

**WOMAN AS SUBALTERN: A STUDY OF SELECT WORKS OF MAHASWETA DEVI
AND EASTERINE KIRE**

**Dissertation submitted to Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for
the Award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in English.**

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DECLARATION

I, K Limei Phom, do hereby declare that the dissertation entitled *Woman as Subaltern: A Study of Select Works of Mahasweta Devi and Easterine Kire*, is a bonafide record of research work done by me, under the supervision of **Dr. Lemtila Alinger**, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema, during the period of my research and the dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any degree, fellowship, diploma to any other universities or institution. This is being submitted to the Nagaland University for the degree of **Master of Philosophy in English**.

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CONTENTS

Declaration	1
Supervisor's Certificate	2
Acknowledgement	3
 Chapter I Women Writing and Publishing in India	 5-24
 Chapter II Status of Naga Women and Bengal Women	 25-42
 Chapter III Biographical Elements and Historicity in Easterine Kire's Mari and Mahasweta Devi's novel <i>Queen of Jhansi</i>:	 43-64
 Chapter IV Relationship of Women towards Women in Kire's <i>A Terrible Matriarchy</i> and Devi's <i>The Why-Why Girl</i>	 65-86
 Chapter V Major Themes of Easterine Kire and Mahasweta Devi	 87-107
 Chapter VI CONCLUSION	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

WEBLIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1. Women Writing in India:

It is rightly said that literature is the reflection of society. Literatures are the portrayals of the society which is never free from the influence of culture and people dwelling in it. Writers belonging to different periods in some or the other ways tend to reflect on the prevailing social, political, religious and economic condition in their literary works. For instance writers in the form of their representation try to reveal the different aspects of life both positively and negatively.

For decades, women in India have hardly been given proper education. Women are usually confined within the four walls of their homes and lack of knowledge of the outside world which made the women even more ignorant. Standard society views women's work as just an exertion that deals with domestic chores, further their imagination and their emotional frustration are inappropriate and irrelevant to the empowerment of modern Indian society.

However, examining the literary works by leading Indian women prominent and pertinent issues arise beyond domestic walls. For centuries, women in India have written and published in some form or another of literary activity. However, these works of the women writers were also invisible to marginal positions in the history of literature. A number of exclusion strategies, exile and general negligence of the female texts are applied to public publishing and institutional censors. The choice of these women writers is limited to permitting or penalizing the society in which they exist.

Women's status in any society is an important indication of their level of social development. Social changes take place with the change in women's role and status. These changes can be observed through the pragmatic changes in the status of women in society. Inversely the level of change is related to the standards of education. Education has been an

important development factor that helped to raise people's status and role in society. Education as the backbone of a developing society should enhance the level of education for changes in the aspects of life and outlook. Progress in education and improvements also increase the participation rate of people in national development activities. A trained citizen is a nation's asset. Although education has penetrated every corners of the society sadly its impact and influence are different among the two genders.

Social censorship draws the boundaries for the writers to express themselves. Literature and other artistic media are entrusted with the dismantling and repression of political and social systems, but when it is used by women to disrupt oppressive tyrannies in homes, families, marriage and maternity, the same artistic expressions or art forms become unacceptable. It contained and restricted the voice which undermines the very foundations of the typical traditional social order. The restriction of the voice of women is a consequence of the need to discipline and institutionalize the women's agency in paternal society. Besides its relegation to a "private" domain which legitimizes the exclusion of women from the public space of writing. Writing by women becomes not only an act of identity and empowerment but also a gesture of disrespect, subversion, resistance and transgression.

In terms of choosing languages, subjects and genres, the gender nature of its psycho- sex context and the extraneous censors are placed by the family, community, society and patriarchy on women. Its subject must be in accordance with the 'social acceptability and appropriateness' norms, its language must be gendered / feminine, sanitized and safe, its genre must also correspond to the practical constraints of its social beings / household position / space and it must provide for a 'strategic' shield' so that the reader does not penetrate the innermost space of its private being. The deep rooted perception that women are lower, dependent and disadvantaged, leading to a culture of disregard for women in Indian society, will not be easy to change. This does not mean, however, that change is unpredictable. It takes time for perception to eradicate. But this task could only be accomplished with a push towards the correct direction and a lot of effort. We only need an organized approach from the country's government and law enforcement agencies, which focuses on the right direction only if women are released from all forms of discrimination in all these fields.

1.2. Some Contemporary Representation of Indian Women and their Writings:

English literature and writings in India takes a major leap at present. In fiction, it has reached a new era and has indeed won success even abroad. Indian women writers questioned the prominent old patriarchal domination and its social set structure. They are not only spectators and instruments in men's hands. They have shown their position even in the field of literature. In the last four decades, the image of women in fiction has changed. Women authors have moved away from a traditional portrayal of women who sacrifice themselves to conflicts, women who seek an identity and are no longer simply characterized and defined by their status as victims. The definition of internal life and the subtle interpersonal relationships was a major concern in recent Indian writings. In a culture in which individualism and protest are often alien ideas and conjugal bliss, the role of women in the home is central. It is important to notice that not only a vital sensitivity in India emerges, but also an expression of cultural displacement. The presentation of women is more assertive, more liberating and more explicit than the woman of the past.

In the area of fiction, it has achieved a new epoch and has earned success even abroad. Indian women writers have started questioning the prominent old patriarchal domination. They are no longer mere spectators and tools in the hands of men. They have proved their significance in the field of literature in every field. Today, the works of Kamla Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Geetha Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai and Manju Kapur and contemporary North-East writers like Temsula Ao, Easterine Kire, Mamang Dai, Harikrishna Deka, Dhruba Hazarika, Jahn timer Baruah and many more have left an indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English. The Indian women writers in their literary works radically explored the unexplored female psyche and turmoil of women in Indian context. Women writings were mostly the outburst of long suppressed silence under patriarchy and normative society. Indian women writers however do not confined themselves to gender bias faced by women. But they also explore current sensational issues like nationality, history, politics and ecology which are often considered as male domains. Women writers like Mahasweta Devi, Easterine Kire, Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai, Kiran Desai and Arundhati Roy boldly addresses such issues in their literary works.

One of the key developments in modern Indian fiction is that women focus on developing and interpreting experience from a feminine consciousness theoretically. In order to create an identity, many Indian female novelists explore female subjectivity. The subject varies between infancy and femininity. As Patricia Meyer Specks remarks,

"There seems to be something that we call a women's point of view on outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the countries." (Smacks Patricia 48)

Shashi Deshpande is a winner of the Sahitya Akadami award, for her novel *That Long Silence*. Her third famous novel is *Roots and Shadows*. She reflects on the problems and concerns of the middle class Indian women. Her writings are rooted in the culture in which she lives. The women characters are with traditional approaches trying to tie family and profession to maintain the virtues of Indian culture. Shashi Deshpande's novel '*A Matter of Time*' is a continuation of her exploration into the many facts of the feminine experience in writing.

In Shashi Deshpande's novels, the main theme is human relationships between mother and daughter, between father and daughter, with husband and wife. We see that women are in the central stage in all these relationships and that the narration changes significantly through her feminine consciousness. Three categories of suffering females also appear with subtle changes in her novels.

The first one belongs to the mother or mother of the protagonist, the traditional woman, whose place is with her husband and family. The female category appears courageous, independent and insubordinate, and cannot confirm its submissive and abandoned vision. As radical feminist, ideology expressed, for example, Sarah's friend Nathan in the *Dark Holds No Terror*.

The third character, which is a type of female, is the woman between her ideas and practices that are neither traditional nor radical. For instance, Indu leaves her husband to seek refuge in her ancient home in *Roots and Shadows*. She sympathizes with women, being a woman herself. As Shashi Deshpande explains in an interview on feminist approach;

"If others see something feminist in my writings, I must say that it is not consciously done. It is because the world for women is like that and I am mirroring the world."

Manju Kapur, who has also received the Common Wealth award for the Eurasian region, is another eminent writer. Her novel *A Married Female* is a seductive story of a love that is knitted in sympathy and intelligence at a time of political and religious turmoil. It is the story of an artist and the challenges and constraints of middle class existence. Manju Kapur describes through her protagonist (Astha);

“A woman should be aware of self-controlled, strong willed, self-reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense.” (Ashok Kumar 90)

Arundhati Roy, who was born in 1961 in Bengal, is a famous and great writer. She believes that, “A feminist is a woman who negotiates herself into a position where she has choices.”

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy reveals at many places her feminist stance and her protagonist represent feminine sensibility. She has made ecology and subordinates the main themes in her writings. In her other works, Roy's closer observations and the minute aspects are noted in her creation of her literature. As Arundhati Roy's mother says;

“Arundhati is a born talker and a born writer. While, she was studying in school, it was a problem to find a teacher, who could cope with her voracious appetite for reading and writing. Most of the time, she educated herself on her own. I can remember our vice principle Sneha Zaharias resorting to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a text for the little fourth grade.” (Roy Arundhati 32)

Anita Desai is one of the most celebrated writers of contemporary female novelists in India and holds a unique position. She has numerous creative works to her credit. Most of her characters in work rebel against the patriarchal community to explore their own possibilities or to live for themselves, irrespective of the consequences of such an upheaval. Desai's women, thus, want freedom within the community of men and women, as it is the only way that will succeed in fulfilling them. In fact, Desai's model of a liberated woman, Bimala in the novel *Clear Light of Day*, is an unmarried woman. Her married women characters like Maya in *Cry, a Peacock*, Monisha in, *The City*, Nanda in, *Fire in the Mountain*, and Sita in, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Become depressed, violent or self-destructive.

Their kind of life, apart from being invigorating, also frees them from dependence on men. Bimala, through her individual freedom, exemplifies Simon De Beauvoir's description of an independent woman in her book. *The Second Sex*, where she asserts that;

“Ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumble; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator.” (Simon De, Beauvoir 76)

Ashapura Devi is also a remarkable writer who focuses on changing the traditional reform of women's rights, which could provide space for women to express themselves. She believes that women's education is paramount. She thinks that women themselves are agents of female oppression and not just male, so she seems to be critical towards women rather than men, whom she believes can dominate women because older women who are dependent and insecure like mothers and mother-in-law help them in doing so.

Another noted writer, Kiran Desai in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* won the 2006 Booker prize and the National Book Critics Circle fiction award. Her first novel *Hullabaloo* published in 1998 won *Betty Trask Award*.

Dr. Shubha Mukherjee remarks, “Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* presents the picture of globalized India. The characters like Jamubhai Patel, Mrs and Mr Mistry, Sai, Biju Nonita and Lolita are affected by Globalisation. As intelligent writer and careful observer of human behaviour, Kiran Desai fulfils the responsibility of writing about current sensational issues.”

At such moments, Desai appears far from authors such as Zadie Smith and Hari Kudzu, who have a generally optimistic opinion of what Salman Rushdie has called, "Hybridity, impurity, inter mingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, and songs.”

1.3. An Overview on the Life and Works of Mahasweta Devi:

Mahasweta Devi is a distinguished Indian Bengali writer. In many states like Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, Devi studied and wrote constantly and unremittingly on life and struggles of the tribal communities. She is a well-known Indian writer born in 1926

into a Bangladeshi middle class family. She was educated by Shantiniketan's prestigious founder, Rabindranath Tagore, a great Indian thinker. Devi has written over 40 books in Bengali, some of which remained unpublished which contained novels and stories. Her mission was to continue to work with the Komadic tribes, the non-tribal poor and desolate, unprepared people to the Indian political system. The author lives with people she writes about and has a significant hand on experience. Her books focus on the simple way of life, but above all focuses on their suffering and their experience of exploitation. She devoted her lifetime trying to eliminate the injustices done to them. She urges the people to defend their rights and resist abuse in her meetings, conferences and writings. She calls for equality and the rights of the oppressed and encourages through her writings to educate especially girls.

Her first published book, a biography, *Jhansi Rani* was written in Bengali in 1956. Her first novel *Nati* was written in 1957. Among her other masterpieces are *Haazar Churasi Kimau*, *Rudali*, *Bioscopes* and *Chatti Munda O Tan Ti*. Some of these books have even been converted to films and depict the lives of the poor people of India and other social issues. In her book, *Breast Stories*, Devi, known as an Indian intellectual in cultural texts, literature and her own radical writings for her feminist, deconstructive and subaltern writings, tells the stories of women in India caught in the cycle of holiness and self- abandonment.

She talks about the oppression of the Indian population in her journal. She promotes the disadvantaged and the outcasts of the peoples of India. She also writes about people like Adivasi, Ledhas, Sabars and Mivelas. She is also becomes a member of a tribe and lives among them. Her experiences with the tribal have influenced her writing to a great extend.

Devi represents the condition of tribal women in various parts of India, and their endless torture on account of their poor socio-economic conditions, whether mental, physical or emotional. Women were seen as living on the verge of hunger and lack of adequate medical facilities, and met a tragic end. She also writes on the lives of ordinary men and women, especially about subaltern position. Her stories, especially her *Palamau stories* and *Draupadi*, give voice to the tribal people. Her novels are profoundly rooted in her experiences of the people she writes about. The works of women notwithstanding patriarchy shows how women are treated as mere non-entity and also as subaltern.

Some of the most distinguished writers use the power of their word to bring these weaker sections of society to a broader audience. Some of the authors feel it necessary to act more than just spectators and journalist of the human condition. They throw themselves fighting to improve their situation, as it were to improve. Devi is among those authors who wrote in both the feudal and capitalist systems about the oppressed and women, who still retain the essence of feudal exploitation. Not only did she write about them, she worked for them too. She has great concern about the lot of suffering which retains still the essence of the feudal exploitative modes.

1.4. An Overview on the Life and Works of Easterine Kire:

Easterine Kire first published book a collection of poems in 1982 titled *Kelhoukevira*. This was also the first book of Naga poetry published in English. Her novel *A Naga Village Remembered* published in 2003 was the first novel by a Naga writer in English. Her second novel was *A Terrible Matriarchy, Mari and Bitter Wormwood*. Kire has also written children's books, articles and essays. Her first children's book in English was published in 2011 and she has translated 200 oral poems from her native language. *A Naga Village Remembered* is about a battle between the British forces and the Nagas. *A Terrible Matriarchy* highlights the internal and social strife that grips Nagaland as a state in India. *Mari* is a novel based on the Japanese invasion of India in 1944 via Nagaland. It is a true story of a young mother who lost her fiancé in the war and made the decision to move ahead and live her life. Kire through her works has tried to portray the everyday lives of the people in Nagaland. *Bitter Wormwood*, brings to mind the effect of wars on human lives and brings into force one of the most significant political events that impacted North-East India. She also brings into focus the lives of the women in a changing Naga society transitioning from past to the present, from the fields to the classroom, from primitive to a modern and civilized society and also brings into focus the vibrant Naga culture and traditions. Kire reflects unpleasant realities of Nagaland and the complexity of the people of Nagaland's atrocities and discrimination. It also emphasizes the internal rivalry and ideological differences between the Naga who fought for liberty. It highlights clearly the lively and fascinating Naga culture and tradition which have passed down from generation to world. The women in her writings are Naga women who live in double risk of being a woman in a patriarchal society that struggles with her post- colonial crisis of identity. The majority of her works are based on real lives of Naga people and colonial period in Nagaland.

Kire was also awarded the Governor's Medal in the year 2011 for excellence in *Naga literature*. She was also awarded the Free Voice Award by Catalan PEN Barcelona. Her novel *Bitter Wormwood* was shortlisted for *The Hindu Prize* in 2013. *A Terrible Matriarchy* was selected to be translated into UN languages. Furthermore, the books *A Terrible Matriarchy*, *Mari*, *Forest Song*, *Naga Folktales Retold* and *A Naga Village Remembered* have been translated into German. In 2016, her book *When the River Sleeps* was awarded The Hindu Literary Prize. Thus, Kire has immensely contributed through her works promotion of the Naga culture and Naga tradition to various spheres of life even to the outside world. Her immense contribution to the history, political impact, tradition and culture of the Naga also showcases the Naga to the larger world.

1.5. Subaltern Concepts in the Works of Devi and Kire:

The term 'subaltern' is used in Postcolonial theory. The exact meaning of the term in current philosophical and critical usage is disputed. Some thinkers use it in a general sense to refer to marginalized groups and the lower classes: "a person rendered without agency by his or her social status" (Young 23).

According to some thinkers it is a term that commonly refers to the perspective of persons from regions and groups outside the hegemonic power structure. In a general sense it is used to refer to marginalized groups and the lower classes—a person rendered without agency by his or her social status. While others writers use it in a specific sense. As Gayatri Chakarborty Spivak asserts, "everything which has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern." (34) The Oxford Dictionary defines the meaning of the term 'subaltern' as "an officer below the rank of captain, e.g. a second lieutenant". A subaltern is a military term for a junior officer, literally meaning "subordinate". It was Antonio Gramsci (1881-1937), an Italian Marxist, who popularized this term while writing to counter Fascism during the 1920s and 1930s.

As a keen observer of the stories of Devi, we have a feeling whether it may be Bengal or any other part of the country, the situation of the oppressed and violence meted out to them particularly women remains the same throughout India. Economic exploitation, sexual oppression and state of violence – all the three put together have made the lives of women

miserable and torturous. This scenario can be followed simultaneously in accounts of the contemporary history through her writings.

In her short story, *The Witch*, Devi paints the picture of starvation and exploitation with a female character as the center of attraction. She reveals the secret behind turning of a woman to a daini. The villagers of Tura reel under the formless terror of daini, let loose on them by Hanuman Misra, the Hindu deota of Tahar:

Though the community as a whole is endangered by the threat of daini, it is the woman who invariably faces the impact of this threat twice over. She finds her space and her movements further restricted within the society already circumscribed by the mainstream bulldozing, despite the egalitarian character of the tribal society. The suspicions and sanctions are directed more brutally towards her than towards her male counterpart. Her movement is more closely watched, for the menstruating woman is believed to be more susceptible to the influence of daini. (Rekha146)

It is through Somri's tale in *The Witch* that Devi poignantly exposes and mounts a scathing attack on the bias that inheres in woman's gendered location dented by dual patriarchal ambush. As a member of a gaunt subaltern collectivity, her existence is not only confined by its socio- spatial configuration, but is also endangered by the intrusion of the principal class. Somri's deafness and mental dwarfness, her molestation and deliberate demonization (being very cunningly marked as a daini by Thakurs of Tahar) and her consequent sub-human existence outside the periphery of civilization, symbolically capture the forced silence, insubordination and comodification of a woman situated within the matrices of conflicting patriarchal domains. The so called superior sex not only exploits her body but also very cunningly exploits the superstition of the villagers to "chase away this contaminated body out of its bound. The female body once ejected out of the legitimized space, is forced into a life of wilderness" (Rekha147).

Even her short stories like "*Drupadi, Breast-giver, Behind the Bodice*" utters the viewpoint of class and gender clearly. It underlines the fact that the society in which Devi works seems to be severely divided into two classes- the haves and the have not's. The woman emerges to be of a lower standard and who has been dominated and doesn't seem to have attained her

freedom even in independent countries. Her sufferings are often under-looked and eventually she dwindles into insignificance never being able to assert her rights and dignity.

Therefore, in her writings Devi focuses on the excluded, the underdogs, the landless tribals, the lives of ordinary people and especially the lives of women in a male dominated society. Devi exposes the brutal reality of the Indian society and their mindset and way of life, their religious superstitions, beliefs and the treatment of low caste people by the higher caste, their relationships etc in her writings.

Literature acts as a tool to bring into focus the various issues working in the nation. Among them, one of the dominant issues is the internally marginalized people of North-East India region. This region of India has a very specific geographical, socio-economic, cultural and political presence in India. Due to the frequent clashes and insurgency and political, economic turmoil in this region, it has undergone massive internal displacement of its population. Literature from this region of India mainly depicts the violence and rage working in the region. There was a time when the writers of Northeast India failed to bring into focus the innumerable complications and internal hitches in their region. Nevertheless, the picture has changed much in the present day. Today we see that much of the works of Northeast is being read. Readers from all over the world take a deep interest in Northeast literature and it has been helping this beautiful and secluded region to get exposure. Writers like Tamsula Ao, Easterine Kire, Mamang Dai, Harikrishna Deka, Dhruva Hazarika, Jahnabi Baruah and many others have written on the insurgencies and the dual treatment received by the people of this region.

Kire in her novel *Mari* talks about the unsaid history of the Northeast region. She gives an account of a forgotten battle which greatly shook the whole world i.e the World War II. The people of Nagaland were greatly disturbed and jolted from their invasion by the Japanese and the British forces with the intention of occupying the entire region. They slowly infused the Naga society with their own values and cultures. Under the colonial subjugation, Nagaland became a victim to the World War II where they were compelled to run away from their own land. Kire also highlights the fact that the people of Nagaland were doubly marginalized and subordinated.

Before the arrival of the British in Nagaland, they were living independently as indigenous people. They were completely free from the influences from the rest of the world.

Colonial cultural system introduced by the Western was the initiation of their interaction with the outside forces. Apart from their concern about how to administer the Nagas, they did not undertake the trouble to see the financial problems faced by the Nagas. During the war, many Naga villages were burned down to ashes. The Nagas endured unspeakable pain. Those who tried to safeguard their villages lost their lives. The nature of colonial rule in Nagaland can be seen as “governance by motives of humanity” and by “attempts to befriend the Nagas. The period of subjugation of Nagaland comprised of strewing baits to the Nagas to accept their demands or cold-blooded murder of those who resisted their rule. The influx of western education, bans on head-hunting had a drastic effect on the lives of the Nagas. The location of Nagaland was very valuable to the British due to its significance as a border to lands of much commercial importance. The writings of that period included only the records of the British of their inclusive attempts of merging the Naga hills. The ‘epistemic violence’ enforced upon them made them deemed to be a savage, uncivilized and heterogeneous population. As opined by Edward Said (1978) the notion of the West regarding the East has always been derogatory, so to seek the actual identity of the Nagas, we need to put them in a broader framework.

Easterine Kire involves in the process of distinguishing the Nagas from the negative attributes tagged to them. Her novel is an insight into the native life of the Nagas who did not bother to be known by the world. Easterine Kire herself being a native depicted the intricate issues more adroitly. She firmly deconstructed the misconception held about this beautiful place. The novel *Mari* attempts to trace the oppressed, marginalized Nagas who are portrayed as powerless by the historians and intellectuals and to shatter the illusion. The mass violence and destruction was camouflaged by the manipulators of history. Thus, Easterine Kire’s bold step to deal with such sensitive issues in her novels is indeed laudable. As seen in the end part of the novel, Aviu talks about the intermingling of the past and the present. The past is very precious for the Nagas as it moves like a shadow with the present generation and the present teaches them not to forget about the sacrifices made for the better living of the post-war generation.

The issues of patriarchy and the domination of men towards women have been beautifully written in her novel *A Terrible Matriarchy*. The issues of gender and the relationship of women towards men are drawn in three generations of mother, daughter and grand-mother. The grandmother who symbolizes the ‘terrible matriarch’ in the novel believes that empowering

a girl child should mean teaching her how to take care of household chores such as fetching water, cooking, cleaning, etc. which would contribute towards her progress as a dutiful wife and a good mother later on in life. She does not believe in educating a girl child in the modern sense of the term. She says;

In my father's days, 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 barren. They were always in constant danger if there was a war... That is why we love our male children so much and we give them the best of food. (Kire 22)

Unlike any female character Delieno, is portrayed as a fierce, free-spirited young Angami girl who is hardworking and wanted equal attention like her four brothers. When she was sent to live with her grandmother, Delieno underwent all the struggles and hardships at such a young age like waking up early in the morning when the first cock crow, fetches water, starts the kitchen fire, cook, clean etc. Delieno's mother, Nino, is a character that is juxtaposed between these two competing women. She resisted Delieno's transfer to her grandmother's house, she fought to get her daughter educated, and tries her best to ingrain in her daughter that they all love her in their own different ways. Whereas, the grandmother Vibano appears as a strict tradition minded who does not believe that girls should receive education love and respect because she belonged to the first generation of Naga who never value education and she had grown up seeing men treated with high respect and honor because they save the village from enemies and protect women and children during wars. The struggles woman in Naga society undergoes is clearly and minutely detailed through the forms of various characters and their roles. Thus, we see that even in every society especially in a patriarchy society like Naga society woman suffers the most even at such a young age like Delieno.

Kire talks about the Naga patriarchy and the relationship of woman towards woman and the ordinary everyday lives of the people in her works. She also paints the historical accounts of Kohima during the World War II in some of her novels like *Mari*, *The Battle of Kohima*, *Bitterwormwood* etc. The lives of the woman and their sufferings during their childhood, as teenage and after marriage, the life as a single mother etc are all mentioned in her works mainly focusing on the Naga context. Therefore, she emerges as the voice for the voiceless for thousands of Naga women who are undergoing these similar kinds of suffering and hardship in

Nagaland. The problems of insurgency which mostly plays as the main themes in most of the North-East writings finds mentioned in her works. The folk elements, folk traditions and oral narration and the beliefs and taboos which were passed down from generation to generation are also described in her novels.

1.6. The Concept of Women as Subaltern in India:

India is a land of varieties and vitalities. It is divided into different states in the name of class, religion, language, ethnicity, gender and citizenship. In this scattered outlook, the condition of the subaltern is all the more pathetic. Spivak (117) came to the forefront of literary circle with her celebrated essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” The essay vindicates the apprehensions of women in India who practice the widow-sacrifice known as sati. The practice of sati in the pre-independent India was considered as part of a barbaric culture by the Western World.

Spivak borrows the term ‘subaltern’ from Gramsci, to refer to the unrepresented group of people in the society (Gramsci 55). In the Indian cultural context, the term ‘subaltern’ acquires more significance as the people have struggled hard for Indian independence. She prefers the term ‘subaltern’ as it encompasses the exact picture of the lower class people. Morton quotes the words of Spivak as: I like the word subaltern for one reason. It is totally situational. Subaltern began as a description of a certain rank in the military. The word was under censorship by Gramsci: he called Marxism ‘monism’, and was obliged to call the proletarian ‘subaltern’. That word, used under duress, has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn’t fall under strict class analysis. I like that, because it has no theoretical rigor (46).

Spivak proposes a theory of Subalternity in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In this essay, she vindicated the limitations of the subalterns, asking “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (283). By subaltern “Spivak means the oppressed subjects or more generally those “of inferior rank” (283). She goes on to add that, “In the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (287). Spivak concludes the essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” by reiterating her standpoint that “the subaltern cannot speak” (308). Her statement “subaltern cannot speak” has litigated flames of controversy in the post-colonial context. Spivak’s statement is actually a one stop answer for all

the questions. It is an outcome of her lifelong search for truth and it is being formulated on the basis of socio-cultural backgrounds. The theory formulates that the subaltern can speak but others do not have the patience to listen to them. The message conveyed by the sender does not reach to the receiver as it is hindered by the element of noise. Articulation is an involuntary act by the human beings but to interpret things in the real sense takes conscious effort on the part of the listeners. Morton clarifies the wide discrepancy between articulation and interpretation of the subaltern women in the following words: (118) Spivak's conclusion that the subaltern cannot speak is often taken out of context to mean that subaltern women have no political agency because they cannot be represented. Such a reading is actually contrary to the very situated theoretical framework that Spivak establishes in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak would certainly not want to deny the social agency and lived existence of disempowered subaltern women. The crucial point, however, is that these disempowered women receive their political and discursive identities within historically determinates systems of political and economic representation (66 - 67).

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak propounds her theory of subalternity. The core of her theory is that "the subalterns cannot speak." The system of belief regarding this theory became controversial as they were interpreted with false conviction. Spivak's theory of subalternity does not mean to come up with the conclusion that the subaltern cannot talk. Spivak tries to give a special meaning to the term 'speak' in her essay. By the word 'speak' she means to imply transaction between speaker and receiver. When the subalterns try to speak, the message that they try to communicate becomes totally distorted. It happens in a continuous process because others are not ready to listen to them. As people turn a deaf ear to the pleas of the subalterns, communication system fails and no transaction takes place. The subalterns are not able to have transactions with others because of the disparity that exists in the society. The subalterns were subjected to the colonial rule and only the colonizer had the voice. The entire concept of 'voice' is determined by the 'subject' and the category of the 'other' does not have a voice of his/her own. After the colonial rule, the subalterns were again subordinated to the elite upper class. The subaltern women continue to suffer and there is little scope for further improvement. In an interview with the editors

Literature is a reflection of society and every period in the history of human civilization tend to reflect on the social, political, economic condition and the status of women of a particular society and period. Thus it can be rightly said that literature is never free from the influence of society. When we talk about Indian women writing and publishing in English, their works remain invisible to marginal positions in the history of literature. The privilege of access to education for all remains a distant vision for most women in India especially for the lowest sections of the society and poorest family. These Indian women lack proper education because of these they are mostly confined within the four walls of their homes. However, with the progress in educational level, the status and role of women impact the society in various fields. There are also numerous Indian women who write on different genres and themes from different era in the history of English literature. Through the writings of Indian women writers we also find that important problems arise beyond domesticity if their literary works are examined. But, the works of all these women remain mostly invisible to marginal position in the history of literature. Even the choice of these women writers is limited to permitting or penalizing the society in which they exist. Thus, we also see that although education has penetrated every lives and corners of the society, its impact and influence are different among the two genders.

All these contemporary writers tend to reflect on the problems and concerns on women's life. The writers mostly deal with the inner struggle and turmoil of human lives in different forms belonging to different sections of the society. They also express the real picture of an ordinary person belonging to different class torn in between tradition and modernization. Being a woman themselves, they can express easily the inner psyche of a female mind in their writings through their protagonist. Different women writers have depicted various kinds of themes on women's life and their struggles as women. Some women are depicted more independent and some are traditional in their outlook, there are also some women in between neither traditional nor radical in their approach as also depicted in Despandi's novel *Dark Holds No Terror*. Some women become self-destructive like the protagonist Maya, Monisha and Nanda in Desai's writings. In conclusion, it is the outlook towards life, attitudes towards hindrances or obstacles on the path of life and taking challenges and by taking steps for improving by bringing solution from a broader perspective towards life. All these women writers tend to stand for such oppressed women through their writings. However, it should be noted that not all these women writers write about female and their domestic life but they write beyond domesticity far better than male writers.

Through the writings of these women authors, we find that there is still subaltern treatment towards women in Indian society as depicted through the life of the women protagonist. The sufferings and problems faced by the protagonist are based on the real picture of Indian women in general. Therefore, these women writers along with numerous contemporary writers voice out for the voiceless sections of the Indian women who is still oppressed in every form.

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CHAPTER 2

STATUS OF NAGA WOMEN AND BENGAL WOMEN

2.1. Introduction:

Status is a condition applicable to a point of time. Status in the sociological sense denotes position in a social system, and by implicating the distribution of rights, obligations, power and autonomy within the same system. Status is also used as a synonym for honor or prestige. It also refers to what a person is, whereas the closely linked notion of role refers to the behavior expected of the people in a status. The term socio-economic status denotes the relative position of a person on a publicly recognized scale or hierarchy of social worth. It is the rank or position one holds in a group. It is the means to a set of economic reserves or assets, represents a source of security providing a measure of a household's ability to meet emergencies, absorb economic shocks, or provide the means to live comfortably. It also reflects the financial position of a person in the society and inter-generational transitions as well as accumulation of income and savings.

2.2. Status and the Role of Women in Naga society:-

The status of Naga women in North East India experience more liberal culture than their counterparts in 'mainland' India. The reality is that women and children are in a particularly vulnerable situation because of the conflict in the region, especially those in indigenous, minority and low-income communities. Naga society is a classless society and every Naga citizen enjoys equal rights and privileges guaranteed under the Naga customary laws of their respective tribes. Women are the backbone of the Naga society and through them the society sustains and continues to grow and live. They are involved in many social activities of the village but comparatively they are more active in the home front. Naga as a patriarchal society almost all the Naga tribes practice patriarchal family system and hence the father is considered as the head of the family. In this kind of institution, the subordination of mother and children to the authority of the father is practically universal. Naga girls are taught to be quiet, gentle and perform all the household chores and work hard in their tender age. This kind of upbringing of the girl child encourages the boys to be dominating, authoritative, to be served and waited upon. In the olden

days, when there has to be a choice, say education, the boys got better privileges but now the trend is moving rapidly for giving education to both the genders in most Naga family. Even though the father is considered head of the family it does not mean to say that the role of the mother in the family is not important. In fact, the Naga mother exercises a firm hand in her family affairs. She acts as the heart and soul of the family. When a girl attained puberty, she went to the girls' dormitory (Morung) and associated herself with other girls of the village. Once she joined the Morung (dormitory) she would leave only when she get married, betrothed and on losing her virginity. It was regarded as a training school for the girls. In the girl's Morung, various kinds of activities like singing, dancing, weaving of various designs, handicrafts, social interaction, manner, discipline etc were taught and practiced. Women were also allowed to join in any village social activities, functions, festivals, dances, except the war dance and head taking victory celebration.

Before the arrival of Christian missionaries to the hills, Naga men folk used to wage war against village to village while women took care of the family and at times even guarded the village. However, at present, it is common to find many women organizations and NGOs formed that are very much actively working regarding various social activities and issues of women safeguards in the Naga society. All these organizations have done commendable services in eradicating social evils, fought against army atrocities and human rights violations. It is worth mentioning that many Naga women have been raped, tortured, killed and molested. However, such kinds of institutions demonstrated a spirit of bravery by sacrificing their lives to uphold the moral and dignity of Naga women.

As the Naga society is an agrarian society, agriculture acts as a vital occupation for both men and women in every village. Mostly men worked in the fields by engaging in activities like cutting down the trees and hunting while, women have to toil from fields to house like cooking cleaning. During the off season, women were engaged in weaving clothes for family and for running the economy of the house. They usually store food grains and necessary items for the whole year or for months to go such as dried fish caught before rice plantation and during harvest time, dried king chili, dried leaves to be consumed during off season. Sometimes she also makes money for her family through backyard rearing of animals and handicrafts. Therefore, practically woman also earns a share of the family income as her husband is engaged in social,

political and other affairs. Naga women were the producer, provider, sustainer and manager of the home.

As mentioned earlier, Naga women are hard working and industrious. They start their work from early dawn until sunset. Traditional women were looked upon by the society as a woman of hard work. Such was the conventional attitude towards Naga women held by the society and it is true even today. The traditional women, though uneducated knows how to manage and plans out her routine work and activities in advance and tries to complete the work within the time frame.

“A tribal woman is in herself exactly the same as any other women, with the same position, love and fear, the same devotion to the home, to husband and children, the same faults and same virtues”, (Verrier Elwin).

The institution of marriage and family has been a much talked about factor in combating domestic violence and gender based discrimination in many parts of the world. In India, practices of dowry, child marriage, sati, and marital rape have been constantly challenged. While these have been the main issues tackled, not much is known regarding the tribal societies of Nagaland. The force towards such issues may vary from society to society; nevertheless violence curtails the society and individual prospective to growth and development. Violence within the institution of marriage and family do exist even in Naga society and an understanding of this is crucial. Marriage is seen as the universal truth, which emphasis on enabling marriages and ensuring its permanence. Families are imagined only within the scope of the marital union and not beyond. Basically acceptable marriages need social approval. Christianity has in a lot of ways changed the practice of marriage and what defines the terms of acceptable marriages in the society. In the Naga context regarding marriage, church marriage is the most accepted form of marriage. A young bride is usually not married against her will but with the approval of her parents and in her husband's home the wife occupies a high position and her children are treated well. The significance of marriage as an act of maintaining lineage in patriarchy is emphasized at every stage of life. Youngsters are guided and efforts are made by parents to ensure the permanency of marriage, as separation and dissolution of a marriage union is never wished. Therefore, relationship between men and women outside marriage is usually not approved or

accepted by the society. What is determined unlawful is bound to distort the society's image and therefore the good image has to be preserved at all cost.

In politics women have a little share. In the village council, women are not given representation and thus debarred from enjoying in the decision making body. She participates in the village administration indirectly by influencing her husband, brothers and father. The issue of women's exclusion from the electoral process has become one of the most difficult issues in electoral studies in Nagaland. While the men in Nagaland dominate the political terrain extensively, the participation and representation of women in political area remains invisible. It is because of the practice of patriarchy which is widely prevalent in the state among the Naga people. However, women in Nagaland have been able to strengthen their political visibility only as voters. The structural, institutional and situational barriers for women to enter politics is never welcomed and even looked down as a bad influence for those women who participate in politics. Women as much as men are interested in politics, but the strong patriarchy mindset dictates the lives of most Naga women and thus infringing them of participating in anything that is of a 'man's job'. It is the general notion of the Naga people that Naga men are compared to 'tree trunks' and women are compared to the 'leaves', though there seems to be a protective veil on the status of women in Nagaland to be progressive and equal with men, the realities reveal the difference. Despite the fact that constitutional rights for women are guaranteed, they continue to be inaccessible and are superseded by customary practices and usages. Until recently, where exceptions are slowly taking place, women have been excluded from the Village Councils, thereby denying them the opportunity to govern the village and administer justice. Despite the advantage of constitutional provision of 371A in safeguarding the common property such as lands, or traditional knowledge, it has alternative implications on the rights of women. The struggle for representation in the Municipal bodies of Nagaland is the best example for 371A to deny women the right to participate in governance. Similarly, there are other customary practices and usages that continue to be discriminatory against women, though it varies among tribes and even villages within the same tribe. Therefore, it is no surprise to say that even after so many decades since independence, Nagaland has no woman MLA. Every Naga women have dreams as high as the male dreams in every field, be it in the decision making body or in any profession they want to pursue. If patriarchy is the root cause of all evils, it should be done away for the betterment of the future generation and a more advanced and equal world for both the genders.

Discrimination against women is widespread and incidents of physical and sexual violence are frequently reported. Almost all Tribal Councils categorically exclude women and their traditional customary law discriminates against them by denying them the right to own or inherit property. The root cause of violence towards women is because of the factors like ethnicity, class, gender, age, disability, nationality, culture, religion. In a patriarchal structure women are always victims. Despite the fact that women, as individuals and collectives have resisted, struggled, challenged the authority and developed alternative strategies to address gender based discrimination and violence against women, their 'agency' is invariably not recognized. Whether their actions got approval or criticism it is important that the narratives of the women are brought to the front. Women are also socialized into being silent about their experience of violence in patriarchal societies. The state, in choosing to conceptualize violence against women in only extreme forms of violence and by leaving out everyday violence, does a great disservice to the fight against the same. The gender-based definition of the United Nation's violence refers to forms of abuse-physical, sexual and psychological-within the community and family. However, domestic violence remains the most continuing form of gender based violence in the country.

The mother is the busiest member in the family as well as in the society. On the family front, both husband and wife are co-workers. They work and toil together in rain and sunshine. A typical Naga mother wakes up before dawn and finishes her daily round of works like collecting firewood, fetching water down from the streams, pounds rice, cooks food for the family and feeds the domestic animals, attends to the kitchen garden at times and keeps herself occupied for a few hours in the weaving loom. By 8:30 AM to 9:00 AM the family is ready to go to their respective fields after taking the morning meal. Sometimes she returns home with a heavy load of firewood along with vegetables, fishes, crabs, etc. filled in her traditional basket. As soon as she reaches home, she will immediately start making preparation for the evening meals, feeds the domestic animals and let her children sit around the warm family hearth that burns like a small bonfire and lights up the heavy loaded Naga kitchen and bedroom. Her husband sits nearby his wife and enjoys drinking the Naga rice beer. After supper, she will flick cotton and spins yarn for weaving. Sometimes she brews rice beer and makes rice cakes for her children. Naga women cannot be ill-treated by her husband and in-laws. In case her husband or in-laws mistreats her or beats her up or faces any trouble on account of it, her brothers, clan and relatives would come to her rescue. The married woman is always consulted by her husband in all domestic and family

affairs. They play their respective roles as husband and wife. However, the society was not limited to irresponsible husbands who do not act as a good father or a husband and mistreats his wife in various inhuman ways. It is a Naga tradition to invite the married sisters by their brothers in any festival of the year and a special gift of specially cooked pork is presented as a token of love to continue the chain of love as brothers and sisters. It is also a customary obligation to present the leg portion of the animal killed for meat during marriage feast or feast of merit. The meat, be it beef or pork, was cut from the thigh portion and preserved for the sisters and all the paternal aunts would also be given the leg portion of the meat according to the seniority of the sisters.

The customary laws of the Naga do not allow women to inherit the immovable ancestral property. In the absence of a son, the nearest relative of the family could inherit the property. Women can be given only movable property. In short, inherited property cannot be given to daughters but any acquired property during the lifetime of the parents' could be given to their daughters. The highest court of justice was the village Headman house and he was the Chief justice of the court. All the decisions and disputes are settled in the name of the village councilors. Women were strictly forbidden in the court except the one where the woman herself is involved. Village court was thus exclusively a male court.

In the days when there was no written record and the appellate was done orally, a woman has the right to make an appeal to the court through the male members of her family or the elder of the clan. When cases were of serious nature, oath-taking resorted to women were always expected to honor men, particularly the village elders in their action, word and gestures. A breach to this was punishable by law. There were number of instances of women being prosecuted or fined by the village court for lack of courtesy and honor to village elders.

There was a place especially for male get-togethers where decisions taken remained as taboo areas for women. Only in matter of controversies involving in person, a woman was given the right to have her say. Women were forbidden to eat certain sacrificed food and restricted to touch spears and shields which were men's domain. Nevertheless it is important to mention here that the position of women varies from tribe to tribe among various Naga communities.

There were also many social restrictions such as those where women cannot perform religious rites and rituals, cannot shout in the main village street, cannot step or cross over men, cannot sit cross legged, should not sit near the main door of the house, married women should not keep their hair short, should not sit in the village court with her open hair, should not wear skirt in front of a man, women should skip her meal, women should not climb on the roof of the house as it is a disgrace to man and many other restrictions. In this way, women were bound by so many social restrictions.

Thus, looking back to the bygone generation Naga women were confined to the four walls of the house. However, with the passage of time, she is given more liberty even in the other spheres of life, apart from her household chores. With many social changes and development, she is given more privileges, but still she remains fettered with many traditional 'do's and don'ts'. In fact, in spite of her competency and abilities, a woman is still considered inferior to men in many areas of life even today.

Today, education has given opportunity for girls to become economically independent and this has encouraged girls to go for higher education. With the progress in the field of education, more and more women are becoming salaried wives/daughters. However, the conservative view has slackened giving more scope to girl's education. But in spite of the increased number of working women more financial dependence still rests on the men. The wife's earning is a sort of supplement to the husband's earnings. Today, a woman in salaried job is not looked down upon, as was the case in earlier days. In fact, to keep up with the fast changing society and the increased needs of the family, it is rather encouraged that a woman should do whatever is in her capacity to support and share the family finance. Earlier usually the families concerned arranged the marriages. An ironic norm of the traditional society was that the man or husband was applauded for his extra marital or illicit affairs. The more mistresses he kept, the higher his status was. The Kesheenei (loin cloth) of the male was originally decorated with three lines of white cowries but that of a married man who could have an illicit affair with another married woman or the suitor of his wife was decorated with four lines of cowries as an honor to his male prowess, whereas, the opposite treatment was meted out to the woman/wife. If a married woman was found to be infidel to her husband she was made to undergo physical punishment- the tip of her nose could be chopped off. In certain cases, even her heel would be

sliced off and her hair cut. Apart from these physical inflictions, she would be socially exposed to shame. In all these, the woman were expected to silently bear the punishments as deemed fit for her infidelity. Such was the punishment for the women for doing something for which the men was showered with accolades. Divorce was quite liberal in the pre-christian society. However, even in this case, the existing rules are biased against women. A woman who cannot adjust or who wants to leave her husband will be allowed to leave for her parent's house only with her neikhro (a short white longi). Other than that, whatever she had brought to her husband's house (ornaments, clothing etc) will be confiscated by the husband and the marriage becomes null and void. On the other hand, a husband can leave his wife without any pre-condition. Unlike the traditional norm, even divorce rules have become more rigid with the Christian tradition. Both wife and husband are bound by their vows pronounced before the God and man. Hence, the women's position within and without the family is rising with the tie of advancement.

On the whole it can be suggested that the Naga society following the patrilineal and patriarchal system has the norms and attitudes of patriarchy, which affects the status of women. Institution and tradition are inspired by the belief in male dominance and female inferiority. Although patriarchy persists in all the Naga communities its impact varies from community to community. The patriarchal values are reflected in notions such as the 'birth of a male child being auspicious', 'man as the bread winner and protector of the society' and 'women being subordinate to their husbands.' However it can further be safely inferred that all Naga communities are passing through transition. Change from tradition to modernity is taking place. We now see that the rural people have started taking to urban version of their culture as their model. Urbanism has caused a change in the ethos of the tribal culture. This finally has led to the changes in the female roles. In modern times, women are working side by side with men in all kinds of jobs. It can further be said that education is the main indicator for the development of women's status in a society. Much progress has been made in the sphere of education and they are occupying high positions in the government jobs. Modernization brought about by the adoption of Christianity and spread of education has gradually altered the contemporary situation among the Naga women. They have begun participating in diverse modern activities like the participation in the Village Development Board meetings, which has immensely helped in ameliorating the condition of women. The process of bringing about change in the old tradition

started since the introduction of education, which has rendered some of the traditional laws completely obsolete. Education is one of the main factors that brought a change in tribal culture both in terms of economic and socio-cultural life of the people. However, despite the changes in the Naga society due to the introduction of education, it can be easily seen that customary laws still influence the life of the Naga people.

2.3. Status and the Role of Women in Bengal society:-

Bangladesh was known as the East Bengal Province by 1947 and has been part of India since the 1700s in the Great Britain. In 1947 Britain divided the Indian colony into India and Pakistan together with India's leading indigenous political organizations. East Bengal Province was incorporated into Pakistan and referred to as East Pakistan. West Pakistan's North carved while, this division of territory was an attempt to create a Muslim nation on the outskirts of Hindu India.

However, more than 1,000 miles of India separated the western and eastern wings of Pakistan, creating cultural discontinuity between the two wings. The ethnic groups of Pakistan and the Indian Muslims who left India after partition differed greatly from the former East Bengali in their language and way of life: West Pakistan was more oriented towards the Middle East and Arab Islamic influence than East Pakistan, which had Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and British cultural influences.

West Bengal is a beautiful and unique country in India because of its historical importance. A progressive coalition government has ruled the state for approximately 30 years since 1977 on a continuous basis. Thus, a diverse view of political, social and economical cultural change motivated the Indian government. Despite all these changes in various dimensions in the state, gender inequality remains a problem in society as the state has not organized a movement to further and raise women's status as a whole.

Women's status in West Bengal is regrettable, and the primary reason for this inequality between men and women is that patriarchy exists in society. It restricts women who are excluded from men's social life from leaving their homes. Normal higher education is not encouraged. Consequently, their ownership and control of property and economic resources, including own labor products, are virtually excluded from decision-making.

Women are also the victims of so many curable diseases, for their husbands and relatives lack both education and ignorance. Incidents of physical violence against women in West Bengal are also increasingly reported in the media but rarely in the context of longer processes of discrimination between women and men. All these problems of gender inequality and discrimination are directly related to the rates of literacy in a specific location, access to primary and basic education, health and nutrition indicators etc.

The Bengal society like Naga society is patriarchal society in nearly every area of life. Although at present some handful women have achieved important positions of political power at the national level, there are many ordinary women who are confined and restricted of the basic necessities of life. The value of education is stressed more towards the man and less for women. Authority is reserved for a woman's father, older brother, and husband. Women traditionally take over the household businesses and are not encouraged to move outside the immediate neighborhood unaccompanied. The economic and social lives of most women therefore revolve around homes with children and families. Islamic practice reserves only males' prayer in the mosque; females practice their religion in the house. Although two women prime ministers have been in charge of Bangladesh since 1991, both have been elected with broad popular support, but women in politics have been generally not publicly active. Women often remain inside the four corners of the walls, but men are often seen working outside their homes as the heads. Even men make the majority of the shopping, as interaction in crowded markets is required. Therefore, men spend a lot of time socializing outside the home with other men.

In Bengal society, marriage is almost always arranged when a child is married, especially by the parents, the father. Men usually marry about age 25 or older and women marry 15 to 20, so the husband is usually at least 10 years older than the wife. A parent who decides that a child is ready to marry may contact agencies, go-betweens, relatives, and friends to find an appropriate mate. Of immediate concern are the status and characteristics of the potential in-law's family. Generally an equal match is sought in terms of family economic status, educational background, and piousness. A father may allow his child to choose between five or six potential mates, providing each candidate with the relevant data. Clearly unacceptable candidates should not be accepted by the child and a slate of candidates can be chosen by the parent. The agreement on a dowry and the kinds of gifts to be made to the groom may be concluded between two families.

The dowry practice is not prevalent among the educated. The most common unit is the larger family that lives in a household called a *barhi* with patrilinear relations. A *barhi* consists of a husband and a wife, their children unmarried and, with their wives and children, their adult children. There may be parents, grandparents as well as brothers, cousins, nieces and nephews related to patrilinear affairs. Although the oldest man can exercise considerable authority in the household, he is the authority figure. In rural areas, a *barhi* is made up of three or four houses facing one another and forming a square courtyard where common tasks are carried out. Often food supplies are shared, and young couples have to contribute their earning to the head of the household. However, cooking often takes place in the nuclear family's constituent units.

“In 1831 *The Friend of India* observed that in Bengal every caste was subdivided into numerous classes each given a certain rank or status by tradition: Hence the station of every individual in Bengal is settled with nearly as much precision as that of the nobility of Europe ... No family is lost in the crowd; there are always some beneath it, who view its right and dignity with feelings of respect; every individual therefore possesses an acknowledged and defined rank in this mighty aristocracy. These family distinctions may be tarnished by ignoble alliances, but they may be regained by a series of advantageous marriages”. (*The Friend of India* 84)

Islamic heritage rules state that a daughter is to receive half of a son's share. However, this is rarely practiced and property is equally divided between his sons after a household head's death. When they visit their brothers as a "compensation" for their lack of inheritance, daughters may receive products and gifts. A widow may receive a portion of the property of her husband, but it is rare. However, sons are personally responsible for their mothers, who have considerable power over the rest of the household. The principle of patrilineal descent is important and the lineage is often located in a geographical area with a majority. In times of financial crisis, lineage members can be called on, especially if support to solve local disputes is required. Lineages do not meet the resources of a group regularly or control them.

In their homes, most women are born and return to when they are near birth. When the child is born, a husband is sent a message. The husband and his close male relative visit the newborn five or seven days after birth, and there is a feast and a ritual hair cutting. The newborn is given an amulet that is tied around the waist, its eye sockets may be blackened with soot or

makeup, and a small soot mark is applied to the infant's forehead and the sole of the foot for protection against spirits.

In the extended family, children are raised and early on learn that individual wishes are secondary to family needs. According to the age order, the orders must be followed, as a sign of respect the instructions of an adult or older child. Child care is mainly for women and their daughters in the household. Boys have more flexibility outside the household for movement.

Most children begin school at the age five or six, and attendance tends to drop off as children become more productive within the household (female) and agricultural economy (male). About 75 percent of children attend primary school. The higher a family's socio-economic status, the more likely it is for both boys and girls to finish their primary educations. Most children start school at the age of five or six, while the number of children is decreasing as their household which is taken care by female and farming by male members making economy more productive. The higher the socio-economic status of a family, the more likely it is for boys and girls to graduate. Very few families (approximately 17 percent), and fewer children attend university. Those who enter a university usually come from families that are relatively well off. As the grade increases, while the attendance at school drops, women stop going to school earlier than men. In this respect, the West Bengal government has had mixed effects on a variety of policies and projects. There was a more and more remarkable participation of women in Panchayat than many other states, and the social impact was very dramatic in some regions. It maintains in a different manner the concept of female empowerment. In this connection, different types of policies and projects announced by the government of West Bengal have had mixed effects. Women have had more and more notable results in panchayat than in many other regions and certain regions of the state have had very positive social consequences. It maintains the concept of women's empowerment in a more different way.

In Western Bengal, however, women are in a relatively better position than in other states of the country in respect to human security issues. Economic exclusion appears to be one of the most crucial problems for women in the state, with spill-over effects in other life aspects. But trends are generally positive in all of these variables, although change is not as soon as possible.

“One of the outstanding achievements of modern Bengal has been the unprecedented awakening of Bengal womanhood. Happily for women, all the great reformers of the state went bent upon improving the position of women.” (Sengupta, Sankar 247)

Violence against women continues to be an ongoing practice in society. Violence undermines a wide range of horrific acts: female foeticide, trafficking, harassment at the workplace, domestic torture and violations. If women challenge societal norms and prevent them from reporting criminal proceedings, they face inequality which refuses to remedy them. Violence against women is the main cause for women between the ages of 16 and 44, according to the United Nations.

In the absence of any meaningful punishment and disincentives, the crime against women is committed with impunity by lawful civil groups, but judgments which may qualify as justice exercised are few and far apart. Crimes against women are committed impunity. This seems unacceptable that all these 'injustices' will continue, whether it's female psychological issue, trafficking of girls, domestic rape, or harassment at the workplace. If the roots of such violence are not ruled out little progress can be achieved. Violence against women is expressed only as dissuasive in terms of the values, law and order of society. Yet, on all fronts of community, educational and better law enforcement and punishment dissuasive, we cannot avoid the size of the challenge.

The improvement of women's skills and education at overall cost would be important and better to empower them in West Bengal and give them better access to earning opportunities. This also applies to equal wage implementation in the non-organized sector; it is urgent and the necessary incentive structures should be developed rapidly.

Finally, girls' nutritional status, education, and overall well-being depend largely on their mother's income and in particular in households of low income. However, in the unorganized sector, a gender wage differential cannot be regarded as an excuse for artificially similar to the Net female income of the organized sector. In West Bengal, true legal reform can only be followed by vital social reform. The idea of gender equality must first be implemented through liberal education, greater cultural socialization between the minorities and the majority communities within the deep recesses of our society. The new law against domestic violence can only become a reality if fundamental power relations in our society also between men and women are discussed and criticized in civil society.

The equal dignity of men and women is always shown in an ideal family. Also because of their masculinity, men should not take upper hand in the family. Men have to protest against all abuses of women on the streets, in markets, in workplaces, in shopping centers, in buses, in trains or hotels. The subject needs to be treated as a social question. As sisters and real friends, men should turn their hands to oppressed women. The corner of men should initiate protests against the dowry system. Women are equally entitled and must have equal status in the families and men have to accept it.

There is gender based in western Bengal and India as a whole, even in the selection of the occupation between men and women. Almost every firm, even in urban areas in particular, has a belief that girls are more homely and take better care of things, especially in rural and even urban areas. That is why arts, fashion, designing and drama are generally fields reserved for women. Engineering and other related fields are seen as male profession so more men than women enroll in these programs. However, at present this perception is gradually changing.

India has been ignored by most historians of feminist movements and feminist thoughts. Perhaps Miriam Schneir's work is a good example of India's current feminist view: "No feminist works emerged from behind the Hindu purdah or out of Moslem harems; centuries of slavery do not provide a fertile soil for intellectual development or expression. The insights that such writings from outside our own historical cultural field might have offered can only be guessed at." (Schneir, Miriam)

But that is not completely done today, as women are relatively easy to manage home and career, we find more women than men in this profession, both at the school and university level. Many women continue to be encouraged to learn and practice social sciences, which are considered appropriate for the character of women, and men are encouraged to participate in disciplines such as engineering and IT. Only a handful offer science courses, which in turn drive more women to take options in the fields of humanities and social sciences.

Thus, it can be concluded that in both the society i.e Bengali society and the Naga society, treatment towards women vary according to their culture, custom, traditions and religious practices. Since every society has their own values, traditions, customs passed down from generation to generation and therefore, becomes deeply ingrained in them. However, in the Indian society, this kind of subaltern treatment towards the women mostly remains the same.

There is a sense of viewing the women as inferior being and not much value is placed upon them in general. The root cause is 'patriarchy' which acts as a hindrance towards women in every field. This kind of subaltern treatment towards women can be seen in almost every parts of the country in India. It is patriarchy which acts as a political-social system that makes men believe that they are inherently dominating and superior beings and sees women as inferior beings. Even in the Naga society treatment towards women remains the same right from childhood stage by giving more responsibility to women. This kind of tradition and culture developed from olden days, acts as a hindrance towards the full development and self-independent women. In the olden days there was different responsibility performed by man and woman. While the men remain busy to protect and safeguard the village, the tasks imposed on women were to look after the domestic chores and go to fields. This division of responsibility makes man to believe that they should be honored and respected because they act as the protector and savior of life for women and children. The women on the other hand, felt the importance of a male child right from their birth. However, slowly the attitude towards male child was given more importance.

The treatment towards women in Bengali society shares the same fate. The women in Bengal society were not given equal grounds and equal foot towards progress in most of the areas of life. The root cause of all this goes back to the various kinds of religious practices passed down from generation to generations. Women unlike other regions and states could share their voice as in Panchayats and contest elections. However, only a handful of them could come up from the clutches of patriarchy. It is the religious practice and their customs which makes the life of women miserable. There are still most families which practice dowry and child-marriages or arranged marriage mostly against the will of the bride. Women remain victims of various kinds of diseases because they remain unaware about the importance of health care as most of them do not go to schools. They remain mostly confined at home looking after domestic works and family members. So, they hardly socialize in the real world and remain ignorant and so they do not feel the need to voice out their opinions. Both the society is greatly influenced by patriarchy and religion which leads women to be treated as the subaltern in their society. However, at present, this kind of aged old attitudes and practices should be ignored and accept women on equal grounds in every fields.

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CHAPTER 3

BIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS AND HISTORICITY IN EASTERINE KIRE'S NOVEL *MARI* AND MAHASWETA DEVI'S NOVEL *QUEEN OF JHANSI*

3.1. Brief Introduction on the Works of Mahasweta Devi and Easterine Kire:

Mahasweta Devi had discarded the middle class trappings in which she was born and chose to live simply, frequently wandering around the country with its subjects as she did researches. She has written about tribal and Maoist communities in India, prostitutes, nomads, beggars, workers, and more than 100 novels and short stories. In 1997, she was awarded the "Asian" Ramon Magsaysay Award for her writing and activism on behalf of tribal communities. Written mainly in Bengali but incorporating tribal dialects, Devi's work has been translated into English, Japanese, Italian, French and several Indian languages.

Mahasweta Devi was born on Jan. 14, 1926, in what is now Bangladesh to Manish Ghatak, a novelist, and Dharitri Devi, a social activist. She was steeped in service from an early age, observing her mother and aunt educating illiterate girls in Dhaka, where she spent part of her childhood. She married the playwright Bijon Bhattacharya in 1947, and the couple lived in Kolkata (then Calcutta), where they had a son. She described her early married life as poor, and worked strange jobs to add income to her husband. She wrote her first novel, *Queen of Jhansi* at the age of 30. It is a fictionalizing account of a real-life queen turned into a male warrior in the Indian Rebellion of 1857 who fought a doomed war against the British which overthrew the Mughal empire.

Easterine Kire is among one of the creative writer from Nagaland. Her first novel, *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003) is the first Naga novel in English to be published. Her novel, *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007) has been chosen by the Indian Government to be translated into the six UNESCO languages. She is a recipient of many awards including the prestigious The Hindu Prize, 2015, for her novel *When the River Sleeps* (2014). Her novel covers areas of the life of Nagaland, tradition, culture and history. She had written many oral folklores of the Naga which was handed down from generation to generation. Her novel *Bitter Wormwood* and *Life on Hold* explores the relevant issues concerning the Naga political issue and the effects of war on

the lives of the people in Nagaland. Most of her novels contain many historical events with political unrest and the brutality of war and the daily lives and struggles of the ordinary people and the consequences of war. She also wrote on the supernatural and the immortal aspects, the spiritual realms in her novels like *Son of the Thundercloud* and *When the River Sleeps*. Easterine Kire's *Mari* is about the life of her aunt Mari which the author has collected the information from her and through her diary. It is also a historical novel in the context of the II World War and the brutal facts and effects of the war.

In their own lives, women in Devi and Kire played an important role in fighting the hurdles and obstacles and endured by braving every odds of society. Both Devi and Kire have incorporated historical facts and biographical elements through their women characters in their novels *Mari* and *Queen of Jhansi* respectively.

3.2. Mahasweta Devi's *Queen of Jhansi* and Easterine Kire's *Mari* as Biography:

One can perceive that there are many similarities in both these two novels. Mahasweta Devi's *The Queen of Jhansi* and Easterine Kire's *Mari* have some interesting aspects to ponder upon. Both throw light on the biographical element as well as historical evidences dynamically revolving around the life of the protagonist. However, the novel deals mainly with the biographical elements as the title of the novel itself conveys, i.e. *Mari* by Easterine Kire and the *Queen of Jhansi* by Mahasweta Devi being depicted names of the protagonist of the novels. In their own ways and different types of society, they appear as brave female characters. The period of fighting in the novel by the protagonist also has important historical evidence. *The Queen of Jhansi* (1956) is referred to by many as a novel but Mahasweta Devi outrightly denies this proposition. It is undoubtedly a historical biography where the different facets of Lakshmi Bai are revealed as a real person of flesh and blood—a little girl, a little bride, a youthful widow, a loving mother, a fun loving friend and at last as a sword wielding warrior with an excellent battle skill. One important aspect that strikes our attention on reading this work is Mahasweta Devi's outright rejection of the 'perception' of the English historians regarding the 1857 uprising. For them, it was just a mutiny of sepoyees and an isolated event against the colonial empire. Mahasweta Devi challenges their claim by saying: "If their version was right, why did they not leave all the documents, records, deeds and reference files here? Why is there no evidence or

witness of this event available when it is possible to lookup for facts of much earlier times?"(Devi, Queen, 71)

In *Mari* Easterine Kire relates a true story through her aunt Mari and the memories of her times spent with her a couple of years back in her young days and also from a diary she maintained during that momentous period. While Mahasweta Devi started writing *Queen of Jhansi*, she undertook all the hurdles and obstacles by travelling to Gwalior and Jhansi to dig out the biography of Lakshmi Bai and the historical events during her reign. To her pleasant surprise, most people she met in the region seemed to have inherited memories connected to Lakshmi Bai. This included a group of women hairdressers and manicurists whose ancestors attended on the queen. Having read several accounts of her life in English and Marathi and also with help from Maharashtrian housewives living in Kolkata, Mahasweta tried to imagine the private world of the woman who was a single mother to an infant son, and who also rode a horse and fought on the front lines of battle. Thus, Devi started her journey looking to write an alternative biography of Lakshmi Bai. She says, "Those who usurped the throne also controlled the pen" (Devi Queen, XI). All the vital records regarding 1857 uprising were systematically destroyed and distorted by the British and no important monument in the name of the Queen is left. Mahasweta Devi observes:

"However, the truth of history does not get lost so easily. I found evidence in folk songs, rhyme, ballads, and in various popular stories, of how local people viewed the rebellion in the places where it happened. There are many locals in Jhansi, who, to this day, deny that the Queen died. The Queen is still alive today through local ballads and sayings. Villagers regularly recall the Queen's story with reverence" (Devi Queen, XI).

So, both the work of Devi and Kire comes under the category of factual information received by the authors in their respective ways by tracing out the biographical elements. Mahasweta Devi wrote her first novel, *The Queen of Jhansi* at the age of 30. It is a fictionalized account of a real life queen turned warrior who dressed up as a man and fought a doomed war against the British in the Indian Rebellion of 1857, which toppled the Mughal Empire. She searched for the novel through North India where she sat with villagers in fire as she related accounts of the queen who had spent generations. The character of the protagonist they choose to depict can be closely compared. It is evident from Devi's *The Queen of Jhansi* and Kire's *Mari*

that both the authors choose to write a biographical novel based on the real living persons in blood and flesh, which had a soul in them and not just as symbols or metaphors like their other works. Easterine Kire's *Mari* flashed back to those turbulent war years. It's a story of love in the time of war, in the well-trodden tradition of novels and films such as *Farewell to Arms* and *Casablanca*. The lovers here are Khrielievu Mari, lovingly called as Mari, the 17-year-old daughter of a treasury officer in the District Commissioner's office in Kohima, and staff Sergeant Victor also known as Vic, a British soldier in the India army. The novel is in the first person, a semi-fictional autobiography written from the stories that Mari told Kire, her niece, about those momentous years of her life, and from a diary that she kept. It is a biographical novel about her aunt Mari whom the author stayed a couple of years with her during her early years. In an interview Kire even mentions once that so far *Mari* is one of the most difficult among all her works because the novel is written about the living memories of Mari and also the historical events she witnessed during such times in Nagaland. So, Mari is her aunt's memories and the diary she had kept, it is a biographical novel of her aunt Mari. But Mari unlike Lakshmi Bai is no hero of war, she is just a romantic protagonist during the events of wars years in Nagaland. Most Naga tribes came alongside the British and a local resistance movement which took place guided the allied troops through the hills, conveyed messages and spied on the Japanese. However, Mari does not take part in all these events unlike, Lakshmi Bai from Devi's *Queen of Jhansi* who rode a horse and fought on the front lines of the battle but the memories of Mari which will live on because of the thought that even in such turbulent times in Nagaland there was also a great love story revolving in the midst of wars.

In Easterine Kire's *Mari*, Kire describes the story of a young Naga girl caught in the midst of the battle. Her family has been displaced, forced to leave the village. Mari looks after her younger sisters separated from her parents. During the battle for weeks, young men move to escape Japanese soldiers from one hide to another. They survived on herbs and greens in the forest, short of food and hide in livestock huts. Throughout this difficult time Mari is longing to see her fiancé Vic in the midst of the struggles in Kohima and who was unfortunately killed by a sniper just one day before the blockade of Kohima was lifted. For the next two months, she has been wandering across the hills and valleys from the village to the refugee camp and escaping the Japanese advancing, joining the hundreds of other displaced residents in the Naga Hills. There was a hard time for the people of Kohima, and when Mari discovers she is pregnant with

her fiancé Vic's child, with bullets flying all around Japanese raping and raiding the country, and even the food supply seems to be lacking in the forests. Around May, when Mari discovers about the heart breaking news about her fiancé Vic, that, he had been killed in the war, she was heartbroken. Because she was pregnant with his baby and with a heavy burden and grief stricken, the young Mari is left to take up the burden at such a young age in war atmosphere expecting a child all alone without a father or family members in the most difficult period in the history of Naga people.

In Devi's *Queen of Jhansi*, Manu was fortunate, unlike many girls of her time, she received training in various activities which were not given privilege to many girls of her time. She studied Sanskrit and took some Persian, the languages of court. She learned how to read and write. She was said to have a clear and independent personality right from her childhood days. Her upbringing was not traditional. As a motherless child, no one taught her what a girl's behaviour was at that time and her father perhaps gave her the opportunity. The custom was to marry girls early, and when an extraordinary match fell in his lap, Moropant was concerned about his daughter. No one other than Gangadhar Rao, the Jhansi raja, was elected to marry Manu. She was 14 years of age at the time and the descendant of Gangadhar was Hari Newalkar Raghunath who in 1770 was appointed as Jhansi Administrator by Bajirao I. The marriage was in 1842 and the bride was much older than the bridegroom. In Jhansi the wedding was held as Moropant could not afford a luxurious celebration.

Gangadhar Rao was a patron of the arts and he enjoyed theatre and classical music. He needed heir for Jhansi throne, his first wife was childless. During the wedding, the name Manu was thought to have changed to Lakshmi Bai. As a queen, Manu was obligated to stay in purdah and thus grew up overnight. She was expected following her marriage to learn about religious rituals and different tasks of a queen. She was however able to persuade her husband to continue her horseback riding and martial arts practice.

When Gangadhar ascended the throne, Jhansi was in dire financial straits. He had to borrow enormous sums from the British, which is why British Superintendent Ross governed the city and a battalion was stationed there. Sometime after his marriage, Gangadhar was given back the reins of government in 1843 by the British. His finances also improved and a magnificent new palace was built, but the couple remained childless. Finally, a boy, Damodar Rao, was born

in January 1851. Unfortunately, only three months he survived. After that, they adopted a child before his death, Gangadhar Rao's health was getting worse and unfortunately Gangadhar Rao died before the authorities acknowledged him as the heir. So it is also obvious from the lives of Lakshmi Bai and Mari in the novel that at a young age, they both become single mothers but could brave all kinds of obstacles. They therefore serve as inspirational media and role models for women in the fight against the sort of society in which they exist.

In Easterine Kire's *Mari*, Mari and her emaciated siblings finally returned to Kohima after the long time of war, but they found out that the village has been devastated by the artillery shell, with only three wooden stations left in their house. But the Elders are shocked, as the houses are leveled by the ruined houses and by the construction of a new village, which would wipe away the old boundaries of the clan that are marked by the walls of the village and would lead to arguments and differences among the Naga people.

The villagers finally received timber and tin sheets as construction material and reconstructed their homes with the help of each other using some saved material from their broken houses. The villagers clear the land of the mortar shells, grenades and other debris. They grieve for their lost kin, but once the mourning period is over, further grieving is discouraged as “it will anger the spirits”. It is Angami belief and a way of rebuilding life following a disaster. Once spring comes back, the crater in the fields will cover herbs and the trees will once again sprout. Finally, Mari tries to rebuild her life and to study nursing in Chandigarh. After the long wars have come to an end, Mari had another new chapter in her life, not giving up faith to live and to look forward to a more successful life. The events in 1944 were described by Kire through the real stories of her aunt Mari, who experienced all the innumerable sufferings and hardships during a war full of violence and confusion, and Mari played a leading role in her beautiful novel. The mindset that girls are weak was a social belief that was affected by the past, as these were times of continuous war when sudden attacks by enemies occurred frequently. And as the physical attribute measured the strength of a person, since time immemorial men have ruled society. The old Naga societal practices classify women as a weaker sex rather than strong and competent, even after generations following such glorious fighting of head-hunting practices. However, even today, the notion of ancestor's view that boys are boys is still accepted.

In North-East India, the problem of politics and insurgency has a strong influence on the lives of women. In wars and ethnic clashes, women are the worst victim. There are special privileges for women, but unfortunately there are also disadvantaged class and sections of women, due to the unhealthy and unequal treatment by the society on all fronts. The problem of politics and insurgency continues to be a threat to the freedom of women.

In Devi's *Queen of Jhansi*, after the death of her husband Gangadhar Rao, a young queen still in her 20s was the widow of the king of Jhansi, the last ruler of Jhansi, in Devi's *Queen of Jhansi*. In 1853 Gangadhar Rao died without the biological child, and Governor General Lord Dalhousie took the opportunity, when the adopted heir was seen in Lakshmi Bai's hand, to apply his "Doctrine of Lapse". Therefore, the Queen was granted Rs 5000 as pension and Jhansi came directly under company rule.

She maintained a rigorous adoration and physical exercise routine in the meantime. She trained Durga Dal of female warriors and included many other women, along with her close associates Mandar, Sundar, Jhalkaribai and Kashibai. Because of the news of the Meerut revolutions, on 10th May 1857, the British officials had already alienated Jhansi's people with their high hands. On 4 June, sepoys in Jhansi attacked the British, killing several officers and sheltering them with women and children in the Jhansi fort. Lakshmi Bai supplied them with food for two days according to Captain Martin, who escaped. Political Officer Skene finally surrendered on the condition that they can be allowed to proceed to Sagar unharmed. However, when the group reached Joka Bagh, the place they selected, they were slaughtered. A few managed to escape through a tunnel in the fort. The sepoys then threatened to loot the city. Then the Queen gave her diamond necklace over to them and escaped to Delhi. Lakshmi Bai then seized the government's reins and restored order and law. After the death of her husband, she had abandoned purdah and now put on male garments. She had to defend a pretender from her experience of actual warfare, Sadashiv Rao Narayana, as well as assaults from nearby Datia and Orchha. Lakshmi Bai sensed more trouble and kept her fighting ready and well armed. Tantya Tope and Nana Sahib and their allies Raja Mardan Singh from Banpur and Bakhtab Ali from Shahgarh remained in touch with her. By the end of 1857, Delhi and Lucknow had been taken over by the British. Nana Sahib has been defeated and has fled in Kanpur, but Tantya has kept the fight with Rao Sahib, his nephew. Lakshmi Bai also kept the British authorities aware of

developments in Jhansi, but they blamed her for the massacre and tagged her as the "Jezebel of India" by sending Sir Hugh Rose to lead the Campaign in Central India to Lord Canning, the new General Governor. The British army was attacked by the Lakshmi Bai allies on the way but was unable to drive them away.

Historical accounts relate that Lakshmi Bai prepared the siege by strengthening the fortresses and the stockpiling of arms and food. On 21 March 1858, the siege began. The British were amazed at the spirited defense, in particular the contribution of women. They used weapons to repair the walls when they were broken. The Rani was everywhere and defenses were directed and moral was maintained. In Jhansi the British soldiers stormed. The battle is reported to be intense and she gave Jhansi a small party when defeat became apparent on the night of 4 April. Legend has it that she has tied Damodar to her back on Sarangi. Jhalkari Bai is said to have disguised the escape by embodying the Rani. In his memoir *Mazha Pravas*, Vishnubhat Godse gave a vivid account of Jhansi's sack. Thousands were mercilessly plundered and massacred by the British.

In the evening of 4 April the Rani escaped from Jhansi through Bhanderi Gate. The next fight in Kalpi started on 22 May and Indian forces nearly succeeded with the audacity of the Rani's plan. On 17 June, Lakshmi Bai was again compelled to ride for battle. The Supreme British forces soon began to prevail, despite her army's best efforts. When Mandar was hit by a bullet, a group of Hussars chased Mandar and the queen. The Rani's horse ran through a torrent and was hit as she slashed on Mandar's assailant. Even if it was deadly wounded, the Rani managed to cross the river. Gul Muhammad, Raghunath Singh and a few others took her away. They immediately sent Damodar. During the Gwalior Battle, she died on the 17th of June. It is believed that Brahmin found it and brought it to the ashram when she lied unconscious in the battleground. Before the British came, they cremated her hurriedly. Lakshmi Bai was only in her twenties, but in history she had left an indelible mark. Even her opponent Hugh Rose acknowledged her great qualities. He wrote: 'Although a lady, she was the bravest and best military leader of the rebels, a man among the mutineers. Rani Lakshmi Bai lives on in song and story.'

Mahashweta Devi reflects minutely on her habits like reading the Gita before sleep and sleeping in the candlelight The Queen's unpretentious tastes for food, her inclination for

jewellery and variety of dresses and blue colour, her taste for books, music and fine arts are also stressed upon in the biography. Here, the concern of Mahasweta Devi is not the war but the human face of the Queen. Her love for the country, kindness towards her subordinates, affection for the soldiers and her horse sarangi, her aversion to the foreigners and her concern for her dependants have been brought out very effectively in this work. She had established a wartime hospital in the palace to treat the wounded soldiers and had preserved the palace library which her late husband had built. The last words of the Queen to her associates help one to 'get into the skin' of the Queen, she says, "Be as loyal to Anand as you have been to me. Pay my troops their salary out of my remaining jewellery and money. Make sure the foreigners don't get hold of my body after my death." (Devi, Queen, 243)

She is called the "Icon of the Nationalist Movement" for her immense effort. Rani's aim was to secure her adopted son, Damodar, the throne throughout the uprising. Her story has been a beacon for the next generation of liberation fighters. She did not lose courage after her husband's death and bravely took on all his responsibilities at an early age. When they treacherously sought to annex the territories of Jhansi, she revolted strongly against the British. Rani bronze statues were placed both in Jhansi and Gwalior on a horseback. In Indian history she had secured a place and was immortalized, inspiring many subsequent generations of Indian liberty fighters. As India's "Joan of Arc," she descended into Indian history as a legendary figure.

The Queen of Jhansi is the incredible woman from Indian lost days, as depicted by Devi, the great tales were drawn from the sources and accounts given by old people mostly the poor farmers belonging to that part of the region. Mahasweta Devi, who always has a strong sense of history, believes history is truly brought to life by oral tradition. The image from this biography of the unique Queen is an expression of what India felt during that history. At the same time she had to play different roles in a limited space, but at the crucial point of Indian history she dealt all quietly, bravely and posed a huge challenge to the powerful British.

3.3. Mahasweta Devi's *the Queen of Jhansi* and Easterine Kire's *Mari* as a Historical Novel:

The Queen of Jhansi, also popularly known as *Jhansir Rani* was Mahasweta Devi's earliest novel, which offered a glimpse into a spirited Indian leader's inner court in 1857.

Mahashweta Devi's *Queen of Jhansi*, with its own perspective on history, is significant. It is Mahashweta Devi's first complete book. It first appeared in series in *Desh* magazine and later in 1956 in a book. She was curious about this unique queen of Indian history when she read Savarkar's book *Eighteen Fifty Seven* (1907).

This maiden work of Mahashweta Devi ensured her a prominent place among the Bengali writers. Her aim of writing about the Queen of Jhansi and Birsa Munda, as she opines is "to provide popular access to (then) neglected chapters of Indian history." (Devi, *The Book*, X).

Devi's work traces the history of the British resistance, while painting Lakshmi Bai as a complex, spirited and bloodied woman who carries unbound her long tresses as she prefers a man's clothing on horseback; who is a cool headed and far sighted leader of men, full of warm concern for her soldiers; as well as a mother who worries about her infant son's wellbeing. Simultaneously a history, a biography, and an imaginative work of fiction, this book is a valuable contribution to the reclamation of history and historiography by feminist writers.

According to Devi "Since then, I have a firm opinion that the most precious historical material is what is preserved in the memory of the common people," she said in an interview with the journal *Revolutionary Democracy* in 1999.

A detailed description of her as a child, as a young bride, a youthful widow, a loving mother, an intimate friend and a brave and inspiring warrior with a superb battle craft is presented throughout. Starting with her historic utterance, "*Meri Jhansi doongi nahin* –I will not give up my Jhansi," (Devi, *Queen*, 57) 'till her death in the battle at Gwalior, she played a wonderful role of a statesman and a patriotic brave military leader. Her equestrian skills, battle craft and self-respect are appropriately stressed. When Tatia Topi deserted the Queen and other compatriots during the crucial battle at Kunch, only the Queen's presence of mind and her excellent military tactics saved the remaining Indian fighters. Her presence was a great inspiration for the Indian soldiers. Even the enemy soldiers marveled at her sword fighting skills in the battle at Gwalior and they mistook her to be a skilful young male warrior as she was in the military uniform. The force of her character that captured the hearts and minds of the people, the successful spy network built by her and the noble method of sending messages through chapattis and lotus petals make Lakshmi Bai a unique Queen in Indian history. Hence, there is no

exaggeration in what Hugh Rose in his account of the war had written, "Although a lady, she was the bravest and best military leader of the rebels. A man among the mutineers". (*Devi, Queen*, 247)'.

The tremendous sweep and breadth of the Revolt was matched by its depth. The sepoy mutiny was followed by popular uprisings by civilians everywhere in North and Central India. The ordinary people came up with arms often fighting with lines and axes, bows and arrows, lathis and scythes and crude muskets, as the sepoy had destroyed British authority. But people revolted in many places even prior to the sepoy or even without any sepoy regiments. It was his wide participation in the uprising, especially in areas that now are part of the Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, by peasants and craftsmen which gave its real strength and character of a popular uprising.

The 1857 rebellion was India's most dramatic battle against foreign rule. But it did not happen suddenly. It culminated in the long-standing resistance to British domination that was unprecedented in Indian history, in scale, duration and intensity of plunder. In Bengal, for instance, the collection of land income in less than thirty years was almost double that of the Mughals. The old zamindars were replaced by new men, who sold and lent money to ruinous heights and expelled their tenants in case of no payment. In 1770 to 1857, twelve major and many small famines reflected the economical decline of rural development. The first to assert the political control over Bengal soon after East India Company, in 1757, was about 10 million dead, the scale of death in India unknown until that time. The Kings of Chandela ruled Jhansi, formerly known as Balwant Nagar. It slowly began to lose importance in the 11th century. In the 17th century, Jhansi became once again popular under Raja Bir Singh Deo of Orchha. Raja Gangadhar Rao was one of the best managers of Jhansi. As Devi's title of the piece, *Queen of Jhansi* refers to the Queen of Jhansi, who bravely led her troops during the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny against the British. In 1853, the British wanted to take Jhansi over, because the king had no biological son for the throne. Lakshmi Bai and other revolutionaries of that era struggled against the British. So the seeds of India's fight for independence were sown by Lakshmi Bai, who led the Sepoys of the 1857 revolt. The political reasons for the revolt can be traced back to the British expansion policy through the 'Doctrine of Lapse' and direct annexation. Many Indian leaders have been dismissed, raising fears in the minds of other ruling families which have apprehended a similar destiny. The adopted son of Rani Lakshmi Bai was not allowed to sit on

Jhansi's throne. Under the 'Doctrine of Lapse' Satara, Nagpur and Jhansi were annexed. Also annexed were Jaitpur, Sambalpur and Udaipur. Other officials feared that their state annexation was only a matter of time. Nana Saheb, the adopted son of Baji Rao II, was refused to continue the pension, creating hostility among the ruling class.

The battle of 1857 is the legendary history of India. It began with the Mutiny of Sepoys in Meerut on May 10, 1857 and led to a series of rebellions throughout Northern and Central India. In the rebellion, Jhansi was considered the first war of independence and Rani Laxmi Bai was a leader who took over the British forces. In 1858, the 1st baron of Strathnairn, Marshal of Field, Hugh Henry Rose, attacked Jhansi in order to end the mutiny once and for all. The brave queen took the British forces from her fort with only few armies, as it has since been well documented in history books. She could have kept it for a long time, but one of its own commanders betrayed her and caused an impending defeat. Counseled to escape immediately from her generals, Laxmi Bai slipped away on horseback from Jhansi. Rani Lakshmi Bai, led the rebel forces at Jhansi when the British refused to accept the Jhansi throne claim from their adopted son. She was fighting the British gallantly. But the English finally defeated her. Rani Lakshmi Bai has escaped. Therefore, Tantia Tope joined the Rani and marched together to Gwalior to capture them. Sindhia, the British loyal ally, was expelled. There followed fierce struggles and like a tigress, the Rani fought the battle to the very close till her last breath. The British recaptured Gwalior. The young Rani Lakshmibai from Jhansi was among the great leaders of the 1857 revolt and also regarded as one of the greatest heroes in India's history. The young Rani joined the rebellious when the British refused to accept the Jhansi Gaddi's heir, annexed her state, and threatened to treat her as a motivator of the Jhansi sepoy's rebellion. She fought like a true heroine; tales of her bravery and courage and military skill have inspired her countrymen ever since.

Jhansi today is one of Uttar Pradesh's incredibly towns. Jhansi is currently the headquarters of a Divisional Commissioner, including Jhansi, Lalitpur and Jalaun districts. The town stands for Rani Jhansi's name. Jhansi's history draws tourists from around the world. On 17 June 1858, Lakshmi Bai was made a martyr during a battle at Gwalior with British soldiers. The Jhansi Fort and city were later handed over to Jiyaji Rao Scindia by the British Government in 1861. During this first Indian Independence fight in 1858, she sacrificed her life. The name of Lakshmi Bai is

known worldwide and symbolizes strength and courage. Apart from Rani Lakshmi Bai, many of the greatest heroes of the revolt had great courage in battle and thousands of who laid their lives alone. Above all, their determination and their sacrifice almost led to the British being expelled from India.

Although the Revolt in 1857 spread across wide areas and is very popular among the people, it could not embrace the whole nation or any of Indian society's groups and classes. The majority of the Indian states rulers were selfish to the heart and were afraid of the British power, but refused to take part. In contrast, Gwalior Sindhia, the Indore Holkar, the Hyderabad Nizams, the Jodhpur Raja, and other Rajput rulers, the Bhopal Nawab, the Patiala rulers, Nabha, the Jind and the Cashmir ruler, the Nepalese Ranas and many other leaders, as well as a large number of large zamindars have actively assisted the British in suppressing and fighting the popular revolt.

The great uprising of 1857 was an important landmark in the history of modern India. The revolt marked the end of the East India Company's rule in India. India now came under the direct rule of the British Crown. This was announced by Lord Canning at a Durbar in Allahabad in a proclamation issued on 1 November 1858 in the name of the Queen. Thus, Indian administration was taken over by Queen Victoria, which, in effect, meant the British Parliament. The Governor General's office was replaced by that of the Viceroy. However, the Revolt of 1857 paved the way for the future struggle for freedom in India. By the end of 1859, British authority in India was fully reestablished, but the Revolt had not been in vain. It was the first great struggle of the Indian people for freedom from British imperialism. It became a source of inspiration for the later freedom struggles and its heroes became household names in the country.

Thus, Mahashweta Devi has successfully presented the subaltern point of view in this historical biography. Her view is that it is not the scholars or the so-called historians whose opinions are to be taken into account in order to understand a historical incident. But, to evaluate a war in history, one has to take into account the views of the people who pay for that war. While describing the role played by the soldiers as well as the common people, she asks: "What is history? What is history made up of? If history is about people, then I would say that the history created on the roads of Jhansi that day is unparalleled. On the cobbled streets and alleys between the closely packed houses, everyone from young boys to Pathan, Afghan, Bundela and Maratha soldiers fought to the end as the ground became slippery with blood. Children cried in horror

when they saw the terrible sight. Bricks and other debris fell into the streets from the burning houses. The history that was made that day by thousands of Indians is the real history of India."(Devi, Queen, 177)

Contemporary writers from North-East India have showcased their desire in coming out of the stereotypical writings which were prevalent from the region at one point of time, portraying the troubled political climate, violence, backwardness, underdevelopment, poverty, and the ever-present image of the gun and political unrest in their region. North-East Indian writers like Mamang Dai, Harekrishna Deka, Dhruba Hazarika, Jahnavi Baruah, Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire too have expressed their discomfort with the terms 'North-East literature' and 'North-East writers' as they relate those with the colonial legacy. Senior Editor of Zubaan, Preeti Gill rightly states "To say that the Northeastern states are different from the rest of India in almost every way is to state the obvious, but it is important to recognize that these 'differences' have created rifts, giving rise to insurgencies, demands for secession from the Indian state and years of internal conflict and discontent.

The writer from this part of India, therefore, tries to highlight the under-represented issues of the region and thus bring to light the rich culture and tradition of the North-East India. Nagaland, one of the seven sister states of India, is a place rich in culture, myths, and beliefs. Along with the rich culture of Nagaland there exist the unpleasant realities of Naga life and its complexities around the colonial atrocities and discrimination. In her novels Kire has vividly etched out these realities which have brought catastrophic changes in the lives of Naga women who live in double jeopardy of being a woman in a male-centric society which itself is trying hard to deal with its post-colonial identity crisis. The Battle of Kohima, if we go through the history of Nagaland, we will find that this beautiful state of North-eastern region in India has gone through many heart-wrenching sufferings; the lesser known Battle of Kohima which was fought from 4th of April to 22nd of June 1944 stopped the Japanese march into India and it was the first British victory over the Japanese. The Battle of Kohima has been christened as 'the forgotten battle' and its veterans the 'forgotten heroes'. The Naga people became refugees in their own homeland; families were separated forever; women were ravaged and left to die; many starved to death; but these are not given substantial space in the Indian history.

Some of the common realities of North-East India which hardly any writer of that region can ignore in their works are the strong political awareness, issues related to identity and

ethnicity, violence in different forms, and above all the ever-present image of the gun. However, the contemporary writers break away from the traditional stereotypical tales of the troubled political climate, violence, backwardness, underdevelopment, poverty, and the sound of gun fires. These contemporary writers have shown a great desire in portraying various under-represented and remarkable features of the region.

These beautiful hills of Northeastern India have an enthralling tale with different themes to share to the wider audience to the outer world. Though Northeast is rich in its culture and traditions because of political issues and rise of insurgency, people in Northeast are facing challenges every day. The fire of insurgency has been increasingly burning in Northeast India. Easterine Kire's *Mari* set in the midst of violence portrays a young girl named, Mari who was caught in the great battle of Kohima. Throughout the battle, Mari and her sister struggle and move from one hiding place to another for shelter and protection. This fiction from Northeast has presented the presence of political disturbances in the Northeast region. Since ages, Nagaland has been one of the worst affected areas.

Mari is an interesting novel relating the life and experiences of the young Naga girl named Mari. At the beginning of the novel she thus quotes:

When you go home
Tell them of us
And say for your tomorrow
We gave our today

Indication on the 2nd Division War Memorial at the Kohima War Cemetery and the effects of the Japanese invasion of India and how those easy and simple people of Kohima were victims of the horrors of war." The book is not just a story about Mari, according to Easterine Kire. "It is about Kohima and its people".

Before the invasion flowers portrayed nature, because there were so few houses, it grew wild all over the city. There were blooming trees in and around such as roses, bohemia and scarlet flame of the forest. With the trees and flowers around, the city certainly looked more vibrant. The front yard, which was formerly full of flowers, was not recognizable after the invasion. Large craters were left by the shell and many numbers of ammunition was left near the home from various mortar shells to glittering rifle shots. In the green countryside, Kire paints an image of the simple, easy-going life of the Nagas before being involved in a life-change war. The

story of a young girl who falls in love is simple and universal, ingenuity and delicacy, meeting, quest and accomplishment in the midst of a war.

The town itself with its neat bungalows and streets and with its floating daisies, rhododendron, and pink bohemia and the scarlet flames of the forest, Kire also expands its considerable style in the building of an idyllic environment before the war; a large family of seven who live in a two-story house called the Bamboo Villa, with terraced grass-patches, fruit trees, vegetable gardens and flower beds; the rhythms of a peaceful life punctuated with a holiday in the fields, or gathering herbs in the garden, the better to drive home its later desecration during the war. The war is intruding into this pastoral life, first on the radio, bringing up the news of far-flung events like the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Later, the closeness when fighter planes start flying across the board creates tremendous excitement, first with villagers running out to see them and later, when hordes of “starving, diseased” refugees start pouring in from the Burma border.

Mari is not just a gentle love story of Mari and her life but also a story about the events which shook the world which greatly affected the people of Kohima and which is also considered a great war story recorded in the history of the world, i.e. of the Second World War. The Japanese Invasion of India in the Second World War was ended by a decisive struggle. Between 4 April and 22 June 1944 in Kohima, the long battle of three months ' war took place.

The Deputy Commissioner's bungalow was part of the most violent struggle during the Kohima siege. The battle came to be called "the battle of tennis court" because the bungalow was located on the front lawns and British and Japanese soldiers digging trenches at the two ends of the courtyard. The Naga villagers, who acted as scouts and ammunition carriers, supported the numerous ally soldiers. The assassination lasted for two weeks until the reinforcement arrived, but the Japanese troops were deployed on the hills for a further two months.

Today, it may not be widely remembered in India, but once in Nagaland's history, Kohima was an allied victory during the Second World War, a victory that had changed the contours of Asia. After the success of Burma in 1941-42, Japanese people who had steadily moved into Asia and dangerously close to the British-ruled India were so convincingly beaten down by the battle at the Naga Hills, and so disintegrated by disease and hunger that they lost the initiative. As is now known, the "battle of Kohima" was a bloody affair because over 10,000 people were killed on each hand. The whole area was once a sleepy, small British outpost.

The Nagas have experienced the trauma of war caused by the Japanese invasion and then their struggle for freedom against the Indian government. In her works, Kire artistically paints the history of Nagaland and its people. They reveal the historical aspect of Nagas and the political conflict and chaos, the insurgency and its aftermath. Kire explores the Indo-Naga conflict in her novel *Bitter Wormwood*. In her other novel *Life on hold*, Kire talks about Nagaland during the troubled times of independence and central characters represent the people who were affected by Naga Nationalism. *A Naga Village Remembered* is also an account of the lost battle between the colonial forces of Britain and the little village of Khonoma. Kire was born and raised in Kohima, and her writings relate many incidents and experiences in her life when she was in Kohima. In the 1960s the conflict fought near the village of Naga she encountered and experienced very closely.

In sensitizing the world about the real situation at home, Easterine Kire was determined. Her writing colors her love of her native land and her culture with nostalgia for the golden days. With regard to issues such as identity and ethnicity, Kire expresses a strong political awareness; it also questions the violence that has taken place at home because of the insurgency. However, because of the rise of infighting in the 1980s, the conflict got worse. There was an unrestricted cycle of killing and revenge in 1987.

There have been two levels of violence. The Indian Army continued atrocities, on the one hand, and the Naga freedom fighters continued to fight because of the ideological differences. The bitterness of the past should not hinder the lives of the new generation, she says, because they deserve a better life. She expressed hope that in the Indian literary world the Northeastern Writers Forum is a milestone that shows that in the North East there was much more to emphasize than political literature alone. Indeed, she has made many of her written stories and poems based on her natural green, hilly beauty, native cultures and traditions, her own myths and her own homes.

Though she has continued to write about her native state far away from home, she also sheds her hope for a better future. She felt that she needed a personal message to write about the conflict that was going on. During her stay in her homeland she had a vision deep in her heart; her writings influenced change, and she could see a green light and a ray of hope and visions for

a better generation. Her homeland Nagaland has an insurgency history and independent struggles as well as various other movements.

Hence it can be concluded that both the works of Devi's *Queen of Jhansi* and Kire's *Mari* has deep source of information compiled beneath this pages of works which gives us biographical information about the life of women living in different society and regions in India. *Queen of Jhansi* by Mahasweta Devi is also a remarkable story of Rani Lakshmi Bai biography as a brave warrior queen of Jhansi who is left with a huge responsibility after the death of her husband. The life of Rani Lakshmi Bai turned the pages of history in a different setting where woman who is considered as the weaker sex emerged as a great warrior, fighting for her people and braving all the events that shouldered upon her. She is immortalized even today in the pages of the Indian history. Thus this novel is both a historical novel about the Revolt of 1857 which is called the first war of Indian Independence and the biography of the brave queen of Jhansi. Kire's *Mari* is also the same kind of an extraction from the life of her aunt Mari though she does not appear to be a legendary figure like Lakshmi Bai in Devi's *Queen of Jhansi*. *Mari* is also a biographical novel about a young Naga lady and all the events of her life in times of war in Kohima when the II World War shook Kohima and its people. It is about the life she has lived and her memories of war and love all occurrence during those turbulent war times and all the historical events which were occurring during her lifetime. Thus, it is a great piece of biography about the Naga lady falling in love to a person from different parts of the world, her pain, grief, struggles eventually overcoming all those war years and starting a new life with a bright hope for a better tomorrow. The life of the ordinary Naga society are clearly depicted throughout the novel, the war atmosphere in Kohima and how it affected the numerous Nagas and the aftermath of the war, the changes in this region from the past to the present and the historical accounts are vividly painted in her novel.

From the biographical view point, both the real life characters of the author emerge as a brave young lady who single handedly took care of the infant child in the absence of their deceased husband. But the hurdles and obstacles comes their way being a widow and by not giving fair treatment to them by the society. In Devi's *Queen of Jhansi*, similar fate can be seen by occupying her empire because she had no biological child of the king and the adopted son was not given privilege to become heir to the throne after the death of her husband. Though

history relates and gives great status to women in every society in forms of written works no such is exactly executed by the law makers and the social norms. However, Lakshmi Bai emerges as a brave warrior, a protective mother, a responsible queen who marked a great turning point in the mindset of the men and the women during her time. She was a strong woman, upholder of woman strength as well as the mindset of the women by discarding the purdah after the death of her husband, she went on to give training to the woman about war tactics and preparing themselves for any kind of raid in her kingdom. She was a remarkable woman who consequently changed the course of treatment towards women. It also relates the significant historical events about the history of different regions within India and also the treatment of women in the context of history in different cross cultural context within these two regions. *Queen of Jhansi* by Mahasweta Devi is also a remarkable story of Rani Lakshmi Bai biography as a brave warrior queen of Jhansi who was left with a huge responsibility after the death of her husband as a king. The life of Rani Lakshmi Bai turned the pages of history in a different setting where woman who is considered as the weaker sex emerged as a great warrior, fighting for her people and braving all the events that come upon her. She is immortalized even today in the pages of the Indian history. Thus this novel is both a historical novel about the Revolt of 1857 which is called the first war of Indian Independence and the biography of the brave queen of Jhansi. History and biography aims to highlight the victim woman who overcomes her fate. Both women writers represent their women as independent and courageous by immortalizing the subaltern woman as the hero in their writings.

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CHAPTER 4

RELATIONSHIPS OF WOMEN TOWARDS WOMEN IN EASTERINE KIRE'S *A TERRIBLE MATRIARCHY* AND MAHASWETA DEVI'S *THE WHY-WHY GIRL*

4.1. Introduction:

Mahasweta Devi, a proficient Bengali writer and activist who puts a question mark on the democratic and civilized nation, India. She is a well-known and respected writer, has been honoured with a slew of awards for her literary and journalistic writing, including the Jnanpith, the Sahitya Akademi and the Magsaysay awards. The problems faced by the tribals and other marginalized communities have formed a recurring theme in her writing for adults and she touches on the same issues in *The Why-Why Girl*, her first picture book for children. Devi very artistically touched the hearts of the young and the old through this beautiful story of Moyna which is packed with a vast meaning and knowledge underneath this simple story of a young village girl called Moyna. Through Mahasweta's writing one gets to hear the voice of a community that is otherwise voiceless. Mahasweta is one of those few writers in India who has been able to creatively integrate her approach with her service to people. Mahasweta empathetically restates her commitment to the poor, exploited and marginalized classes of India primarily consisting of the "lower" castes and tribals, and the peasants and laborers who constitute the rural and urban poor. She tried to bring their unheard stories before the world to sensitize the world about these people particularly children in Bihar, West Bengal, Gujarat and Jharkhand. Like Devi, the issues, concerns and lived realities of Naga women and the social problems are some of the subjects close to Kire's heart. Her own life experiences and the daily incidents of the lives of the Naga society infused in her and inspired her to write her award winning novel *A Terrible Matriarchy*, which took shape and was given life in the form of a novel. The novel is based on a tale set 50 years in history and reflecting the ideal, value systems and attitudes of those times. The book portrays the patriarchal set-up of the Naga society, amidst many changes and political disturbances in Nagaland. The narrative is in the first person which is an elegant part of the novel reaffirming her Naga consanguinity through oral narration of histories, customs and cultures. The characters in the novel are mostly based on real people and reflection of real events, circumstances and beliefs of the people of Naga society. This book is

remarkable in bringing out the lives of many women of three generations. Through her novel one get to know the Angami society which is essentially patriarchal and matrilineal and at the same is visible in the society's approach towards girl's education, inheritance of property, marriages and divorces, and their way of life for the Nagas themselves.

4.2. Discrimination towards the Girl Child in Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* and Mahasweta Devi's *The Why-Why Girl*.

Childhood is an important stage in everyone's life. It is an age of one's physical and mental growth, when one is eager to become an adult and be part of the wider society. But in reality, all the children do not get the same kind of opportunity to enjoy their childhood for many reasons; many children faces violence in the form of punishment, abuse and neglect. Especially the female children are the most vulnerable victims of such kinds of treatments in a place like India where women are discriminated. Such kinds of subaltern treatments especially towards the girl child are portrayed in Mahasweta Devi's *The Why-Why Girl*, through the lens of a ten year old protagonist little Moyna, who belongs to the lowest sections of the society and also is not allowed to go to school because she has to do all the household chores and tend the babu's goat, such kinds of responsibility is shouldered upon Delieno, an Angami Naga in Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, despite being the youngest child in her family was sent at the tender age of five to live with her grandmother. She was happy while she was in her parent's home with her parents and brothers but her troubles stem from the matriarch of the house, her grandmother, a strict disciplinarian and clearly one without any sympathy for a girl child. At her grandmother's home, Delieno not only undergoes physical hardships, but also has to abide by the impossible rules set by the matriarch who firmly believes that girls do not need education, love or affection. Discrimination between the education of a girl and a boy is more common in rural areas and in urban slums, where most of the families live below poverty line. In these poor families men are supposed to be bread-earners and women bread-makers. No wonder education of the former is being given greater importance. Children and the elderly sections of the society is the most vulnerable victim who faces different kind of oppression in such a society as is reflected through both the works of Devi and Kire.

A similar comparison can be drawn from the life of Moyna in Mahasweta Devi's *The Why-Why Girl*, little Moyna being a Shabar tribe, is in the plight to support her mother with heavy housework and tends the goats of the village landlords. Many children in poor families are made to work and when it comes to the tribal children the condition is all the more adverse. The hard life of being born a girl in her childhood days and suffering memories are the only memories of the girl which we observe through the lens of Moyna and Delieno. *The Why-Why Girl* is a book which is full of attraction and it is a lively book which can be read by young and old alike. Unlike her other works it is one of Devi's quite an unusual book to the reader while gently raising several unsettling questions. The book has an elegant structure, beginning and ending as it does with Moyna's 'whys'. Moyna's questions are typeset in a larger font and in wavy lines, perhaps to signify her unconventional thinking, and this adds visual quirkiness to the page. Being fearless, dutiful, logical, sentimental, rational, Moyna, a delightful ten year old protagonist of *The Why-Why Girl* with sparkling eyes, endless energy and avid curiosity who is forever wanting to know indeed, what a lot of 'whys' Moyna asks! Why must I eat the leftovers? Why must I thank the babu? Why do I have to walk so far to the river to fetch water? Why do we live in a leaf hut? Why can't we eat rice twice a day? Her questions paint a vivid picture of the life of Shabar tribals: lack of employment, no access to running water, schools which are many kilometres away, a subsistence determined by the whims and leftovers of the landlords. This kind of simple truth which nobody in her family or even her friends ever dare to the time to seriously ponder this questions like her. Moyna is so full of questions that the postmaster calls her the "why-why girl"! She is not crushed by the circumstances of her life. Instead, she constantly demands answers to her questions. "But why?" she asks, "Why shouldn't I catch a cobra?" or "Why can't fish speak?" The book is a sequence of events of the author Mahasweta Devi's interaction with Moyna. The author is completely at ease addressing children, perhaps because she has interacted extensively with them during her work with tribal communities. She spins her tale simply and evocatively.

One of the biggest ways people are handicapping themselves today is by being too afraid to ask questions. While it is very easy to talk about, it is often very hard for one to take the leap and ask. An ancient Chinese proverb says, "He who asks question remains a fool for five minutes. He who does not ask, remains a fool forever." As a society one often treats question as a threat to authority, challenge to hierarchy and a mark of impolite behavior. It is not easy to be

curious when hardly anyone wants to be at the receiving end. In a study made at Harvard Business School, they cited multiple reasons for people's reluctance to ask questions and the most prominent response was: fear of negative evaluation.

Moyna is described in the story as the eponymous Why-Why Girl. She is a lively and free spirited child who manages to retain her curiosity and self-worth in spite of growing up in abject poverty. Her family belongs to the Shabars, landless tribals, who have very little work to sustain themselves where they live. Moyna grazes the goats of the village landlords and goes to the forest everyday to collect firewood just like Easterine Kire's Delieno from *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Delieno too had to fetch the water, collect fire wood from the forest, do all the domestic chores before she goes to school. There are so many similarities in the character of Devi's Moyna and Kire's Delieno. Both the protagonist is a girl child and they are exploited in their own society by the customs and traditions of their society that exist.

Easterine Kire's novel *A Terrible Matriarchy* portrays the coming-of age story of a young girl, Delieno, and her confrontation with the traditional Angami society to which she belongs. Kire unveils Naga society in light, especially from that of the Angami culture and way of life, and also presents the status of women in the contemporary Naga society which was undergoing tremendous changes. While, Mahasweta Devi's, *The Why-Why Girl* has a lot of meaning underneath and tries to shed light not only on gender issues about also the class distinction and the condition of the exploitation and marginalization of the hill people.

Growing up in a feudal village in West Bengal, her parents own no land and are practically slaves to the local landlords. Thus, Moyna is burdened with the triple handicap of being a child, a female and a tribal. While brothers of Moyna and Delieno were allowed to go to school, Moyna's education was given no importance because she is a female and also belonging to the lowest class in the society she exist. Instead, she is busy doing all the domestic chores in the family as well as tending their land lord goats. In the tradition bound Indian society, domestic work was associated with the women folk. Women were supposed to be most suited to run the household. But, majority of the women in urban centre, who take up employment outside the family find minimum time to attend to their domestic chores. Therefore, they have to depend on some form of paid help to get their domestic work done, which led to the emergence of a wage earning group called 'domestic servants'.

Even in the context of Naga society women suffers all the more comparing to her male counterparts yet their burdens and plight are not celebrated by the male as well as women themselves. Instead, women like Vibano, tries to make patriarchy all the more worst by her lack of wisdom and knowledge. There are many children like Moyna and Dielieno whose voices are unheard and unacknowledged by the people close to their lives. From the cradle to the grave women are bound to suffer and are made to suffer.

Under privilege girls like her were sent off to such homes to do part time job while children of her age should be in the schools. The socio-economic, cultural and educational background of these workers is different from labour employed in other sectors. The very nature of domestic work, conditions of work, duration of working hours, the disproportionate distribution of wages as compared to work, lack of leisure and leave facilities, lack of education and awareness, lack of legal rights and labour legislations to protect their interests, lack of social security measures provide ample scope for their socio-economic and sometimes even mental and physical abuse, of course, violation of their basic human rights. They are born in poverty, they continue to live in poverty and finally succumb to poverty. Most of these workers lead lives of economic bondage. It is mainly the economic pressure and hardship in the rural areas that encouraged the migration and employment in domestic service. *The Why-Why Girl*, also compares the urban life and life close to nature, the rich and the poor, the divide between the literate and the illiterate, between adult and child, and above all, the divide between those who ask “why” and those who don’t. Why is there no work for them? Why must children work rather than go to school? Therefore this questions stands true to the context.

4.3. Concept of Woman towards Woman in Mahasweta Devi’s, *The Why-Why Girl* and Easterine Kire’s *A Terrible Matriarchy*:

In the preface, Kire states, “while the visible structure of the novel is patriarchal and seems focused on bringing out the misuse of the patriarchal system, the less visible under-structure is matriarchy and how it abuses the patriarchal structure resulting in gender abuse within the same gender.” This statement more or less summarizes the very base of Kire’s book.

The customary laws of the Naga society provide mere token gestures to the rights and desires of married women. Kire’s story features three generations of women and thus, portray a vivid picture of women’s position in the society. Grandmother Vibano, following the traditional

practice, not only showers her maximum love and affection to Vini, but also reserves her property to him. Even though Dielieno stays with her, does all her work and takes care of her household, she is not to get anything from the matriarch. Even after Vini's death, grandmother's share of affection and her property shift to Vini's child, but not to Dielieno or Bano, who regards the old lady as her mother and had spent their entire life looking after her. Explaining this partiality in grandmother Vibano, Dielieno's mother says that it sprang from a society which believed in a males-only inheritance system. It meant "...widows without sons lost all their husband's property to their male relatives", leaving them with no choice but to try marry men with personal property and be obsessed with bearing male children. Kire takes up this issue further in the case of Neiko, grandmother Vibano's younger sister, who is unmarried and so has lived on in her father's house. It is common knowledge that the actual owner of the house after the father's death is Sizo, Neiko's brother. Sizo may have chosen to live in another town after his marriage and for the purpose of his job, but that is only because of his convenience. Dielieno states clearly that even though Sizo lived separately, the house was his and would be passed on to him when Neiko dies.

In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Kire stressed that the discrimination against the girl is carried out not only because of men but by also of the elders, in-laws or even the mother, mother-in-law or grandmother. As the statement is made it clear by Delieno's grandmother's Vibano. In her views we exist in a society which is quite difficult for the women and clearly partial to men: "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 barren. They were always in constant danger if there was a war. The women would have only 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." However, women should realize the value of daughters and importance of girls, of the family and daughter-in-laws. Every woman should treat another woman with respect and dignity. Also as the popular saying states, "A women who stands for herself is strong but a woman who uplifts another woman is even stronger".

Delieno's mother's comment on men in general is important to understand traditional position of Angami women in their families and society: "Men don't like women who are aggressive and outspoken. They like their wives to be good workers. You are a good worker,

Delieno, but you must try to be more docile.” Similar comparison can be seen on how the customs and tradition of the society and the outlook of women towards woman in Mahasweta Devi’s *The Why-Why Girl* when Moyna’s mother herself being a woman comments Moyna “obstinate” because of the many questions she used to ask and the remarks made by her teacher “She’ll (Moyna exhaust you with her whys”) this kind of mentality existed even among the women folks. Women are expected to be meek and low towards their male counterparts.

Not only is discrimination and violence committed by men, but also in the Naga context it is perpetrated by women themselves in the form of the mothers and grandmothers. Gender sensitization and equity is linked with education and the fact is that most Naga mothers and grandmothers of the older generation were uneducated and unaware of women’s rights as portrayed clearly in Kire’s *A Terrible Matriarchy* through the character of Vibano who discriminated her little granddaughter just because of the fact that she is a girl. The movements of feminism articulating women’s rights has gained momentum only from the late fifties, born out of violent conflicts and the aftermath of the relentless killings of men, innocent women and children by the Indian army. Kire’s portrayal of how Delieno and her friend hesitate to approach shopkeepers to buy sanitary napkins conveys much idea of the society’s perspective of such situations. Women in Naga society faces a glass ceiling which had been in existence till the present century.

Even at times of war women are the most vulnerable victims, they are abused and raped because of their lack of physical weakness strength. *A Terrible Matriarchy* records one such event in the life of Delieno’s mother, one day after the closing down of schools when she was seen alone in the kitchen, a German spy came into the kitchen and pulled her into his arms and tried to molest her. She moved out and desperately called for help. Though she escaped from him was shaken by the incident. But many women were not as lucky as her, such kinds of incidents describes the plight and the miserable condition of women even during war times. They are tortured, raped and had to run from one place to another for their own safety.

Vibano, the grandmother states that, “In our day...girls did not go to school. We stayed at home and learned all the fieldwork as well. That way one never has a problem with girl-children, they will always be busy at some work or other, too busy to get into trouble.” Education was not an issue for Naga women during her grandmother’s time. They think that they (women)

themselves being inferior physically tend to regard the superior male counterparts as their masters and so it was regarded as their duty to domestic works at home, while the men were busy in other social activities.

The women in the wells also portray the mindset of women towards other women, the lack of knowledge also draws them to such kinds of gossips as seen in the Naga society in Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, right to education should be made known in every section of the society far and near and should be practically applied in each and every society. Kire, in her book, makes a deeper analysis of the real situation and presents quite a different picture from an ordinary understanding of how a patriarchal society operates. Kire also took the example of three generations of women to highlight the traditional view versus the modern views in her reflection of the Angami society's approach towards education for girls and Naga society in general. Dielieno is shown to be growing up at a time when the importance of education for Angami girls was still being debated and not prioritized. Grandmother Vibano has very clear ideas about the fact that girls do not need education as it does not help them in any way to attain their most important goal, that of becoming a good Naga wife and mother. However, Delieno's mother she tries to explain to her daughter that grandmother Vibano's outlook towards girls and boys have been shaped due to the discrimination towards women in the society that she has seen her mother facing. Through this we also find that the concept and beliefs that her mother holds is much broader unlike her grandmother Vibano who is the upholder of patriarchy.

The Why-Why Girl is an inspiring story about the power of books and reading and the way in which education can empower every single person like Moyna of Devi's *The Why-Why Girl*. The turning point in Moyna's life comes when she learns from the author that books have the answers to all her "whys" She goes and fights with the Samiti school teacher that she is unable to study because the school timings clash with the time when she has to tend the goats. "If you don't teach me, how will I learn? I will tell the old lady (Mahasweta Devi) that none of us, goatherds and cowherds can study if the hours are not changed" When the village primary school opens, no guesses on who is the first person to be admitted there. Moyna and her world with a touch of fantasy are rooted in realism and she is struggling to preserve her 'identity'. She is the one who respects tradition, spreads happiness to people around her, but never forgets to question the customs that don't make sense anymore. Identity has largely been portrayed as relational in nature and characterized by a socially defined sense in girls and women. It also comes across as a

joyless phase for lower caste girls who are bogged down by the compulsions of child labor, poverty, struggle for survival and vulnerability to exploitation.

Moyna expresses a desire to learn because she had never considered books as something that contained answers to her questions. This new idea startles and excites her. She falls silent at the thought about the means by which she could get the knowledge in books. Since Moyna has an enquiring mind, she is determined to learn to read and write. Plying the author with questions, she finally comes up with: “why do you read books before you go to sleep?” “Because books have the answers to your whys,” replies Mahasweta. “Why shouldn’t I study too?” asks Moyna. Why couldn’t school open in the afternoon so that the goat herds and cowherds could be attended. Mahasweta Devi ensures that Moyna goes to school so that her quest could continue. Moyna comes with her bag of clothes and her pet mongoose to the author’s house, promising the author snake curry made of any good snakes caught by the mongoose. Moyna ignores her mother’s protests steadily: “Why not? It’s a big hut. How much space does one old woman need?” or questions like: Why can’t fish speak? Why do stars look so small if many of them are bigger than the sun? Or to question even deeper: Should the people who work for us be ‘grateful’ for their wages? Why do we employ people to do the jobs we can do ourselves? And even, what is the role of a fiction writer? Moyna shows her resistance by asking such kinds of questions.

One must eliminate the rural – urban divide in development indicators. As the great philosopher Socrates once said, “The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.” Coming from such a brilliant man who has provided the world with so much wisdom, this quote should speak volumes about the importance of understanding how little one really knows. It should also create a sense of humility, allowing one to feel comfortable about asking questions. At the end of the account Mahasweta Devi writes, “Had Moyna known that she was being written about, she would have asked, ‘Writing about me?’ Why?” (21). However, in the socio-economic hierarchies pragmatic measures are needed to refrain one from discouraging a questioning attitude. How does one ensure that the Moynas of the world do not get silenced? How does one stop compartmentalizing the unequal real world that strangely co-exists with the idealized world? In fact, it is these questions that push the imaginary boundaries and bring about change, inspire inventions and make people discover new things. The first task is to glorify the

act of questioning itself, right from childhood. It is only the habit of questioning that will make confident and righteous adults.

Childhood and adolescence for most girls are also mirrored through the imposition of restrictions, suppression of freedom and denial of education to them. Unlike her passive companions, Moyna raises new and troubling questions. These questions reveal the plight of the forest dwellers, and the casual way in which their hardships are accepted. Not only does Mahasweta expose the extreme oppression of children in rural India but she shows the way out. Resistance is a spontaneous response to oppression and it is a counter dominating move. Resistance gives voice to the voiceless, space to the excluded and attention to the exploited. Resistance to the oppression is the core in Mahasweta Devi who asks the question repeatedly through her literary work, “why do the big swindlers and power wielders go unpunished and why do the oppressed communities pay the price all the time?” Moyna shows her resistance by asking such kinds of questions. *The Why-Why Girl* is no small contribution towards making children aware of the problems faced by the marginalized. It presents a way of life that is far removed from the experience of an average urban child, sparking off a million questions.

4.4. Socio, Economic and Political status reflected through the Woman in Mahasweta Devi's, *The Why-Why Girl* and Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*:

Tradition and religion together broadly regulate life in several ways. They do this by outlining a tacit set of norms about what men and women are entitled to and how they ought to behave. These norms are presented not as structures or rules, but as ideas and notions that directs our everyday life: norms of precedence, which tacitly endorse the rights of men to eat before women; norms of mobility, such as the observations of purdah and restrictions on where women ought to go and ought not to go. Political and social developments influence the manner in which households function: membership in parties and groups committed to economic equality might force the question of equity into the household and result in women having better access to household goods and resources.

Patrilineal family and kin arrangements are varied and these too have important consequences for women's status. These variations are due to differing marriage practices. In India, as we know the choice of a spouse is seldom an individual act of decision making. There is

also practice of whom one should definitely not marry (this is the principle of exogamy, which prohibits marriage within a certain kin circle); and whom one should marry (this is the principle of endogamy, which enjoins marriage within a specified social group). These rules together define boundaries of what is called a marriage circle. In India, there are two major types of marriage circles and each of them has different implications for the status of women. As far as women are concerned, the state has often been viewed as a guarantor of their constitutional rights, including the right to equality and justice. Such was the kind of attitude already present in the last decades of colonial rule.

A substantive understanding of equality points out that women's equality is possible only when circumstances and structures that obstruct their free and fair access to resources and rights are altered or transformed. Thus, women must be granted special concessions to overcome a historical and social lag that they have inherited to enable their empowerment. However, the very real social and other differences between men and women must not be taken as explanations and justifications of women's given status or of what they deserve.

Describing the typical Indian man, Shobhaa De, India's best-selling English-language author, told Times: "For him the universe begins and ends in his belly button. He is self absorbed, narcissistic, feudal, hopelessly spoiled and completely infantile in his responses...In a society like ours, to be born male is enough. A man does not need any other attributes. It is also a society that pampers men beyond reason."

Indian society has traditionally been strongly patriarchal. In Hinduism, a man is both the leader of family as defined by a family. The Sanskrit term for husband means "owners". According to the ancient text the Laws of Manu: "He is a perfect man, who consists of three persons' united: his wife, himself, and their offspring."

Traditionally men had a reputation for ruling their homes like tyrants. As a householder, in the four Hindu stages of life, a man is expected to pursue the "three aims": religious merit, wealth and pleasure. These aim mentioned often in Hindu law books, with particular emphasis placed on the first aim and the second having precedence over the third.

The convention in our patriarchal society is that male persons enjoy the freedom of taking decisions about all types of household matter and social matter and women only obey the

decisions. Although this convention has been changing recurrently, but it does not happen at that rate as we need. We should not forget that nearly half of world population is women and a major proportion of poor is women. Women are poor not for the lack of their ability to participate in the production process but for the lack of opportunity to participate in the production process or for non-recognition of their housekeeping activities as productive. Globally the gender gap in economic activity is very prominent. Women are, generally, unemployed or underemployed and when employed, in most of the cases, they are under paid and employed in informal sectors. Though working hour of women is very high within house, it is not counted as most of the time women are involved in household's chores. These household's jobs are not included in economic activity of a country. Different indicators of human development show that women have lesser access to property, resource, education, health facilities, medical care and lower percentage in earned income and finally lower participation in job market, if not least, in decision making power also.

Some women in India take classes on how to be a dutiful housewife before they get married. Women are taught to think of the husbands as gods and given tips on performing household chores and getting along with their mother -in-laws by doing everything they say. Sex, they are told, should kept to a minimum. (Source: John Lancaster. Washington Post, November 11, 2004)

Women are told not to pursue careers or even view themselves as partners with their husbands (they should be subservient). One student told the Washington Post that she was taught one of the worst sins was sticking up for herself in an argument with her husband or members of his family. She said: "Even if they say something mean to us, our first instinct should be not to retort back, but to stay silent....I have learned that we were newcomers in that family and we have to adjust. We have to reduce the ego."

The textbook used by students at the Manjju Institute of Values in Bhopal reads: "After marriage, the bride should not think she's going to her in-law family to throw her weight around. Instead, she's going there to serve the family and perform her duties, in order to turn that home into heaven...The mother-in-law and father-in-law are never wrong... The bride should do everything according to the wishes and orders of the mother-in-law and father-in-law." On getting along with her husband the textbook advises: "The wife should sleep after her husband

and wake up before him....When he returns home welcome him with a smile, help him in taking off his shoes and socks, and ask him to sit down. Bring him water and biscuits, and with a smile, ask him about his day. A husband's happiness alone is your life's goal...Do not go out without your husband's permission anywhere."

In a traditional Indian household women are expected to serve their husbands. All a man has to say is "get some water," seeming to speak to no one in particular and one of the veiled women in his household will get it. The water cannot be given directly to the man—as this violates Hindu customs about pollution—it must be laid down in a place where he can fetch it. Men cannot ask other men about their wives or enter a courtyard unannounced out of fear of surprising an unveiled woman.

The worst years for a woman are when she is a new bride. As she gets older and her position in the household is improved she gains more freedom and privileges and can order the younger people in the household around. It is not surprising that young brides look forward to trips back home. Sometimes they stay away for three or four months.

According to the 2011 Census, women constitute almost half of world population. In India women constitute 48.46% of the total population. Like men, women take the responsibility of human capital formation in the family and hence in building nation and its destiny; but the status of women in our common society is far below the expected level. There is a sharp distinction between male and female in our society in terms of sex ratio, child infanticide, literacy rates, health and nutrition indicators, wage differentials, access to finance, ownership of land and property and in power and culture. Comparing to their male counterpart, women have lower access for resource, education and health facility, medical care and lower percentage in earned income, lower power, and lower percentage even in food.

Kire also portrays frequent cases of domestic violence arising out of alcoholism for which women suffer. Nisano's married life turns into a nightmare due to Vini's drinking habit and physical abuses resulting from it. The Angami men's domination in the society is further showcased in the story through the problems women incur due to men's alcoholism and the resultant domestic violence. Men are regarded superior and therefore Naga men are attributed the power and authority to live as they like and do anything. This kind of domestic violence is also

reflected in Monalisa Chankija, a Naga writer from Nagaland in her collection, *Weapons of Words on Pages of Pain and To Whom it May Concern* her thoughts on battered and abused women, on domestic violence and on women's ability to rise above the "second class citizenry." Where she empathizes with them and also cries out at the same time along with women who have suffered and continue to suffer in a discriminate society. In several of her poems Monalisa raises the basic question about inequality and sexual discrimination in the society and against the atrocity and patriarchy which exploits the weakness and innocence of the fair sex and shatters their "liberty, peace, prosperity and right to live independently at par" with their male counterpart. As such she seeks justice for the eternally oppressed, exploited and dominated women class: If god made man in his own image, where shall the battered seek justice?

Most of the Naga women face various kinds of sufferings, insecurities. Such kinds of gruesome picture of the Naga society are exposed by those writers. Their destiny of eternally suffering not because of their blunder or fault but she is made to believe that it is her ill fate and therefore has to undergo and bear all the sufferings throughout her whole life. Violence - induced miscarriages, black-eyes and bloodied-lips, black and blue bruises and broken ribs and hands or legs within the sanctity of marriage etc which are very much prevalent especially in homes. Writers like Kire and Monalisa therefore feels sympathetic for their deplorable condition and feels acutely troubled over such kinds in a Christian society like Nagaland. Women like Nisano in Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, are the victims of domestic violence in the sanctity of a so called Christian homes. Even today there are many characters like Vini who becomes wild and dominant at the drinking houses and abuse women and children at homes. Because of all these experience of alcoholism within the family and the tragic marriage breakdown sometimes even between good friends. Some man realize too late their folly and this is when their own children grow up like them, squandering family wealth and name and follow in their father's footsteps. As most of the work outside the home is covered by the male folk especially after marriages some Naga men enjoy relentless womanizing one woman after another with the knowledge that his wife is very much busy with the household chores and looking after the children is such kinds of picture prevalent even in Naga society which are exposed by the Naga writers. The situation of women who dare not break away from abusive husbands and failed marriages because of the fear of losing their children brings to the fore the Naga custom of custody of children to the father and not the mother. So, in such a situation, women have to endure all the bitterness and

suffers endless hardships not only in the case of their husband but sometimes even in the cases of their son's.

The concept of many Naga families are spoiling and pampering the son, thus making them more irresponsible as they grow up. Naga women on the other hand are forced to be responsible for their siblings and homes, and this prepares them to be stronger, resilient and cope with bad situations in life, come what may. The tenacity and devotion of the wife towards their husband and the belief that rest and peace will only come to women after death is a strong message of the futility of marriage and relationships in the face of alcoholism or philandering by men. The resignation of women towards such kind of situations in marriages proves futile and very hard because it is bound by tradition and family commitment to marriage and the honor of the family. The recurring themes of women and violence and battered lives, domestic violence, incest, threats, victims of prolonged political conflict are found in both fictional and poetic worlds of Naga women writers and their art. Within these artistic expressions, Naga women writers recount historical stories of discrimination and political consciousness of rights are slowly realized.

Not only is discrimination and violence committed by men, but also in the Naga context it is perpetrated by women themselves in the form of the mothers and grandmothers. Gender sensitization and equity is linked with education and the fact is that most Naga mothers and grandmothers of the older generation were uneducated and unaware of women's rights as portrayed clearly in Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* through the character of Vibano who discriminated her little granddaughter just because of the fact that she is a girl. The movements of feminism articulating women's rights has gained momentum only from the late fifties, born out of violent conflicts and the aftermath of the relentless killings of men and innocent women and children by the Indian army.

Naga feminism has not become a force as the black feminists', either in literary works or in movements till recently. The demand for protections of women's constitutional rights pitted against claims of men that Naga customary law does not allow women in decision making bodies has driven Naga tribe women organizations to demand for their rights in the mid nineties and to move the court to seek legal justice. Naga women, especially the enlightened and educated, which include writers like Temsula Ao, Easterine Iralu and Monalisa, Kekhrievou Yhome are

more aware of their rights and express their feminist concerns on Naga women through their literary works, either in fiction or poetry. Emerging from the stronghold of Naga patriarchy has been a difficult move because the difference with Naga feminism, as explicitly defined in Easterine's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, protest is more or less against the constrictions of the Naga matriarch, the mother or grandmother who discriminates Dielienuo, representative of the Naga girl, till the very end.

The status of women in any society is measured in terms of education level, income, employment as well as role played by them in the family, society and the community. In India, the falling sex-ratio of women to men, their lower life expectancy, higher death rate, negligence of their medical care, dowry system, etc are the indicators of their lower status in the society. Though we are marching fast towards the twenty first century, women still continue to be isolated and more disadvantaged group even among the so-called disadvantaged section of our society.

Education impact employment opportunities and the decision-making role is influenced by education and employment of a woman. Economic viability and education contribute jointly and separately to women's emancipation. In fact, education and employment of women are the first pre-requisites not only for improving the status of women but also moving towards gender equality. Education and knowledge give women the power to reason and in turn help them much in their fight against social injustice.

Education is the ladder which takes the country on the road of development. It is the bedrock of all progress. In other words, imparting education leads to the process of human resource development. The Fourth Education Commission (1964-66) of India stated: "for full development of our homes and for moulding the character of children during most impressionable years of infancy, the education of women is of even greater importance than that of men".

According to Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* clearly expresses "a purposeful desire to change the way things have been for women even as it talks about the changes that have taken place through the generational shifts". She further adds on saying that, "Naga women today are far better off than their counterparts 50 years ago. But more and better changes are still to come.

Being a woman writer, whose publisher, editor and agents over the years have been all women, has put me in a unique position to project the realities of my sex freely and fairly.” Mahasweta Devi and Easterine Kire being the champions for the cause of education especially for the women folks in their respective society set up. They stressed on the significance of education for the marginalized children in their works. Education is still remained a dream for many tribal children in India as well as many villages in Nagaland. The plight of the tribal girls in the works of Mahasweta Devi’s *The Why Why Girl*, Moyna, a Shabar tribal girl who is unable to attend the school as she has to attend the household chores and look after the babus goats and therefore she does not get time to go to school like her brothers who share a similar predicament with Kire’s, *A Terrible Matriarchy* which traces the journey of Dielieno who is mistreated by her grandmother

Mahasweta Devi’s involvement with the people she writes about illuminates and gives resonance to the story. In her acceptance speech at the Magsaysay award (1997), she says that her engagement grew from witnessing the injustice done to indigenous people and the subordination of women in particular. “... I felt that I could not remain a mere writer of fiction without doing anything about it. So I write about them in my works of fiction. I write about them in journalistic reports. I provide a forum for them to write about their own problems. I take up their cause at every level. And, above all, I help them in organizing themselves in groups so that they could take up development activities in their own areas. And I do all this in my own small way.”

Women are victimized by the ethnic tradition, culture and religion. The solution to these problems requires the building of the capabilities among women. For the betterment of the condition of women it is necessary to empower women. This urgently, needs the creation of an environment in which the distribution of power and resources, the opportunity to engage in productive work, opportunities to access education, medical care and public services can move in favor of women population.

Thus, it can be concluded that the writers wrote novels and stories based on historical subjects and also on topics of social and political relevance. Through the works of Mahasweta Devi, she has directed to create a space for the voice of the tribal, the most underprivileged and the most downtrodden sector of the society.

Mahasweta Devi and Easterine Kire have played a crucial role in setting up a new paradigm in literature by giving it connectivity with larger political and social concerns. Their writings, both fictional and non-fictional, forcefully articulate the indictment against the 'hegemonic forces persecuting the underdogs'.

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CHAPTER 5

MAJOR THEMES OF MAHASWETA DEVI AND EASTERINE KIRE

5.1. Major Themes in the Works of Mahasweta Devi:

Devi is an activist and writer who work to improve the subordinate in her own way and protests against the atrocities of the downtrodden society. Devi thought that there is nothing less than war for the rights of the oppressed, which must be fought on all fronts, be it social, economic or political. There will be a liberation from all kinds of fear through this war, which is the right of every man, woman and child. She is an extraordinary woman who wrote and fought tirelessly for the marginalized sections throughout her life. Most of her story deals with war on superstition, war on atrocity, war on corruption and discrimination against tribal and low-caste society, especially women. India can never be called an independent country, because subordinates in every way exist in India. This is the main reason for India's collapse on all fronts. It has become a society in which a woman is reduced to a mere commodity and has not been treated as a responsible citizen who can express her opinions. When we look carefully at Devi's writings, we find a message to have a society free from oppression, especially in the context of women in such a patriarchal country like India. In Mahasweta Devi's short story *Draupadi* she not only voiced out for the tribal women but also gives the gendered subaltern a voice to speak through her writings. Thus, Devi in her works mainly focuses on gendered subaltern and makes breast a symbol as Spivak states in the Introduction to the *Breast Stories*:

In all her stories, the breast is not a symbol. What is represented in *Draupadi* is an erotic object transformed into an object of torture and revenge, where the line between (hetero) sexuality and gender violence begins to waver. It is a survival object transformed into a commodity in '*Breast-Giver*', which makes visible the indeterminacy between filial piety and gender violence. Devi's mature fiction never romanticizes the socio-libidinal relationship between the sexes. . . '*Breast-Giver*' builds itself on the cruel ironies of caste, class, patriarchy. Devi keeps Jashodha's name unchanged from the Sanskrit scriptural form. Although the orthodox Hindu middle class nominally reveres the Brahmin, the prerogatives of economic class are in fact much more real for it. The underclass 'Hindu female' (*Breast-Giver*), as

long as she credits Hindu maternalism and family value, is unable to save herself. Even in her lonely death, she remains ‘Jashodha Devi’- literally, the Goddess Jashodha, honorary goddess by caste.

By artistically combining the breast symbol with the historical names of the protagonists in her short stories, she ardently reveals the cruel suffering of the gendered subordinate. In Devi's *Draupadi*, we see the story of a tribal woman being tortured and raped by police officers, and by carefully selecting words, she points out the misery that the subordinate woman is facing.

Draupadi stops before him, naked. Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts, two wounds.

What is this? He is about to bark.

Draupadi comes closer. Stands with her hand on her hip, laughs and says,
The object of your search, Dopdi Mejhen. You asked them to make me up,
don't you want to see how they made me

Where are her clothes?

Won't put them on, sir. Tearing them.

Draupadi's black body comes even closer. Draupadi shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand. Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. Draupadi wipes the blood on her palm and says in a voice that is as terrifying, sky splitting, and sharp as her ululation, what's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?

She looks around and chooses the front of Senanayak's white bush shirt to spit a bloody gob at and says, There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do?

Come on, kounter me—come on, kounter me—?

Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the

first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid.

The above mentioned lines which are extracted from the text highlights that women are treated as mere kind of commodity and as objects of physical fulfillment. No matter what the circumstances are, she is always seen as an object of desire, a thing to win over. Dopdi is raped in a single night by army men, this indicates the physical assault and a kind of market commodity objectification of the weaker sex in the society. This story could also be termed as a satire on *Mahabharat's* Draupadi on a metaphysical level. As clearly depicted in the book Devi stresses that a woman is seen nothing more than an object, a thing so personal so as to put her on stake. Draupadi of *Mahabharata* was saved By Lord Krishna, but there is no such kind of Lord in a contemporary India who could come and save Devi's Dopdi, like Draupadi of Mahabharata. She is raped incessantly by the army men and even while she is bleeding she is made to serve the hungry dogs of the army. While the next morning they try to cover up their own deeds by clothing but Dopdi refuses to put on clothes, this act by the army personnel show the hypocritical nature of men and society at large.

Men in *Draupadi* are seen fantasizing about women, materializing them, objectifying them and even enslaving them to do all the homework, and in return they use their body to fulfill their desire. This is the real hypocritical nature of men who take no blame and wash their hands to society. It would be an error to read the modern story as a rejoinder of the old. Like all her female characters, however, Devi's Dopdi is as heroic as Draupadi, even without the help of Lord Krishna in the Draupadi of *Mahabharat*. It is also what Draupadi wrote in the patriarchal and authoritative sacred text, which could not be proof of male power.

In the short story of Mahasweta Devi, *The Witch*, she sheds light on the realities of life based on the context of Indian society. Devi creatively paints the image of the higher class of people and exploitation as the center of attraction for the poorly handicapped female character. She also reveals the secret of turning a woman into a Daini. It is through the character of Somri in *The Witch* that Devi poignantly exposes and offers a contemptuous strike against the preferential treatment inherent in the gendered position of a woman shattered by a dual patriarchal attack. As a member of a subaltern gaunt collectivity, its existence is not only limited by its social and spatial configuration, but also threatened by the intrusion of the primary class.

Somri's deafness and mental dwarfness, her molestation and deliberate demonization being very cunningly marked by Thakurs of Tahar as a daini and her sub – human existence outside the periphery of civilization, symbolically capture the forced silence, insubordination and modification of a woman within the matrices of conflicting patriarchal realms. The so-called superior sex not only exploits her body but also exploits the superstition of the villagers very cunningly to "chase this contaminated body out of its bound." However, the retrieval of Somri, who is now a mother at the end of the story, enables the tribal to see the oppressive and hegemonic discursiveness of Hanuman Misras. Also they decide not to work in his brick kilns. But this optimism is extremely fragile. The conflict lurks still under the calm surface. Even if Somri is finally reclaimed by the Tura village tribal, she is reclaimed more as a mother than as an autonomous person. The fate of women remains bound to the fate of patriarchal standards. She is still treated as a subordinate and not a male-dominated entity. Further, the upper class people think it to be their right to exploit the downtrodden.

Through *The Witch* Devi, she tries to speak up against women who are still living the harsh realities of life in a country such as India, whether in Bengal or any other part of the country, the situation of the oppressed and the violence against women in India remains the same. As discussed in this comprehensive study, 'subaltern' is the most significant part of the design of Devi's work. The author conveys her vision of life or may be her vision of society mainly by her very choice of the characters as well as motifs, and she attributes them. She is a socially conscious writer, the lines running through French philosopher Taine, Naturalistic writers like Zola, Flaubert and Russian novelists like Ruskin and Tolstoy to the Marxist and the Subalternist writers of our time. This literature has not only social realism, but also a commitment to social reform and even revolution. The literary works that constitute the study's input have a clear sociological orientation. More explicitly, her contributions to the literary field have also been incredibly committed in the present time. Her writing has both the coarseness and the ugliness of the real life situations in animation—no embellishment or ornamentation. The realities are presented in crude and naked form. They reflect the mind of the gentle humanist whose heart bleeds from the predominant inhumanity and injustice of human society. She yearns for the current state of affairs being demolished. Her wrath falls on the perpetrators of this injustice, who have reduced the world to a hunting ground and benefited at the expense of those who owned and produced natural resources.

A missionary activist, she takes her writings as a way to shed light on the ills and exploitation that prevail. She is one of those writers in India who has a strong commitment and a passion for the underprivileged. Each of her short stories begins with an overview of either an area or a character or local practice before it snowballs into a story. The novel thus presents subalterns in their true form by creatively interweaving and presenting all the elements of subaltern issues.

In Mahasweta Devi's short story, *Breast-Giver*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, she talks about the Mother, Jashoda, who had taken motherhood as her profession.

Jashoda doesn't remember at all when there was no child in her womb,
when she didn't feel faint in morning, when Kangali's body didn't drill her
body like a geologist in a darkness lit only by an oil lamp. . . Motherhood
was always her way of living and keeping alive her world of countless
beings.

The second son impregnates his wife at the same frequency, but behind it
lies deep love. The wife is often pregnant, that is an act of God. But the
second son is also interested in that the wife remains beautiful at the same
time. He thinks a lot about how to combine multiple pregnancies and
beauty, but he cannot fathom it. But today, hearing from his wife about
Jashoda's surplus milk, the second son said all of a sudden, 'Way found.'

'Way to what?

'Uh, the way to save you pain

'How? I'll be out of pain when you burn me. Can a year-breeder's health
mend?'

'It will, it will, I've got a divine engine in my hands! You'll breed yearly
and keep your body.'

The couple discussed. The husband entered his Mother's room in the

morning and spoke in heavy whispers. At first the Mistress hemmed and hawed, but then she thought to herself and realized that the proposal was worth a million rupees. Daughters-in-law will be mothers. When they are mothers, they will suckle their children. Since they will be mothers as long as it's possible- progressive suckling will ruin their shape. Then if the sons look outside, or harass the maidservants, she won't have a voice to object. Going out because they can't get it at home-this is just. If Jashoda becomes the infants' suckling mother, her daily meals, clothes on feast days, and some monthly pay will be enough.

The irony and satire of the high class is reflected in the happy and relieved wives of the high class because they were able to keep their figures. They could wear 'European cut' blouses and bras. Jashoda was called the milk-mother and about fifty children of her hers and her masters were breast-feeding. She knows no other way to earn her living, and so her breast is her only way to earn her living, so she constantly had to conceive to keep her filled with milk. The job of the breast is to keep milk.' At the end of the story, it is a pity to learn that Jashoda is diagnosed with breast cancer and while she is suffering with the greatest pain, none of her sons is with her. She was gradually considered to be the other for the children and her husband. None of her milk children comes to look after her when she struggles between life and death. Despite all her noble deeds as professional milk-mother, she was left alone even during her last breath.

Jashoda died at 11p.m.

The Haldar-house was called on the phone. The phone didn't ring. The Haldars disconnected their phone at night.

Jashoda Devi, Hindu female, lay in the hospital morgue in the usual way, went to the burning ghat in a van, and was burnt. She was cremated by an untouchable.

This was the ugly fate of poor Jashoda, who took up motherhood as a profession, a professional mother, who had raised so many children. In fact, it is a pity that she was finally left

alone to be cremated by an untouchable. The main concerns of Mahasweta Devi are mainly about the marginalized sections of society.

The landed wealth exploitation and the municipal administrative machinery of Adivasis brutally sustained a legacy of involvement with the colonizers, the hard work and prostitution, the poverty and misery of urban residents who were doomed to live on the edges of the city and those who had hardly two meals a day, the problems of women who had bread and who were victims of sexual violence against men, the needy widows, mistreated wives, and unnecessary daughters whose bodies can fetch a few sum of money are remarkably represented in her writings.

The novel *Mother of 1084*, by Mahasweta Devi, which was translated by Samik Bandyopadhyay, shows the Naxalite Movement bringing together, despite the class barrier, two subaltern mothers. A hollow being fully aware but yet ignorant of its environment, Sujata around whom the story revolves. She still thought of being the closest to Brati, with a lot of children, however, but was shocked, surprised, puzzled, dismayed as she learned how Brati, her son, died.

She "thinks" she knows "all," but her son's death provides her with clarity of thinking and action. She is no longer submissive at the end of the novel. Sujata realized that Somu's mother thought in all of her learning, clearness of vision and expertise, with all its knowledge, her limited intelligence and her inability to put her views into words. The thoughts that troubled her were cried aloud by Somu's mother'. Sujata could not vent her emotions, being mother she was the other in her own household.

How could Somu's mother understand Sujata?. . . if Sujata had told her that she lived in a shiftless, rootless, lifeless society where the naked body caused no embarrassment, but natural emotions did; if she had told her that mothers and sons, fathers and sons, husbands and wives never hit one another even when relationships stood irremediably poisoned, never wept aloud, showed their best manners to everyone, Somu's mother would not have been able to make any sense of it at all. (67-68)

These are feelings of *Hazaar Churasir Maa*, she was subservient to her own needs and unaware of her own second class position as a wife, as a mother and had spent her life living in illusion. It is only in Somu's mother and Nandini both women and part of the lower classes that she finds solace in. She was all along living in a society where:

It was all like a festering, malignant cancer. The dead pretended to live within relationships that were long dead and thus keep up a masquerade of life. Sujata felt that if she went close enough to Amit, Neepa and Balai, the stench of carrion would overwhelm her. They were contaminated and diseased from the very wound. The society that Brati and his comrades had tried to exterminate kept thousands starving in order to nourish and support these vermin. It was a society that gave the dead the rights to live, and denied it to the living. (115)

The centralized power is always patriarchal, so as to keep weak, marginalized and oppressed people weaker and less prosperous in general. And they are gradually being excluded from the power scene and their primary rights to live are being denied. This system necessarily keeps the indigenous peoples, the tribals, the lower castes, and the women out of the boundaries of power. Women are the largest minority to be cast aside and oppressed by their sheer numbers. The situation has not changed significantly in the years following independence. The state, language, patriarchal elite culture has been posing for long periods like they were not—not like a human being. In other words, women are always attractive, sensual, playthings or hussies or mothers. She was in the socio-political stage a display high or a piece of flesh violated to disgrace the clan, or group or nation to which she belongs. A woman has therefore always been treated as an object politically and socially and not as an individual.

We realize from the above that Sujata plays an irrelevant role in the *Mother of 1084* as a woman, relegated in all forms to the position of a neglected, oppressed, ill-treated, mechanical, marginalized man, who regards women as an object of sex only to reproduce, to bring money when it is necessary and doesn't possess a voice to express her own worries.

Women such as the Dalits and the lower castes were not allowed to say the alphabet or to touch any books for such an extensive period in India's history. But this gradually had to be removed with time from the seclusion and domination of men over the second sex. We have discovered some indigenous prose writers after hundred and fifty years, but only one or two of them first. Mahasweta Devi has addressed in her many prose works more directly the place and relationship of a woman in patriarchal society. She has also recast and rewritten the stories of ideal womanhood associated with the iconic Seeta, Draupadi, Jashoda and others.

Rudali by Mahasweta Devi is a powerful condemnation of the socio-economic system in India. It also comes as an attack on the footprints of feudalism in rural India. It is also ironical that in India, women were regarded as a representation of Goddess is exploited and marginalized by the upper classes.

In *Rudali* the transformation of Sanichari and her empowerment is clearly depicted. Anjum Katyal comment;

Her powerful haunting tales of exploitation and struggle have been seen as rich sites of feminist discourse by scholars. Her innovative use of language has expanded the conversation borders of Bengali literature. She stands at the intersection of vital contemporary question of politics, gender and class.

She has become an important figure in the literary fields, and even her real life is spent eating and sleeping with them. Her writings demonstrate her concern for poor landless workers from the especially the lower East Indian castes. *Rudali* is one of Mahasweta Devi's best and renowned stories. The story is about an untouchable person's life. The story is an ironic story of a poor class woman's exploitation and fight to survive. The author builds an accusation of the system through them. The financial lenders such as Malik and Mahajans are shown as economic system controlling agencies while, they easily victimize of the lower-caste villagers and the outcast. Religious practice and rituals are turned into manacles for them.

In *Rudali*, the life of Sanichari is the ultimate illustration of how the high handed try to suppress and oppress the poor. Throughout the narrative of *Rudali*, Mahasweta Devi concentrates on the problems and sufferings of rural women in India. These women characters are poor

untouchable women and prostitutes. These poor women were the victims of poverty and suffering in India and they had no other option than to turn themselves into prostitutes.

Sanichari's life is the ultimate example of how the high-handed are trying to suppress and oppress the poor. Mahasweta Devi focuses on rural women's problems and suffering in India throughout her Rudali story. These female characters are poor women and prostitutes that belong to untouchable caste. These poor women were the victims of poverty and suffering in India and had no choice but to become prostitutes. Devi emphasizes the socioeconomic causes that build up Rudali's fictional world. The author calls the prostitutes, Rudalis, as workers, through the spokesman, Dulan, who works hard for salaries. Even when they sell their own bodies, the author intends to preserve the dignity of women in their social roles, since she knew the fundamental cause of all these situations. She does not like to be labeled as a feminist but as one who takes the problems of woman as a writer. The female characters are provided with their mentor and guidance in Dulan's form, who tells them how they use the system themselves. These characters are images of real life and are not fictitious about the context as they exist in real life. The author therefore exposes with fidelity the sordid and harsh realities of poverty, exploitation and death.

Through the women characters like Sanichari, Bikhni, Sanichari's daughter-in-law, and the other rudalis Devi is exposing the struggles of the poor people and the exploitation of gender. But with the help of Dulan, her guide and mentor, Sanichari succeeds to overcome the oppression and exploitation that the system operates upon her. With her strong will, her sharp intelligence, her irreverence, her cynicism, and her cunning, she proves that the subaltern can subvert the masters' total control. Sanichari uses her sharp genius, and shows how she can adapt and cope. She finally told the other Rudalis their professional pleasure is like working in the fields. Finally, we discover that they finally decide to form the Rudalis union.

5.2. Major Themes in the Works of Easterine Kire:

Easterine Kire became the first individual Naga poet to publish a volume of poetry with her book *Kelhoukevira* in 1983, and her first novel *A Naga Village Remembered* in 2003 was Nagaland's first novel written by a Naga writer in English. Poet, novelist, short story writer and children's book author Kire has a PhD in English Literature from the University of Pune. From

1988 to 2005, she taught English at Nagaland University. *Kelhoukevira*, her debut work, was the first English poetry book published by a Naga, and *A Naga Village Remembered* the first English novel by a Naga writer. Kire has written about 25 books on a variety of topics since she published her first book in 1982, a collection of poems called *Kelhoukevira*. In 2011, Kire won the Governor's medal for excellence in literature, the Catalan PEN 'Free Voice' award in 2013 and the Hindu Prize in 2015. Her novels include *A Terrible Matriarchy* in 2007, *Mari* in 2010, *Bitter Wormwood* in 2011, *When the River Sleeps* in 2014 and *Son of the Thundercloud* in 2016. Her works have been translated into several languages.

Kire's writing has lyrical beauty, which makes her activist zeal to take Naga stories out to the world all the more powerful. Kire's writing has lyrical beauty, which makes her activist eagerness more powerful to take Naga stories to the world. It is also said that the writings of Kire particularly touched the people of Catalonia, Spain, where their people struggle to preserve their own language in schools. Kire has succeeded in translating many oral stories into a written language and spreading the story. Thus, by working with the Angami in particular and the Naga people in general, she contributed so much. Most of her writings are written in a simple and straightforward way, particularly in the prose sections.

Kire creatively mixes her view of the past with current situations and sincerely reflects environmental erosion. She contemplates the decay of time and is nostalgic for her glorious heritage. She is haunted by a Naga myth of Utopia (*Kelhoukevira*) and passionate about the glorious world of her past:

Keviselie speaks of a time
 when her hills were untamed
 her soil young and virgin
 and her warriors worthy
 the earth had felt good
 and full and rich and kind to his touch.
 Her daughters were seven,

with the mountain air in their breaths
 and hair the colour of soft summer nights
 every evening they would return
 Their baskets overflowing
 with the yield of the land
 then they would gather round
 and their songs filled all the earth.

In addition to these themes, Easterine writes about romantic and religious topics. Her writing is a patriot and passionate about her motherland's glorious heritage and very critical of patriarchy in Naga and women's old suffering. In the fictional and poetic worlds of the Naga women's writers and art, recurrent themes like violence and brutality, household violence, incests, threats, victims of protracted political conflict can be found. Naga women authors tell historic stories of discrimination and political awareness about rights slowly developed into these artistic expressions.

The emergence of Naga's patriarchy as a stronghold was difficult because the difference between Naga feminism and Easterine's *A Terrible Matriarchy* was that the Naga matriarch's restrictions, the mother or grandmother of the Naga girl representative Dielienuo, are also being protested, until the end. Discrimination and abuse are not only committed by men, but also by women in the Naga context as mothers and grandmothers.

Gender awareness and equality is linked to education and the fact is that most Naga older generation mothers and grandmothers are unaware of women's rights. Thus, feminist movements articulating women's rights only gained momentum in the late fifties, born of violent conflicts and the aftermath of the Indian army's relentless killings of men and innocent women and children. Today, Naga feminism is strongly being articulated in poems of younger women and essays that draw the attention of the Naga public and the outside world on the serious questions of gender based violence and domestic violence behind the fragility of the veil of Christianity and marriages.

This movement for women's rights, though late, is very much like the African American women's civil and political rights movement in which women like Zora Hurst came to the fore, and Alice Walker and younger authors have been strongly inspired. In a country that is supposed to be peaceful, in the midst of more than a half-century of armed political violence and self-determination movement, Naga women's movements have been borne in the face of violence faced by Naga women. This has made the difference that one needs to understand.

In many of Nagaland's creative writings, voices protesting the violent acts of the Indian military are full of atrocities. In most Naga women there is an extremely strong political conscience, making it very natural for these poets and writers to speak out for the silent suffering half of the Naga people.

The contemporary writers of Naga, except a few privileged women, do not have voices and strength, but rather are ray feminists that lurk in their minds and hearts. Many forces, including the Church and patriarchy, are influenced by them. Despite all these forces, change is obvious and time will have a positive turn that can be predicted by the symptoms shown in these texts.

Kire's story *A Terrible Matriarchy* features three generations of women and thus, portray a vivid picture of women's position in the society. Lieno's mother explains to her that grandmother Vibano's outlook towards girls and boys have its orientation as she has seen her mother facing discrimination towards women in the society. Lieno's mother's comment on men in general is important to understand traditional position of Angami women in their families and society:

"Men don't like women who are aggressive and outspoken. They like their wives to be good workers. You are a good worker, Lieno, but you must try to be more docile."

Much alike to her mother's statement, Lieno's grandmother's words also portray a society which is quite difficult for the women and clearly partial to men:

"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 barren. They were always in constant danger if there was a war. The women would

have only 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.”

The other women characters in the novel, Nisano, Vini’s wife, a long suffering young wife and widow; Bano, an unmarried spinster; Vimenuo’s mother, a dutiful wife and caring mother who suffers to no end after her alcoholic husband dies, represent “the Naga girls and women who rise daily at dawn to fetch water, cook, clean, and care for family; who give birth, raise the kids, and mourn the dead and serve the mourners at funerals” and are greatly marginalized at various levels. At the same time Kire also highlighted the other group of the society by showcasing an authentic picture of women like the women in the neighbourhood who start to gossip at the water spot, the women in the drinking houses, and the cunning daughters-in-law, Sino and Leno, who present the other dark shades of the society.

Easterine Kire's *Don't Run, My Love* calls into question women's position and their anticipated social roles. The Naga patriarchal society of Visenuo and her daughter Atuonuo is expected to maintain certain standards and customs and to be very polite and careful in their manners and dealings. A young widow or unmarried girl in a Naga company is not considered suitable for so freely mixing up with a young man. Although a young woman in the community can refuse to marry, as was the practice of the Naga people in the case of Atuonuo, who refuses all her suitors. A young person may suggest to every girl that he would like to marry and only marry the person who agrees to marry. So if she doesn't like a suitor, a girl had the right to refuse. The novel deals with a man with the spirit of a tiger that loves a young girl and the supernatural element.

Kire’s *A Terrible Matriarchy* is one of the most thoughtful novels presenting at its core, from the point of three generations, the strong reality of Naga society and tradition. The first generation consists of elderly people whose background is deeply rooted and is restricted to the outside world and the advance of education and diverse other sectors.

Dielieno's grandmother, Vibano, is the perfect example to her children and grandchildren and is the best representation of her generation. The second generation comprises the children of Vibano and the present society of the novel. Dielieno's mother is a perfect example of the second generation in Nagaland when she was born or when the education system took form in the Naga

society. However, most girls were sent to school during the third generation of people like Dielieno but many still struggled with the ancient customs. This novel is therefore 50 years old and reflects the ideal, the system of value and the attitudes of that period. Kire said that her novel, *A Terrible Matriarchy*, clearly expressed "a purposeful desire to change the way things were for women, even when talking about the transformations that took place through different generation.

A Terrible Matriarchy significantly paints the life of Naga social life and the common incidents and activities and each of these are presented very vividly so as to capture the rural hills of Nagaland. In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, the mindset of the old tradition and old people like Vibano, Dielieno's grandmother, who would provide her grandsons with the most desired portion of meat instead of the young granddaughter, and offer her love, attention and sympathy to her male heirs, shows that even the women themselves divide themselves into a patriarchal society like Naga society.

In Kire's *Don't Run, My Love*, the patriarchal existence is reflected by the lens of the village people who talk about Mother Visenuo and her daughter, Atuonuo. In particular the issue of women in Naga society the issue of reputation and morality is very stringently considered. Thus, the society of Nagas in general and the Angami tribe in particular is remarkably reflected in this novel. An often quoted traditional saying says that, even if a man makes a thousand mistakes, his scar would be taken by time but if a woman makes a mistake, the scars would remain forever in her till her death. In other words, people may be able to forget the mistakes that a man has committed but people will never forget the mistakes that a woman has committed. Such a kind of society is reflected which speaks about the position of a woman in the society.

Easterine Kire also deals mainly with the historical aspects of political turmoil and on the supernatural aspects and the myths beliefs and the oral narration of the Naga society. Her novel *When the River Sleeps*, begins as a physical quest for a stone which is believed to possess spiritual qualities. But it is also a journey into the spirit world and how the protagonist learns to acquaint himself with his spirit self. The protagonist Vilie is a lone hunter looking for a faraway river to get his hands on a stone that will give him untold powers. As he does so, he continues to gain more and more spiritual knowledge and power and even goes to the extent that he can fight the spirits of premature death, and defeat them for Ate. This kind of beliefs in encountering the

spiritual over by the physical realm is often seen in her novels which very truly depicts the Naga beliefs and ways of life. She paints the picture of Naga myths and beliefs cleverly bringing the two aspects together very artistically and makes it real i.e the physical aspect and the spiritual aspect.

According to Kire, “This book is the exploration of the Naga spiritual universe, a very personal journey. It’s all about my roots, identity and the belief system I have grown up with and I am glad that it has resonated with a larger audience”. She also writes allegorically in her writings like in *When the River Sleeps*, but above all this book is about the importance of the spiritual over the material. In Angami culture, the culture to which the protagonist belongs, survival of the tribe depends on conformity of its members. Vilie takes a non-conformist stance when he chooses to live in the forest, and not amongst his clan members, doing what everyone else does, marry, have progeny, male heirs to carry on his name even as he matures into an elder contributing his wisdom to the life of the village. There is nothing wrong with that life, but by choosing the route he has taken, Vilie gives himself much more opportunity to explore the spiritual universe.

Through the book *When the River Sleeps*, one can observe that there are both benign and malevolent spirits which Vilie faces on his journey. While Ate is deceived about her identity and deserves our compassion, there are malevolent spirits like the widow-spirits full of negativity and are extremely focused on destroying every semblance of goodness around them. The story unfolds in a complex universe where one encounters territorial spirits throughout the landscape whether it is in the forests or in the fields, all a recognizable part of Naga spiritual geography. The book is also about power, and learning to exercise spiritual authority. It is about feeding your courage. It is a world where the good can triumph if they have the necessary wisdom.

Son of the Thundercloud is a story of hope and miracles. In this grounding yet elevating book, the author combines lyrical storytelling with the magic and wisdom of Naga legends to create a life-affirming tale of a simpler age. In a narrative reminiscent of biblical beliefs, such as the virgin birth of Jesus Christ and Magi watching the star of Bethlehem, the author heralds the birth of a miracle child who will give meaning to the lives of suffering people coping with drought and famine. The narrative is interwoven with enlightening wisdoms and anecdotes. Allegorical in nature, the story contains multi-layered metaphors about fundamental issues of

human existence such as human's search for meaning in life, the question of good and bad, right and wrong, and joy and suffering. The impregnation of the woman from a single raindrop, for instance, is a metaphor for the regenerative power of rain to restore the fertility of land. The spirit tiger is the embodiment of evil and human greed. The conservation of the natural environment is also a subtle but recurring metaphorical theme throughout the book. It is essentially a book that invokes in us a feeling of timelessness. With disarmingly simple language and inherent honesty, Kire gently holds the reader's attention to bring home the message that love and life are eternal. The novel reminds us that we can always choose love over fear, hope over disbelief and to believe in what's miraculous rather than what is merely plausible.

Kire's historical novel includes *Bitter Wormwood* which deals directly against the backdrop of the Naga struggle for independence. The story is told largely through the lens of Mose, a Naga villager who lives out his life during tumultuous times in Nagaland. It follows him through an uncertain childhood and his short-lived stint as a member of the Naga underground and then later as he along with his family, attempts to live a relatively peaceful life even as the Naga movement loses ground and descends into violent factionalism. In the final part of the novel we are introduced to his grandson Neibou who moves to Delhi to study and come across personally with the racism and stereotyping by the main land India towards the North-Easterners. Even the foreword by the author spells out the shocking scale and brutality of the events that have unfolded in Nagaland in the last few decades and with that at the back of one's mind, the story has a disturbing ring of truth to it and makes progress through the novel an often gut-wrenching affair. The key characters are well-defined and relatable and bring a human element to the story that statistics and reports often cannot do by themselves.

Amidst the violence and politics, there is also a glimpse into the culture, beliefs and rituals of a community that most of us don't know a lot about. In fact, even the name of the novel is actually the name of an actual herb called bitter wormwood that the Nagas believe protects them from evil spirits. It is about two soldiers on different sides of the conflict and spans three generations. Their grandsons, who become good friends, are able to better-understand what their grandfathers fought for. *Bitter Wormwood* is about forgiveness and a human solution to a political problem.

Kire's another historical novel is *Life on Hold* which is set in Nagaland during the troubled years of the independence movement. Everything is kept in abeyance, except sacrifice and pain, in the name of a greater future. It takes Kire just a few scenes and bits of conversation to reveal and unravel Naga life with admirable accuracy. *Life on Hold* is a well-told, realistic narrative that works equally well at a symbolic level. The hard-edged, relentless, stubborn Roko is as tantalizing to his girlfriend, Nime, as Naga nationalism is to many Nagas. Women like Nime have to put life on hold for man like Roko, as Vituo does his because of his father's wayward life and Nagas do theirs for the dream of an independent nation."

Life on Hold is a vibrant reflection of the Naga society. It captures the lives of a group of friends and their families. It also captures the lives of ordinary people living through the difficult and confusing times of factional violence in Nagaland. The novel brilliantly captures the essence of the Naga life that has been stained by the struggles and hardships faced during the factional violence which resulted for some a permanent scar. The fact that so many people were forced to take important decisions such as marriage out of compulsion, consequent upon the impact of the struggle is so vividly narrated in the book.

Kire's first historical novel *A Naga Village Remembered* traces back from 1832 to 1880, a little warrior village numbering about 500 houses fiercely fought and defied the invading troops of the colonial power of Britain on their ancestral lands in the Naga Hills. A major offense in 1879, which later historians recorded as *The Battle of Khonoma* was launched against this little village. It ended in a four month siege and a treaty was finally signed between Her Majesty's Government and the elders of Khonoma on March 27th 1880. For the first time, the rich cultural life that fostered the spirit of the people of this village is recaptured in a novel. Warriors jostle with enemy warriors and with the spirits in a pre-Christian world of taboos, rituals and festivals where women worked as hard as men and men strove to live up to obligations of manhood, protecting their village and their womenfolk, making the name of the village fearful and ensuring the survival of the old religion in the face of the ever widening influence of colonization.

Kire in her words says that, "Each story of mine is different; so each message is different, too. However, I always try to give my readers something positive to hold on to."

Mahasweta Devi's mission is to free the tribes from social violence through their writings from a caste-based society. So we know how deep her eagerness is when she said in an interview to the outcasts and women: "Fight the tribal, downtrodden, underprivileged and write if and when I find the time" when asked what she would do for the rest of her life?

In most of their novels, Devi and Kire touch on all these types of themes in their writings. Throughout their writings, traditions, customs, and religions are reflected. In addition, they reflect on the political and historical consequences of their societies. In particular, women from different social contexts have a prominent place in their writings in every sphere of the life of human beings from different races, religions, beliefs and settings.

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CHAPTER: 6

CONCLUSION

Many prolific Indian female writers have contributed through their works in the contemporary period by publishing their works in various genres and fields at present time. Among them is an eminent writer from the beautiful state of Bangladesh, Mahasweta Devi, who has contributed so much to the oppressed and downtrodden people and another writer from the seven sister states of Northeast India, Easterine Kire, who comes from the beautiful state of Nagaland. Kire has played an important role in translating her native oral narratives about different questions and historical aspects of the region. Both these two Indian women writers have their own particular ways of writings and reaching out to the readers through various characteristics. They deal with contemporary topics that are based primarily on actual incidents or historical facts from other timescales or about the problems of the downtrodden and outcast in their society, as well as with the fiction particularly on the lives of women, their biographies and the problems of the everyday life of the ordinary people. They like to write about the simple lives and daily activities of ordinary people, which are full of significance and morality. Both authors also study childhood and children's lives in their society. Most of her writings are based on ordinary people's lives and their cultural roots and identity. Their writings have metaphoric, symbolic meanings that also make the deeper connection with the center of their writings easier to grasp. Both the author could brilliantly bring about a spark and also form a deep connection to the readers about the pain and sufferings of their characters through their creative writing skills. They are ready to stand and speak up through their writings about the bitter truth and harsh reality faced by them. It is through their writings, they want to convey to the excluded the women and children who suffers the most and conveys the message of the injustice that prevails in society. In the society in which they are present, Devi and Kire act as the mouthpiece for the subaltern. Their works urged the rest of the world to bring about a change in the status of women, the injustices which exist in every form, when we read and dive into their world.

They both write in their mother tongue and their works in different languages were translated. The patriarchal system and its influence on women are presented. In addition to all these similarities as a contemporary writer, they have their own unique writing methods. When studying Devi's work, her writings are mainly based on the lives of the outcasts and women.

While both Kire and Devi appears as a writer who voice out the injustice that exist in their own society. Most of their writing generally tends to be based on the voice for the voiceless and injustices that exist in their regions. They have their own different ways and approach of expressing on behalf of the oppressed through their writings. Devi dedicated her life to the exclusion of injustices, marginalized and the poorest sections of society. She writes not only for their rights, but also lives among them and work for the improvement and upliftment of their society. She is not just a spectator; she immerses herself in the fighting and actually fighting for it. Devi writes about the tribal and the outcaste, the poor and excluded, the worst victims of which are women. In her work on the political atrocities during her time in Nagaland, she tries to take reclusion away from afar and express the historical events and social lives of ordinary people. In some of her writings she also writes about the cultural differences between the two during the Kohima wars and their aftermath in the younger generation. However, their works allow us to obtain a clear picture of the lives of the women who, both traditionally and from generation to generation, are worst victims of history. Even in the subordinate society, women are subalternized through patriarchy practices. As is clearly shown in both Devi's and Kire's writings, women are subalterns. Devi and Kire thus seem to be expressing their voice in their own approach to all the injustices that are prevalent in society. Kire also writes in her writings about the Naga people's rich custom and tradition. She takes the reader to a different level on Naga's supernatural happenings, myths and ethos. Through her creative texts, she takes the reader into the past, where all was true.

Both Kire and Devi uncover the realities of the ordinary lives of women and traditional beliefs and the kind of society in which they exist through their writings. Through Kire's writings we learn more about the status of Naga women especially in *A Terrible Matriarchy*, *Don't Run My Love*, *Mari*, and so on where women seem to have different treatments and where certain manners and etiquettes are expected to follow in their society. Women have far more better status in the Naga society than in the Bengal society because they do not practice caste systems, dowries, child marriages and various other social evils.

Still today, when we compare the status of women in both these two distinct societies, we find that Naga women are far better than the other women because, even in their early years, they had not practiced all these different sorts of evils. But when compared with other regions,

the status of Bengali women is no way better. However, we find that women's status is low and subordinate in all respects when we observe their status as women.

The Queen of Jhansi by Devi was the greatest fight in India in 1857 and popularly known as the 1857 Revolt and the first independence war in India. In this novel, we also come to know more about the role they played and their status in the pages of Indian history. Through Laxmi Bai's life, we understand about all that brave women like her who fought bravely to save the country from foreign invasion on the fronts of the battle. When we study the life and education of the young queen, we see that unlike the girls of her time, she was treated and educated unconventionally. She has been trained and well educated in different kinds. The young Manikarnika grew up into a queen, courageous, intelligent and legendary figure because of her great deeds and sacrifices, who deserves all the more respect and admiration for defending her kingdom till her last breath. The queen was brave and intelligent and she left her footprints in the greatest battle in Indian history.

In *Mari*, Kire describes in detail how the Naga people have suffered from the foreign rulers. During the Second World War that affected Kohima, the people of Nagaland faced all the obstacles and bitterness. Kire's *Mari* is also a biography about the life of her aunt Mari. The story of Mari also reflects this kind of suffering among the common people. They had to leave their homes and live in the forest for their lives. For about a month, they had to rely on herbs and leaves in the forest. It is seen that even the forest ran out of herbs. Living in such a critical situation like this, Mari, a young widow, braved everything and struggled all alone.

The novel also deals with the biographical of Laxmi Bai, known as the Jhansi Queen. Devi speaks of the birth, upbringing, marriage and the different types of training she undertook. Her role as a queen and her relations and ties she maintained as a queen, etc. Her novel mentions every detail of the queen. Kire's *Mari* is a biography and a diary about her aunt Mari. The information is not entirely extracted, however, but the environment of war and atrocities was known to Kire, since she grew up in her hometown, Kohima. The novel itself is the story of young widow Mari and the struggle of the protagonist.

Women suffers most during wars and atrocities, they are mercilessly raped and tortured even prior to their killing or are raped and physically abused day and night in many cases. They

are the victims because the majority of the females are physically weak and mentally weak compared to men since they are not permitted to read and write and so have no idea. Even today, this discrimination against girls is also practiced in some remote villages within the context of Naga people as well, to offer them education and equal treatment. When we see, however, that a girl child's hard work and commitment are in school, house work, etc., they stand out from men.

It can be seen in the historic accounts of Devi and Kire that women are the victims of the patriarchy and all the plight and hurdles they face. The question of Doctrine of Lapse for the heir of the throne began in the Queen of Jhansi right after the king's death. The young queen was confronted with all the trials and consequences because she had no biological child from the king who died and it worsened even further when she began defending her fort Jhansi. The queen was bravely fighting against all odds for protecting her people and her kingdom. During this time, there was little emphasis on the importance of the queen ruler as India is a patriarchal society.

Through the life of Laxmi Bai it can be easily predicted that the value of a queen lies solely with the king. The king might marry as many women as he likes and make her his queen which makes it obvious about the power and rights exercised by the king even in marriage and the position and status as a queen. Therefore, even during that time, women were subjected and outlined from the political activities and administration. A brave queen like Lakshmi Bai was like a man even when she was not much appreciated by the British after the death of the king. The British were confident because they could see the queen all alone in the throne with the adopted son Damodar, and as they knew well that she had no biological child of the deceased king and thus gradually they attempted to take the throne through the policy of the Doctrine of Lapse.

Mari's history following the war and with a child without her husband, discriminated against by her families and society, is an indication of women's subordination to society. She was not responsible for her fiancé passing away during the war, but at a young age she became a poor widow who was disregarded by society and even by her parents. Such was the kind of society that existed for women in Naga society. Mari suffers through all this harsh times in her life, mentally, physically, emotionally.

The historical features in both the writings of Devi and Kire entail the voice of voiceless in these two novels *Queen of Jhansi* and *Mari*. Through this novel *Queen of Jhansi* known in the history as the Revolt of 1857, Devi reports the detailed history of India and the status of women in that era. Through her novel *Mari*, Kire made an equally remarkable contribution by spreading the message to a larger audience in her writings about Kohima and the simple and ordinary lives of people before the war and the after effects of the war people i.e the II World War in that part of northeastern India which greatly shook the whole world.

The writer also reveals the evils of patriarchy and the consequences faced by women as a result through their writings. Most women were left at the mercy of their parents and husband or son preventing them from taking decisions about their own life like an individual and thus denying her rights to follow her passion and aims. Similarly, since their tender age Moyna and Delieno both suffer and were denied of their rights while their brothers enjoy all the love and attention from their parents.

Through the story of Moyna and Delieno we are made aware about the lives and relationships among women themselves as children, mothers, sisters, daughters and grandma. All these relationships show that patriarchy is increasingly resurgent. With the practice of patriarchy in India, not only males, but also women, as in the case of a grandmother of *A Terrible Matriarchy* Vibano, try to control and subdue women to the safeguards they have of their own accord.

Women do not care for each other because they think they are weaker sex and they do not respect each other or defend one other. They believe that they are destined to face this burden and quietly accept it as both the mother of Delieno and Moyna, who recalls their daughter as “woman”. Their mother both suffers every day but being a mother and a woman they try to bear all this kinds of sufferings and burden. These women cannot stand firmly and even make decisions about whether their children can stay at home and work or go to school by following the old tradition and belief, like the grandmother Vibano, does not think women should go to school and be loved in the same way as they do towards their male child.

Not only is the man who mistreats women and calls for honor and respect in a patriarchal society. There is also disrespect and ill treatment among women and partial treatment of male

children by the women themselves in the form of mother and grandmother as clearly shown in *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *The Why-Why Girl*. Patriarchy therefore harms even in the same sex as the mother-daughter, sister and sister, mother-in-law or daughter-in-law relationships. In return this has caused more havoc in the relationships between women towards women. Through their works, the author strongly objects to freeing women from patriarchal ties and treating everyone equally without discrimination.

Even if it is impossible to do away with the patriarchal system that originated from the ancient times in India, there is still a hope for a better and more equal society in the future. If such a patriarchal system continues to exist which has greatly influenced us right from the beginning, India is unable to progress in any field. Thus in their novels, both authors try to convey that only education can open the eyes of a traditional system which do not have any positive impact and only continues to bring about bitterness in human relations.

In any kind of society women too play an equal role in discriminatory and evil practices. Women should also be able to understand their rights as individuals and shower the same affection and attention to their children whether it a girl child or a boy child. In the eyes of the law, every human being is equal, and only education can open the eyes of patriarchal evils. Women tend to know their rights and responsibilities only when they receive education. Their scope tends to get wider in their perspective and also try to mold each other. They tend to teach the values of life and the wisdom and knowledge they had acquired to their children.

Both Kire and Devi exposed the kind of society which is mostly based on the ordinary life of the common people. Their works mostly relate to the ordinary daily life of the people and their experiences. They also concentrated on the historical evidences and the oral narratives transmitted between generations. They write about the oppressed sections especially the women folk who suffer the most and are considered as the lowest sections of the society. We obtain the information through their writings on the historical myths and ill-treatment of women in the society. They highlight the suffering, the pain that women suffer in most parts of the society.

All of these pains and sufferings are highlighted through the character of the protagonist in their works which mostly have a positive hope for a better tomorrow at the end of their novel. Most of their women characters fight the patriarchal bondage and subjection. Most of the

writings of Kire revolve around the theme of Naga myths, tradition and historical aspects of her native land. She also touches upon the supernatural elements and oral narration.

The heroes of the past, the historical facts and events, biographical elements, women and their sufferings in the society are focused mostly in their writings. The fiction and the writings of Devi have mostly been transformed into plays. Although she has good knowledge writing in English she prefers to write in her own mother tongue i.e Bengali and it is learnt that writing prose is one of her favorite. Devi always believes that there is a blank space between the two printed lines of history so she dives deeper into the real and true facts by researching around before writing. It is more important for Devi that her works are translated into many Indian languages than to translate it into English, French, German, Japanese etc because of the fact that most of her writings deal with the Indian society and the problems faced by the outcaste and the women. Devi was greatly inspired to write through the writings of the 16th century poet Mukund Ram and Kavi Kankan Chandi. She likes to work more on human life and the real life rather than romanticizing about nature. According to her, the tribals and the outcaste though they are oppressed by the larger society, are much more civilized as they do not practice widow remarriage or dowry which is quite prevalent even at present. Even the female child had the right to inherit the property of her parents after their death. However, in the domestic fronts and educational opportunities women are still very much neglected even today. Thus, throughout her life she was actively involved in the fight for the tribal and outcaste. Like Devi, Kire too wrote on her mother tongue besides her works being translated into different other languages. Kire's contribution especially to the Naga people in the field of literature is remarkable. Her writings are mostly about the rich oral tradition and folktales which has been converted into written form and even received acknowledgement from external readers. Thus, through their works they have contributed greatly towards the upliftment of the women and voicing out for the voiceless sections of the society especially the women who are the worst victims. Though the present age is fast advancing and progressing, there is still much effort to be done for the empowerment of women. The condition of women crimes is ever increasing even in the most advanced countries and especially in the case of India. Women become the victims of all the crimes and are subjected to all the evils right from cradle to grave. Thus, the condition of women are eternally subaltern and it is only if the mindset, evils of the tradition and society replace the minds of the

people with equal values for both the genders and eradication of discrimination the society would improve for the women.

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