachers and he played truant from school frequently (ibidem).

Vini playing truant frequently from school is an indication of his estrangement from familial values. He started to provoke his brothers for a fight and insults his own father when drunk. There is a sad picture when Vini's sister, Lieno, the narrator says: "According to Vini, it was always something that Father had done wrong in his life which was the reason for things going wrong in Vini's life. Father had stopped getting into arguments with him long ago. At fifty-two Father looked much older, I saw an old man stooped over with the burden of an alcoholic son and an ailing wife slowly dying of their son's alcoholism" (ibidem 200). Vini's unexpected change in character gives a partial explanation to the disturbing political climate of the state and the increasing sense of social and economic impotence. It is reflected when Vini explains the reason on meaninglessness of life where people brawl and kill one another for neither of them wants to submit to political defeat. He speaks out of a frustrating society, where to be a Naga is to live with the fear of being tortured, killed and shot all the time. He argues with his brother Leto, who insisted that he gives up drinking by saying:

> Do you know what it does to your insides when you hear about the people tortured and killed by the army and you can't do anything about it? And then, this smart elite comes along who thinks it is alright to stop fighting for freedom, to stop being men and be sitting at an office desk, having sold your identity for a bundle of money. You don't know that Rocky's father was killed by the army, do you? You don't know anything but you are so quick to accuse. You won't be safe anymore, it will come to you, it will come to all of us soon (ibidem 226-27).

Vini surprised his brother by such revelations that go on to accelerate the phase of his drinking habits. When Leto further asks him: "Is that why you drink, my brother" (ibidem). He did not reply instantly but contemplated over it and says:

> I didn't start out drinking because of that reason but now that I have been drinking for some years, I feel the futility of stopping because things are just going from bad to worse… didn't you hear that they killed Lato's mother? Put a gun into her mouth and shot her dead after they had raped her. Do you know that when Lato went to avenge his mother they beat him until he was half dead and then they released him. And no one could do anything to help him, certainly not the Government. Tell me Leto, what is the use of trying to live life by the rules? (ibidem 227).

Such a futile state of affair invites a sad lamentation on how conflicts can spoil human life. In *Bitter Wormwood*, Kire has addressed the Indian military aggression in the following introduction:

> The struggle for independence from India by the Naga people, indigenous inhabitants of the Naga Hills, has been a story hidden for several decades. Cleverly concealed by censorship on newspaper reports, there was only one western journalist, a British war correspondent named Gavin Young (The Daily Telegraph) who managed to enter Nagaland illegally in the 1960s and report what he saw of the genocide and rape and torture of the Nagas by the Indian Army (1).

> The conflict which began as a peaceful resistance of Indian occupation escalated into a violent full-scale war after the death of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji had supported the Naga right to remain independent of India and even declared that anyone who tried to force them into the Indian union would have to deal with him first. Sadly the Mahatma was killed in that first rush after independence and Nehru, the first Prime Minister of free India, chose the path of military aggression to make the Nagas submit (ibidem 3).

The atrocities committed by Indian armies are well narrated in her poetry collection *Kelhoukevira*. The poet Kire, here, laments the sad death of her mighty warriors in the hands of a 'sojourner' called 'plague.' The 'plague' is a symbol of invasion and war that brought death and decay. The title poem *Kelhoukevira*, which means 'where life is good', echoes the sadness, death, destruction and utter humiliation of proud warriors and, bemoans the loss of a way of life. This same anguish led to the writing of a non-stereotypical political story through the eyes of an ordinary man, Mose, whose life spans the entire history beginning from 1937 to 2007. Mose is depicted as a quick learner in school, and could filter things happening around him. The moment he saw four men being beaten by the army, he realized the brutality of the army attacks and learnt the dark situation that his community is into. He decided to join the Naga underground to tackle Indian militaranism and help his people. He stays in it until his retirement in 1963 at the dismal news that Nagaland has been created into a state in India. In the same novel, Kire further notes the ethnic insurgency in Nagaland, the split of Nationalist movement into two factional groups the Isak Muivah NSCN (IM) and the Khaplang NSCN (K) factions, and the continuous infighting amongst the Naga freedom fighters. She states:

> At the height of military oppression in 1956, the Naga Army was formed… to fight the Indian army… In 1980, the first factional group called themselves the National Socialist Council of Nagaland and used the slogan "Nagaland for Christ." After some years, there was a split in the NSCN, and the two factional

> groups appeared, the Isak Muivah and the Khaplang factions. The factions began killing off the leaders of the Naga National Council, and drug addicts and drug peddlers, as well as members of their rival groups on a large scale right through the 80s, 90s and up till 2008. In the continuous infighting amongst the Naga freedom fighters, Naga society was driven apart by extortion, and rapid brutalization (*BW* 3-4).

Bitter Wormwood grimly explores the internal conflict that is overriding the society into a grave situation that history has never experience before. The novel opens in 2007, in the midst of factional fighting, where Mose witnessed a brutal assassination of a Naga youth.

> It was over quickly. The young man who was shot lay dead in a spreading pool of blood. Shops quickly downed their shutters… after some minutes, there were just a few people left in the crowded market. Mose stayed rooted to the spot, but when everything became quite, he crept over to look at the body. One of the shots had gone wild. Luckily it was embedded in the wall of a hotel. No one else had been harmed. There had been times when bystanders had been injured, even killed by stray shots in these shootings.
>
> The streets were deserted now… The deathly stillness of yet another day brought to a close by a sudden killing brooded over the town (ibidem 7-8).

Kire has emphasized this endless killing to be interrelated to unsolved political affairs. The conflict, which started as a defence against the takeover of their ancestral land by the new nation of India, has grown into a full-blown power struggle. *Bitter Wormwood* is a careful study on how conflicts can change the entire psychology of human self. The Indian youth, Rakesh, observes that life is slower and sadder in Kohima. Such a sensitive observation is in line with the despondency of Naga people caught in the conflict. Rakesh has befriended a Naga boy called Neibou and has visited Nagaland with him. To Rakesh, Nagaland was so different from the rest of India. While in Neibou's home, he had felt the warmth and the hospitality which he had missed in Delhi. He came to learn that though people greeted him

warmly, smiled and laughed at his awkward pronunciation of a tonal language Tenyidie with him, they were steeped in grief:

> …there was always some terrible tragedy behind their smiles. Some member of the family killed in the war years with India or even now, young male relatives shot in factional encounters. It was as though all families carried unhealed wounds from the conflict in some way or the other. There was a present sense of fear that permeated normal life and everything would come to a standstill at the sound of a single gunshot (ibidem 221).

In spite of life being far from idyllic, the fictionist Kire shows optimism by ending the novel on a lighter note. She introduces the metaphor of 'bitter wormwood' to link the gap between two bitter enemies, India and Nagaland, in the newfound friendship of Neibou and Rakesh. Kire has also included the metaphor of 'bitter wormwood' as a remedy for forgiveness and reconciliation. For instance, when Neibou's beloved grandfather dies in the hands of factional killers, the term 'forgive' became a hard word while considering the fact of how grandfather devoted his best years to the Naga cause. Nevertheless, on his part, Neibou finds a meaningful solution in forgiveness, he states: "I have forgiven" "not so much the men.. but the act itself. I always need to stop and remind myself of that so I don't get eaten up by bitterness. I'd be of no use to anyone if I let this destroy me," (ibidem 242). The title, *Bitter Wormwood*, is again a metaphor that explains the healing solutions of the stalemate that political conflicts have led the people into, and which has not yet found a lasting solution. It is significant because it implies healing. Neibou explains:

> "Bitter wormwood"… It's a herb we use for cuts and insect bites. When I was young, Grandfather would pluck that and put it behind my ear on our way to the forest. 'That will keep the bad spirits away from you, the leaf will make sure they don't get at you,' he would say (ibidem 243).

Thus, Kire evokes a curative traditional herb 'bitter wormwood' to dispel darkness and bring in hope to this conflict-ridden Nagaland. She says; "I needed to become an objective writer and thinker… I am at the same time moving beyond the narrow confines of being defined by other people and being defined by the conflict because there is much more to me and my people than just another political conflict" ("Kire in Network News." www.icorn.org).

In Thomas King's writings, it is the 'relationship conflict' between native and non-native society. The novels, *Medicine River* and *Green Grass Running Water*, depict natives living in a predominantly white society. King's native characters often find themselves subjugated by white man's prejudices and are wrongly depicted in Hollywood movies, western books, as exotic figures or saleable commodities for entertainment. In King's narrative, there are visible distances between natives and whites in their relationship with one another. *Medicine River* can be read as a story of white man's erroneous policies and laws that obstruct native peaceful community are laid bare. For example, a white man's law controls the identity of protagonist Will Horse Capture. He is classified as mixed breed, and is denied many privileges. In a white society, natives are the malcontents, drunkards, or troublemakers, and in such stereotypes, they often find themselves in difficult situations. Even though Clyde is a famous basketball player, he could never shake off his troubles in a white man's rule. Clyde is portrayed as unlucky, always at the wrong place and time. He is constantly in and out of jail for many wrong reasons. He was given a year in jail for not divulging his friends' names on interrogation by the cops. At another time, he was jailed because he was sound asleep in the back seat of a truck driven by a group of robbers. Clyde's anguish indicates white man's repetitive injustice towards natives. In *Green Grass Running Water*, King tackles the issue of relationhips between native and white society. He pokes fun at the white man's tendency of noting everything in black and white. *Green Grass Running* besides being a fallacious land settlement recounts ludicrous events in Lionel's life. Lionel

wants to have his tonsils removed in Calgary but is driven all the way to Toronto as a heart patient: “By the time Lionel was dragged back to the hospital, insisting the entire way that his heart was just fine. The resident on call had the good sense to phone Calgary and discovered that the patient they had been expecting was a ten-year-old white child named Timothy and not an eight year-old Indian boy named Lionel” (35). Such a mistaken identity stays forever with Lionel. It did not end there, because the white man has recorded everything in black and white and seems to be inerasable. Fourteen years later, when he applied for an insurance policy, Lionel discovered the original error had somehow worked its way into a file. The insurance company wanted him to have a health check with a separate evaluation of his heart condition. A year later, he applied for a car loan, and when he went back to checkup with the loan manager, the man sat Lionel down, smiled and inquired if he had any more trouble with his heart. Six months after that, he was turned down for a part-time job as a driver of a school bus because of his health. For years the Heart Foundation sent him letters about tax-deductible donations, furthermore, a woman from Calgary requested him to share his experience and help heart patients. These events in Lionel’s life symbolize the inability of white man to correct their mistakes committed against native people.

Historical clichés assigned natives with twin stereotypes of ‘savage’ and ‘primitive noble’. In King’s, it connote and define its way in establishing native and white relationship. For example, in *Green Grass Running Water*, Karen and Eli’s marriage takes place primarily because Karen likes the thought that Eli was an Indian. She is blinded by her own belief in the ‘Imaginary Indian’ and calls him ‘Mystic Warrior’ i.e. an idiom she composed while reading a book about Indians. There is also the prejudiced relationship between Latish and George. There is no way that George can adore his wife, Latisha, because of her Indian origin. Even after marriage, George could not forget the essential difference between native and white. He continues to nag Latish with ideas that natives are “traditionalist, stuck in the

past and unwilling to take chance", which is indicative of a sense of the destructive white imagining of native indigeneity (175). Native people are considered as oppressed groups and are subjected to both racism and sexism. Karen desires the false idea of Eli, yet she feels shame about her connection with him. She is uneasy about showing her intimacy with an Indian man and resist to make love to him in her white parent's house (ibidem 181). In the same way, George turns out to be a wife beater, and his actions symbolize the racial abuses meted out to natives by the white colonizers. By illegally clicking photographs during native sun dance festivals, George becomes a symbol of white man's violence and intolerance towards the authentic native culture. George's action indicates the oppression of cultural and religious practice by whites. King also exemplified the misconception of white man in considering natives as devoid of intellectual ability. In *Medicine River,* Alice feels ironic that Will is a native who is a photographer, because the profession of photography is a luxury affordable only for white people. In *Green Grass Running Water*, Sifton does not wish to regard Eli as a native because he could drive cars, watch television, go to hockey games and is a University professor. Eli's life has all the magnificence possessed by a white man.

In his depictions, King shows the violation of native rights by white domination. King's purpose in emphasizing native and non-native relationship is to deconstruct the stereotypical image in which natives have been represented in European portraits. In *Green Grass Running Water,* King creates Babo to censor the spell of colonial enslavement of native people by imperialist group. In King's story, Babo is a female janitor in the mental hospital, from where the four Indians escape. The name 'Babo' has affinities with imperial slaves. So, when 'Babo' is confronted with Dr Hovaugh's expectations of her slave history, her response involves more than simply resistance, she refuses to engage in regimes which construct oppression:

> "Your ancestors were slaves, were they not?" said Dr. Hovaugh.
>
> "Nope," said Babo, "But some of my folks were enslaved."
>
> "Ah" said Dr. Hovaugh.
>
> "There's a difference," said Babo (348).

By using the name, 'Babo', King destabilizes the imperial positioning of the slaves. Here Babo resists the depiction of slave. She uses the term 'enslaved', which is not inherent but is enforced. Babo's usage implies that one can be enslaved but is not a slave. King has symbolically given a rightful place to native by allowing the native mythical figure Coyote to outdo the Christian God. Coyote performs 'Immaculate Conception' in a native girl, Alberta, who wants a baby without marriage. He also allows the natives to defeat whites in Hollywood movies. His native actors are proactive and clear the conventional stereotype role of native actors as sidekicks meant only for entertainment. King has also redefined racism, which is the underlying ideology of the manifest policies regarding native-white relations throughout the history. He gives a list of Indian attributes:

> Indians can run fast. Indians can endure pain. Indians have quick reflexes. Indian don't talk much. Indians have good eyesight. Indians have agile bodies. These are all Indian gifts (ibidem 434).

This statement serves as a comment that attests natives as empowering people who can manage with ease, the disturbing historical process.

It is edifying to find in the works of Easterine Kire and Thomas King, a keen sensitivity armed with appropriate artistic skills. Kire and King noticeably became popular with readers and creative writers. Having examined pivotal issues of Kire and King through the topic of the thesis, *Native Voices in the Works of Easterine Kire and Thomas King: A Comparative Study*, it must be said that the two native writers felt the necessity of furthering

their modes of analysis. They did and worked from within native literature or tradition to come up with appropriate tools and distinctive voices. Literature is a part of the societal negotiations, where history and contemporary situations, power structures, group relations and the position of the individuals are imagined and given form. Kire and King participated in these negotiations in manifold ways in their writings. They address not only the relationship between individuals and society, but also the interactions and conflicts in native communities as well as native positions within transnational and broader framework. Thus, native literature in the creative hands of Kire and King delved into a central part of how community and society are imagined, questioned, and perpetuated, culturally and politically.

The introductory chapter has defined the main idea and themes that is discussed in the study of the thesis. It looks into the aspects of Native literary background, Native literary narrative and a progress from oral to written tradition, and an understanding on 'Native Voices' of Northeast India and Canada. Acclaimed as important voices coming out of their respective native community, the *Introduction* also has highlighted Kire and King's place in creative writings. The second chapter, *Native Voices in the Fictional Works of Easterine Kire*, has given an extensive study on native voices as prominent in the fictional works of Kire. The accentuation of native voices in most of Kire's fictional works emerges from her traditional, ancestral oral community. We find an authentic document, a resonating voice of the Naga society she comes from. The examination of native voices in Kire opens with an introduction of the writer's career as a literature teacher and creative writer. Her works are inspired by the native community of storytelling tradition, tribal culture and deeply religious ethos, historical narrative and intrinsic political issues. The third chapter, *Native Voices in the Fictional Works of Thomas King* offers a broad analysis on King's representation of native voices in his fictional works. His writings provide an undeniable sociological significance that gives voice to the essential self of the native society as opposed to the stereotypes. An assessment

of King's redefinition of native status is done by focusing on his career and his conscious resistance of Eurocentric models, historical issues and political voices, societal issues and cultural identity. The fourth chapter, *Comparative Study of Easterine Kire and Thomas King as Native Writers* brings out similarities and points of contact in their works. The appraisal of native voices in both authors is carried out under the given sub points: Approaches in Comparative Literature, Orality and the Significance of Storytelling, Evocative Writers of Cultural Tradition, Community and Land, Political and Socio-Religious Concerns, Historical Basis of the Chronicle of Native Voices, Effects of Colonial Impact and Negative Native Stereotypes, Ethnicity and the Native Identity.

Placing, Easterine Kire and Thomas King in the tradition of Native writers, and having closely studied native voices in their works, it can be highlighted that both Kire and King have imaginatively created reliable native voices. Their stories can operate as guiding principles through which other stories can be interrelated, understood and create room for comparisons. Contemporary cultures been profoundly influenced by the many native cultures, one can produce a speculative outlet for further literary creation and can generate a closer understanding to the broader aspects that made up the native society. King says of its authenticity as he talks about his position as a native writer: "I want to look Indian so that you will see me as Indian because I want to be Indian, even though being Indian and looking Indian is more a disadvantage than it is a luxury" (*The Truth about Stories* 59). It is also pertinent to point out that Kire and King's writings have motivated interest among readers all over the world. Native writers of today have taken on the task of rejecting the image of the doomed, tragic natives by revealing the conscious fact that natives are breathing, lively beings who can stand up and speak for their own selves. Thomas King in his Massey Lectures *The Truth about Stories*, declares that native can distinguish the difference between good and bad and should not be considered otherwise. Native writers are also engaged in

much more than a literary debate over the nature of good and evil. He points out that, while writers such as N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Silko examine the tension of good and evil and the need for sacrifice and renewal, other native writers have taken other concerns. That Gerald Vizenor borrows traditional figures, such as the trickster, re-imagines them within a contemporary context, and sets them loose in a sometimes modern, sometimes post-apocalyptic world. Of how James Welch looks at the question of identity, of place and the value of names; Louise Erdrich explores the shadow of land of resistance; Simon Ortiz captures the rhythms of traditional song and ceremony in his poetry; Tomson Highway handles the difficult matter of reserve community and gender and family relationships; Lee Maracle and Jeannette Armstrong show how traditional wisdom and customs can suggest ways to conduct oneself in the present. For King what is most satisfying is to know that there are native writers whose names he had never heard of, "who are, at this minute, creating small panoramas of contemporary native life by looking backward and forward with the same glance. Not so differently from non-Native writers" (ibidem 112). According to Thomas King, the magic of native literature as with other literatures "is in the way meaning is refracted by cosmology, the way understanding is shaped by cultural paradigms" (ibidem). Likewise, if a novelist, Margaret Laurence, can speak of the history of the making of the land and can stress the human factor and its relatedness to the land. Powerful native writers like Easterine Kire and Thomas King have breathed fresh life and authenticity into native voices. Their art, befittingly, flows from the oral tradition. A tradition that is based on spoken language which is all inclusive and can accommodate actions, behaviors, relationships, practices throughout the whole social, cultural, economic and spiritual life process of people. It is in such an inclusive and flexible framework that native voices in the creative works of Easterine Kire and Thomas King become representative but also celebrate a unique individuality at the same time.

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