

**CONTEMPORARY NAGA LITERATURE: SOCIAL REALISM IN THE
SELECTED FICTIONAL WORKS OF EASTERINE KIRE AND TEMSULA
AO**

(Dissertation submitted to Nagaland University in partial
fulfillment for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English)

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SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that dissertation entitled is a bonafide record of research work done by Ms. Neisetsonuo Casavi, Regd. No. 78/2021, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2020-2021. Submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English, this dissertation has not previously formed the basis award of any degree, diploma and other title and the thesis represents independent and original work on the part of the candidate under my supervision.

Ms. Neisetsonuo Casavi has completed her research work within the stipulated time.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of reviewing the works of contemporary Naga writers through the prism of social realism is to investigate how significant social, political and historical transformations are negotiated and expressed through the literary medium. The traumatic years of political turmoil and devastations caused by the Second World War and the Indo-Naga war are vividly depicted in the works of various authors such as Easterine Kire and Temsula Ao. However, far from a detached commentary on history these stories are embedded within the normal everyday life of the village. This realism is conveyed through the depiction of beautiful scenic environment, customs, beliefs, superstitions and the humble dwellings of the village setting in which characters come alive. These images are contrasted to the canvas of war-stricken barren lands, stories of forced migrations and displaced families longing for return to their homes, not as a way of romanticizing the peaceful life that had been uprooted but to capture ugly experiences and the bitter memories that left an indubitable scar in the history of a people. These stories lend voices to a generation that has been suppressed by violence. They provide a literary glimpse into a dark chapter of Naga history which is so often forgotten in the history books. The stories of pain and humiliation, suffering and loss, do not find any literary space in the stories of the Indian nation and they lie hidden along with the lives of those who perished with the Naga movement. It is precisely in bringing these stories to life that Naga literary authors not only expose the uncomfortable truth beneath Indo-Naga history but also recover the voices of those who have been suppressed and silenced. The element of social realism is also reflected in the critique of societal set up. The great forces of modernization in the form of social and cultural changes are given a localized perspective while the traditional Naga society is made to stand bare with all its shortcomings and failings. These literary works lend voices to the marginalized within Naga society even as the moral values and social ethos of the community are also emphasized.

The recent years have witnessed a spur of creative literary works which are yet to take their rightful place amongst other greats of modern literature. Although cultures of storytelling are richly imbibed in the oral traditions of the Nagas, Naga authors writing in English have gained a wider audience only fairly recently. Though there are quite a handful of emerging writers, prominent among the Naga Writers writing in English today

are Easterine Kire, Temsula Ao, Nini Lungalang, Monalisa Changkija, Avinuo Kire and Neikehienuo Mepfhu-o. While these writers may or may not have close associations among themselves, they are contemporaneous and one can see the shared history which inspired their works and issues that influenced their writings. These writers have used their literary art to weave the people's history and social realities in their works. Their writings are not debarred of socio-cultural meaning; rather they are powerful re-creation of the rich cultural heritage while at the same time acting as commentators on the social ills of the present day. These contemporary Naga authors weave stories through the eyes of the common people in attempting to present an unblushing and critical perspective of society.

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I, **Neisetsonuo Casavi**, do hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **Contemporary Naga Literature: Social Realism in the Selected Fictional Works of Easterine Kire and Temsula Ao**, submitted for the award of the Degree of Masters of Philosophy in English is a bonafide record of research done by me under the guidance and supervision of **Dr. Rosemary Dzüvichü**, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema, during the period of my research (2020-2021) and the dissertation has not been submitted, for the award, of any degree, fellowship, diploma to any other universities or institution.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Realism, in literature, is an approach that attempts to describe life without idealization. Realism has been chiefly concerned with the commonplaces of everyday life among the middle and lower classes, where character is a product of social factors and environment is the integral element in the dramatic complications in literature. It attempts to show the reality of life, omitting nothing that is ugly or painful, and idealizing nothing. Realism is anything that is real. It believes in whatever is real during ordinary course of life. It is the common aim of realism that focuses on picturing life as it really is. It is generally based on one of the most important features of literature: to hold a mirror up to Nature. Realism, in literature, is a representational form and its ultimate aim is to mirror reality. The realists select materials from real life and represent it as accurately as possible in their works. The elements in a realistic novel such as description, stories, characters and setting are truthfully presented as they are commonly observed from the everyday life. Realism is an artistic technique of presenting stories, characters and settings that are similar to those commonly found in the everyday life.

According to the *Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, realism is a “fidelity of representation, truth to nature, and insistence on details; the showing of life as it is without glossing over what is ugly or painful” (Pearsall 2008:1202). In *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, Realism is defined as “the portrayal of life with fidelity” (Cuddon 1998: 729). In literature, realism is a process that depicts facts about things and people. Realism, in art and literature, is an attempt to present life as it is; the accurate, detailed, unembellished depiction of nature or of contemporary life. It imitates truth that is governed by nature. It mirrors the contemporary life without omitting anything that is unappealing or painful. In the *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Coles has illustrated the term more elaborately with significant literary examples. According to him, “Realism, in literature, is a manner and method of picturing life as it really is, untouched by idealism or romanticism. As a manner of writing, realism relies on the use of specific details to interpret life faithfully and objectively. In contrast to romance, this concerned with the bizarre and psychological in its approach to character, presenting the

individual rather than the type. Often, fate plays a major role in the action. Realism became prominent in the English novel with such writers as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Anthony Trollope and William Makepeace Thackeray.” (Coles 2001:78)

To the realists, the writer’s most important function is to describe as truthfully as possible what is observed through the senses. Realism began as a recognizable movement in art in the eighteenth century. By the mid nineteenth century, it was a principal art form. In the past, realism has been an upheaval against classicism and romanticism – artistic movements characterized by works that idealize life. Classicism shows life as being more rational and orderly than it really is while Romanticism shows life as being more emotionally exciting and satisfying than it normally is. While Realism is an attempt to present life as it is. The literature of realism has potential to explore the common experiences of the society and appeals universally. The life reflected in fiction is a representative life of the world. The fiction of realism especially the novels reflect the life of common people and the personalities who are oppressed. The realists emphasize on the depiction of contemporary life because the contemporary notion shows the present problems of life, i.e. society. For maintaining the faithful copy of reality in their works, the realists deal with the contemporary society and its problems. The main objective of literature is to give pleasure to readers. Literature pleases readers because it throws light on the contemporary problems and issues of life. It is interested in recreation of life or society. So the realists give pleasure to the readers through the real picture of their life. The readers are also interested in reading their contemporary stories. Realistic literature has endured the passage of time due to its truthful presentation of contemporary life with all its aspects. It is the picturing of precise details of real thing or scene, i.e. life and its surroundings.

Steven Earnshaw in his book *Beginning Realism* states that the Realist novel presents stories, characters and settings that are similar to those commonly found in the contemporary everyday world. The characters and storylines are plausible, and in this they are therefore commonplace rather than out of the ordinary. The desire to portray contemporary everyday life entails and requires a breadth of social detail and as a

consequence, the classes represented tend to be categorized as working class and middle class, since these groups form the majority of the population (Earnshaw 2010:14). Steven Earnshaw talks about a distinction between Realism with a capital 'R' and realism with a small 'r'. According to Earnshaw, realism with a small 'r' describes the works that reproduce a loyal image of the world. This kind of realism can be found not only in all kinds of literature but also in almost all periods of literature. Realism with a capital 'R', on the other hand, describes the literary historical period. It is the period of the second half of the nineteenth century. The literature of this period is often known as the Realist literature. It is "synonymous with the novel genre" of the period. It is the period of the notable novelists: George Eliot, Anthony Trollope and Elizabeth Gaskell in England, and Flaubert and Zola in France. Realism with a small 'r' deals with one of the principles of realism: a faithful copy of the world. It is the common notion among all realists that realism with a capital 'R' denotes a particular period in which the notion of realism seems prominent (Earnshaw 2010: 5)

In M. H Abrams & Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* a realistic novel is defined as, "the fictional attempt to give the effect of realism, by representing complex characters with mixed motives who are rooted in a social class, operate in a developed social structure, interact with many other characters and undergo plausible, everyday modes of experience" (Abrams & Harpham 2012: 254) The subject matter of the Realist novel is to be found in everyday life, good and bad. The narrative point of view is characteristically omniscient. The novels often engage with social issues of the day, for instance, employment relations or the place of women in society. Earnshaw further writes that Realism has continued to be the most popular mode of artistic representation, in the visual arts as well as in literature, although critically the most maligned (Earnshaw 2010:15). Realism is an honest representation of reality using third-person omniscient narrative technique or first person narrative with flashback technique. The realist remains neutral while describing a faithful copy of life and society.

Realism is a style of writing that gives the impression of recording faithfully an actual way of life. Social Realism is an artistic movement depicting the social and racial injustice, economic hardships, through the direct pictures of life's struggles. It is a rebel

movement against the idealized and abstract representations that sought to capture reality in all its unappealing contours. The real tendency towards realism entered in the mainstream of English Literature during 1880s. Becker writes:

“...no one invented it (realism); rather it seems spontaneously to have come all at once and everywhere, except in England. As may be inferred from the selections presented in this volume the main battle over realism was waged in France, with subsidiary skirmishes in other countries in which French works were usually the bone of contention”(Becker 1963:8).

The term ‘Realism’ is widely accepted according to the need and time. Realism in literature and the visual arts is used to describe a variety of approaches in which accurate depiction of reality is the major aim. Social Realism in literature is not only a literary style; it is also a form of protest that gives voices to the unseen and unheard subalterns. Social Realist pledged to ‘fight the beautiful art’ focusing on the ugly realities of contemporary life and sympathized with working-class people, particularly the poor. Social Realism is an artistic movement especially in literature and visual art like painting. In this literary tradition authors attempt to deal with social, racial and economic injustice. Social Realism is not to be confused with Socialist Realism which was adopted by the Congress of Soviet Writers, Joseph Stalin, Nickolai Bukharin, Maxim Gorky and Andrey Zhdanov in 1934. There is a difference between Social Realism and Socialist Realism. Socialist Realism demanded that all art must depict some aspect of man’s struggle toward socialist progress for a better life. The principle source of the subject matter in Social Realism is made up of problems linked with life, work, thoughts and actions of the people who are struggling for their rights in capitalist, rather than socialist countries. The main difference between social realism and socialist realism is between ‘is’ and ‘should be’. Social Realism means the depiction in literature of social reality as it is. Socialist Realism means the depiction of the social reality as it should be: idealized.

Social Realism in art and literature do not belong to one period of history, rather it has found varied expression at different junctures in different countries. Yet, Social Realism is most often associated with the literary movement in 19th century France, when interest arose in recording previously ignored aspects of contemporary life and society. It was a

major trend in French novels and painting between 1850 and 1880. The early French realists like Count Frederic De Stendhal (1783-1842) and Honore De Balzac (1799-1850) opposed the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' and accepted the doctrine of 'art for life's sake'. They attempted to portray the lives, problems and customs of the middle classes in their writings. Realism was systematically developed in pictorial art and literature with the exhibition in Paris of *Du Realism* by the painter, Courbet in 1855, and with the publication of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* in 1856. The French painter Courbet used realism in his painting to indicate the real life and its real problems. He viewed the frank portrayal of scenes from everyday life. He also viewed that peasants, common people and the workers were the suitable and appropriate subjects for painters or artists. However, Flaubert's realism was focused on the professional procedures of a novelist. His theory emphasized a scientific detached observation, a calmness and watchfulness in perception of man and his life. He was in favor of presenting life-like pictures of natural objects. The novel *Madame Bovary* was both the masterpiece of realism and the work that established the Realistic Movement on the European scene. Honore De Balzac and Count Frederic De Stendhal were the chief French forerunners of realism in fiction. According to Auerbach, Balzac and Stendhal opened the new way for modern realism. They chose random individuals from common life and made them the subject of serious, problematic, and even tragic representation. Balzac presents the whole range of French society in his *La Comedie humaine* (The Human Comedy). Here, Balzac mirrors the vices, virtues, passions and events of his society. He depicts man and society as they have their own identities. He gives a new life to realism. He paints the natural history of man in relation to his social surroundings. He presents his characters through his observation as types rather than as averages. He presents them as representative characters in relation to society. Stendhal was one of the major realists in France. He was a journalist. He was the first who used journalistic-technique of narrating facts into novel-writing. He mirrors "all the essential aspects of some definite stage of development, evolutionary tendency or social group" (Lukacs 1972:71). Like Balzac, he tries to present the most typical and important qualities in each and every social phenomenon. His novels are praiseworthy for his characters that look like true or real. Balzac and Stendhal's realism spread the feelings of social realism in the field of literature.

The origin of the term 'realism' is French. It spontaneously spread in England in 1886 due to the complications of modernism, the spread of education, the increasing numbers of middle class readers and rapid development in science. In England, the tendency towards realism gave birth to the various types of novels such as political, historical, religious and social. The nineteenth century women novelists such as Jane Austen, the three Brontes, Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot played a major role in the gradual growth of the nineteenth century realism in England. They mainly concentrated on the social aspects of life. They drew their material from factual life as they observed it. Jane Austen was a unique realist. She wrote about common men and women falling in love and getting married. She wrote about their failures and successes. Her realism is based on a direct translation of life. Her novels, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1815) are domestic novels. They deal with ordinary men and women and their ordinary places and events. They record social problems and reflect socio-economic conditions of the contemporary time. Emile Bronte and Charlotte Bronte were the great realists after Jane Austen. Emile Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) describes the life of middle and lower classes. It is a domestic novel that presents socio-economic elements and their effects on ordinary human life. Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) is an autobiographical novel. Here she delineates her own factual experiences through Jane Eyre's experiences. Ian Watt, in his book, *The Rise of the Novel* (1987), pens that the realistic writing in England developed during the eighteenth century by Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. According to him, their writing links with the empirical tradition of philosophy where "truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses" (Watt 1957 :12). Their writing exhibits realistic presentation of the world. They create true individuals coming from ordinary life. Daniel Defoe's *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is the first English prose fiction that has been credited to the developing presence of realism. In *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749), Henry Fielding gives more importance to the trivial things and presents his actual experiences. His realism is based on a vivid picture of life of lower and upper classes. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) is an epistolary novel that deals with everyday actual life of Pamela.

George Eliot, in the true sense, brought realism in England. Her views on realism were influenced by Ludwig Feuerbach and Auguste Comte. Her realism, like them, lay in the exploration of human psychology as intimately related to social conditions. She offered a broader and deeper view of humanity. She offered a faithful copy of reality. In her article *On Realism* she writes that her ultimate aim is “to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves” (1963:113). George Eliot rejected idealism and accepted realism because she wanted to present a mirrored copy of life as it appeared in her mind. However, she admitted that it was not possible to represent reality in the sense of the mirror metaphor. She knew that such a reality might be confused. But she, as a realist, liked to give a truthful reflection of life as it mirrored in her mind. Her *Adam Bede* (1859) is the best example of her rejection of idealism and acceptance of realism.

The mode of social realism is then utilized in Charles Dickens’s novels. His novels are woven around London city. They record London life and the struggles of ordinary people, mainly poor people. *David Copperfield* describes the real story of David’s life while *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* reflect his unhappy childhood. *Hard Times* is the only novel of Dickens that is set outside London. It attacks utilitarian abuses in the factory and mirrors the true picture of Victorian working class. William M. Thackeray is another realist whose representation of the world around him is true to life and whose characters are drawn from real life. His *Vanity Fair* (1847) is the best Victorian novel that focuses on the upper-middle-class life in English society. It is related to the three families which are interrelated to one another by acquaintance and marriage. His realism moves around the authentic presentation of daily life. Thomas Hardy is a great nineteenth century realist. He attempted to present the aspects of human experience in his fiction. He, like Zola, accepted a scientific method of presenting social reality. His theory of realism was also based on imagination. According to him, realism was an imaginative recreation of social realities that are true to life. His *Jude the Obscure* (1895) and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* are characterized by realism. They describe the life and society of countryside people. They deal with the problems of working class. His realism deals with his real-world experiences. He presents and comments upon actual situation of life such as suffering of rural laborers and oppressed women and problems of modernity. Thus, it

is found that the eighteenth and nineteenth century British novelists follow the classic tradition of realism that sowed the seeds of social realism in the field of literature.

Realism in America emerged as a reaction against romanticism. In the last phase of the nineteenth century, its real concern in America was with national identity and defining a native tradition of realism. Mark Twain (the pen name of Samuel Clemens) was the early pioneer of realism in America. The development of realism into naturalism is also seen on the soil of America. Henry James was an American realist. He was actually an American naturalist in England, acquainted with the realist and naturalist writers such as William Dean Howells, Gustave Flaubert and Emile Zola. He advocated his straight path of new realism. His article on Emile Zola declares his acceptance of Zola's new kind of realism and his choice of the more rough side of human experience. Realism, in America, is thus a medium of representation of truth that is concerned to life and society. In India, R.K Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand used Realism in their works to portray the unpleasant side of reality.

Since the beginning, realism has been used as a technique of representation of the reality of society or life. In the Renaissance, it has been used to show ordinary, contemporary, everyday reality of middle class, the bourgeoisie. In the twentieth century, realism has been used in a wider and different sense. It has moved from actuality to plausibility, from the object to the subjective and from the external reality to the inner world of man. It has been extended to express the reality of one's psyche and inner self. This kind of representing reality is known as psychological realism. It denotes fidelity to truth in depicting the inner working of the mind, the analysis of thought and feeling, the presentation of the nature of personality and character. Such realism also requires a fictional character to behave in character. The ultimate in psychological realism is the use of the stream of consciousness method. It is the modern realism that examines inner landscape of one's mind. In this kind of realism, the realist gives plausible picture of the characters' psychology.

Realism has gained popularity over recent years in a work of art due to its reaction against romanticism, and the increasing wish of writers and readers for a realistic understanding of different social problems. The development in various fields and social

movements cause social change. The changing social ethos along with the various aspects of social life such as poverty, hunger, the sufferings of the common people, the conflict between tradition and modernity, social evils, inter-racial relations, and such others are fully articulated in the recent literary works. These social realities of life are more obvious in the modern novels than in the nineteenth century novels. Erich Auerbach presents some qualities of modern realism in his classic work, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. His realism has little in common with Balzac and Stendhal. His realism throws light on the serious and problematic subjects of daily life. Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) throws light on his theory of realism. It rests on social base but is free from political ideology, like Auerbach. In this sense, his views differ from those of the Marxists. Marxists' realism is based on systematic socio-political ideology that they apply to the interpretation of texts. It is, mainly, dependent on the technique of depicting social reality as it should be. Georg Lukacs's *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (1963) and *Studies in European Realism* (1972) are notable treatises on realism. Lukacs is regarded the first major non-Russian interpreter of realism. In *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, Georg Lukacs too defines "the literature of realism" as "a truthful reflection of reality"(Lukacs 1963:23). According to him, realistic writing offers a more general understanding of the social and economic conditions which produce the specific experiences. Realism, for him, is not only a political category but also an aesthetic category. He argues that realism raised the question of presentation of the complete human personality, hence, generalization. He also believes that realism generates from an understanding of an individual as a type and society as a whole. Realism, according to him, gives unique insights into the underlying forces shaping alike the social formation and individual type. Raymond Williams, in his essay *Realism and the Contemporary Novel*, states: "Realism, as embodied in its great tradition, is a touchstone in this, for it shows, in detail, that vital interpenetration, idea into feeling, person into community, change into settlement, which we need, as growing points, in our own divided time. In the highest realism, society is seen in fundamentally personal terms, and persons, through relationships, in fundamentally social terms. The integration is controlling, yet of course it is not to be achieved by an act of will. If it comes at all, it is a creative discovery, and can perhaps only be recorded within the structures and substance

of the realist novel” (Williams 1972:590). Thus realism, in literature, is not a simple reproduction of reality, but a system of producing literal or creative world that seems life-like. The origins of realism, the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century’s critical applications developed the concept of social realism. The definitions and meaning of realism focus on the realists’ engagement with social as well as political problems. Since the twentieth century, realism has been used as a vehicle for social and political propaganda. This method of writing is generally called Social Realism. As a concept, the origin of social realism lies in the term, realism, and as an art movement, its origin lies in the Ashcan School Painters of the first decade of the twentieth century. The members of this School were John Sloan, Robert Henri, George Bellows, and George Luks. They depicted the commonplace realities of city life and painted scenes from everyday life. Since then social realism, in literature, insists on exact documentation of the fact of life with sociological insight. It also presents the negative aspects of life under capitalism such as labor conflicts, poverty and the nobility of long-suffering workers. It attempts to record the experiences of suffering people as well as weaker sections of the society. Social realism is a branch of literary realism. As realism, it is a technique of describing life and society. It is an attempt to present realistic depiction of society. It is a mode of representing people, their lives, their hopes, dream, doubts and anxieties, hence social conditions. It makes literature to portray life and social realities as they are found in the real world. Needless to say that it delineates life in its true colors. It covers all truthful and honest pictures of society with the depiction of social consciousness, social sense, social experience and social insight. It is a way of dealing with social facts and events of society. It shows life and hence society with camera fidelity. Social realism is the writer’s way of dealing with realism in his/her writing. It is a technique by which truth is represented in an artistic way. Though it is true, it also acquires the same sense of realism. It, like realism, presents life as it is. So we cannot separate social realism from the term realism.

Social realism, like realism, covers all aspects of human activity. This kind of writing is more or less not for the sake of art, but for the sake of life and hence humanity. It is used to describe the contemporary life of common people. Today, it is used as neo-realism or contemporary realism. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* defines social

realism as “a distinct term used loosely to describe a realistic, objective yet socially aware and detailed method of artistic presentation” (Drabble 1985:917). Social realism thus reveals the truth of contemporary life as it is presented in society. It insists on exact record of the truth of life with sociological insight. It tries to present the life and the things as they are, as they are thought to be, as they ought to be in the society. There is a marked difference between the social realism depicted in the books of sociology and that depicted in literature. The social realism depicted in literature or art is not a photographic truth. It is an artistic truth based on artistic representation. It is imaginative rendering of social truth. Hence, it is a recreation of social truth. It is a representative truth or reality. It is not merely “imitative of people and objects in the real world.” It is not only imitative truth but also a transformation of truth into everlasting reality.

In *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon*, David Shapiro writes, “Social Realism attempts to use art to protest and dramatize injustice towards the working class-the result of capitalist exploitation” (Shapiro 1973:15). Social realism as an artistic movement depicts the everyday struggles of the working class people for their rights. It is made up of problems linked with life, the work, thoughts and actions of the people. It shows the ugly realities of contemporary life and sympathizes with the working class people. But with the passage of time, social realism has acquired a changing sense. It attempts to portray life and social realities as they exist in the daily world. It became a mode of recording the lives of middle and lower-class people along with the depiction of social and racial injustice, and economic disparities. It makes literature to present minute details of everyday experiences of people and their environment. Social realism attempts to use literature for recording “revolting voices of all oppressed sections of the society” (Mohod 1997: 46). It is a weapon for making the oppressed sections of society such as women to wake them up and break their chains. It uses literature for fighting against racial discrimination, patriarchy, oppression, domination, lack of freedom and human rights. It records the modern voices of subjugated people who want to be free from traditional bondages. It also records the strengths as well as the weaknesses of the society and comments on better opportunities. Social realism also attempts to use literature for generalizing common and ordinary life. A realist chooses his characters, story-line, setting and language from common life. He/she does so to generalize the common and

ordinary life. It is the aspect that makes realistic writing permanent and universal. Henrik Ibsen, for example, draws his characters, story and situations from ordinary life and presents them in his writing. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* presents women's suffering through the protagonist of the play, Nora and shows the lack of serious relationships in marriages.

The main emphasis of social realism is on a faithful reporting of all aspects of society. As a technique of realism, social realism attempts to reprint all aspects of society. It relates literature to the contemporary life and hence the society. It makes literature to tell deeply about the contemporary people, their lives, their tradition, culture and society. It also makes literature to represent individual, social and cultural changes in all the spheres of life. Social realism, according to G. Davidson's *Encyclopedia of Social Science-English Literature*, "exposes idealized mystification and presents accurate depictions of incipient class conflict"(Davidson 2008:786). It, thus, insists on the universalized human experience. It focuses on the realists' engagement with social problems along with the depiction of class conflict and hence social reality. It also insists on the accurate portrayal of various aspects of ordinary people's life and society. Even today, i.e. at the beginning of the twenty-first century, social realism emerges as a brighter form of contemporary social realism. It shows that this genre of literature depicts life continuously. It deals with the notion of scientific depiction of social reality. Realists are more interested in depiction of the contemporary social problems. They attract readers' attention towards today's burning social issues and want to eradicate these issues rooted in society.

Literature reflects a mirror image of the society and the social realities in which it is created. It also reflects the socio-economic and political life of the people living in a particular place. "Literature is a direct reflection of various facets of social structure, family relationships, class conflicts, and possibly divorce trends and population composition."(Albrecht 1954: 425-426) This relationship helps to understand the concept of social realism. The study of social realities through fiction is essential in order to understand the contemporary life and society. It is true in the sense that fiction depicts man's life, his society and its various social issues, values and so on. It delineates the different roles of man within the family and other institutions. It also delineates the

conflicts and tensions between groups and social classes. It is a representative reality of society.

An Introduction of the Nagas and their literature

The Naga people are an ethnic group of several tribes native to the North Eastern part of India of which 14 major tribes are recognized in the present state of Nagaland. They are traditionally an oral society and speak distinct Tibeto-Burman languages. There are as many as 60 native dialects spoken by different tribes and sub-tribes and English is the official language of the state. The Nagas follow patriarchal social norms and therefore the men folk take over superior roles in all decision - making. Naga society is deeply bound by customs and practices, framed according to the tribal way of life, that are known as Naga customary laws. It is important to understand that each tribe has its own distinctive characteristics in terms of language, festivals, dress and food and hence, every tribe has its own effective system of self-governance. Before the advent of the white man in the Naga Hills in the nineteenth Century, the Nagas were illiterate. Writing was unknown to them and they did not have a script. They lived in village-states almost in isolation from each other and the rest of the world. The world of the Nagas revolved around the village, family, clan and khel. Their calendar was based on the agricultural cycle. The people were self-sufficient and there was little contact between the tribes. Prior to British rule, every Naga village was an independent republic. No tribe had ever ruled over the other. Therefore, written Naga literature is of very recent development compared to the literary traditions of other communities. In the introduction of the book *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from NorthEast India: Fiction*, Titollotoma Misra rightly states “The scribal tradition is a recent one amongst the Nagas and before the development of a script for the Naga languages through the efforts of the American Baptist Missionaries, literature was confined only in the oral form” (Misra 2011: xxii). The Nagas have always had a very rich oral tradition which has been passed down from generation to generation through word of mouth. History and culture were transmitted and preserved through the rich tradition of oral literature. These are found in the form of folktales, myths, legends, proverbs and poem songs as well as the whole cultural way of life.

In her seminal work *The Ao Naga Oral Tradition*, Temsula Ao asserts that the oral tradition of the Nagas is “in many ways the source of the people’s literature, social customs, religion and history” (Ao 2000:174). All the Naga tribes share the commonality of oral tradition. Because of the absence of written records and history, the oral tradition assumes profound significance for non-literate communities. The lore of the people kept alive through the myths, legends and tales remain the only link between the past and present. Therefore, as Ao puts it, the history of the Nagas “lies within the ambit of the oral tradition” (ibid 175). In it is found the treasure trove of cultural values, knowledge, information and all aspects of the way of the people that binds them as a distinct race. Oral forms which primarily existed in preliterate societies do not end with literacy, but continue to flourish and strengthen different aspects of a people’s culture. The written form now plays a very important role in transmitting information more rapidly to greater numbers and distances. The emerging contemporary Naga literature reflects an amalgamation of the written and the oral. As stated by Misra, “adaptations and transcriptions of oral literature constitute a significant part of print literature in modern times” (Misra 2011: xxii). Any discussion of Naga literature therefore, has to take recourse to the oral tradition as it is the primary source of their original literature.

The traditional way of life incorporated all aspects of development of the community. One of the most important characteristics of oral tradition is that it is a community-centered tradition. In preliterate traditional life, education was a community affair. Education was brought through traditional institutions such as Morungs and age-group houses. The Morungs served as educational centers equipping the young with the values and ways of their culture. The basic concept of this educational system was that the elder members of the community taught and guided the younger ones by sharing their knowledge and wisdom gained through experience. Traditional customs and practices were taught in this manner and the youngsters were prepared for life to play their roles in the society. The onset of British colonialism destroyed the traditional economic base of the native communities and replaced the age-old political and social structures by new institutions and practices compatible with the interests of the new rulers. The Nagas inhabited areas were arbitrarily divided by the British and the idyllic life of the Nagas was totally disturbed during the war period.

Easterine Kire states that during the British rule, “the villages that were found rebellious were burned and their populations scattered into other villages for specific periods of time. Burning of houses and scattering of village populations destroyed the setting of oral narratives effectively” (Gopinath Mahanty Lecture). For about half a century therefore, oral literature was silenced. According to Kire, the history of Naga literature is punctuated by “the silencing of oral narratives at critical periods in their history,” and this was “the first silencing of our narratives” (ibid). War caused the silencing of oral narratives while a foreign culture under colonial rule made intrusion into the lives of the Nagas and caused cultural erosion. Though the Nagas are traditionally an oral society, modernization along the Western line commenced after the encounters with the British rulers (1832) and the American missionaries (1872) who introduced them to the written culture using the Roman Alphabets; the translation of the Bible, church hymns and other religious texts being the primary reason for the Western educators to evolve a written literature. Since then, there has been a sea of change in almost all aspects of Naga way of life. The Nagas saw two world wars during the British rule. Between the years 1942-1944, the Second World War created great unrest in the Naga Hills when Kohima became one of the main theatres of the war. It was in the Battle of Kohima that the Japanese invasion of India was stalled which ultimately led to the victory of the Allies. The Nagas found themselves embroiled in a war that was not of their making. Majority of the Nagas supported the Allied forces to preserve their hearth and home. But the villages were bombed and people had to evacuate their homes. The war caused displacement and total disruption of normal life. According to Kire, this led to the “second silencing of Naga Narrative” as people were “preoccupied with rebuilding their lost homes after the war”

After the war, the Naga Hills District Council was formed in 1945 which was rechristened as Naga National Council (NNC). Under the leadership of the NNC, the Nagas declared their independence on 14th August, one day before India, which resulted in violent military suppression by the Indian Government. Thus was born the longest running insurgency in modern history and the most violent chapter in Naga history. In *War and silencing of Naga Narratives* Kire writes that the narratives of the Nagas were silenced by wars which disrupted the setting essential for the continuation of folktales

and caused the premature deaths of their carriers. The oral narratives of Nagas suffered a long period of being silenced after military operations began in the wake of the India-Naga war. (www.nelitreview).

During the 50s and 60s Nagaland passed through a reign of terror when an undeclared war was waged between the Indian Army and the Naga Army. This conflict compelled the Naga Army to go underground. In 1957 another group of Nagas formed the Naga People's convention with the primary aim of bringing an end to the war and bloodshed. They negotiated with the GOI and reached an agreement creating the state of Nagaland within the Union of India on December 1, 1963. There was thus another kind of silence in the post colonial period. The Nagas had been written by others, such as the British Anthropologists and Christian Missionaries. But writings by Nagas about themselves began to appear only from the 70s. The earlier Naga writers were pre-occupied with the Naga Political Issue, and naturally, the first writings by Nagas were political in nature. The written word began to be seen as a symbol of resistance which led to another silencing of Naga narratives.

Tilottoma Misra observes that during the early years, the developing literature in the different Naga languages “bore the recognizable stamp of the style, imagery, and diction of the Bible” due to the influence of Christian Missionaries (2011:xxiii). The change came about “after the outbreak of the war between the Naga underground army and the Indian Government forces which completely transformed the cultural ethos of the people, bringing in significant changes in what was considered the “Naga way of life” (ibid). Therefore, the new emerging literature of the post-1950s reflects a change from the concerns of earlier writers. A cursory glance at the beginning of Naga creative writing reflects its political history. However, not all Naga writings are soaked in bloodshed and tears. Writers are making an effort to retrieve and adopt the old tradition of their oral culture. The integration of oral tradition in modern literary genres is the most distinguishing feature of the emerging Naga literature. There has been a surge of literature in the form of poetry, novels, short stories and retelling of folktales. Today, Naga writing is at an exciting stage, vibrant with fresh new ideas, and Nagas have come of age learning how to script their own narratives instead of being defined by others.

The recent years have witnessed a spur of creative literary works which are yet to take their rightful place amongst other greats of modern literature. Although cultures of storytelling are richly imbibed in the oral traditions of the Nagas, Naga authors writing in English have gained a wider audience only fairly recently. Though there are quite a handful of emerging writers, prominent among the Naga Writers writing in English today are Easterine Kire, Temsula Ao, Nini Lungalang and Monalisa Changkija, Avinuo Kire, Neikehienuo Mepfhu-o. While these writers may or may not have close associations among themselves, they are contemporaneous and their writing traces are also reflections of the generation that has seen one of the most turbulent phases in Naga history. These writers have used their literary art to weave the people's history and social realities in their works. Their writings are not debarred of socio-cultural meaning; rather they are powerful re-creation of the rich cultural heritage while at the same time acting as commentators on the social ills of the present day. These contemporary Naga authors weave stories through the eyes of the common people in attempting to present an unblushing and critical perspective of society.

Social Realism in Naga literature

The purpose of reviewing the works of contemporary Naga writers through the prism of social realism is to investigate how significant social, political and historical transformations are negotiated and expressed through the literary medium. The traumatic years of political turmoil and devastations caused by the Second World War and the Indo-Naga war are vividly depicted in the works of various authors such as Easterine Kire's *Mari*, *A Naga Village Remembered*, *Bitter Wormwood*, *Life On Hold*, *A Respectable Woman*, *A Terrible Matrairchy* and Temsula Ao's *These Hills called Home: Stories from a War Zone*. However, far from a detached commentary on history these stories are embedded within the normal everyday life of the village. This realism is conveyed through the depiction of beautiful scenic environment, customs, beliefs, superstitions and the humble dwellings of the village setting in which characters come alive. These images are contrasted to the canvas of war-stricken barren lands, stories of forced migrations and displaced families longing for return to their homes, not as a way of romanticizing the peaceful life that had been uprooted but to capture ugly experiences

and the bitter memories that left an indubitable scar in the history of a people. These stories lend voice to a generation that has been suppressed by violence. The element of social realism is also reflected in the critique of societal set up. The great forces of modernization in the form of social and cultural changes are given a localized perspective while the traditional Naga society is made to stand bare with all its shortcomings and failings. These literary works lend voices to the marginalized within Naga society even as the moral values and social ethos of the community are also emphasized.

Easterine Kire, born in March 1959, is one of the most prolific writers from Nagaland. Her stories reflect deep social awareness and portray a cultural picture that invites us into the real life of the Naga people, their pain and struggles and the wounds and scars of their history. Majority of Kire's writing are footed in the lived realism of the native people in Nagaland. She published her first book of poetry in 1982 titled *Kelhoukevira*, which is also the first book of Naga poetry published in English. Her novel *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003) was the first novel written by a Naga Writer in English. She has a number of books to her credit including *The Windhover Collection* (2001), *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), *Naga Folktales Retold* (2009), *Mari* (2010), *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), *Life On Hold* (2011), *Forest Songs* (2011), *Dinkypu* (2012), *Different Strokes* (2013) *Jazz Poetry and other Poems* (2013) *When the River Sleeps* (2014), *Son of the Thundercloud* (2016), *Don't Run, My Love* (2017), *A Respectable Woman* (2019), *The Rain-Maiden and the Bear-Man: And Other Stories* (2021). In 2011, she was awarded the Governor's Medal for Excellence in Naga Literature and the recipient of the Catalan PEN International Free Voice Award in 2013. Her poetry and books have been translated into German, Croatian, Uzbek, Norwegian and Nepali. She also won the Hindu Literary Prize (2015) for her novel *When the River Sleeps* (2014). She was awarded Bal Sahitya Puraskar by Sahitya Academy in 2018 and received the Book of the Year Award for Fiction at the Tata Literature Live Award in 2017 for her novel *Son of the Thundercloud* (2016).

A major portion of Kire's works reflects the kind of life she lived through during the first few decades of the violent war between Naga undergrounds and the Indian armed forces. Growing up in Kohima, the centre of most actions for the Nagas in the last century, she

tells of how she saw violence at close quarters at several times. Her desire to uphold the oral tradition is reflected in the way she source her materials from the constructions of Naga people's past through her stories. In her essay *War and silencing of Naga Narratives*, Kire writes that the narratives of the Nagas were silenced by wars which disrupted the setting essential for the continuation of folktales and caused the premature deaths of their carriers. Kire maintains that besides the loss of folktales, another form of oral narratives silenced by the Indo-Naga was 'the many and varied peoplestories'. In his *Theory and History of Folklore*, Vladimir Propp maintains that "the folktale, and especially the tale of everyday life, is an ancestor of written realistic literature" (Propp 1984:20). Kire short stories belong to this genre of folklore moving into written realistic literature. The stories are unusual and uncommon, yet they are based on actual occurrences. They record the process of developing written Naga literature as the author transforms the oral accounts into writing adopting the format of fiction. Kire's focus on folk themes provides the human element missing in narratives of war and conflict. She brings alive a vibrant culture by delineating the values that uphold the people and the tradition which sustains them. These are narratives that have been silenced by war and buried under the debris of violence. They are the histories of the people that have hitherto been preserved only in the memories of its carriers.

A recurring theme in Easterine Kire's novels is situating the encounter between everyday village life and the unpredictable outside forces such as the colonial encounter, social and political upheavals, and new cultural and religious forces. The element of social realism is unmistakable in her writings such as *Mari* where she depicts the real experiences of war through the eyes of a woman, Mari. The Battle of Kohima, perhaps the biggest and definitely the most significant battle on the eastern theatre of the Second World War, is presented not as a clash between two imperial forces but through the experiences of the local people on whose lands the war was fought. It is a realist depiction of war at the ground level away from the high tables of political masters in war offices and brings to the fore the authentic voices of the Naga people caught in a war not of their making. Easterine Kire's novel *Mari* projects the Battle of Kohima in 1944, which is often referred as a 'forgotten battle' by the Naga people. In this novel she has beautifully intertwined the theme of love, war, peace, meeting and parting of their dear and loved ones. As

conflict shatters the lives of the people and it made them to doubt their own identity and existence. *Mari* is a tale of forgotten past which narrates the silences of history and the living memories. The novel presents the lives of common people set amidst horror during the Second World War. *Mari* unravels the sufferings and plunges into the turmoil of Second World War which shook the lives and everything around it in the Naga Hills. Kire's writings unfold the untold human emotions, experiences and anxieties of the War events. In her novel through the story of Mari, she depicts the innocent lives attempting to survive amidst it. *Mari* is the first ever attempt by an insider to shift the focal point of history from grand-narratives to local narratives and let the world know and remember the erased stories of people and place ravaged by war. Kire used the method of storytelling in her novel with the help of mundane experiences, memory and with the help of a diary kept by her aunt Mari (the protagonist of the piece) during and after the War. It unveils the plight and traumatic experiences of local people during the War which shattered their lives making them homeless and refugees in their own land. The novel revolves around the life of Mari and her memories of the nostalgic past and the ravages of wars on the Nagas.

The element of social realism is however not limited to a critique of injustice perpetrated from the outside. It also actively engages with the injustice and corruption within Naga society. *A Terrible Matriarchy* wrestles with issues of social status and the growth of economic class, the distinction between the rich and the poor in a hitherto classless society. The novel mainly focused on how the common Naga people cope with the winds of modernization that swept across their land, while the discomfiting political unrest hovers at the background. Set in and around the town of Kohima in the 60s and 70s, one of the themes in the novel focuses on the impending rise of the disillusioned youth in an increasingly militarized society. The lives of the Nagas were bound to nature in their social, cultural, ethical and religious values. Easterine Kire dynamically portrayed in the novel *Bitter Wormwood* (2011) how the livelihood activities of Nagas were closely related to nature. In the novel, Easterine Kire recounts the painful episode of the Nagas' quest for a sovereign nation which eludes them till today. Through a retelling of Mose's experiences in the freedom struggle from the times of fervent nationalism, it ends with his death as result of the later day factional wars that marred the movement. The many

decades of Indo-Naga conflict has left scars, not just physical but emotional ones too, and one of the central themes of the novel to overcome the trauma is forgiveness. She titled the novel *Bitter Wormwood* because 'bitter wormwood' was a type of bitter herb traditionally believed to keep the bad spirits away. The novel showed the deep connection of Naga culture and tradition rooted in nature. The old way of life for the Nagas also contains wisdom and advice for the younger generations. *Bitter Wormwood* talks about the Indo-Naga clash, a heartrending insight on how the decades stretched freedom fight has tainted the life of the common natives in Nagaland. The novel not only exposes the social and political problems of Naga people but also unavoidable fact of differences that lies between Nagas and the rest of India. It not only highlights the intolerable cruelty shown to them in the past but also at present. The novel was shortlisted for the Hindu Literary Prize 2013.

Kire is widely regarded for her first historical novel *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), a version of the last battle between the British colonial forces and the diminutive warrior village of Khonoma. The work replicates the distasteful realism of life in Nagaland and the involvedness around the colonial carnage and inequity. It also highlights the in-house enmity and ideological variations that survived amid the Naga brothers who struggled for freedom. *A Naga Village Remembered* is a novel which attempts to give the history of the Angami village of Khonoma and its uprising against the might of the British Empire. Historical account has it that Khonoma was one of the fiercest villages and a constant nagging force in the British Dominion over the Naga Hills. With a blend of history and fiction, the novelist Easterine creatively reconstructs the past to make the modern reader acquire a holistic picture of the Nagas. Set in the middle and the second half of nineteenth century, the novelist delves deep into the tradition of the people and explores the fabric of the closely-knitted society. The advent of the British in the land of the Nagas was a bother to the warrior village of Khonoma as they suddenly became a formidable enemy. It was the time when the glory hunt for head was still the most effective means of achieving fame and garnering titles. The parents and elders of the society, in the novel, teach the younger ones all these wisdom so that they can be responsible individuals in the future. Against the failings of society are also presented tiny glimpses into the social ethos that cement relationships and bind the community. Easterine Kire brings this out

very beautifully in her works as she highlights moral values practiced in the midst of tragedy. Kire movingly portrays the mesmerizing and vivacious Naga culture for the entire world to see, through her creative writings that provoke an allure for its old-age traditions and dazzling folklores from the innermost corner of the mystic state that Nagaland is.

Life on Hold tells of the other side of suffering in the later day story of Naga nationalism. While the nationalist movement continues to attract young people, the anxieties persist for those who wait at home as so often the news that comes home is heart wrenching. The novel brilliantly captures the life of the Nagas that were stained by the struggles during independence movement, which has turned into a permanent scar. The fact that everything was forced to kept in abeyance, except pain and sacrifice, in the name of better future. It beautifully unfolds bits of conversation and few scenes to unravel and reveal life of Naga with admirable accuracy.

A Respectable Woman depicts the broken reality of a society still struggling to settle somewhere between the age-old traditions and the modernity slowly seeping into their lives. The novel brings alive the post-war Kohima in a coming of age story of two generation of the Angami-Naga women who make decisions against convention and tribal customs. Kire explores women's journey through these altered realities. The narration in the novel brings out the aged-old practice of oral tradition. It is through this narrative technique that Khonuo is able to share her stories that were concealed yet still fresh in her memory. Through her narration, Khonuo recreates the memory of the people in the decisive Battle of Kohima in the Second World War. She stitches together the unforgettable memory of devastation, the loss of home and property and the deaths of their loved ones. Forty years after the event, Khonuo stitches together her memories bit by painful bit, for her young daughter, Kevinuo. As memory passes from mother to daughter, the narrative glides seamlessly into the present, a moment in which Nagaland, much transformed, confronts different realities and challenges. Using storytelling traditions so typical of her region, Kire leads the reader gently into a world where history and memory meld-where, through this blurring, a young woman comes to understand the legacy of her parents and her land. In *A Respectable Woman*, Kire redefines the nuances

of respectability for women, in women by women and is successful in making the silenced history heard. The horror of the Kohima War is recounted after forty-five years of a muted silence by the mother of the narrator, Khonuo. Kire through her characters of Kevinuo, Khonuo and Beinuo reflects the reality of an Angami Women in a close knitted society after the end of war which brought about so much of destruction. Domestic violence on women is one of the major themes in the novel; the unpleasant reality of men turning to alcohol and letting out their anger on women in a show of strength and frustration. Women, being abused and silenced, fears society will mock and look down on them for not being a good wife to their husband instead of questioning and standing up against such ill behavior. Through Beinuo, one of the major characters in the novel, we also see the shift of a carefree girl who is totally against domestic violence falling into the hands of an abusive husband.

Temsula Ao, born in 1945, is a poet, author and an ethnographer. She has been one of the most prominent literary figures from the Northeast. She is a retired Professor of English in North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) at Shillong in Meghalaya. She is a winner of Padma Shri (2007) and Governor's Gold Medal (2009) from the Government of Meghalaya. She received Sahitya Akademi Award in 2013 for her short story collection, *Laburnum for My Head* (2009). Ao has so far published five poetry collections, *Songs that Tell* (1988), *Songs that Try to Say* (1992), *Songs of Many Moods* (1995), *Songs from Here and There* (2003), *Songs from The Other Life* (2007). These five collections of poems have together been published by Heritage Publishing House under the title, *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988- 2007* in the year 2013. Her non-fiction includes a book on Henry James entitled *Henry James and the Quest for an Ideal Heroine* (1988) and another titled *Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (2000). Her first short story collection is *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006) and her next collection is *Laburnum for my Head: Stories* (2009). She has continued with *Once Upon a Life: Burnt Curry and Bloody Rags, A Memoir* (2013), and her recent novel is *Aosenla'a Story* (2017). Though born in Jorhat, Assam, her stories and poetry is deeply rooted in the oral tradition of her people, the Nagas, and has inspired many in the importance of recovering the lost heritage of people's history.

These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone discusses the social realities of Nagaland against the backdrop of the troubled relationship between Nagas and India. The stories lie at the heart of historical events, through the work of fiction. She writes on the political strife and turmoil of the land, the quest for separate political status and how the villagers survive in such a conflict prone area. Many of the stories are about ‘bloodshed and tears’ and it depicts common people who are victimized by the conflicts, violence and politics of the state. Set in the early years of fervent Naga nationalism there are stories of the unexpected raids and atrocities committed on the innocent Naga Villagers by the Indian Armed Forces, the precocious young girl brutally raped by the soldiers in front of the church and the old man reminiscing his underground days as a Naga Army to his grandson. What endures the most is the portrayal of how the common people cope with living in an uncertain time, the conflict being far from over. Ao gives a picture of Nagaland where the common people are trapped in an atmosphere of violence and conflicts. It deals with Naga insurgency and its consequences, the political strife and turmoil of the land.

Aosenla's story talks about gender identity and the fate of a woman in a male-dominated society. The narratives give voice to the subaltern existence and experience of the female who is threatened by the socio-cultural powers. She pointed out that –as long as patriarchy exists, no one is ever truly free. Ao writes from a space that bears the scars of violence but also contains a space that allows interaction and introspection upon questions of the self in the context of the larger Naga identity. *Aosenla's story* touches upon the themes that are deeply rooted in social realities. Temsula Ao manages to keep closely at the heels of Aosenla's journey of struggling with patriarchy, social taboos, cultural barriers, family problems, secrets and self-doubt.

These works provide literary glimpse into a dark chapter of Naga history which is so often forgotten in the history books. These stories of pain and humiliation, suffering and loss, do not find any literary space in the stories of the Indian nation and they lie hidden along with the lives of those who perished with the Naga movement. It is precisely in bringing these stories to life that Naga literary authors not only expose the uncomfortable

truth beneath Indo-Naga history but also recover the voices of those who have been suppressed and silenced.

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CHAPTER 2

RETELLING STORIES FROM BELOW: THE RAVAGES OF WAR, ERASED STORIES AND LIVING MEMORIES

Easterine Kire is undoubtedly one of the finest contemporary woman writers from Northeast India. Her stories reflect deep social awareness and portray a cultural picture that invites us into the real life of the Naga people, their pain and struggles and the wounds and scars of their history. A recurring theme in Easterine Kire's novels is situating the encounter between everyday village life and the unpredictable outside forces such as the colonial encounter, social and political upheavals, and new cultural and religious forces. The element of social realism is unmistakable in her novel *Mari* where she depicts the real experiences of war through the eyes of a woman Mari. The Battle of Kohima, perhaps the biggest and definitely the most significant battle on the eastern theatre of the Second World War, is presented not as a clash between two imperial forces but through the experiences of the local people on whose lands the war was fought. It is a realist depiction of war at the ground level away from the high tables of political masters in war offices and brings to the fore the authentic voices of the Naga people caught in a war not of their making. Easterine Kire succinctly captures this in *Mari*: "It was paradoxical that a village that had offered refuge to others should now be worrying about seeking refuge itself" (Kire 2010: 74). Mari's Kohima may barely be recognizable to the eyes of a modern reader but Easterine Kire is able to capture Kohima with no exaggerated pretensions of a city ravaged by war. "Kohima today is so different from the Kohima of my childhood, and completely unrecognizable from the Kohima of Mari's childhood. Crowded sidewalks. Old houses of tin looking incongruous beside new concrete shopping malls. The town has grown in all directions" (ibid 15).

The ravages of war and the sense of alienation and displacement are often achieved through a juxtaposition of violence and the serenity of nature. This is exemplified by the use of natural images like hills/mountains, rainbow, forest, dust, flowers etc. alongside the disturbing images of fire, bullets, blood, death etc. The contrast powerfully captures and exhibits the ugly face of war and the social reality of living in a land where 'uncertainty' prevails. It also resonates with the chronicle of a land that is robbed of its

fertility. *Mari* mirrors the story of a community experience during the Second World War that left an indelible legacy on the social psyche of the Naga people as Mari exclaims: "What is so remarkable about World War II which is still referred to as 'The War' by the Nagas, is that people have very little memory of what they were doing before the war years. I was left with the impression that the war, for us, was almost equivalent to the Big Bang, the beginning of all life"(ibid 10). *Mari* gives a firsthand account on the exploits of war, "We had never seen so many dead bodies before...there were so many bodies on the streets in the town and they lay in different stages of decomposition. None of us had the stomach for it. There were trenches dug out everywhere. We saw abandoned rifles on the streets corners and fragments of mortar shells and grenades. We were warned that there were buried mines as well. We couldn't believe this was Kohima, this mess of human destruction" (ibid 93)

Easterine Kire's *Mari* begins in the 1940s and runs through the 90s offering a vivid description of life and its people before, during and after the Second World War in Kohima. Khrielievu Mari O'Leary, the eldest sister of the author's mother and the protagonist of the novel, who survived and lived through the World War II narrates the pre-war Kohima as, "Flowers grew wild all over town because there were such few houses. Here and there were flowering trees like the pink bohemia and the scarlet flame of the forest. The town certainly looked colourful with the trees and flowers all around" (ibid 26). The pre-war town of Kohima has been recreated mostly through the author's mother's and Mari's eyes. They recall the landmarks in the town such as the shops and the schools and hospitals etc. Nothing significant was remembered by the people about what they were doing before the war. "Everything happened at the same time. Growing up, falling in love, war, homelessness, starvation, death and partying and, finally, peace" (ibid 10).

Mari is a tale of 'forgotten battle' which was fought between British Allied Forces and Japanese Army from 4th April to 22nd June 1944. The Allied Force under the leadership of Colonel Hugh Richards with the help of some local Nagas who acted as Scouts, Spies, Stretcher bearers and ammunition carriers uprooted the Japanese from Kohima Garrison Hills. Nevertheless Kire's novel *Mari* is much more than the Battle of Kohima. It is a tale

of a young mother who dared to live on for her child after the death of her fiancé in the war and a first-hand account of the events by an insider. Even though Kire is not a historian, she fictionalizes history with her magical touch, human emotions through her narratives. The novel reconstructs the past with the help of memory and narratives. Giving voice to the silenced narratives is one of the significant motives of Kire's writings. Mari (the protagonist) described it in the prologue of the novel as: "I open the diary slowly. The childish scrawl of a young girl fills its pages and, as I read on, I am almost that girl again. Carefree and innocent and oblivious to the way in which the war would change my life forever. I am drawn once again irresistibly, into that mad whirl of living, loving and dying. That was the war I knew" (ibid 2). Life started for Mari at seventeen when she fell in love with Victor, a Sergeant Major in the British army and had dreamt colorful dreams with him. She wanted the war to end so that she could live happily ever after with her man. But the onset of the war snatched her dreams away. She was shattered into pieces as she heard the news of her fiancé's death from her cousin Jimmy. As soon as the Japanese entered into the eastern part of Kohima in 1944, people started leaving their villages for refuge. Mari was separated from her family as a result. The tranquility is replaced by this 'mess of human destruction' brought by the war. The civilians sandwiched between the Japanese and the British not only experienced physical torture but also psychological trauma. Mari narrates the plight of the civilians in this manner, "Stories of Japanese atrocities hurtled through my mind. Our men who had been picked by them were badly beaten and then tied to trees all night long where the captors slept. We had heard stories of women being molested by them, spoken of in whispers among the elders because rape was considered the most heinous of crimes and we knew very little of it before the Japanese came (ibid 67).

The atrocities of war have remained in people's collective memory. *Mari*, set in Nagaland of pre-independent period successfully depicts the common people's struggle. They were killing, molesting, raping and threatening people for food and shelter. Mari and her sisters suffered unfathomably – there were no foods, no edible herbs to be found in the jungle, no fruits, no fish in the streams – they were hungry and lonely. *Mari* depicts the state of homelessness and displacement faced during the World War II generally known as the 'Japanese War' by the Nagas and how it made a deep impact in the lives of

the Nagas. Mari records in her dairy jottings her experiences of growing up in an atmosphere of fear, starvation, and being alienated from her family members and lover.

In March 1944 Kohima became like a ghost town because everybody including the businessmen, shopkeepers and plainsmen fled to Dimapur and beyond (ibid 62). The town of Kohima changed drastically after the war. The beauty and serenity of the town became a thing of the past as Mari describes the desolate town, “The front yard which used to be filled with flowers was unrecognizable. Large craters had been left by the shells and there were lot of ammunition near the house, from different – sized mortar shells to glittering rifle shots” (ibid 94). War was over by 22nd of June 1944 and left Mari grief stricken but Mari’s indomitable will power enabled her to gather courage to live on for her children – Marion from Vic and Lily from Dickie, another soldier in British army. After Dickie left Mari and went to England, Mari decided to be someone in her life and do something for her children and parents. She joined nursing course in Christian Medical College in Ludhiana in 1950 and thereafter at St. Stephens’s Hospital in Delhi and finally in 1956 she joined Digboi Assam Oil Company Hospital as a member of their senior staff. While serving at Assam she met Patrick O’Leary, who had been working at Assam Oil Company and eventually married him to be happy again. Mari’s daughter’s Marion and Lily grew up and got married. Things were going well in her homeland but in late 50’s and early 60’s as the India-Naga war gathered momentum, news from home about the brutality of Indian army and measureless suffering of innocent people troubled her. Kire portrays the naked reality of the war that was fought in Kohima in particular and Nagaland in general. Even though Nagas were not directly associated with the war yet the worst sufferers were the Nagas themselves. They were victimized, marginalized and were used for the selfish purpose in the pre and post war milieu. Their anxiety and agony could not acquire a place in the meta-narratives of the British colonial period. Many anthropological accounts were written by British officers and ethnographers such as JH Hutton, JP Mills, Christoph Von Furer Heimendorf, Ursulla Graham Bower and WG Archer about the Nagas but their sufferings and psyche were never aired by these writers. Silenced voices and stories are brought out from the closet by Kire’s authentic narratives. She portrays lives, feelings, and experiences as Naga people lived, felt and experienced during the Battle.

Kire's novel *A Naga Village Remembered*, renamed as *Sky Is My Father*, describes the war fought by the Nagas against British colonial forces. In establishing its colonial empire by force, the British uprooted the Nagas from their ancestral setting. Rebellious villages were burned and the scattering of villagers destroyed the atmosphere for oral narratives. The villagers of Khonoma had to leave their homes and live in a fortified position known as Tsiekha fort, where they resort to guerilla warfare. They lived on the hill side for a period of nearly six months. Food was short, sickness was on the rise and the scarcity of food compelled them to change their policy, and at last they surrendered on the 29th March, 1880. History records that the people of Khonoma in particular received the fiercest treatment as its people were chased out from their village and forced to resettle in other villages. Its terraced fields were also confiscated. However, in the aftermath of this War, a process of assimilation began as Nagas negotiated with the reality of colonial rule.

The First World War exposed the Nagas to the great world outside their homes. A total of two thousand Naga men joined the Labour Corps in France and this experience led to the formation of the first Pan-Naga organization called the Naga Club in 1918 for promoting the interests of the Nagas. For the first time, it brought a sense of belonging among the different tribes and gave a common Naga identity which would not have been possible before the arrival of education and Christianity. This was a positive change. The formation of Naga Club and memorandum to the Simon Commission, 1929 proposing the Naga desire for independence can be said to be the two most important development in the post World War- I. The Second World War and the Battle of Kohima fought between 1942- 1944 during the time of the British rule brought about a total disruption of normal life. The Nagas found themselves caught in the midst of warfare between the Japanese and the British forces. The Nagas fought along the side of the Allied forces but in the process, their villages were bombed, people had to be evacuated bringing about mass displacement. Despite floggings, torture, execution and the burning of their villages by the Japanese, the Nagas refused to help the Japanese. The devotion to the British is explained in highest acknowledgement. In the process of rebuilding, the entire social fabric of the Nagas underwent change.

In *A Respectable Women*, Kire addresses through a vulnerable yet patient protagonist and highlights the changes Nagaland saw since the war and how rough its encounter with modernization has been. Kire's characters are bearers of the narrative in a detached and drifting manner. The novel talks of a broken reality and a society still struggling to settle somewhere between the age-old traditions and the modernity slowly seeping into their lives. The novel brings alive the post-war Kohima in a coming of age story of two generation of the Angami-Naga women who make decisions against convention and tribal customs. Kire explores women's journey through these altered realities. The narration in the novel brings out the aged-old practice of oral tradition. It is through this narrative technique Khonuo is able to share her stories that has been erased yet still fresh in her memory. As the narrator says, "It took my mother, Khonuo, exactly forty-five years before she could bring herself to talk about the war." (Kire 2019:3) Through her narration, Khonuo recreates the memory of the people in the decisive Battle of Kohima that has been fought between the Japanese and the British. Though her mother's stories were "without a beginning, a middle, and an end", she stitches together the unforgettable memory of devastation, the loss of home and property and the death of their loved ones. As she narrates her "generation that has seen the devastation of war" and how it is like "to lose everything almost overnight, homes, loved ones and life as [they] knew before the war". (ibid 37). Forty years after the event, Khonuo recreates this moment, stitching together her memories bit by painful bit, for her young daughter, Kevinuo. According to Khonuo, wartime was also a strange time, they saw "some people doing the meanest things and others doing the most noble of actions" (ibid 38)

As memory passes from mother to daughter, the narrative glides seamlessly into the present, a moment in which Nagaland, much transformed, confronts different realities and challenges. Using storytelling traditions so typical of her region, Kire leads the reader gently into a world where history and memory meld-where, through this blurring, a young woman comes to understand the legacy of her parents and her land. Easterine Kire in International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN) writes about her experience of growing up in Nagaland: "Curfews and continued periods of gun-fire were all a part of growing up in Nagaland". Khonuo, through the use of her memory compared her life

before and after the war period. She says “Before the war, no one had even seen an aeroplane. During the war, our skies were filled with all sorts of planes. Some would drop rations, some dropped leaflets, and some others bombed the areas where the Japanese were reported to be camping”(ibid 54). In *A Respectable Woman*, Kire redefines the nuances of respectability for women, in women by women and is successful in making the silenced history heard. The horror of the Kohima War is recounted after forty-five years of muted silence by the mother of the narrator, Khonuo. Kire through her characters of Kevinuo, Khonuo and Beinuo reflects the reality of Angami Women in a close knitted society after the end of war which brought about so much of destruction.

Kire further presents a marginalized perspective of history through a narrative of war in Kohima. In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Dielieno learns about the Battle of Kohima from her mother Nino who tells her of how they had to flee and leave their homes during the war. Her mother described a Kohima which she had never known, “trees and houses bombed out till only black ruins and stumps were all that were left” (Kire 2007:170). Mother tells her of an incident when an officer had entered the house and tried to molest her. Her struggle, along with her sister’s loud cry and the barking of the neighbor’s dog made the officer leave abruptly. She later reported it to her father who identified and got the officer arrested. This prompted a few other women who came forward and confessed that he had tried to molest them too but they were “too scared to tell before”(ibid 170). Through her story, Kire give voice to the women who were abused and silenced. Lieno also observes that Mother always distinguished between life before and after the war. “She made life in Kohima before the sound like a long series of picnics and festive times”(ibid 170). This description of idyllic life is contrasted with life during and after the war. Even ordinary domestic activities in *A Terrible Matriarchy* evoke imageries of a violent past; “Mother baked a cake in the ammunition box that had been left behind during the war by British troops. Almost every house had one of these”(ibid 53) .The visible remnant is manifested in the ammunition-box-turned-cake-tin which they continue to use as a normal part of their present life. Through the memories of the mother therefore, Kire draws our attention to the impact of war on Naga Society, the silence about Naga history in the literary canon as well as the silence about women’s voices in recorded history.

In *Bitter Wormwood*, Mose's entire life is shadowed by war. He joins the Naga Freedom Movement as a soldier to protect his homeland, but is eventually killed by the same movement while trying to save a Bihari Boy, perhaps hinting at the excesses of nationalism in the tragic death of an ardent and faithful nationalist. *Bitter Wormwood* narrates the silences of Indo-Naga conflict and how lives have changed because of decade long freedom struggle. The novel opens to introduce the reader to the present day scene of rampant shooting, refer to factional killing that marred the contemporary Naga Society, far adrift from the freedom struggle to which the first generation belonged. Tracing the life and experience of a person called Mose (short for Moselie) from his birth in 1937 to his fatal death in 2007, it give a glimpse of what it meant to live through one of the longest conflicts of modern history. Retired from active involvement in the movement Mose had taken the back stage to live a low profile life until a wanton killing of a young man just before his eyes in the small town of Kohima brings back memories of the past. At a young age of five Mose experienced the first brutality of war when the Japanese invaded their village. Though Mose vaguely remember his family running for cover from the invader's takeover of their village, "he had one vivid memory of seeing war plane crash with a deafening sound into some rocks at Zubza"(Kire 2011: 24). Later, he and his buddy Neituo would be part of another war that would change their lives forever. Though not of their making, young people like Mose and Neituo found themselves growing up in one of the most disturbing period in Naga history. With the British granting independence to India, the Nagas found themselves at loggerheads with the newly founded nation. For India the Naga Hills was only a colonial legacy but the Nagas asserted their independence and saw the Indian army coming into their land as an occupying force.

Easterine Kire has not only given her readers a glimpse of what may have been the situation back in the 1950s and 60s, but she also offers an opportunity to understand what could have been avoided or grasped. She skillfully weaves the theme of unrest in the Naga Society and the desire to recover from the traumas by suggesting a human need to heal and forgive. Forgiveness can lead the way forward in the relationship between India and Nagas

From the turbulent period of the 1950s and 60s the novel transpose fast forward to the 21st century for Kire to substantiate her point. Mose's Grandson Neibou is now headed to Delhi for studies. And yet, the hostile environment and the stereotypes against people from Northeast in the metropolitan city of Delhi almost derailed Neibou's prospect of continuing his college life, but for the unexpected appearance of a friend named Rakesh. A chance meeting and the discovery of Rakesh's grandfather, a retired army officer, who was posted to Nagaland in the 60s heightened Neibou's curiosity, As the friendship grew Neibou also got opportunities to get an insight of the Indian soldiers on their "punish posting" to Nagaland during the troubled days. The episode of the two young friends in their college campus and their planned visitations to each other's homes is a very well thought plot. In as much as those small steps help build the ties between their families, the novel also suggest that there is need to look to the future with mutual understanding than just hanker after the past misdeeds. And this is one very strong point which the novel tries to put across. The realization that dawns on the two friends, thus, points to the title of the novel too. Bitter Wormwood, the traditional herb believed by Nagas to keep bad spirits away and also used medicinally, therefore becomes a strong metaphor.

Despite the serious topic of the Naga conflict demanding much attention, Easterine Kire did not fail to throw light to the other sides of Naga life too. While the novel looked like a re-telling of the whole episode of the Naga movement with the story spanning across three generations, it gives the readers a chance to go back in time through the lens of the author and understand the culture and the humble country life of the Nagas. The novel transposes us to a time when life was simple and easy. Though tension was building high the people try to enjoy new developments like the evening session of listening to the radio or celebrating the birth in the family. The folk life is finely recreated by the author that one could enjoy that atmosphere which belong to those period. Perhaps, being from the oral tradition of storytelling helps Easterine Kire generate the desired proximity with the past.

Life on Hold captures the growing uncertainty and the confused direction that Naga Nationalism took following the factional break-ups of the Naga underground movement in the eighties. It narrates the silences and ideological differences among the Naga

brethren fighting for freedom. In *Life On Hold*, Nime's blissful life is snatched away by violent insurgency when her childhood friend and lover, Roko, decides to join the Naga Army and shatters her entire life. By narrating a story of two childhood friends, Nime and Roko, whose feeling for each other could not develop into a fruitful union because the boy left to join the Underground movement, the novella unveils the uncertainty that prevails in the Naga struggle. For years, Nime put her life on hold hoping for Roko to come back but it was never to be. The only time she met him alive was when Roko had come to put an end to their relationship because he had become "a condemned man now" and said, "They'll never stop looking for me. All my life, I'll be looking over my shoulder for an assassin. What kind of a life is that for us? Do you want to live the rest of your life as my widow? I have nothing to offer you, Nime, not even my love" (Kire2011: 39). But she wouldn't relent and suggested to "go away somewhere" in other states where she could find a job now that she has a degree. Roko however advised, "Don't say that... Go and marry a good man, have children and forget about me. I could never make you happy. I have already caused you a lot of hurt, you said so yourself" (ibid 39-40). He persisted "... There is no room for woman in my life, there never will be, that's the choice I have had to make. That's why I never wrote to you. I wanted to be dead to you" (ibid 40-41)

Nime married and had children, as Roko wished, but he was the constant nagging thing at the back of her mind. Every time there was killing she fears if he might be among them. With killings becoming more rampant now she knew peace wouldn't return soon in the near future, and all she could do was to pray for a better life for her children so that they don't have to go through what their generation went through. One day she woke up with a bad dream, "it was the same dream she had 14 years ago of finding Roko's lifeless body in the wood" (ibid 98). It was like an ill omen that came true. That same day Setuo called to inform her of the failed coup in the faction where Roko belongs. When Nime saw his body brought home "he looked the same as he had in her dream" (ibid101). After the burial Setuo told Nime of the rendezvous he had with Roko just a few days before the fatal incident. Roko told him, "I've been wrong, Setuo, I've been very wrong. The cause is dead. Most people don't even remember what it was anymore. It has become a contest for power and money, you know. Such a waste,.. Such a waste"(ibid 103).

Life on Hold addresses the serious issue of a greater threat to the peace of the Naga society by elements from within. The divisions caused by misunderstanding and ideological difference along the road are posing bigger threats to the building up of the society and the people. The grim reality that stares at Naga society today, the factional killings in the name of 'Nationalism', has made everyone weary of their future. It is just like the realization that dawned on the young protagonist in Bitter Wormwood, Neibou, after his grandfather was shot dead; he knew that "(his) grandfather was not the first to die in a shooting accident. Nor would he be the last" (Kire 2011:233). And yet, learning from his peace-loving grandfather, he comes to term that violence only breeds violence and the best way to stop that vicious cycle was to forgive..... (ibid 243)

Temsula Ao writes her fiction through the use of memory. She states in her prologue that: "Memory is a tricky thing; it picks and chooses what to preserve and what to discard" (Ao 2006 :ix). According to the author, all history is memory which involves interpretation of the past. Memory is valid for a person who experiences the historical events and is always a synthesis of facts. She tells how the memory of her mother's special curry of sun-dried fish haunts her even after her death. Memory being selective, the author claims that the purpose of her stories is "to re-visit the lives of those whose pain has so far gone unmentioned and unacknowledged (ibid ix). Many of her stories in the prose collection are writers on the background of the brutal bloodshed and tears which sums up the history of the Nagas from the early fifties to the present. Temsula Ao puts it succinctly in the prefatory note of her *These Hills Called Home* collection of what it is like, revisiting memory in pain and tears. She gives the reason for her writing by stating that her stories are not about 'historical facts', neither about 'condemnations' nor on the question of who did this to whom, rather it is about the victims, the loss of lives and trauma of living through the conflict. She articulately points out: "this collection have their genesis in the turbulent years of bloodshed and tears that make up the history of the Nagas from the early fifties to the last century, and their demand for independence from the Indian state. But while the actual struggle remains a backdrop, the thrust of the narratives is to probe how the events of the era have re-structured or even "revolutionized" the Naga psyche. It was as though a great cataclysmic upheaval threw up many realities for the Nagas within which they are struggling to settle for a legitimate

identity. It was almost like birth by fire” (ibid:x).The ‘turbulent years’ in her stories depict the uneasy tensed situation, about the lost historical-cultural connection and they are an attempt to retrieve the same through fictional writing. The whole process of the metaphorical rebirth ‘like birth by fire’ presents the realization on the part of the Nagas how a great change has come over not only in the external world but also the very psyche of the people. Ao’s description of Naga Hills ravaged by the two warring parties: the Indian army and the Naga Nationalist army, is hardly pleasant.

Violence is a recurring theme in the writings of Tamsula Ao. Violence has deeply affected sensibilities, disturbed the psyche of the people and embedded a deep seated urge for writers to communicate through literature. Tamsula Ao’s essays and short stories focuses on the ethnicity harmony using the weapon of literature. Tamsula Ao’s prose writings become poignant portrayals of the human drama that unfolds on the turbulent terrains of Nagaland that was dealing with political disharmony. Nagaland’s ongoing crisis where an underground army is fighting for freedom and sovereignty is reflected in the crisis of her characters. Violence presented in her fiction directly or indirectly influences the fate, the choices and the actions of characters. A very interesting aspect of the book is her choice of the narrative technique. The narration flows in the manner of small disjointed stories, yet connected to each other on the basis of the main theme.

Tamsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a war zone* (2006) discusses the social realities of Nagaland against the backdrop of the troubled relationship between Nagas and India. She writes on the political strife and turmoil of the land, the quest for separate political status and how the villagers survive in such a conflict prone area. Resulting from the agony of suffering and the crisis of politics, she could not hold still and with the help of memory she poured the realities of Nagas at the time of insurgency in her creative work. Many of the stories are about "bloodshed and tears" and it depicts common people who are victimized by the conflicts, violence and politics of the state. Set in the early years of fervent Naga Nationalism there are stories of the unexpected raids and atrocities committed on the innocent Naga Villagers by the Indian Armed Forces, the precocious young girl brutally raped by the soldiers in front of the church and the old man reminiscing his underground days as a Naga Army to his grandson. What endures

the most is the portrayal of how the common people cope with living in an uncertain time, the conflict being far from over. Violence has transformed many innocent people into cruelty. Displacement of the people from their rural habitats to a world of conflicts and confusion in urban settlements constitutes one of the major themes as it had left the Naga disabled in many ways.

The author shares how Nagaland's struggle which started with high idealism of nationalism turned into one of disappointment and disillusionment. Also few stories express how the traditional Naga way of life was becoming irrelevant to the young generations with modernization. Temsula Ao uses satire to resort to capture rampant violence. As she denounces with anger and disgust, she at times ridicules the character under the influence of violence. She cast her experiences into an objective of realist through the medium of literature. The period of political unrest from the point of view of the poor village folk is fittingly described in *The Jungle Major*. It opens a gamut of horrific acts implemented by the Indian army in the name of suppressing the Naga independence movement. This particular village too became a participant in a network which aided the underground outfit with information, food and occasional supply of arms. Many of the young disappeared and their names were spoken only in whispers. There was an overall sense of tension in the atmosphere leading to fear and mutual suspicion. Ao depicts the general sense of insecurity in the following lines: "The houses were ransacked by the security forces, the grain in their barns was burnt and the people themselves were herded into camps away from the village and kept in virtual imprisonment inside areas fenced by bamboo stockades. This form of group incarceration was the infamous "grouping" of villages which the Nagas hated and dreaded even more than bullets. Numerous stories proliferated of women being molested by the security forces and the obstinate ones who refused to give information being severely beaten; not only that, sometimes they would be hung upside down and subjected to unspeakable tortures like chilli powder being rammed into their extremities" (Ao 2006:3) The Indian army perform their duty to take control of the 'law and order situation' by adopting inhuman measures to subdue the rebellion. On the other hand because of such treatments, the villagers began to feel more sympathetic towards the underground forces.

A common element in the stories is the historical setting as the backdrop of the fictional narratives. Naga history is steeped in political turmoil which led to armed Naga insurgency and consequent Indian Army operations which devastated the lives of the common man and changed the entire structure of traditional society. In the stories, though the characters and situations are fictional, the setting is usually some specific historical time period. Temsula Ao's stories are set during the 1950s and 60s Nagaland when insurgency was at its height.

In *An Old Man Remembers*, Ao captures the psychological trauma that haunts the life of old man Sashi which makes him incapable of speaking about his painful past. He has frequent nightmares which prevent him from having sound sleep at night. His 'bad leg', caused by a bullet injury continues to trouble him and the physical pain it causes is a constant reminder of the psychological wounds he carries within him. Therefore, he does not wish to revisit the traumatic experience of losing the innocence of his childhood. He refuses to talk about his past because he believes that it has nothing to offer but pain. The death of his best friend Imli and an unexpected question from his grandson compel him to confront the truth he had been trying to forget. The boy asked "Grandfather, is it true that you and grandfather Imli killed many people when you were in jungle?" (Ao 2006: 92). The old man is 'taken aback'. He is unable to respond immediately, but the boy's query stirs up many painful memories that had been buried for years. It is Imli's visitation after his death which prompts the old man to finally take his grandson's question as a challenge. Reflecting on it, he realizes the truth of his friend's opinion, that "the young had a right to know about the people's history and that they should not grow up ignorant about the unspeakable atrocities that they, the older generations had witnessed" (ibid 93).

Sashi struggled to tell his story because he does not wish to revisit the traumatic experiences of the living memories with his friend Imli. His horrific experiences had affected him in such a way that he no longer felt a sense of worth in himself. He had often wondered if he really "turned into a monster" (ibid 111). His childhood had been snatched away by violence and the old man struggles to identify his boyhood identity. The Indian Army came to their village, bringing death, destruction and disruption of the whole community and turned them into ruthless killers before they were sixteen years of age.

Sashi and Imli were victims caught between the forces of the Indian Army and the Naga underground army. They were forcefully recruited into the Naga Army and taught to use weapons within a year of their displacement in the jungle. They soon found themselves carrying guns instead of schoolbooks. This was the darkness in his life that he had tried to bury. The story highlights the loss of innocence and identity conflict caused by war and violence. The impact of the turbulent times is such that in his old age, the old man is haunted not only by his violent past but more so by the loss of his childhood.

Ao narrates the innermost cry of the sufferings faced by women in conflict. *The Last Song* rings an all too familiar tune of atrocities enacted by the army as a disciplinary act. The context is a Naga village and the victim Apenyo, nicknamed, 'singing beauty' (Ao 2006:25). It was the troubled times, Naga independence movement was gaining momentum by the day. The members of the Naga National Movement were collecting 'taxes' from the villagers every year compulsorily and unknown to all, the government forces were planning a secret operation to demonstrate the entire Naga people of what happens when you 'betray' one's own government. The fateful day was on fall on that particular day of church building dedication and the plan was to arrest all the leaders for their 'crime' of paying taxes to the underground forces. The Sunday dawned bright and cool, the villagers attired in their best assembled at the church. The pastor led the congregation, and Apenyuo with the choir was singing their first number when the sound of gunfire in the distance disrupted the festivities. But the choir continued singing uninterruptedly. Very soon, the approaching soldiers surround the gathering. Just then Apenyuo "burst into her solo number, and not to be outdone by the bravery and foolishness of this young girl, and not wishing to leave her thus exposed, the entire choir burst into a song" (ibid 27) the open act of retaliation anger the soldiers and they begin to prod the pastor and *gaonboras* into their jeep with their rifle butt, some are kicked and assaulted. The crowd overcome by fear began to disperse helter-skelter. Only Apenyuo stood her ground. "she sang on, oblivious of the situation as if an unseen presence was guiding her"(ibid 27). Her mother called her out to stop but she would not. The leader of the army with a 'bemused look' on his face pulls Apenyuo by her hair to be taken to the old church building. "All this while, the girl was heard singing the chorus of her song over and over again" (ibid 28). Perhaps the soldiers had not expected such an open

retaliation, that too coming from a woman. She had to be taught a 'lesson'; she had to be 'muted'. The next scene that unfolds is even more horrifying. The girl's mother Liyani finds the Captain raping her while the few other soldiers watching the act, waited for their turn. Liyani "crazed by what she was witnessing, rushed forward with an animal-like growl as if to haul the man off her daughter's body but a soldier grabbed her and pinned her...bashed her head on the ground several times knocking her head unconscious and raped her dead body" (ibid 28). As the soldiers leave, the Captain sees the villagers coming out to help the mother and the daughter and orders to open fire. Again the villagers run off seeking safety in the old church. The Captain orders the limp dead bodies to be brought to the church porch. He then ordered them to take positions around the church and at his signal; they emptied their guns into the building. The cries of the wounded and the dying proved that even the house of God could not provide them security and save them from the bullets of the crazed soldiers. In the distance too, similar atrocities were taking place (ibid 29). The horror of the scene is unimaginable. The Captain who appeared to have gone mad, orders the church building to be set ablaze. "He snatched the box of matches...But his hands were shaking; he thought he could still hear the tune the young girl was humming as he was ramming himself into her virgin body" (ibid 29). The next morning, after the end of the orgy the villagers arrive at the burnt-out site of the old church building only to see masses of human bones washed clean by the night's rain. On the porch is seen a separate mass of body, Apenyuo's new shawl cloth lying still intact beneath the pile of the mother and daughter's charred bones

Ao vividly describes the untold misery people in conflict areas face, particularly women who become the victims of such warfare. Using the narrative technique of 'a beginning at the end'. Grandmother sitting by the hearth narrates the story of Apenyuo to young college students coming home in December for their winter holidays. Indeed the timing is well placed considering that it was the anniversary night of the Black Sunday. Apenyuo's eerie tune could be heard in a gust of wind and one could hear the song as "it resumes its whirling as though hurrying away to other regions beyond human habitation" (ibid 32). The scene turns uncanny as Grandmother begins her story. The symbolic representation of Apenyuo's shawl lying intact exhibits the undying spirit of a woman like Apenyuo who refuses to bow down under the face of such circumstances.

It is said that literature is a mirror of life and the writer a product of his age. In the postcolonial states, writers use it as a means for personal inquiry. Literature is also a tool for negotiating conflicting cultures to achieve a solid and positive sense of identity. A cursory look at the emerging contemporary Naga Writers in English reflects that it originates from the socio-political conditions prevalent in the society. The writers are naturally informed by the immediate issues that face them as a community. The writers have lived through the turbulent history of the Nagas, and continued to negotiate with the complicated issues of contemporary society. A common element in these stories is the historical setting as the backdrop of the fictional narratives. Naga history is steeped in political turmoil which led to armed Naga insurgency and consequent Indian Army operations which devastated the lives of the common man and changed the entire structure of the traditional society.

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CHAPTER 3

THE INSIDER PERSPECTIVE: COMMUNITY VALUES AND LIFESTYLES

Easterine Kire enjoys a special status in the literary scene of the Nagas because of her meticulous portrayal of socio-cultural life. It also actively engages with the injustice and corruption within Naga society. Easterine Kire brings this out succinctly in her works as she highlights moral values practiced in the midst of tragedy. Easterine Kire movingly portrays the mesmerizing and vivacious Naga culture for the entire world to see, through her creative writings that provoke an allure for its old-age traditions and dazzling folklores from the innermost corner of the mystic state that Nagaland is. *A Terrible Matriarchy* wrestles with issues of social status and the growth of economic class, the distinction between the rich and the poor in a hitherto classless society. There is a clear departure from the image of the pristine Nagas bound to nature in their social, cultural, ethical and religious values in. Against the failings of society are also presented tiny glimpses into the social ethos that cement relationships and bind the community.

The basic social organization of the Naga society is the clan, and it plays a major role. All members of a clan use common name after their personal names. Therefore, the clan relationship is very strong and members act collectively in all activities, be it in village building, construction of clan member's houses, construction of clan dormitories for various age groups, cooperative support during marriages or funeral of clan members, shared responsibilities during wars, ceremonial events, festivals, and so forth. Clan bonds are very rigid and effective in the Naga society. The clan is powerful and its power is vested in the clan elders, "the custodians of the laws of the land" (*Folk Elements* 2000: 17). Clan elders in Easterine Kire's narrative are decision makers and initiator of all rituals. They have duties to instruct and educate younger man on the paths of life. The old way of life for the Nagas also contains wisdom and advices for the younger generations.

Easterine Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered* is the first Naga novel in English. Being a native postcolonial writer, the narrative of Easterine Kire in the novel utilizes the grand narrative of history created by the colonizer as a backdrop and presents the perspective of

the colonized. The novel, therefore, recreates a pre-colonial, pre-Christian world depicting the rich cultural life of the Nagas especially of the people of Khonoma village. The novel tells the story of Khonoma village through one of its three clans, viz., *Merhu*, *Thevo* and *Thepa* clan. People of the *Merhu* clan constitute most of the characters of the novel. It spans through three generations following the lives of Kovi, his nephew Levi and Levi's sons Roko and Sato. The characters lived their culture. They are representative of what the Nagas were before the influence of other cultures which entered their society.

In *A Naga Village Remembered* this clan affiliation of the characters is denoted when a notable character is introduced like "Pelhu of the Merhu clan," (Kire 2003:2) "elders from the *Thepa* clan and the *Thevo* clan" (ibid 16), "The seer of the *Thevo* clan" (ibid 28) and others. It is also seen from the novel that community life of the traditional Angami Nagas began at the clan level. This clan affiliation was so strong that a man was known by the clan to which he belonged, and the clan members took initiatives in matters concerning other clan member. Clan was in fact the main social identity of the Angamis. J. H. Hutton also mentioned this clan affiliation of the Angamis. He writes, "Although the village may be regarded as the unit of the political and religious sides of Angami life, the real unit of the social side is the clan. So distinct is the clan from the village that it forms almost a village in itself, often fortified within the village inside in its own boundaries and not infrequently at variance almost amounting to war with other clans in the same village." (Hutton, 1921: 109)

At the same time, in Angami society family was the smallest unit in a village. According to their custom, "joint family system is not encouraged so that a son after getting married moves away from his parents' home and shoulders his own share of responsibility" (Zetsuvi 2014: 20), while joint family system is a traditional practice found with their neighboring Asamese community and other Hindu communities in most parts of India. This traditional practice of Nagas maintaining nuclear family is well reflected in the novels. In *a Naga Village Remembered*, Piano has two sons and a few days after her elder son Levi married Peno they shifted to a new house.

In the familial set-up, the husband is the head of the family and all major decisions are taken by him while the other members occupied secondary status. Therefore, the pre-colonial Angami society was patriarchal. A story of three generations (*A Naga Village Remembered*) tackled only through male lineage indicates the patrilineal Naga society

Like most pre-moneyed, pre-literate society, the Naga society of the past was a community-centered one. Every individual was dependent on the community for his survival, and in the same way, the community was responsible for the individual members. R. R. Shimray in his book *Origin and Culture of the Nagas* (1985) writes, “One of the most colorful ingredients of the Naga village-states is its “Community Life.” Naga individuals know no other life except that of “community life.” They work in groups, eat in groups and sleep in groups. There is neither individual cultivation nor harvest, no individual house-building, no ‘feast of merit’ by individuals alone and no wooing of girls individually. All things are done in groups and in the full presence of the entire community. The individual has no existence apart from the community” (Shimray 1985:121) Such a scenario may not necessarily exist today, but the ethos of the old days, of clan and village life remain the same. The Angami community life without class hierarchy reflected the egalitarian society that prevailed at that point in their history

A significant event incorporated in *A Naga Village Remembered* which showcases the community life of the Nagas is Keviselie performing feast of merit. Keviselie felt ready to take a title when he “had dreamt of the short-tailed gwi” (Kire 2003:16) and before that he wanted to perform the *Phichupihie*. In fact, *Phichupihie* is the third feast in a sequence of the seven stages in a feast of merit performed by a married Angami man. The first feast is given to his close relatives when a person is able to accumulate sufficient amount of wealth. The second feast is given to the relatives and neighbours. The third was giving feast to the clan elders, and the stage went on with each successive stage more demanding than the previous, and each completed stage entitles the feast giver to show his status rise in the community. The feat of feast of merit is exclusive only to the few privileged men in the society and is beyond the performance of the general public. (Zetsuvi 2014: 51) Therefore, even in the fierce and powerful Khonoma village a feast of merit is a rare occurrence so after Keviselie feasted his village, “The village had not been feasted so

well since Nikerhe's title taking feast, some twenty years ago. But many were too young to remember that" (Kire 2003: 23). Feasting culture was not a unique feature of the Angami Nagas, but a common practice of several pre-moneyed societies.

Another important feature of the pre-colonial Naga society incorporated by Easterine Kire is the institution of the dormitory system generally known as *Morung*. The outermost part of the *Kichuki* formed the *Thehu* or *Thehou*. In *A Naga Village Remembered* Easterine writes: "Are you going to sleep in the *Kichuki* tonight? Vipiano asked her son. "I would like to, Apfu" Levi answered. "Good. Do not spend all your time jesting but do listen to the stories that your parent has to tell."... As he walked up to the male dormitory of his age-group, he crossed another dormitory.... Levi walked on till he reached his dormitory... their parent was saying something in great earnest. "If you are at a community feast and take more than two pieces of meat, shame on you. Others will call you glutton.... This is the key to right living – avoiding excess in anything – be content with your share of land and fields.... Never be arrogant, respect yourself sufficiently so that you fulfil the responsibilities of manhood.... Obscenity of speech does not prove anything, keep that in mind."... Evenings at the dormitory were exciting events when they exchanged stories and were taught by their parent, the elder chosen to be parent for their age-group.... The members of Levi's dormitory... were to be included in the raid this time as an initiation into warriorhood.... (Kire 2003:24, 25 & 34)

A well-functioning dormitory system in Naga society played a crucial role as a social institution. After a day of hard labor in the fields, the young men having cleaned up and had their supper would proceed to the dormitory and spend the night there. It was here that young men were taught different skills in life. It was a power structure that literally controlled every aspect of village life. It was a place of learning and the repository of indigenous knowledge. Another important purpose of the dormitory was that it facilitated quick action from the young men with regard to security. It prepared young men for manhood. "After intensive training and discipline in the *Morung*, they turned out to be good warriors and to be a good warrior was the lifelong aspiration of every young man" (Changkiri 7). In the absence of modern education system, the Nagas had this well-established social institution of the dormitory system. Similar to modern education which

functions by clubbing students into classes and delegating teachers to teach them, in the *Morung*, young men were divided into age groups and *Peyumia* (Angami term for veteran leaders) were assigned for them. At the same time, this age-group system among the Angamis was not confined within the *Morung*, but was employed in all social activities. Each age-group had a foster parent whose name henceforth was used to identify the group. K.S. Zetsuvi writes, “During the village festivals such as *Thekranyi*, the members of this age group get together for recreational activities. Such social occasions are times for fun, enjoyment, singing, laughing, drinking etc. while at work, they work very hard as a unit... These peers remain close at all times and are loyal to each other, helping in times of need and in distress always and every time as an end in itself.” (Zetsuvi 2014: 26)

This age-group system is reflected well by Easterine in *A Naga Village Remembered*. From the moment when the young characters in the novel started attending *Morung*, they are identified by their age-groups, instances like, “Levi and Penyu were on their way home when they heard the hubbub. Several elders were walking out of the village with the oldest age-groups” (Kire 2003:27). “Three weeks to *Thekranyi* from today....Apfu, our age group has earned much this year” (ibid 32), and others. In order to have better insight to this aspect of their religious and belief system during the precolonial period are *genna*, marriage and death rituals:

Genna: “The most important ritual of the Nagas is the *genna* which was observed by an individual, family or village” (Changkiri 2015: 13). During the observance of *genna* works were avoided. They believed that strict observance of *genna* was necessary for health and wealth of the individual and the community and that failing to do so would bring misfortune. So, every individual had to see to it that they did not break this ritual. “Piano knew how important it was to abide by all the rituals and especially the taboos forbidding work.” (Kire 2003: 11) “So the *genna* was death to those who defied it but life to those who abide by it” (ibid 42). So strict were the *gennas* that some were forbidden to even talk to sojourners (ibid 66). *Genna* days were observed by the Nagas for religious reasons to appease spirits which they believed could harm them.

Marriage: Nagas were monogamous and exogamous. Marriages within the same clan were strictly forbidden. Socializing of both sexes was permitted. The ceremony involved

both the boy's and girl's family. An intermediary, preferably a woman, a close relative of the boy would approach the girl's family for their consent. "A few weeks before harvest, his aunt visited the girl's family and they did not hesitate to accept Levi's suit" (*Kire 2003*: 48) This traditional marriage ritual is reflected in *A Naga Village Remembered*: "The next night, Levi's mother invited her brother-in-law home. He took the chicken she kept aside and strangled it and held it fast till it was dead. In death, the chicken's right leg crossed over the left and Viu pronounced it as good ritual" (*Kire 2003*:48). The ceremony ended with feasting. All the rituals were done cautiously as any obstacle was unsolicited in the marriage ceremony.

Funeral rites: During pre-colonial period methods of disposal of dead bodies differ among different Naga tribes. "It was a custom among the Aos, Konyaks, Phoms and Changs to dispose the dead bodies by exposing them on a raised bamboo platform outside the house or place on a bier under a small roof in the village cemetery... They smoked the dead bodies for about two months, after which the dead bodies are kept in wooden coffin till the next sowing," (Changkiri 2015: 14) and only after that they bury the dead body. With the Angamis, they buried the dead body after some days when they finished the needed rituals of washing the corpse, laying it on the bed, covering with his own clothes, digging the grave, making the coffin, and others. These formalities were performed with certain set rules and "all this time the family of the dead man maintain a doleful howling" (Hutton 1921: 226). Moreover, an Angami disposal of dead ritual was not complete without feasting. J.H. Hutton writes that when a man died his, "most intimate friend... brings flesh, rice, and rice beer to the dead man's house... Next day the young men of the deceased's kindred bring cattle, including those of the dead man" (*ibid* 225). An important aspect in the disposal of the dead by the Angamis incorporated in the novels by Easterine is treatment of 'apotia' or unnatural deaths. Among the pre literate Nagas, women who died at childbirth, persons killed by wild animals, suicides and other accidental deaths are considered *apotia* death. J.H. Hutton explains the meaning of *apotia* with its Assamese equivalent 'accidental' or 'causing misfortune' (229). No mourning is allowed and no rituals are performed for such *apotia* death. The first notable event made mention in the novel is the death of Kovi's wife at childbirth. Maternity death is treated differently by different pre-literate societies. Dying at

childbirth called *lashu* death by the Nagas was considered to be the most abominable. Kovi's sister Piano remembers her sister-in-law as a good, hardworking, pious person and someone who never breaks taboos, and is therefore unable to comprehend why she met such a tragic end. About Piano's uncertainty in Kovi's wife fate, Vizovono Elizabeth writes, "The uncertainty of life and death is a mystery that is left unexplained in her simple world view ... her confusion is indicative of the fact that in spite of religiously observing the traditional rituals and taboos there were mysteries that the indigenous religion could not provide answers to and certain things like matters of life and death remained unexplained. She experiences the situation but is unable to analyze the mystery behind death" (Elizabeth 2017:30-31). This uncertainty, among others, could have been an important factor behind the Nagas conversion to Christianity as the old religion could not provide the answer for such twists of fate.

Easterine has drawn heavily from the memories of oral narrators and based many events from true incidents. About *A Naga Village Remembered*, Easterine Kire says that the novel is "set in 1850s to about 1900s and goes as far back as the memory of my oral narrators could take us." (qtd. in Elizabeth and Tsuren 2017: 27). In doing so, she presents an account of the Naga past society from the perspective of her people. Incidentally, by presenting such stories wherein Nagas survive in their own land without assistance from outside cultures, Easterine Kire in turn makes her political stand that her people were self-reliant and self-sufficient and need no one to govern them. Their rituals and beliefs, their reverence for the land, the close knit communities, the life lived in harmony with their natural surroundings reflect the survival of the Naga society on its own.

Easterine in *A Naga Village Remembered*, *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), *Mari* (2010) and *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007) showcases how colonialism ushered changes in the Naga society. She focuses on the everyday life of ordinary Nagas during colonialism and thereby presents an insider's story of the impact of colonialism on the society. With the prospects of higher education which enabled the Nagas to secure government jobs, as by this time Nagas were already introduced to moneyed economy and the realization of the benefit of salaried jobs over their traditional cultivation of land, some Nagas began to

embrace the new way of living that is the new religion, Christianity. In 1937, Mose in *Bitter Wormwood* was born to a simple agrarian family. He was born in the field shed without any assistance. After the birthing, the mother went home with her new born child which was an hour and a half away. “Their neighbors were not surprised when they saw Vilau walking past their fields with the baby. Women birthing while out in the fields was not an uncommon phenomenon in those days”(Kire 2011:15). By the early 1940s, Mose attended school but his family continued to adhere to their traditional beliefs and customs. At the same time, with a school going child the family was gradually introduced to modernity in the form of purchasing a radio, and Mose feeding them with little news around the world which he learnt from others at school and from the radio. Apart from those fragmented news of the outside world, the village society continued to strive in its own traditional way of everyday life

In the novel *Mari*, Mari and her family in Kohima town lived a different kind of life from that of Mose’s family in *Bitter Wormwood*, although both the novels are contemporaries. Mari’s father was an officer who worked directly under the then Deputy Commissioner, Charles Pawsey. Moreover, Mari’s sister-in-law was also an educated woman and all the siblings were attending school. While Mari’s families were already Christians at the opening of the novel, some Nagas still followed their traditional practices. Anyie lived in Kohima village. She and our other relatives would visit us all the time, bringing news of happenings in the village. ‘It’s genna day today.’ She announced that day. ‘Is it a fire genna day or a water genna day?’ Mother asked her. The genna days were no-work days when it was taboo to work in the fields or woods. They were very important in the old religion. ‘A fire genna,’ Anyie replied.... Though we were Christian, we abided by these cultural practices in order to live in harmony with the non-Christians. Anyie Kereikieu was not Christian. (Kire 2011:5&6) Here the narrator asserts that they abide by the old cultural practices in order to live in harmony with the non-Christians, and this, in the years to come, could be the reason as to why the Nagas incorporated many of their cultural practices into Christianity. As the narration progresses, the old and new world view is reflected upon:

‘How old is Aviu now?’ she asked my mother,... I was cleaning rice in a winnowing mat, and hoped she wouldn’t notice that I hadn’t tied a scarf around my head like she always told us to do. ‘She turned sixteen last month,’ Mother replied. Anyie looked at me again and said, ‘Hmm, at her age, I was already married and a mother of one.’ ‘Times have changed, Akieu,’ said mother mildly. “The children want to be educated before they think of marriage.’ ‘Yes,’ Anyie agreed, but I knew that deep down she thought that educating girls was a waste of time, as did most of the non-Christians. In the Naga culture, the woman’s role was to look after the house and children, and nothing beyond that. (ibid 6)

In *Mari*, the benefits of education and government jobs are apparent. During World War II with the impending Japanese invasion of Kohima, Mari and her sisters could flee and stay with their father in Shillong while many could not afford such a move and so suffered the destructive war in their land. Also, in *Bitter Wormwood* and *Mari*, Easterine Kire narrates stories of people from the same community and show how the people lived remarkably different lives. In *Bitter Wormwood*, the characters are found toiling every day in their fields and children playing with mud pellets. On the other hand, in *Mari*, fathers are busy going to offices; houses look beautiful with flowers blooming and children helping their mothers baking cake.

Western education eradicated many of the traditional Naga beliefs and practices. It is also one of the main reasons for the disappearance of the *Morung*. In fact, it was that section of the society who embraced Christianity and gave up their old belief system who received western education first. However, the new system of education was brought in such a way that they looked down on the traditional values. “The educated class abandoned their traditional hair cut, wore western dress and there was also a change in their food habit, mental outlook etc” (Zetsuvi 2014: 83). At this juncture, the Nagas had lost their identity to a great extent, unknowingly though. Easterine Kire’s works suggests that with education and Christianity the Naga society was inevitably geared towards modernization, development and a wider outlook, but there were many elements among the old ways upheld by the traditional Naga society but which went against the dictates of their new faith, and so were abandoned. In the old Naga society, the social structure, their indigenous faith and their village community were closely interlinked and played a very

important role in their lives and it can be said that their entire worldview was structured by these. With Christianity and western education the Naga society got transformed into what Temsula Ao aptly puts:

Then came a new religion and a new system of knowledge whose main preaching worked directly against the essential core of our 'being'. Being a Naga then in the way we thought of ourselves, was held out to be negative. Even those who embraced the new faith and followed the new education were condescended to, given a pat on the back and given stipends and scholarships. Slowly but surely a new breed of Nagas was emerging, who rejected the old ways and who sought new identification apart from the tradition and culture of the fore-fathers. At this stage of our history, being a Naga became an apologetic acknowledgement of a seemingly inferior individual. (Ao 2000:4)

The colonizers indeed succeeded in ending inter-village feuds and raids which was a common occurrence with the Nagas in the pre-colonial era. However, the peace the colonialists provided the Nagas was short lived. They were introduced to a more fierce and destructive wars; the first and second World Wars. The historical events of World War I & II were directly experienced by the Nagas during this period. The latter, in particular, as it was fought in the Naga territory, had a great impact on the lives of the Nagas. Easterine Kire asserts that the Nagas have very little memory of what they were doing before the war years. It was such a momentous chapter in their life that even years after the war, its impact on the life of the people resurfaced in many forms. In *A Terrible Matriarchy* Lieno's mother baked cake in an ammunition box left behind by the British troops. Even when old people tell the young of their early life it begins with the white men. For instance, "Mother had many memories of the war. Of being evacuated from Kohima and travelling to Dimapur in an army convoy ... returning home in June only to find that their home was too ruined by the shelling to live in... They watched while the men buried decomposing Japanese soldiers before they could continue with their work of rebuilding the village and town" (Kire 2007:170). Slowly but surely, the lives of the Nagas had changed under the British. Their transformation took place to the extent wherein they had to reinvent themselves in order to look like native Nagas again. This is found in *Mari*, when Mari and her siblings fled Kohima during the Second World War to

Chieswema village “My brother and his-inlaws were being given Naga haircuts...Instead of trousers, he wore the black kilt... The rest of us had changed out of our dresses and we wore faded woven Angami waistclothes” (Kire 2007:58-59). The impact of colonialism on the Naga society was so great that it became a defining chapter in their lives. The Nagas were no longer able to define themselves without those elements of colonial influences in their society. Therefore, the end of colonization marked the beginning of a total new era for the Naga society.

The authority of the village-state of bygone days now no longer exists in modern Naga society. In *A Naga Village Remembered* when Levi was accidentally killed by his friend Penyu in their hunting trip, “Penyu went away to the village of Bakiria, beginning the customary exile for seven years to atone for accidental killing” (Kire 2003:112). Likewise, under the British rule “Criminal laws were very harsh... Thieves were sent to Tezpur to serve long sentences. Murderers were hanged” (Kire2010: 9). Now in modern Naga society “The killers are too smart. In any case no onedares to catch them... Everyone is afraid of them... Everyone is sick of it, all these killings. But no one has the guts to do anything about it” (Kire 2011:9). The modern Naga society covered in the selected novels by Easterine was a period of turmoil.

In *Bitter Wormwood*, *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *Life on Hold*, Easterine clearly reflects on the modern Naga society. The Naga society after India got her independence was greatly shaped by their struggle for independence from the Indian sub-continent. Although touched upon in the previous chapter, it is relevant to reiterate the history that initiated Naga nationalism which would affect all aspects of their social life. Scholars opine that Naga nationalism was the direct outcome of British colonialism. Nagas are a patriotic lot, they fought whoever they deemed was a treat to their existence. They have not given up fighting those who try to dominate them. This, however, was done at village level in earlier days. Even though they had a very close-knit community feeling and solidarity, it was limited to the village level. Inter-village wars justify the absence of collective identity amongst the Nagas prior to the British incursion to their land. Mar Imsong writes, “The impact of colonialism in the formation of ethnic Naga identity is an important area... Colonialism or colonial experiences played a pivotal role in creating,

recreating, and rejuvenating ethnic Naga identity” (Imsong 2007: 55). He also writes, “It is true that the ethnic Naga identity as a nation, or Naga nationalism, was a seed unintentionally planted by the British administration because of its policy of Administration and Communication, but the Naga intellectuals further nurtured it in the 1940s” (ibid 109). The Nagas strongly nurtured this nationalism that within the approximately fifty years covered by Easterine Kire in her novels, the Naga society had greatly transformed on all fronts. This national movement of the Nagas, a movement so big that it stirred the entire societal paradigm of the people is studied here. It is not the intention of this research to delineate on the politics that had shaped the Naga national movement, though. Still, some basic and conflicting ideologies of both India and Nagas are given space in the following paragraphs in order to better understand Easterine’s interpretations of these issues. As she writes in *Mari*, “It was around this time that there was political unrest in Nagaland. Letters from home were full of the tense situation and about the Indian army’s killing of many Nagas who were fighting for independence from India. The situation became so serious that after a few months my family wrote to say that they were travelling to Assam to live with me till the worst was over” (Kire 2010: 143). The situation was so tense that many fled Nagaland to more peaceful places. The tense situation is also described by Easterine Kire in *Bitter Wormwood*, “No one dared venture out on curfew nights. Even the drunks stayed home and drank in the safety of their houses. School was very unstable, closing frequently for days at a time. Sporadic shooting broke out...” (Kire 2011:67).

Nagaland became a state in 1963 but did not really bring peace for the Nagas. In fact, it complicated the struggle for independence to another level. With regard to the Naga struggle for independence the selected works show Easterine Kire as a supporter of her people’s struggle for independence. There is no instance in her work that maintains skepticism towards Nagas fighting for sovereignty, as the Nagas were self-reliant and independent in the pre-colonial era in spite of their relative smallness in territory when compared with other nations. However, it is the later developments within the Naga freedom struggle, different ideologies, factionalism, after the attainment of statehood which greatly affected Easterine Kire in her view towards the Naga struggle. The consequence of the birth of factions within the Naga army in the 1980s was that the

Nagas were forced to keep everything in abeyance, except pain and suffering in the name of fighting for independence. Every household, even those not directly involved was affected by the infighting. The Nagas have been fighting against the Indian government for decades, but their situation deteriorated with the infighting. In *Life on Hold*: ““Very young,” said Bounuo’s husband in a low voice, “They are as young as 19 or 20. They never beg for food. They demand it. Oh, so different from the older groups that asked politely for a little rice or meat...” (Kire 2011:20) In *Bitter Wormwood*, as the narration progressed Mose retired from the underground army and ran a shop to support his family. He became a passive spectator of the conflict with which he could not delink from. One afternoon, when Mose was alone in his shop, two young men attacked him and called out, “Traitors! You and your kind have sold out the cause. This is just the beginning. Next time it will be worse!” (Kire 2011:139) It was indeed worse the next time. Mose, who had spent his youth for Naga freedom lost his life from the bullet of his own people.

This infighting amongst the Naga freedom fighters affected every aspect of Naga society. This is seen in *Life on Hold*. Nime’s father is a businessman and they could manage well with her father’s earning. However, with underground parties wanting their share in people’s hard earned money, business was not profiting. It was not due to the lack of customers, but “the extortions were ruining the tradesmen” (Kire 2011:11) Pusalie, Nime’s father is deeply in debt from borrowing large sums of money. Yet he found himself too old to look for jobs, and business being the only livelihood he knew he tries his luck by traveling to different places as far as Assam to find business partners. Every step he takes failed because of the involvement of the underground extortionists. After several years of painstaking attempts Pusalie realizes that it is the end for him. This realization does not result in him changing his way of earning, but in mental breakdown. He suffers from delusional disorder due to which he is in need of constant care. Far from earning for the family Pusalie is now totally dependent on others. After suffering from this madness for some time he meets his death, not from his illness but at the hands of the underground army.

It is not just the economic life of families that is affected by the underground involvements in people's business, it also led to the breaking down of familial ties. Due to his heavy debts his brother-in-law Neiketouzo turns hard on Pusalie which results in halting the visits between the two families. Extortion continued even in the late 1990s, Nime's husband, Abeiu, a successful businessman based in Dimapur also becomes a target: "Lately, Abeiu had been troubled by some National workers who wanted him to pay "taxes" to their organisation. It was an exorbitant amount of two lakh rupees...." (*Kire:2011* 83) Abeiu is fortunate to be able to negotiate to lower the amount and the time frame for him to pay. Others are not as lucky as him. His uncle reminds him of the man "whose truck was burnt as a lesson for refusing to pay tax" (*ibid* 85). Also, There was a growing number of men like Pusalie. Middle-aged men who had earlier been successful at their business were now forced to borrow money to keep their business going. "Tax collections," as the extortions were politely called, took away their profits, leaving them poorer than when they had started out. (*ibid* 31 & 32)

Today, extortion, bribing, nepotism, corruption and the likes are found in insurgency infested Nagaland and other parts of Northeast India. The underground army controls business and activities of the government including job recruitment to a very great extent, the government officials are no less corrupt, and the people must pay bribe to get their things done. It is therefore almost impossible for a common man who does not have any good connection and money to get on in life. In the novella Zeu tells Nime and his mother about the interview he attended: "There were 150 applicants for two vacancies. When the interviews were over, I overheard one of the experts laughing, "Two jobs and 150 applicants. I guess the Underground will get 148 new members tomorrow.' I know he was only joking but there is a lot of truth in there. I know that Shekato and Neituo got appointed because they bribed the Minister with one lakh each." (*ibid* 36)

Another important aspect in Easterine's interpretation of Naga conflict is a dialogic discourse. She acknowledges the virtue and vice of both India and Nagas in her writings. While condemning the atrocities meted out to the Nagas by the Indian army she also tells

the Indian side of the story in *Bitter Wormwood* through the character of Himmat, an ex-army officer posted at Nagaland during the 1960s. Himmat narrates:

We left with very high morale, believing we were going off on a mission to save the country... War is a dreadful thing *beta*, it blinds you to the horror of what you are doing... The feeling of deep vulnerability never left us in Nagaland... We felt alienated because we entered Nagaland with the understanding that the Nagas were fellow Indians but the truth was that the Nagas looked completely different and obviously hated our presence there. Sadly, some of the soldiers posted there suffered serious psychological disorders... They were always under pressure from the constant tension caused by the atmosphere of alienation. It proved to be too traumatic for them. This is probably one reason for the great numbers of military atrocities committed by the army.... (Kire 2011: 196 – 200)

Here Easterine Kire acknowledges that the intention of India was to prevent secession of the Nagas from India as according to them they were part of the Indian Union. She is persistent in sensitizing the world about the real situation of the Nagas.

However, amidst the political unrest that greatly affected their everyday livelihood, by 1947, the Nagas lived a relatively advanced life with education and money economy and other facets of modernization. In *Bitter Wormwood*, “In 1947, Mose proudly went to the third grade having passed his exams... The school was moved to a new location, the former hospital in town... The thatch houses became a thing of the past” (Kire 2011: 28). On the other hand, the basic social life was still deeply traditional in a sense that majority of them were agrarian and lived in a very close knit society.

In fact the historical circumstances around the world like the Second World War, and India’s independence of 1947, inevitably exposed the Nagas towards a wider outlook. Therefore, the old and the new way of life prevailed simultaneously. Some stringent laws that were once strictly abided by the Nagas no longer hold their grasp. *Genna* days were no longer observed, instead Sunday was regarded as no work day and worship services were held at churches. Christmas, New Year, Easter and other Christian festivals replaced old Naga festivals like *Kelipie*, *Sekrenyi* and others. Young men and women were now

permitted to marry anybody of their choice even if they belonged to the same clan. In *Bitter Wormwood* “Neituo...had married a girl from his clan” (Kire 2011:111). Naga society at this point was already functioning with a strong Christianised world view. This change was witnessed in the manner in which funerals are conducted in *A Terrible Matriarchy*. When Petekhrietuo died the Pastor came and conducted Christian rites of burial for him.

A close scrutiny of the above excerpt reflects that Christianity is meticulously appropriated in Naga culture and tradition. Their cultural practices now are an amalgamation of elements of Christianity and traditional Naga customs. Mourning deaths is a practice followed by Nagas from traditional times except for *apotia* deaths. In the modern milieu, they continue the mourning; women wailing and crying, relatives coming together to observe the last rite of the deceased, but Christian hymns are sung and the Pastor conducts the funeral while consoling the bereaved family. This is the case with marriage ceremony too. Most of the formalities are carried out in a way traditionally followed by the Nagas, like, the young man’s family sending a female delegate to make an offer of marriage to the girl’s family, as in *A Terrible Matriarchy* “My Aunt Bino, accompanied Grandmother on her one visit to the girl’s family,” (Kire 2007:207) and the ceremony completed by feast as in Vini’s wedding in the same novel, “Vini had a grand wedding, grand by our standards because they killed five cows and a *gwi*.” (ibid 207) However, the actual wedding is solemnized by a Pastor. In the traditional Angami society, marriage rituals were observed in all seriousness and it was a custom to bless the newly married couple for their prosperous future. Easterine writes that proclamation of blessings was one of the marriage customs from the old religion that they still observed “but the words of blessing were now treated lightly” (ibid211).

These instances and others reflect that Nagas appropriated Christian culture into their tradition in modern times. Easterine Kire showcases how Christianity transformed Naga society from a traditional to a Christianized one. At the same time, throughout the narratives she asserts that the Naga conversion to Christianity and their incorporation of western ideologies into their society did not necessary transform them into a new people. They still retained their basic cultural identity as Nagas. They might have replaced their

belief systems and some traditional practices with new ones, but they also maintained certain basic systems which they still observed. Maintaining nuclear family is a case in point. All the three brothers of Lieno in *A Terrible Matriarchy* shifted to new houses once they married. Though this may be a logical thing to do, practiced already by many people, for the Nagas, this practice was one inherited through tradition.

Easterine's interpretation of her people's unchanged identity is also found in their belief that the soul of dead persons lingered on. In *A Terrible Matriarchy* when Grandmother died Bano, Delieno and others witnessed the presence of her ghost in her old house until they 'right the wrong' by bequeathing the house to Bano. Easterine does this with a comical touch that while reflecting other facets of social reality they add humour to the narration. This superstitious belief in fact reflects the old Naga beliefs of spirits. Concerning the Nagas superstition J. H. Hutton writes, "To enumerate the various superstitions of the Angamis would fill a book in itself" (Hutton 1921: 251). So, if belief system is one of the main characteristics of people's collective identity, as posited earlier in the chapter, than the Nagas though greatly altered, remained the same. As Mar Imsong writes, "The Naga traditional spirituality persisted in many forms even after they became Christians" (Imsong 2007: 139).

Again, in the modern Naga society the aspiration of the young Nagas for salaried jobs is another important factor. Nagas were, as already mentioned, principally agrarian. However, various political factors and their growth in population in urban areas changed their economy. With the changes in their land relations, moneyed economy became much more profitable for the Nagas than their traditional agricultural economy. Therefore, parents sent their children to school, as school education provided the needed qualification for salaried jobs. In the stories, all the children within school going age are found attending schools. This education system in turn opened equal opportunities for both men and women to earn their living even though there was gender bias in this system.

In *Bitter Wormwood*, *Life on Hold*, *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *Mari*, Easterine Kire's interprets the modern Naga society denoting that life was joyous and happy only for young and innocent children but became miserable when they grow up. The lives of all

grown-up characters are full of predicaments and hardships. Their political uncertainty and their insecure future engulfed every aspect of their society. For many of them life become an impasse. All these are because of the rampant factional killings and the inherent cultural loss of the Naga society.

Easterine Kire acknowledges the circumstances evolving in the Naga society at that point in time. The inevitable influences of other cultures ushered developments in many fronts of the society as was done by western education. At the same time, she is concerned with the cultural loss. She incorporates the inherent social evil found in the Naga society like domestic violence, neighborhood gossips, poor health and untimely death, poverty and others. Each family found in her works have had their share of problems; some go to the extent of fighting inside the house as in Lieno's family while some are cast out from the house as in Levi's family. At the same time, many of the characters portrayed in the novels are very unhealthy. Gossip mongers and superstitious beliefs in the society are not spared. Lastly, poverty can be said to be the main problem of most of the people found in her works.

Another social evil found in Naga society depicted by Easterine Kire in her works is alcoholism. The abuse of alcohol is found to be present in the Naga society from pre-colonial period to modern times as far as Easterine Kire's writings are concerned. Roko in *A Naga Village Remembered* is a heavy drinker. When he is drunk "he spoke with that tone in his voice, a quiet dangerous snarl" (Kire 2003: 96) and his antagonism towards his younger brother, Sato surfaced. This hampers the bond between the two brothers and their family ties. Another instance of alcohol abuse is found in the character of Vini in *A Terrible Matriarchy*. Vini's alcoholism greatly upset his family. His father's efforts to better him are in vain, his mother's health deteriorated because of his bad habits and his relationship with his siblings turns sour. His family thought that marriage would tame him, but it was not so, "Vini was dead drunk on the night his wife delivered a healthy eight pound baby boy" (Kire 2007:215).

Temsula Ao's "The Pot Maker" from *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, deals with the theme of conflict between the individual and community. This is further complicated by the changes in society leading to conflict between the tradition

and modernity. The village setting sets the tone for the community based society where each is interdependent on the other for survival. Tradition still holds sway over the lives of the individuals and it is evident that the communal spirit is always superior to individual will. The changing values and its effect on traditional way of life are portrayed through the conflict between the protagonist Sentila who desires to become an expert pot maker, and her mother Arenla who refuses to teach her the craft. This conflict between mother and daughter is symbolic of the conflict between tradition and modernity. Sentila is representative of the younger generation who has thirst for reclaiming cultural knowledge. Arenla exemplified the confused state of identity conflict faced by those living during a time of cultural transition. The conflict between them results in a strain on their relationship. Temsula Ao points out the importance of the cultural value that guided communities and sustained them. She is concerned about the need to record and keep them alive. But in the process she also demonstrates the struggles that individuals have to undergo in the face of rapid social change. Due to the change in lifestyle and changing values, Naga today face a situation which is characterized in Arenla. The need for attaining economic prosperity in the competitive and increasingly urban setting continues to overshadow the value of cultural heritage. At the same time, tradition still has a stronghold on community life. Arenla's character illustrates the way such changes affect the lives of individuals. In her own way, she was in the quest for a meaningful existence by holding on to her individual aspiration. Unfortunately, she failed to negotiate the struggles involved in learning to accommodate new idea without losing her sense of tradition.

In interpreting the social reality of the Nagas from pre-colonial to modern times, Easterine indicates that the Nagas society has gone through a series of changes and is far from perfect; many aspects of the social evils are generated by the Nagas themselves. The various historical, political and economic changes ushered modernization into the society, but they also brought about certain unwanted elements such as the rejection of their old cultural values by the younger generation in particular. Easterine's writings of the past, and modern Naga society when compared shows a sense of nostalgia for the past. The pre-colonial society indicates a certain order while the modern society she portrays is chaotic. She has glorified the past society and posits that her people lost

many of their good values with the onslaught of modernization. A cursory examination of the emerging contemporary Naga Writers in English reveals that it stems from the socio-political conditions prevalent in the society. The writers are naturally informed by the immediate issues that they face as a community. The authors have lived through the Nagas' turbulent history and have continued to grapple with the complicated issues of contemporary society.

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CHAPTER 4

INTERNAL GAZE ON SOCIAL REALITIES: WOMEN AND SOCIETY

The status of women across all societies has, no doubt, improved considerably. However, we are yet to arrive at and achieve uniformity/equality in all sectors of social and political participation. Although Indian society, which is deeply entrenched in patriarchy, struggles to recognize the contributions and capabilities of women, contemporary women are beginning to change the normative narrative across academics and administration. This is a welcome change. This change in narrative is visible among Naga women in their fight against and resistance to patriarchy, particularly to find a position in the political process. What is remarkable is that the struggle, which is centuries old, is steadily achieving a voice of recognition, an immediate example being the 2018 state elections in which women candidates contested and represented the political process. This indicates that Naga women have begun to take on positions in the social, economic and political process. Changkija discusses the success stories of Contemporary Naga women as they successfully manage to carve a niche in society through honest and capable contributions. Changkija says:

Being precluded from inheriting land, Naga women have taken to education with Missionary zeal. Today, Naga women excel in the public and private spheres academically, intellectually and to a certain extend economically — this is frightening to the Naga male, who continues to expect the woman to be dependent on him. The new Naga woman is very different from our subservient grandmothers, which is truly frightening to the Naga male, who has failed to and /or refuses to understand and appreciate how much the world has changed from the days of British colonials and American missionaries" (Changkija, 'Equality's time has come, ' The Indian Express)

A close reading of the novel *A Terrible Matriarchy* shows that the grandmother is a suitable example and reference for 'subservient grandmothers' whose values contradict the approach of the 'new Naga Woman'. In the novel, Dielieno's grandmother embodies matriarchal hegemony. However, if we take a close look at the Grandmother's narrative,

we see that the power she exerts on the young female protagonist is primarily owing to a fear of society rather than a contribution to the community's cultural values.

Similarly to every patriarchal society, a Naga woman's role is very restricted, and hence her space is limited. An indigenous Naga woman is twice subjugated: by the patriarchal social system on the one hand, and on the other, by the stringent tribal laws and customs that restricts her participation in larger social activities by limiting her resources and opportunities. This inaccessibility and lack of participation mainly stems from tribal laws and customs that are ironically defined and framed exclusively by male members /elders in society. This naturally leaves little room for debate or conversation as it reflects an exclusive one-sided approach and also clearly shows how the customary laws directly reinforce patriarchy.

Naga women, as compared to their mainland counterparts, enjoy certain privileges, as they do not have to adhere to certain rigid customs and practices. The geographical location, religion, and mainly tribal laws and customs contribute to the disparities between Naga women and their mainland counterparts. However, the extent of Naga women's freedom is not inclusive as it fails to cater to their opportunities beyond a few spaces (mostly the domestic space). While women from the mainland deal with the social evils such as the practices of dowry, female infanticide, domestic violence and the caste system, tribal or Naga women are marginalized politically and economically as they are barred from access to resources allocated by the state and central governments, which since time immemorial, which are exclusive domain of men. The position of Naga women and their mainland counterparts shows that democracy in its truest form impacts and affects only one gender.

Naga women have seamlessly exceeded their counterparts. Besides creative outputs, what is commendable is that Naga women are presently committed to offering publishing platform and opportunities to young emerging writers. Local Publishing houses such as *Barkweaver*, *Heritage Publishing House* and *Penthrill Publication House* are led by women and are working towards encouraging creative literary production by young emerging writers from the state. There are a few noteworthy contributions to Naga society, customs and tradition by the earlier generation of male writers. However, in

terms of creative writing (fiction and poetry) there is still an evident gap. In the recent past, we have seen a gradual contribution by young male Naga writers such as Sentilong Ozukum, Nzan Kikon, Wedekhro Naro. However, compared to the literacy contributions of Naga women writers, it is quite right to state that women writers write out of passion. Easterine Kire and Temsula Ao give us another perspective. Kire and Temsula Ao share an understanding that the lack of opportunities for Naga women in social, political and economic aspects as well as in decision making are reasons for their passing creative writing. Similarly, Easterine Kire says, "Naga women today are far better off than their counterparts 50 years ago.... Today there are educated and successful women in every field. Indeed, literary pursuits have become a popular vocation among the women". (quoted in Hanghal 'A writer born from the shadow of violence,' the citizen). Hence it is very timely that the creative works of Naga women writers are being recognized, and equally important that their narratives are understood, as they are often deeply rooted in the history of the community. The roles of both men and women are important in society but customs and traditions do not give women equal rights. The traditional idea of women being confined to the house-hold activities has an important effect also on the thinking and attitude of both men and women. Some of the traditions and customs that are followed or practiced were for the benefit of women but such traditions sometimes were the cause of discrimination against them. Tradition and customs are based on myths and beliefs. The consequences of disobeying such laws were met with heavy penalties, sometimes to the extent of being ostracized from the society or even death. At every step of their life, women were controlled, not by law but by custom. The general view that women in tribal society enjoy equal status with that of man holds true for the village people but when it comes to the working of the customary law in the society, women do not enjoy equal rights as that of men. In many instances, women's roles and status were determined by social institutions and norms ideologies and taboos. (Vitso 58)

Easterine Kire's A Respectable Woman represents the psyche of the Naga community during and after the 1944 Kohima War. It also explore women's journey through the harsh realities of life in a patriarchal society. They bring to light the underbelly of society in transition – one that is reluctant to cast off traditional ways even as it entangles itself in the problems of the modern world. In *A Respectable Woman*, the victimization and

oppression of woman in a patriarchal society is portrayed through the character of Beinuo who was subjugated and oppressed by the conventional roles of the society. From her childhood, Beinuo was forced to take care of the household chores at the same time pursue her education. After she completed her study she soon got a job, but she was made to leave the job when she got married to Meselhou. As it is taught for women to look after her husband and household chores and to rely on their husband for financial support, and are never encouraged to pursue their careers or follow their dreams. Moreover, in this kind of male dominated society, women are objectified in such a way that they are treated as 'property' for their husbands. Beinuo was referred as a property – “My family is my property. I'll do what I like” (Kire 2019: 145) and was ill-treated by her husband. Soon after their marriage, Meselhuo started beating her, but when she wanted to free herself from her husband because of the ill treatment, she did not seek any help from anyone – “I kept avoiding you because I was afraid you would find me some day with bruises or a black eye”, “...I was afraid to tell you because you would...insist that I leave him” (ibid 139), “I did try once but I was already pregnant with Uvi...” (ibid 140). The conventions of society compel women to be so dependent on men that it becomes extremely difficult for them to make decisions about leaving their husbands. Even though, it was possible for women to get out of abusive marriage, Beinuo held back herself, firstly, because she was afraid that she would be criticized as failure as a wife by the society – “I was so afraid that others would condemn me”. Secondly, she cared about Uvi, her daughter as it would affect her all her life. Thirdly, she was intimidated by her husband that he would kill her and her baby if she ever left him – “...he threatened to find us both and kill us if I ever left him. I will kill your baby in front of you...” (ibid140). Moreover, when her second baby died of sickness, Beinuo was blamed for losing the baby by her husband and gave a beating of her life – “He blamed me for losing Uvi's brother” (ibid139). Then she was pushed down the steps by her husband that resulted in fractured skull and broken ribs, and soon she died in the hospital. Despite Beinuo dying a terrible death, she was not avenged even by her own families, as being a girl she was not considered to be of much importance by them – “Beinuo had no brothers. But in the absence of brothers, her male cousins could have stepped forward...Even her father had every right to do that. But he did not.”(ibid 148), “Even without the option of sending Meselhou to prison her father

could have brought a case against him (Meselhou) by making an appeal to the elders. He didn't do that." (ibid 149). Beinu was confined in an unhealthy patriarchal society, a society that accepted Meselhou's cruel behavior towards his wife. Beinu likewise became a product of objectification, was treated as a property of her husband and along with it she became a victim of abuse by her husband that finally led her to her death but she is not given any justice by the society. She was devoid of her dignity even after her pre-mature death. Women in a patriarchal society often become a product of abuse which in some cases leads to their death but are often overlooked based on the superior treatment of males in the society. Beinu's character is the personification of the evils of patriarchy and its annihilation of a woman. A woman is not considered a 'human being' in such a space.

On the other hand, Kevinuo as a woman also faces certain challenges in a patriarchal society because of the tradition and conventional norms. She was often criticized by the society including her relatives and family for being unmarried especially, when Beinu got married, Kevinuo was pressured by her father's relatives to get married too – "Don't put it off too long. You modern girls want to wait and wait but if you wait too long, you'll find out no one wants an old maid." (ibid 121) Here, we see how the society perceives woman as a 'maid' who is supposed to do all household works at home, and after marriage they are bound to take care of the husband, children and all other domestic activities. Women are always confined within the domestic realm and are never encouraged to pursue their dreams or to take part outside, in the men's world. Moreover, there were always others who would keep pressuring women to get married especially at family gatherings and friends' weddings, likewise Kevinuo as a woman often had to hear things like – "There is a time for everything. In a person's life, there is a time to marry. It is good to marry when the time is right for it" (ibid 122) This clearly reflects the attitude of the society towards women in a patriarchal society. However, we see that Kevinuo restrains herself against such criticisms passed by others by laughing them off. She was strong enough to stand firm on her belief against oppression. She believed that simply knowing the earning prospects of a man was not enough for her to commit herself to marriage. Her reaction against oppression was so strong that she refused to get married even though she received proposals from men – "Most of them

knew I had turned down two of the men who proposed me.” (ibid 121) One of the reasons why Kevinuo refused to get married was because she did not want to end up like Beinuo and other women who are oppressed by their husbands and become a victim of patriarchy – “...to become like Beinuo in a marriage with a controlling partner was not what I wanted at all.” (ibid 128) Kevinuo was aware of the consequences of getting married to a stranger as the man could usually turn up to be a dominant figure being a part of the male dominated society. She had witnessed many married couples in her society, where women had become victims to violence engendered by the husbands. Kevinuo was totally against such cultural practices of the patriarchal society where “wife had to be submissive and do his (husband) biddings. If she didn’t listen to him...she would be beaten until she submitted.” (ibid 147) Therefore Kevinuo refusing to conform to get married can also be seen as an act of resisting domination by man in a patriarchal society in the form of husband. Because if she gets married to someone whom she is not familiar with, there is a probability that she would end up being dominated by her husband being in a patriarchal society, as it – “legitimizes male power and authority over women in marriage...” She might probably be oppressed and forced to fulfill the expectations of the society which is considered – “the ideals of familial patriarchy” (Millet 1969:222-223). However, her financial independence gave her some kind of power to resist the patriarchal norms of being dominated by man through marriage –“...I needed to know the person better if I were to commit to marriage” (Kire 2019: 122). We see Kevinuo being very careful not to fall under the domination of a controlling husband even if she had to bear the criticism from the society. Voicing her opinions about her marriage had not been difficult for her because firstly, she had no father to exert control over her, as in a patriarchal society it is seen that men exercise dominance over family members as the head of the family and are considered as the sole decision maker of the family. And secondly, she was self-dependent having a job to support herself financially she needed no man to rely on for economic needs. And by being self-dependent she was able to resist the conventional norm of marriage where a woman is expected to marry at certain age and is counted as lucky if she gets to marry a wealthy man. Her self-dependency allowed her to resist this norm by refusing marriage proposals and standing on her own belief against society, being the sole decision maker of her own marriage. In a patriarchal society, men are

given the role of the bread-winner of the family – “A man’s responsibility is first and foremost, to provide food and shelter for his family” whereas women are compelled to be dependent on men for financial and economic support (ibid 104). Therefore, women are considered to be inferior as they are not in control of their own expenses which also hinders them to voice out their own opinion against men. But when women are self-dependent by doing a job or by having a career of their own and earn their own money, it empowers them to voice out their opinion against men and norms of the society, and to make decisions on their own.

Education has the power to empower women and the right type of education can help women to be more self-reliant, bridge socio-economic disparities and foster peace. Financial independence and skills acquired by women through quality education enables them to break the social cycle and tackle harmful gender stereotypes of the society. It allows them to stand along with the opinionated bread-winner of the family and at the same time to step out and learn the ways of the world rather than being confined with the domestic chores. Empowerment of women through education can bring about significant change in the society. Education remarkably enhances the lives of women. It not only educates a woman but also empowers her to realize that she is an important part of the society. It is education that ensures occupational achievements, self-awareness and knowledge to women. Education also helps women to choose their desired jobs and build their career for themselves. It plays an important role in enabling women to make decisions and accept responsibilities at home and society. Women are empowered by education to understand better of her rights to equal treatment in the society.

In *A Respectable Woman*, Kevinuo received formal education and was able to complete her graduation properly without any hindrance. Because of her education she was able to discern the inequalities prevalent against women in the patriarchal society and had become aware of the needs of modern secular values like equal rights and egalitarian. It most importantly enabled her to chase after her own dream of getting a job as a teacher which helped her to be financially independent. It gave her a sense of identity as an independent woman.

Awareness through education is the key to any form of empowerment. It is one of the greatest milestones of women's empowerment as it empowers women to react to the challenges, resist the traditional conventions and to bring about change in the society. The education of women acts as the most powerful tool in bringing about a change in the position of women in the society. It enables women to be financially independent in life. The importance of being a financially independent woman is been emphasized in the text. It emphasizes the necessity for every woman to be financially independent so that she is not just someone's daughter, someone's sister or someone's wife, her identity is defined by her ability to be independent and that comes with finance in the world that we live today. In *A Respectable Woman*, Kevinuo goes against the cultural practice of the society by adopting Uvi as her own daughter who was not related to her by blood. It was considered to be culturally incorrect to adopt a child who was not related by blood. However, Uvi's grandmother took heed of the request of Kevinuo, her mother and aunt in allowing Uvi to be a part of their family as the adopted daughter of Kevinuo. It is clear from the study that women are able to resist the patriarchal norms and make constructive decisions most effectively in the absence of men. It was through Kevinuo's act of rebellion empowered by her financial independent status and in the absence of men that she succeeded in resisting oppressive patriarchy. Moreover, Kevinuo's financial independence enabled her to be the provider for Uvi and to support her financially. The very act of adopting Uvi as her own daughter can also be seen as an act of rebellion against the norms of the society. In both cases, we see Kevinuo succeeding in her act of rebellion against the constraining conventional norms of the society. By adopting Uvi, Kevinuo had gained a new identity as a surrogate mother. The status of a mother which is considered of great importance in a patriarchal society was achieved by Kevinuo in her own way that is through the means of adoption. Kevinuo whose identity in the society was that of "a registered spinster" had gained a new identity of her own as a 'mother'. Looking at the character of Beinuo, she can be regarded as the representation of a conventional ideal woman as we can see that in the novel she is portrayed with the required qualities such as having a submissive nature yielding to the norms of a patriarchal society, subjected to her husband and in-laws she was always determined to please them. She fulfilled the responsibilities of a good conventional wife taking care of

her children and household chores – “...a kitchen where she had already arranged her utensils and crockery...” (Kire 2019: 121) She was an ultimate homemaker under the authority of her husband. Till her death, Beinuo took care of her children and family without any resistance against her ill-natured husband. In addition, Beinuo is a representation of a conventional woman in a patriarchal society who brings to light the various experiences of violence, oppression, unequal treatment and suppression faced by women in a male dominated society.

On the contrary, Kevinuo is the representation of the ‘new woman’ who was able to be resilient against the criticisms of the society. She was successful in going against the conventions of the male dominated society through her act of resistance. Education empowered her to become self-aware of the inequity prevalent in the society and also to become self-independent. By being self-dependent, she was able to emancipate and also became a tower of hope for Uvi, who in turn enabled her to acquire an identity of her own as a ‘mother’. She emancipated and took control over her own personal, social and economic life. It is evident that Kevinuo’s ability to be independent in the midst of a conventional patriarchal society enabled her to find an identity of her own, being financially independent she was able to achieve the freedom to live her life on her own terms resisting the norms of the society.

In traditional society, the economic roles of men and women were sharply distinguished because men generally engaged in hunting and warfare while women were engaged in domestic and agricultural activities. Women play an important part in the socio-economic development of the village in spite of the fact that they are controlled by customs and traditions. Women were not encouraged to participate in politics, administration or in religious activities because those were considered to be the domain of men. The people try to maintain a very strict moral code of conduct in the society through restrictions put on women. Punishment is more severe for women than for men where chastity is concerned for both married and unmarried women (Vitso 59). Traditional values also restrict the mobility of women to a great extent. The attitude of both men and women towards women affects the statuses of women to a great extend. Women have played an

important role in the society in almost every aspect of life but sometimes their roles were undermined by customs and traditions.

One can examine in tandem with the narrative of creative work by contemporary women writers such as Kire and Ao, as their personal experience/observations becomes the fabric of the stories that they write which portray a collective experience of Naga womanhood. Easterine Kire claims this faithful representation as she talks about her book *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007):

The little girl [Dielieno] is a combination of many little girls... I put together my experience of school and growing up to piece Lieno's experience into a typical childhood experience. I was bullied at school as the youngest in my class: she is bullied at school. Dielieno actually means, errand girl, so it is a name that designates what the status of a girl-child is, she is considered good for running errands and looking after the house. Nothing very wrong with that but grandmother's way of raising her harshly and preferring the male-children, i felt, was wrong and i have seen that in many families (Kire 2007 :ix).

Similarly, Temsula Ao draws on indigenous social and political realities of the place and the community she belongs to. Each of the women characters in *These Hills called Home* (2006) portray the 'new Naga woman', a term used by Changkija. In most of Ao's work, both in poetry and fiction, we see a conscious attempt to critique the erase and historical experiences of Naga Women's existence. Ao designs the narrative of the marginalized women characters by transferring their positions from victims into agents, as the women in most of her stories actively take control of the chaotic social and political disorder. Rengleen Kongsong deliberates on Ao's women characters in her essay *Women Frontliners: A study of Victimization and Agency In Temsula Ao's Fiction* in which she states:

"Temsula Ao's fictions are significant for their strong marginalized characters who not only present their side of the story through their voice, and hence their version of history, but also recount the strength of these women who came out triumphant with their humanity intact amidst the oppressive nature of the private space. These characters

frequently assume new roles and responsibilities participating in political struggles redefining traditional roles and existing gender relations (Kongsong, 2017, 67)

Some interesting facts in the narratives of the writers like Kire and Ao is their deep sense of rootedness and attachment to preserving the community's culture. Kire, in particular shows consciousness in maintaining the essence of her mother tongue (Tenyidie) as she uses and deploys native expressions and terminologies in her work. The inclusion of an indigenous narrative by Naga or North-eastern writers is a recurring theme in the context of their works. Writers like Kire and look at their embedded culture as a process of preservation and continuity is essential given that their works, which can be placed under the category of realistic fiction. On the idea of understanding the narrative North-eastern literature as a representation of realistic fiction, Kashyap says:

One of the most important mediums connecting different cultures is realist fiction. More we read about a certain people, community and the nation through their fiction, closer they become for us. (The Peripheral Imagination :Writing the Invisible India, 2012)

As stated earlier, Naga society functions in parallel with a set of tribal laws and customs that are unique to each tribe. This set of customary laws has been surprisingly and interestingly framed and regulated by the male members of society since the time of implementation. This one-sided control was unfortunately sidelined for a long time perhaps with the understanding that in a patriarchal for a long time perhaps with the understanding that in a patriarchal society certain decisions rest in the hands of a few.

Naga society, which does not have class and caste divisions, enjoys a better social position than the other societies in India where the societal structure serves as a marker of an individual's identity. The absence of these factors is very appreciative and has given Naga society an image of being more advanced, inclusive and sensitive to social issues. This claim is visible in the statistical report of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2016 which found that Nagaland had the third lowest recorded incidence of crimes(Nagaland :Safest for women, ' The Morung Express). The low criminal records recognize Nagaland as the safest place for women and the only state in the Indian Union

to have the crime rates against women in single digits(6), as shown by NCRB data(Women are safest in Nagaland, ' The Hindu). The classless and casteless Naga society brings into discussion the principle of egalitarianism that is widely used to define the Naga way of life. The egalitarian principle that prioritizes and believes in equality as a tradition is often used as an identity marker to highlight the tribal 'others' from the inequalitarian caste-Hindu societies in India. However, a close study of the gender roles in Naga society affirms that the term is contrary to the values of Contemporary Naga society with the concept of egalitarianism generally losing its significance. An egalitarian Naga society will continue to be an uneasy ideology till equality in its truest sense is achieved: or perhaps till a Naga woman is able to exercise her power, privileges and capabilities, this association and presumption will never be fully defined. Kham Khan Suan Hausing essay 'Equality as Tradition and Women's Reservation in Nagaland' throws light on the principle of egalitarianism as one of the common perceptions of tribal societies in the Northeast region (Hausing 2010, 250). Hausing relates this by focusing on the attempts of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly (NLA) to extend 33 percent reservation to women in ULBs. Similarly, in another essay titled 'Equality as Tradition Women's role in Naga Society' V.A Shimray(2002) questions the ambiguous role and status of women in society despite the significant increase in their education and employment ('Equality as Tradition and Women's Roles in Naga Society,' Economic and political weekly, February 2002, accessed on)

These reflections are important for recognizing the existence of gender inequality in Naga society. What needs to be examined here is the root cause for the glaring difference in people's presumptions and pragmatics of the principles in the context of gender equality in Naga society. The stark differences, as identified by Shimray, in the low social status of Naga women and their relatively higher increase in education and employment need to be addressed.

Naga society has a long and a complex history of political violence and conflict which has affected the indigenous Naga community in several ways such as loss of individual lives and community values, loss of peace, living under the reign of constant fear and terror, shift in geography and encroachment of indigenous land and culture. This political

chapter of Naga history is quoted often and has been extensively studied by scholars across the world. Contemporary creative writings produced from the region mainly focus on topics of indigenous political conflicts that ravaged the state and presently there is commendable scholarship on these works. Temsula Ao's debut work of fiction, *These Hills called Home* (2006), is an example of the lives of everyday ordinary men and women caught in the web of the social and political disorder. Easterine Kire's first novel *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003) is a historical novel that describes the battle between British forces and one Naga hamlet of Khonoma Village. Both these debut works tell us that writers from the region recognize the importance of recording the political narrative of the region through lived experiences. Having lived such experiences, it is natural that the issues and concerns of the Naga movement become one of the primary narratives of their work. However, the overwhelming political narrative of the region has blurred several other agendas that plague the state starting with gender justice in Naga society. Gender and empowerment is an ongoing discourse and is not a new topic in Naga society.

Naga women writers are conscious of their subordinate position and have used their writing to express how women are treated in Naga society, a community that is known for its egalitarian values. *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), is among the few texts that reflects the ideals and values and how they shape the roles of a Naga woman. What contributes to the uniqueness of this work is the subtle ways in which Kire underlines the power and control of patriarchy. Kire carefully brings in maternal power as a primary subject in the novel which exerts physical and mental trauma on the girl child Dielieno. There is no male physical presence in the work, however, there is a subtle yet very powerful force of the patriarchal social structure that vibrates in the background of the narrative. One can see this spill over to the role of the grandmother who ably takes control of the lives of the three women in the novel (Dielieno, Bano, Dielieno's mother). She is a good example of 'subservient grandmothers' used by Changkija to refer to the conformist attitude of the earlier generation of Naga women. This submissive role in many ways comes through the social, political, and economic influence around the early 1960s and 1970s in Naga society as Kire elaborates, 'The story is set in a time of rapid social change, the Nagaland of 1960s in particular,' while further expressing that the novel is aimed at changing, 'the way things have been for women' (Kire 2007: x). Set

against a complex period, Kire projects the significant role of history in the Naga shaping of their customs and traditions. In the midst of a transitional phase in the history of Naga society, the women bore additional consequences as their identity and narrative were historically silenced and devalued by being denied opportunities in public spaces. We see a continuous pattern of 'selective participation' as women are still restricted from getting involved in matters of decision-making in particular.

The patriarchal set up is in many ways maintained through women themselves as Easterine shows how women exploit women in a matriarchal hegemony. In *A Terrible Matriarchy* Dielieno, the youngest and the only girl child of the family, happens to live with her grandmother, who has a firm belief that "education, is wasted on girls". Grandmother here represents the traditional attitude towards the girl child as she voices:

"In my father's day, boy 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 only have one man to protect them. That is why we love our male children so much and we give them the best of food. And we should". (Kire 2007: 10)

But where patriarchy dictates terms the novelist make Dielieno's mother say, "I can see that women are not weak. They just have strength different from men"(ibid 251).

In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Dielieno is challenged physically and mentally as she is a girl child. The title of the novel relates to the matriarchal hegemony that is played out by the grandmother who represses the agony of a girl child in a male dominated society. In the process of training Dielieno to become a 'suitable' girl according to the society's expectations of a girl/woman, her grandmother fails to realize that her authority is strengthening a patriarchal society that denies women freedom of choice and decision. We notice this early in the novel as the grandmother rebukes Dielieno's mother for not engaging her five-year-old daughter in household chores. She states, 'The girl must be made to work at home. Don't let her run about with her brothers anymore. That is not the way to bring up girl children' (Kire, 4). Besides the Grandmother's traditionalist view,

there is a troubling way in which she denies an identity to Dielieno as she refers to her as 'the girl' rather than addressing her by her name. As Dielieno questions this puzzling identity given to her, her grandmother swiftly responds to her 'cheeky' (Kire, 4) attitude. Interestingly and relatedly, Dielieno in the Angami dialect means 'errand girl'.

In the process of exerting traditional values and customs, Dielieno begins to question her position as she clearly observes the different treatment meted out to her and her brother. Dielieno, represents the attributes of a Naga Woman in many ways as she is fully conscious of society's ideal expectation of a good Naga wife and mother. She realizes this on many occasions, particularly on one occasion when her grandmother disapproves of her parents 'proposal that the young girl receive formal education, as she states,' In our day.....girls did not go to school. We stayed at home and learnt the housework... I really do not approve of girls getting educated. It only makes them get fancy notions about themselves and they forget their place in the family' (Kire, 23). As Dielieno gradually matures she begins to question the unfair and rather rigid customs of her community. While she is already aware of the injustices meted out by her grandmother she also begins to understand the harsh realities of being born a girl. One such occurrence in the novel is when Bano, a young woman who lives with her grandmother, tells Dielieno of an unusual customary practice of the community. The following is an excerpt from the novel where Bano narrates the story of Dielieno's friend Vimenuo's family and the reasons for Vimenuo's father's unruly behavior. The narrative is from Dielieno's perspective:

"Bano said that he (Vimenuo's father) was angry his wife had given birth only to daughters. He wanted a boy to carry on his name. I asked, "Aren't the three girls [Vimenuo and her sisters] doing that?" But Bano replied that girl-children are never considered real members of the family. Their mission in life is to marry and have children and be able to cook and weave cloth and look after the household. If they got married, they would always be known as somebody's wife or somebody's mother and never somebody's daughter. That way they could not carry on their father's name. I thought hard about it but could not think of anything to replace that system." (Kire 2007:26)

This specific incident in the novel is one of many instances when we see Dielieno beginning to question the status of a girl/woman in Naga society. In the ensuing narrative

in the novel, Dielieno gradually tries to find alternate ways of becoming self-sufficient and useful to the society that she belongs to. She subtly though consistently tries to redefine the expectations from a girl. Dielieno is a combination of many little girls and her unwavering attitude against the forces of society thrown at her by her grandmother is a good representation of Contemporary Naga Women fighting to establish a voice and identity despite the looming force of patriarchy. Prevented from achieving ownership (material and non-material), as per customs and traditions, Naga women have taken to education with zeal and success. This is reflected in Dielieno's attitude as she realizes that education is the only way to change the rigid system and an attribute which will set her part in ideology from the older generation of women. However, for Dielieno this is not an easy task as her grandmother continues to harp on a woman's limitation. In one section in the novel, Dielieno is rebuked for being ambitious as she prepares to set off for college education. Her grandmother reminds her of the bitter truth, 'a woman's role is to marry and bear children, remember that. That is her most important role. Men don't like to marry educated wives (Kire 2007:206). In the process of protecting and valuing the community's cultural norms, the grandmother internalizes patriarchy and becomes a victim of subservience as she unconsciously,' keeps herself rigidly confined to her gendered role...And limits the other women in her household to 'virtual prisoners' (Kire 2007:56)The grandmother represents a tradition that is reluctant to change as opposed to the 'new Naga woman' who is 'generally more open, willing and able to adapt to new ideas and change and generally to global culture, politically, economically and socially' (Changkija, 'Equality's time has come', The Indian Express).

The grandmother also represents the womenfolk of the past whose identity is a construct of society and who presents themselves as subordinate to men and depicts society's consciousness that is entrenched in traditional practices. Temsula Ao in an essay titled *Benevolent Subordination: Social Status of Naga Women* reflects on the possibility of a more gender inclusive Naga society and states that the process of arriving at such a vision is often 'mind-boggling and two-pronged'. She says:

"The obvious opposition will be from men: but equally strong would be the opposition from a section of women who are themselves still traditionalist...and would like to

continue in the state of 'benevolent subordination' rather than be involved in a struggle to reform the mind-set of men so strongly entrenched in their age-old belief in male superiority.” (Ao 2003:131-132).

The process of acquiring gender neutrality for Naga women means addressing male superiority and simultaneously engaging with the psychological trauma of subordination among the women. This gives rise to a conflict between tradition and modernity.

Women have been assigned the role of subordinate figures, and their social identity and status have, time and again, not been allowed to rise above that of second-class citizens. Naga women are often deprived of dignity and right on the pretext of valuing social customs. K. B. Veio Pou’s essay *Charting a Space of Their Own: Naga Women and Writing* (2015) brings into the discussion the invisible identity of Naga women. He frames his argument around the stagnant traditional values that are not conducive to contemporary Naga society. Pou draws the views and opinions of various scholars on the reality that exists at the grassroots level. He points out, "Though women in Naga society are often said to enjoy a better status compared to most societies.....the level of freedom endowed may be debatable" (Pou 2015: 164)

One of the distinct characteristics of Naga Writers' work is the community centric narrative as each of these writers writes about the customs and traditions of the indigenous community or the tribe that they belong to. Ao and Kire tell stories about the communities that they belong to. Kire in *A Terrible Matriarchy* deals with the pressure of matriarchal control in Angami society. Ao deals with the social, political, and economic transitions during the 1960s and 1970s in the Ao Naga community in *These Hills called Home* (2006) while also defining in her poetry and other fictional works such as *Laburnum for my head* (2009) and *Once Upon a life* (2014), the role and status of Ao women through characters that are strongly rooted in the community. Perhaps there are various reasons why writers like Kire and Ao invent and talk about vocal women characters to rethink women's existence behind a 'veil of liberty' for generations and to debunk the common presumption Naga women are given space to celebrate their choices and opportunities in taking decisions in the private and public spaces.

Like every other Naga tribe, Ao society has a rich oral literature in the form of poetry, songs, myths and legends. Interestingly, the mythical stories of the Ao community include women-centric narrative that talks about the 'inherent power and authority' bestowed by mythical gods on Ao women. This in itself is a useful reminder of women's capabilities in assuming roles of 'power and authority'. The oral history of the Ao community is an important reference for revamping contemporary societal structures that fail to recognize the identity of a woman in a democratic space. The oral narratives provide an alternative story of gender roles. Temsula Ao states in her article 'Gender and Power: Some Women-centered Narratives from *Ao-Naga Folklore*':

....women...as the weaker sex are often belied by certain figures from myths, legends and history the world over, wherein she is depicted as the embodiment of power of a different kind. The association of some extra-ordinary or extra-human power with women has been a curious but integral aspect of narratives of human history and civilizations (Ao 2004: 89)

Temsula Ao is among the first Ao Naga scholars to translate folk stories from the local language to English and also to offer a critical appraisal of the stories. To a large extent, Temsula Ao's women characters in *These Hills called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, replicate and represent the strength and authoritative power of these mythical figures as we see the characters taking decisions beyond the domestic spaces. Ao's women characters are similar to Kire's Dielieno as they all individually and collectively represent the experiences of Naga women. This representation is evident in Ao's stories as her characters contextualize their narratives around topics of gender roles, the community's customs and traditions and indigenous politics. These narratives are studied by Sandra A. Zagarell in her essay 'Narrative of community: The Identification of a Genre' (1988) in which she talks of the technique of communistic narrative used by women writers. Broadly, what Zagarell does is identify narratives in literature that shift from individual representation to more collective and community oriented themes. She defines a community's narrative as a 'powerful literary and theoretical alternative to the overwhelming preoccupation with the self...that genre that takes on their subject the life of a community in its everyday aspect' (Zagarell, 1988: 499). Her narrative of a

community 'portrays the minute and quite ordinary process through which the community maintains itself as an entity' (Zagarell, 1988: 499). This approach responds coherently to the community's social and cultural change of how Temsula Ao's stories are constructed. Works like *These Hills called Home* portray people, their collective memories and the shared histories of pain and pleasure. Although the ten stories in Ao's *These Hills called Home* (2006) are weaved within the fabric of the rise of the Naga political movement in the community.

One of the striking features in the stories is the unconscious celebration of women characters that take decisions and control situations. In this collection, the history of violence in Nagaland is illustrated and represented through Ao's creation of very vocal women characters. We come across strong and resilient women characters from the collection in stories like "The Jungle Major", "The Curfew Man", "The Night" and "The Pot Maker". In "The Curfew Man" the female character Jemtila's menial job as a housemaid is not meant to demean her observant attention towards things happening around her. Her husband's uneasy activity of serving as a 'government informer' (Ao, 2006:37) during the 1960s and 1970s, a period marked by social and political chaos, and his inability to quit his job due to the disturbing consequences that could follow puts her into action in the story. She secures his freedom from a sinister bondage. A portion from the story that shows the incisive questioning by the wife speaks of the shared history of pain caused by the political anxiety that gradually takes a toll on domestic and individual lives. Jemtila's action tells us that, 'this woman was by no means ignorant of what was happening all around them....she had to admit that they were indeed caught in a vice-like situation.' Ao says:

"..she became suspicious and began to ply him with questions. Satemba admitted to her that some nights he did not come home because he got delayed while gathering some vital information for the sahib, which he could do only at night. "What information?" she persisted, "and those people you meet, don't they sleep?" He wouldn't tell her at first, but when she threatened to go to the sahib...Satemba had to tell her everything. Jemtila was furious...She also threatened him by saying, "Just wait and see, one of these days the other guys will come for you." It was only then that Satemba told her how the sahib made

it clear that her continuing in his household depended on his accepting the job.”(Ao 2006:36)

The fate of women in a male-dominated social set up is succinctly presented in the story of Temsula Ao entitled *The Night*. An unmarried girl Imnala is impregnated and deserted by a man. *The Night* gives a fine illustration of the injustice done to a woman, because of the customs set by man. Imnala was just another village girl whose consummation of love with a married man, Alemba has landed her in huge trouble. As a woman this incident changed her life drastically but the man, responsible for the whole act, goes on living a normal life. With the unborn child kicking inside her, she has to bear the scoffing of not only the villagers but also of her father whose pride and reputation as a leader has been badly injured. The wife of Alemba has requested the village council to solve the case. Strange though it may sound, the village elders decided to take up the matter. The girl's family has been tensed over the possible outcome because “the balance of injustice always tended to tilt against the women. A married man was equally guilty, but today she would be the sole accused”(Ao 2006:54). What's more worrisome is the fact that there has been “instances where under similar circumstances a girl's hair was chopped off and her clothes stripped off ‘to shame her’” (Ao 2006: 55). As the story unfolds, the man is gentleman enough to claim paternity over the unborn child. That saved a lot of embarrassment for the unwed mother. Despite being scorned by society for bearing an illegitimate child for the second time, she is not affected by such rebukes as she makes her choice:

“Come what may,’ she thought, ‘ I shall devote my life to bringing up these two children in the best way I can. I shall finish my high school, get a job and educate them. I shall spend every ounce of my energy so that they have a better life than mine.” (Ao 2006: 54).

The patriarchal concepts of illegitimate motherhood and paternal security are addressed head on in this story:

"The one consolation amidst the chaos of her life was that her unborn child had been given the right to call someone 'father' in a society where acknowledged paternity was crucial for a person born out of wedlock".(Ao 2006:56)

Imnala's life could never be the same again; she would have to bear the stigma of being an unwed mother all her life. Unfortunately, Naga society even today continues to struggle with gender injustice.

Like the women characters in these stories, in *The Pot Maker*, a young girl Sentila shows an unwavering dedication to learning the ancestral art of pottery. Despite the difficulties associated with learning this skill, she is reluctant to follow her mother's advice who suggests a relatively comfortable skill of weaving, 'a skill highly valued as an asset in any girl' (Ao2006: 57). Sentila's determination and perseverance is the culmination of the society's expectations of a girl/woman and her 'assigned' duties. We see the complexity of tradition and modernity at play in this story. The two different categories of Naga women: the 'subservient grandmothers' and the 'new Naga woman' are visible in this story in which we see a complex mother-daughter relationship through the generation gap that exists between them. Sentila recognizes the pot-making specialty of her community, and the fact that she prefers to learn this art is interesting given that it provides economic sustenance to her family. Here, we see how a young girl realizes the contribution she can make to her family and society. While Sentila is intent in challenging herself with a more difficult art and is determined to financially support her family, we realize that the choice she makes is a retribution for Arenla's mother's remark, which she overhears one night :

"the mother[Arenla] was complaining to the father about their daughter's[Sentila] indifference to weaving. She said, ' I don't know what will happen to our daughter when she grows up, she seems so reluctant to learn the craft (weaving).... She will grow up to be a useless girl and no man will want to marry her' (Ao 2006:58)

The women characters in Ao and Kire's works are an important inclusion and contribution for understanding the importance of women's role as decision makers. Such representation of women characters are more than just illustrated characters necessary for the plots of the stories. Each character represents women who exercise freedom and

demonstrate agency as the chief protagonist. Such representation not only blurs the gender gap but also simultaneously allows the readers to understand the importance of indigenous narratives that are primeval, distinctly local and universal all at the same time for tribal writers.

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CHAPTER 5

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE WORKS OF EASTERINE KIRE AND TEMSULA AO WITH OTHER NAGA WOMEN WRITERS

The protagonist of Easterine Iralu, Temsula Ao, Avinuo Kire and Neikehienuo Mephu-o are educated modern women and lives in a society where the atmosphere is intermingled and blurred between tradition and modernity. During such a time, women are sandwiched in between and they suffer silently. But these women are way ahead of their ancestors who accepted their sufferings as their fate. These women break out from their cocoons and find ways to emancipate themselves from the clutches of patriarchy. Some of the major similarities identified in the writings of these Naga women writers are: Identity crisis, Conflict within marriage and family, Silence, conflict between tradition and modernity, quest for self.

The theory of comparative literature explains that it is the comparison of two or more literature, taking into consideration some aspects such as language, culture, religion, economic, social, political and historical factors of the societies which are to be studied. Thus, it includes the study of International literatures, National literatures and regional literatures. Therefore, it is the study of inter-relationship between two or more literary works where the similarities and dissimilarities are studied with an absolute absence of prejudice.

Identity Crisis

The protagonist of *A Terrible Matriarchy* by Easterine Kire, the protagonist of Avinuo Kire in her short story *Fallen Bird*, the protagonist of Temsula Ao's *Aosenla's Story* and the protagonist of *My Mother's Daughter* by Neikehienuo Mephu-o faces identity crisis at one point or the other. Since childhood, the protagonists of these stories are taught what to do and what not to do. Traditionally, in Naga culture a woman's sole destination

or goal in life is generally to marry. Right from the time she is born, she is taught and moulded so that she becomes capable of marriage. On the other hand they are given education which enlightens them on equality, freedom and rights as human beings. Traditions have been practiced since time immemorial and have become part and parcel of their lives. In such a context women become victims of identity crisis.

A Terrible Matriarchy written by renowned Naga author Easterine Kire is a coming of age novel of a girl called Dielieno. We get a glimpse of the Naga society through her eyes. It is set in a colony in Kohima town around the 60s and 70s. Dielieno belongs to a big family but with low income and being the only girl child in the family she is loved by all. However, she had to leave her parental home and stay at her grandmother's place in order to become the 'ideal woman'. Staying with her grandmother she grows up observant of the differences with which she is treated because she is a girl. The novel opens with a negative tone as Dielieno says, "My grandmother didn't like me." (Kire 2007:1). Her grandmother denies her a chicken leg when she asks for one but gives it to her brothers instead. She is told, "That portion is always for boys". (ibid:1). That denial sets the tone for the rest of her life. At first she didn't understand but soon she finds out at an early age that girls are denied most of the things in life like love, leisure and fun. Dielieno also overhears her grandmother complaining to her mother about the fact that she had send the boys to fetch water. She is told, "Send the girl next time, that is a girls' work. No man in my days has ever fetched water." (ibid 3) Dielieno is the youngest in the family. From a very tender age she starts to feel that she is the odd one in the family. She says, " I sometimes felt that I was an afterthought, and maybe Father and Mother didn't know what to do with me." (ibid 2). Dielieno is denied of any fun and in fact denied even acting her age. Once her grandmother sees her playing with her own uncle. She hits her on the calf with her walking stick. Grandmother explains that a girl should not mingle so easily with men and should be taught at a very early age. She is not even called by her name but her grandmother refers to her as 'that girl.' When she starts living with her grandmother she finds out that she had to suffice with one biscuit for her tea in the morning and is denied hot water for bath. For her meals she is given two pieces of meat and is expected not to ask for a second helping. However, she knew that it won't be the same if her brothers are around. She would have always served extra gravy and meat to

them. Dielieno wishes she was a boy like her brothers so that she can be favored. She also recognizes partiality when her brother Leto comes over to grandmother's house. She is in a bad mood and speaks to Dielieno harshly but speaks to Leto as though she is completely another person. "I went out to do as she bid. At the door I stopped and tried to listen because I was sure she was going to say something harsh to Leto. Her face had that look. But she began to coo." (ibid18). Dielieno is denied sympathy when she pricks her fingers, when she goes to the outhouse at night or go to fetch water early in the morning.

Dielieno's grandmother denies her education as she is a girl. It takes a lot of coaxing before she finally agrees. For grandmother girls shouldn't go to school but should go to the fields and learn field work. That way they will be busy all the time and won't get into trouble. Further she opines that education is a waste on girls. But she says it's ok for boys to get into trouble every now and then. When Dielieno starts school she is given more work as to make her stop going to school but she persists to work harder. Grandmother disapproves girls going to school as she is of the opinion that education gives girls fancy notion about themselves. Dielieno gets promoted to higher class because of her hard work but this enrages her grandmother more. When Dielieno is compared with her brothers who are not doing well, grandmother takes their side saying that they are boys after all. She says, "They are boys. Boys will be boys. They will be all right. They should be taught to be manly. 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 war. The women would only have one man to protect them. That is why we love our male children so much and give them the best food. And we should." (Kire 2007: 37). One day, Dielieno stays back an hour late at school to learn. Instead of appreciating it, her grandmother hits her with the cane again. As she sobs, Bano explains to her that it is not because grandmother hates her but it is to bring her up to be a good woman. As a young girl, while gossiping, she is told by Bano about the position of women in the society. She learns as to why a girl child is not preferred in the family. Bano said that he was angry his wife had given birth only to daughters. He wanted a boy to carry on his name. I asked, "Aren't the girls doing that?" But Bano replied that girl-child are never considered real members of the family. Their mission is to marry and have children and to be able to

cook and weave cloth and look after the household. If they got married, they would always be known as somebody's wife or somebody's mother and never somebody's daughter. That way they could not carry on their father's name. As she grows up, she is often told: "Don't rush around, girl, that is not the way young girls should behave." (ibid 51). Grandmother also refers to women's menstruation as the curse as she asks Bano if Dielieno has got it yet. Dielienuo wonders what she means by the curse. When she gets through her high school exam, and wants to pursue further studies, her grandmother argues that school is enough for a girl and says, "a woman's role is to marry and bear children, remember that. That is her most important role. Men don't like to marry educated wives (ibid 206). Even at home, when Dielieno tries to express her resent over her grandmother, her mother advises her to behave like a woman. Here too, she is given advices so as to please a man. She is told, "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." (ibid) Dielieno's experiences in life made her realize her position as a woman in the male dominated world.

Avinuo Kire's *The Fallen Bird*, a short story also highlights identity crisis felt by the protagonist. She is an educated woman who was once inspired by feminist thought. After marriage she chooses to retain her maiden name not because she once liked the idea of being a feminist but because when her brother is born, an elderly person congratulates her parents and says: "Finally! A male to carry on the family name and give you pride!" (Kire 2015:43). At thirteen when she decides to keep her maiden name. After marriage, her mother-in-law is unhappy and told her that she is breaking the tradition. Her own father disapproves of it and considers it as a dishonor to her husband. But she confesses that at the end it didn't matter as her children will never bear her name. She remembers her death brother, Keneisevor. She cannot forget the day he was born. Her mother cried out of joy and her father's mood that day is something she still remembers vividly. She narrates, "The next morning, your father came home to take you all to the hospital to see your new brother. There would be no school that day. Your father was in a jubilant mood and took down the detachable covering of the family's soft top Maruti Gypsy which you always begged him to do but which he consented to only during family outings into the woods. On the way to the hospital, your normally reserved father called out to people he

knew, while you and your sisters waved at strangers as the sun poured all its gold into the open Gypsy. Father stopped to buy you each tetrapaks of Mango frooti and Uncle Chips, and glucose powder too, for mother to mix with water and drink. Surely everyone in Kohima town must have envied your family's glorious undiluted joy that day." (Kire 2015:44, 45). Thus, the protagonist gradually yet unintentionally realizes her position in the society. A feast is also organized by her parents in the name of the new born baby and everyone congratulates and celebrates for the baby boy. The protagonist remembers the day he died too. She says, "Your mother wailed like a deranged woman and clung to the tiny wooden coffin. The women had to literally prise her fingers loose from the coffin when the time came to be lowered into the earth." (ibid 46). From there on her mother never fully recovers. Her father took long walks into places she didn't know. Thus she became, "a mother to your sisters." (ibid 46). She starts to do the household chores and looks after her father and her siblings. It made her angry sometimes and once she reminds her mother that she is still left with three daughters.

Despite her sacrifices, the protagonist of *Fallen Bird* discovers that her husband is having an affair. When he falls sick, she takes care of him as a devoted wife. She hates the fact that he falls in love with her again after he falls sick but she didn't have a choice. She still remembers the day she gave birth to her son. She says, "Your mother experienced a brief spell of renewed life and came to take care of you and your new baby. She cooed and cried over him and you felt like baby Kenisevor had returned." (ibid 48). When her mother falls sick, she takes care of her which her sisters are unable to do. Yet when she dies, she doesn't leave any words of endearment for her daughters like the movies. She is the one who bears all the burden of doing the last rites for her burial. All these experiences make her lose herself. She felt indifferent even with her husband and children. She says, "No one, including your husband knew who you really were, sometimes not even you." (ibid 48).

All the characters in the novel *My Mother's Daughter* by Neikehienuo Mepfhu-o are nameless but there is clear distinction of a category of oppressors and oppressed. The women are oppressed because they are women who possess no voice in the family while the men are the oppressors who are invested with the authority to do so by the patriarchal

society. The women are expected to adhere to certain norms and roles that are assigned to them and any hints of failings were met with strict censure. Women are expected to be submissive wives and obedient daughters, always ready at the service of their husbands and fathers. . In fact their duty as wives and daughters is to please and honor the men in their lives. When the wife announced her first pregnancy to her husband, he reached for her hair, pulled violently and dragged her out of the bed and made her sleep in the kitchen even when she was pregnant. Despite all the abuses she received from her husband, she still diligently obeyed the commands of her husband only to be beaten repeatedly by her husband. The helpless wife was forced to serve and sit by his side until he finishes his meal as she wraps her arms around her operated stomach and dragged herself at one o'clock. However, she is committed to her husband and blames herself for making her husband angry and for irritating him. She would apologize to her husband just as her mother would apologize to her father even though she has done nothing wrong. She painfully realized that she had enabled her husband to treat her exactly the way her father did to her mother. She realized rather too late that all her life she has been adjusting, pulling, pushing and bending herself to fit into her husband's life. It was her voicelessness in front of her superior voice. She saw that her husband had transformed into the man she had hated all her life. No one knows that she had slept in the storeroom more than in the bedroom.

The title is subversive in this regard as it shows the author's intent to define the women in relation to women independent of the men in their lives. Mepfhu-o in her author's note justifies why she chose the title *My Mother's Daughter*. She writes that people always say their father's name when asked whose daughter they are. Only after naming the father do they come to know about their mother. But as women, they are really their mother's daughter. Women tend to become who their mother ought to become. If mothers are normalizing abuse, then their daughters will too. If mothers are stepping up against violence, then their daughters will too. And one day when these daughters become mothers, they will transfer the same to their daughters and it will continue. The daughter in the novel tried every possible way to protect her mother from her abusive father but only ended up as a disappointment to her mother. Living in a patriarchal society, the

mother thought that she is protecting her daughter by taking side on her husband, yet it only resulted to the daughter hating her mother as much as she hated her father.

Role of Conflict

Role of conflict generally means a situation where a person is expected to play two roles. It can be for a short period or for a long period of time. Mothers in olden days were limited to domestic works. However, today many women have come out of that single role as wife and mother and pursue their career. These women face challenges everyday of maintaining two roles. Many women are allowed to pursue their career but it doesn't relief them from their obligations of carrying out their roles as mothers and wives. Working women are constantly reminded of their roles as mothers and wives and are expected to give priority to that role. If there are any signs of neglect then she is considered as selfish or arrogant. At work, a woman is looked down upon if any signs of neglect at work are detected. Avinuo Kire's *Fallen Bird* also touches upon this problem. Not only as a wife and as a mother but as a daughter too, a girl is expected to work at home as well as pursue her studies and career. This instance is vividly portrayed in *A Terrible Matriarchy* by Easterine Kire. An analyses and comparison of these novels bring to the forefront the various predicaments faced by women as they try to balance between the role assigned by the society and the roles they desire to play.

In Avinuo Kire's *Fallen bird* we also see how the protagonist leaves a job which she loves for the sake of her marriage. She is highly qualified but her husband gets transferred to another place and thus it's her who has to sacrifice her job. She says, "You also had a job teaching English at a local school that you enjoyed, but your husband got posted to a different district and you had to resign because you were taught that a wife's place is her husband." (Kire 2015:46)

In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Dielieno is torn between her studies and her domestic chores. She is made to stay at her grandmother's house in order to teach her to become the 'ideal woman'. Against her grandmother's wish, she manages to go to school. Dielieno, however being a girl is expected to do her household chores before and after her schools.

Her grandmother doesn't even care to lighten her burden but instead gives her more work in order for her to quit school. "School was the best thing that could have happened to me. There were sacrifices I had to make. Grandmother did not want me to go to school so she tried to make life even more difficult by making me get up an hour earlier. In that extra one hour I had to fetch water alone and make fire... I liked going to school so much. But I did not like going early to the water spot by myself; it was very dark and I could not see anyone ahead of me." (Kire 2007: 32). As she grew older and went to higher class, she had to find ways to study more. Dielieno says, "There were more things to do now that I was bigger. I struggled to finish my task and find enough time to do my homework and study a bit. Vimenuo and I worked out a way to get to school earlier and come home forty to forty-five minutes after school was over." (ibid 166, 167). When her mother becomes sick she is called home to look after the house. Though she is happy to be home, she had to juggle between her domestic work and her studies. "I had even more work at home. At Grandmother's it had helped that two of us shared the workload. At home, I was alone and mother could not do very much. The boys' clothes were difficult to wash and my back ached from the great amount of washing. (ibid177)

Conflict within family and marriage

Avinuo Kire's *Promise of Camellias* is about Vime who gets into an arranged marriage. Though in the initial years of marriage they are happy, they discover that they are entirely two different individual. Vime is from a humble background whereas her husband is a government officer from an influential family. Vime hopes that in time, their liking for each other will grow into love. But as time went by, their expectations of each other are not fulfilled. As an important officer, he gets visitors regularly and wants a sophisticated wife who can play the role of a hostess, one he can "show off." (Kire 2015:74) However, Vime feels uncomfortable even around the house help. The husband is interested in politics and world affairs and she tries her best to fit in but without success. After a year she cannot tolerate anymore and tells him so. She tells him to do as he wishes but not to include her as she cannot cope with it anymore. Meantime, even her in-laws suggest them to start a family and tell her that it would solve the problem between her and her husband. But unfortunately, it is not possible for them to have any children because of

her husband's "insufficient sperm motility." (ibid 74) .This worsens the situation as he also starts having affairs and becomes a drunkard. On their 8th anniversary, she wakes up alone. She is later informed that her husband will be going down directly to Dimapur. Vime is aware that her husband is not alone, yet she doesn't do anything. She says, "I used to feel hurt and humiliated during the early years, but now I realise it is more trouble to complain." (ibid76). She becomes alienated and silenced and thus becomes attached to sadness. Vime is also informed by her childhood friend Anuo, who is aware about his extra marital affairs. Anuo works in the same department as her husband's and she fills her with the details of her husband's affair but she takes it calmly. Soon after that, her husband leaves her.

Aosenla in Temsula Ao 's *Aosenla's Story* is forced into marriage not so much for love as for the concern over her family's social standing within the community, "The father...was growing more apprehensive; he knew how obstinate his daughter could be and if he did not send a formal word of acceptance to the boy's family soon, the marriage would be off, and his family would be in disgrace... one never knew what a rich and influential family would do to safeguard their prestige..." (Ao 2017:14). Class, not to mention gendered, hierarchies dictate the terms of Aosenla's marriage. As Aosenla navigates the fragile realm of her marriage, these hierarchies would impinge upon the nature of her identity. The oppressive nature of patriarchy and class hierarchy, for instance, is suggested in the opening lines of the novel where the house in which her mother-in-law lives seems to bear down on Aosenla, "Her gaze drifted towards the big house, the house that had symbolized authority and domination over her life ever since she had entered it as a daughter-in-law. She wondered how an inanimate object like a house could wield so much power." (ibid 1-2). The house by itself, of course, does not carry such meanings. Rather, these meanings are generated because the people associated with the house — Bendang's mother, his father and Bendang himself—perpetuate patriarchal hierarchies. Bendang's mother, for instance, is bitter because she holds Aosenla accountable for not producing a male heir and Bendang himself violates Aosenla a few months into their marriage. Domestic spats, infidelity and marital rape conspire to rob Aosenla of her voice within the world that she inhabits. When Bendang opts for a guest room following a motor accident, Aosenla is relieved for the blessings that his

choice affords her: “‘Her’ bedroom; it had literally become so ever since the nurse had been engaged...If, in the earlier days, her bedroom was a space of conflicting experiences for Aosenla, it now became a refuge; a sanctuary where she could be free of any intrusions or painful memories of enduring the pain of her husband’s drunken ardour or the memory of her own participation in torrid matings induced solely by her own fantasies of love for him.” (ibid 100). Although the sanctuary that the bedroom provides is short-lived, Aosenla is able —for a brief amount of time— to re-claim her place within a household dominated by a male presence. And, perhaps, it is because of patriarchal hierarchies that we find characters in the novel defining themselves and their motivations according to how they might appear to others. *Aosenla’s Story* may be fiction, but it touches upon themes that are not at all divorced from our realities.

Rape is reported to be the fourth most common crime committed against women in India. Over the years, the number of rape cases has only increased in a place like India. Cases of rape had been unheard of in small State like Nagaland in the past decades. However, today it is a common crime and despite the condemnation by the society, it is still rapidly increasing. In the short story *The Power to Forgive* by Avinuo Kire, the protagonist is also raped at the age of twelve by her own uncle. Sixteen years after the incident, as she rummages through the file, she sees a newspaper clipping which was headed “FATHER FORGIVES MAN WHO RAPED DAUGHTER.”(Kire 2015:2). Memories and emotions rushes in despite her resistance. It clings to her like “...an overpowering rotten smell, effectively erasing all other remembrances.” (ibid 2). This memory had destroyed all her good memories in the past and even now as she gets ready for marriage, it threatens to destroy her happiness. She still distinctly remembered the nauseating smell of him – a mixture of sweat together with a faint eggy sourness – and the hot wave of heavy panting. She was alone in the house and her uncle had left hurriedly after committing the heinous deed (ibid 3). She finds happiness in her daily chores of fetching water and washing clothes beside the river along with the other girls. But this happiness is short-lived as she is overcome by her wishes to be carefree like the other girls. Her mother often reminds her “people will think you have no shame” and laments over the incident and the fate it has brought to the family. She feels betrayed by her father as he had forgiven the rapist and cannot bring herself to forgive him. She is also haunted by

nightmares of the rapist. She is no longer the person she was before. Once a gay and cheerful child, she had now become withdrawn and reserved. She is still the dutiful daughter to her parents but it ended there. Her relationship with other people could be described as cordial at best. Though always polite, she was unable to forge close friendship. She often broke out in cold sweat whenever she came across anyone who resembled her uncle. Her biggest fear was the thought of meeting her uncle now, after all these years (ibid 6).

In Temsula Ao *The Last Song* from her short story collection *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* is a story of a singing prodigy called Apenyo. On an ill-fated Sunday when the entire village was about to celebrate church dedication service, the Indian armed forces appeared out of nowhere in one of their routine raids. They were going from area to area “determined to ‘teach’ all those villages the consequences of ‘supporting’ the rebel cause by paying the ‘taxes’ (Ao 2006:26). Since it was troubled times, people became apprehensive of this disruption and everyone was worried. As the soldiers marched into the church and questioned the congregation, “Apenyo burst into a solo number” defying the presence of the interrogation (ibid 27). The soldiers took the cue of the girl’s act as an open defiance. Grabbing and dragging her into the old church building, they raped her in public view. The situation was aggravated when the soldiers even raped Apenyo’s mother when she came to the rescue of her daughter. However, one may note the point that such was the inhuman acts that the Indian Army committed on the innocent Nagas on the excuse that they were aiding the underground Nagas. The atrocities of the soldiers continue to haunt the memories of the people even to this day. The violent turn of situation in the story and the brutality it unfolds was, perhaps, beyond the expectation of everyone. What infuriated the soldiers the most was the fact that the woman was leading the group defying their power. Sexual violence against women in war and conflict has been seen as one of the biggest crimes against humanity. It is not just a humiliation of the community but violates an individual’s rights to live with dignity. Yet, time and again, “rape” has been used as a weapon in war.

Silenced and quest for self

Women had been taught to be silent no matter what goes through her life. It has become the ideal to measure a “good women.” Even today, as the world progress, it is still expected of women to be silent sufferers. The novels of, Easterine Kire, the short stories of Avinuo Kire and novel Neikehienuo Mepfhu-o highlights this phenomenon. Though they come out of their silence in the end, they recoil to it in the beginning. A number of women suffer silently in Easterine Kire’s *A Terrible Matriarchy*. The protagonist of the novel Dielieno undergoes emotional, mental and physical hardship staying with her grandmother. The youngest and only girl child born to her parents after four brothers, she sometimes felt she was an "afterthought". Made to live with Grandmother at age five, Dielieno grows up running errands and doing household chores. The name designates the status of the girl child in the society. But significantly, Grandmother refuses to even call her by nane and always refer to her as "the girl". When Dielieno asks why, Grandmother points her stick at her and snaps, "Don't be cheeky with me, girl". By refusing to call her name, Grandmother suppresses Dielieno's individual identity, marginalizing her further in the patriarchal society. Along with Dielieno, Naga society too is seen coming of age and learning to accept the changed roles of men and women in the society. Through the conflict between Grandmother and Dielieno, the author asserts that certain traditional practices and beliefs have lost their place in the inevitable changes in society, and thus are beyond the control of the individual.

The title of the novel refers to matriarchal hegemony in a patriarchal society. This concept challenges the common belief that gender inequality is a suppression of the female in a male dominated society. Kire draws attention to the way in which matriarchal control in her Angami society perpetuates gender inequality through gender abuse within the same gender. Grandmother Vibano is the terrible matriarch who manipulates and misapplies culture in her effort to hold on to tradition. Though she come across as a strict disciplinarian, Grandmother ultimately is more a victim of patriarchy than her granddaughter Dielieno. She represents tradition that is averse to change.. She holds the view that girl need no education because it has nothing to do with becoming a good Naga wife and mother. Grandmother wants to retain the values of her generation and so she thinks girls have to be raised "on a tight leash" to keep them from trouble. She was raised

in a different era when the roles of men and women in the society were more specific than in the contemporary context. Grandmother attempts to take on the role of the patriarch, but loses her maternal instincts and turned into a strict disciplinarian who tries to keep people within the boundaries of what she considers as the cultural norm. Grandmother has internalized the patriarchal values so firmly in her consciousness that she fails to realize what it has done to her. She keeps herself rigidly confined to her gendered role as a woman and limits the other women in her household to virtual prisoners. She believes that submissiveness is a female virtue but she herself dominates everybody. She never comforts or shows affection to Dielieno. Instead she reprimands her for her natural impulses and denies the very childhood of the girl by restricting from play and making her do household chores from the young age of five. Through Grandmother's character, Kire peels the layers of patriarchal values that bind the Angami society so rigidly and determine the character of its people.

However, Dielieno never raises her voice against her grandmother but works diligently and silently. Nino bears the oppression of her mother-in-law silently. According to Dielieno, she cannot even wear a new blouse without it being covered by an old shawl she is scared of her rebukes. Besides, Nino, there are other two daughter-in-laws but they live far away. Thus, she is the only one who has to face grandmother's frustration every day. Nino is also supposed to have been the prettiest girl in the village during her time but now there are no such signs of her beauty. She is always anxious and frightened of grandmother. "Mother, with her face and clothes wrinkled, how could she possibly have been pretty at my age? I thought she was born with that worried expression on her face. It was like she wanted to please and yet did not quite manage to and that set a constant, anxious look on her face. The person she feared most was grandmother and I hated grandmother with a Vengeance because nothing my mother ever did seemed to please her." (Kire 2007: 3). Nino cannot even speak to her husband about grandmother mistreating Dielieno. Nino complies with the decision of her husband as he decides for Dielieno to stay at her grandmother's place. Dielieno's father also blames Nino of not being capable of raising her own daughter. While, she recoils to silence. "Mother was right. You are not raising her properly. She will leave tomorrow for mother's house and I don't want to hear any more arguments about this" (ibid 10).

Bano, the illegitimate child of Grandmother's youngest brother Sizo, is another silenced female character. She is raised by Grandmother as her own daughter. Though this was done with the intention of avoiding scandal and saving the family's reputation, Bano is denied a real family. She is not allowed to call her biological parents 'Father' and 'Mother'. She grows up calling Grandmother 'Mother', and has hardly seen her biological mother. Her father's visits are unwelcome at Grandmother's house. This arrangement however, is a sham, as everybody knows the truth about Bano's identity. Lieno learns about it from gossiping women at the water spot. The only proposal for Bano's hand in marriage is refused by Grandmother without her consent. Through Bano's plight, the author highlights the fate of an illegitimate child who has no place to go. The importance attached to respectability denied Bano a proper family since she was born out of wedlock. For no fault of hers, she has to live a life of submission all her life. Grandmother is at times hypocritical and has double standards. She implies that moral looseness is genetically inherited by branding unwed mothers as having "bad blood", but tries to cover up the scandal in her own family. The unwed teenage mothers are another group of marginalized females in the novel. As an illegitimate child, Bano is sensitive to the plight of other social outcasts who are discriminated and relegated to the margins of society such as the unwed teenage mothers who end up in the wine houses. Nisano, Vini's wife suffers greatly because of his drunkard husband. Right after marriage, Vini doesn't indulge in alcohol for a few months but soon starts drinking. Even on the night Nisano gives birth to their son, he is sloshed and cannot help in any manner. He also gets involved with the thugs of the town like Rocky and Bai. Nisano suffers Vini's tantrums and violence when he is drunk. Though she takes the help of Leto and Dieleino, she silently suffers emotional and verbal abuses hurled towards her. She says "Last night he accused me of trapping him with the baby. He said he really didn't want to marry me but he had been forced into it." (Kire 2007:240).

Life on Hold by Easterine Kire is a love story of two childhood friends Nime and Roko. However, their love story is unfulfilled as Roko joins the underground movement and Nime marries Abeiu. After her marriage, they settle in Dimapur. Nime being a responsible daughter visits her parental home every weekend especially because of her father's mental condition. But Abeiu is unhappy about it and tells her to visit her parents

only every six weeks. Nime thinks of working and earning for her expenses but even this is refused. Instead he accuses her of visiting Kohima to meet Roko. "I've never been his mistress", Nime wanted to shout, but instead she said, "We were childhood friends, But we have lost all contacts with one another now (Kire 2011: 65). Two days after her father's death, Abeiu also comments that she can now cut down on her trips to Kohima. Nime also listens silently when her husband lends her brother money on the condition that his house is mortgaged to Abeiu. Nime have to listen to his verbal abuses as he would often comment "your father's daughter" (81). Abeiu is also partial to his son as which worries Nime but all she can do is watch silently.

The short stories by Avinuo Kire in her book *The Power to Forgive* portray women who recoil themselves into silence under suppression. *The Power to Forgive* is the story of a rape victim. It tells of a twelve year old being raped by her paternal uncle. As a minor, she is silenced by her uncle as he commits the crime and as he leaves he murmurs something to her which she cannot comprehend. Soon the news spreads like wildfire and the whole Naga village rise up against it. Even after 16 years has passed, though she had learned to accept the truth, it still haunts her. She seems to move on and is happy but this happiness is often disturbed by the memories of this incident. She longs to be carefree like the other girls in the village. Her mother instead of being supportive reminds her of the taboo attached to their family and emotionally remains detached from her. She does not receive any kind of emotional, mental support or counseling from her family. She only suffers in silence. She sensed judgment through her mother's furtive glances, her thinly pursed lips her grimaces. She thought no one understood the meaning of silences more than her mother; in time she too had learned the language well. She would repeatedly agonize over the events that had unfolded that fateful day; over whether she ought to have been more alert, more wary, fought harder. But above all, her most agonizing thought was whether life would have been simpler if she had kept that one day of life her secret. She often wondered whether things would have been different had her mother discovered first. Somehow she knew she could not get over the violation of her body; she could bear her shame in private. It only became intolerable when society "shared" the shame. (Kire 2015:4,5)

She even feels betrayed by her own father as he forgives the culprit. Even he seems to be detached from her as when he comes to her room; he sits at the edge of the bed. He tells her about “forgiveness, justice and family honour” (ibid 5) and leaves. She remembers the day her father, without consulting her forgives the rapist. She says: “The taut stirrings of a strange and alien emotion bubbled deep within her the words; feeling much too complicated for a child of twelve. Frustrated at not being able to express what she felt, she burst into helpless tears.” (ibid 5) It angers her but she remains silent because she is never given the chance to speak about herself. Though the rapist is ex-communicated and is sent to jail, he gradually picks up his life and lives a normal family life. This definitely is unfair to her but all she can do is say aloud, “As if *he* had been the victim.” (ibid 5).

In the story *The Fallen Bird*, the protagonist is a modern educated woman. As a child she gets to know of her position in the family as well as the society. She notices how jubilant her parents become as her baby brother Keneisevor is born. However, the day he dies, her mother becomes almost a non-entity in the house and she takes the whole burden of house. Once unable to bear it she had told her mother, “Don’t forget that you still have three children!” (Kire 2015: 46) but it only made her bitter and even her father is unhappy about it and makes her apologise for it. When she marries, she is happy, yet it is short-lived. She is a teacher at a local school but though she enjoys it she gives up as her husband gets transferred without question. Later on as they have children and moves to Kohima, she finds out that her husband is having an affair. Even after that, she stands by him and looks after him without any complain.

In the *Promise of the Camellias*, the protagonist gets into an arranged marriage. At first they like each other and hope that it will turn to love. Unfortunately, they turn out to be two completely different individuals. The husband is an important officer who gets regular visitors. As such the husband wants a sophisticated wife. The wife tries her best but cannot cope with his lifestyle. The relationship slowly begins to deteriorate. It becomes worse as they are told that they cannot have children because of her husband’s infertility. Soon the husband starts to have affairs but she does not confront him. He also becomes a drunkard. On their 8th anniversary, she is alone as her husband goes to Dimapur. She knows even then that he is with another woman but

she chooses to keep quiet. Anuo, her childhood friend and her husband's colleague also informs her that her husband is having an affair but she does not react. Soon the husband leaves her and she returns to her parental home silent.

In *A Respectable Woman*, the victimization and oppression of woman in a patriarchal society is portrayed through the character of Beinuo who was subjugated and oppressed by the conventional roles of the society. Traditionally, women are assigned a subordinate position in a male dominated society. From her childhood, Beinuo was forced to take care of the household chores at the same time pursue her education. After she completed her study she soon got a job, but she was made to leave the job when she got married to Meselhou. As it is taught for women to look after her husband and household chores and to rely on their husband for financial support, and are never encouraged to pursue their careers or follow their dreams. Moreover, in this kind of male dominated society, women are objectified in such a way that they are treated as 'property' for their husbands. Beinuo was referred as a property – "My family is my property. I'll do what I like" (Kire 2019: 145) and was ill-treated by her husband. Soon after their marriage, Meselhou started beating her and when she wanted to free herself from her husband because of the ill treatment, she did not seek any help from anyone – "I kept avoiding you because I was afraid you would find me some day with bruises or a black eye...I was afraid to tell you because you would...insist that I leave him" (ibid 139), "I did try once but I was already pregnant with Uvi..." (ibid 140).

The conventions of the society compel women to be so dependent on men that it becomes extremely difficult for them to make decisions about leaving their husbands. Even though, it was possible for women to get out of abusive marriage, Beinuo held back herself, firstly, because she was afraid that she would be criticized as failure as a wife by the society. Beinuo was confined in an unhealthy patriarchal society, a society that accepted Meselhou's cruel behavior towards his wife. Beinuo likewise became as a product of objectification, was treated as a property of her husband and along with it she becomes a victim of abuse by her husband that finally led her to her death but she is not given any justice by the society. She was devoid of her dignity even after her pre-mature death. Women in a patriarchal society often become a product of abuse which in some

cases leads to their death but are often overlooked based on the superior treatment of males in the society. Beinuo's character is the personification of the evils of patriarchy and its annihilation of a woman. A woman is not considered a 'human being' in such a space.

Neikehienuo Mepfhu-o's fictional novel *My Mother's Daughter*, unveils an uncomfortable story of domestic abuse and the trauma of victimhood faced by women in the patriarchal Naga society. *My Mother's Daughter* deals with the stories of women who suffer from domestic abuse and violence. It offers a biting critique of a patriarchal society that has normalized violence against women within the household and the voicelessness of women who suffer physical pain and emotional trauma. The title '*My Mother's Daughter*' is central to the narrative that is woven around the plight of women in a male-dominated society. It concentrates the focus on the lives of women within the household and hints at the shared experiences of domestic abuse across generations. It is also suggestive of the invisibility of women and the erasure of their subjectivity in a society that has relegated them to gender and social roles that are assigned to them- as a mother, wife and daughter. The use of nameless characters in the novel is in this regard doubly significant. However, the title is also a subversive act as it directs the reader's gaze into the private space of the household to challenge deeply rooted social norms and practices. It is also an assertive claim of identity that attempts to break free from the male-centric understanding of lineage and identity. The novel also ends in a hopeful note where the daughter finds refuge in her mother's home again. The household is the site of abuse and the site of refuge as well thus pointing to the need for change within the household first.

Even though the women characters in the novel suffer immensely from the daily drama of domestic violence their voices of protest are muffled and silenced. The social norms do not look unfavorable upon a husband for mistreating his wife but at the same time imposed strict censure on a woman who talks back at her husband. Every single word that came out of her mouth is tattooed on every inch of her body whenever she tries to talk back at her husband. It was better to stay silent than to be beaten by her husband. The silencing of women who suffer domestic abuse is succinctly captured in the remonstrance of the husband, "Always remember that you are a woman. Just keep quiet and don't

interfere in everything. It is not your job to tell me what to do.” The misogynistic attitudes of men reduced women to an object that merely exists to keep the bond of marriage alive. The novel distinctly identifies patriarchal norms and attitudes as the root cause of such abuses.

The patriarchal mode of thinking is internalized by the women resulting in the partial treatment of women towards their own. Women suffering from abusive treatment do not find refuge or support from other women thus adding to their voicelessness and alienation. The patriarchal norms are so deeply entrenched that even women have come to accept the unjust treatment as their fate. When the five-year-old daughter pleaded with her mother to run away from her abusive father and live with her *Apfotsapfü* (great-grandmother) her mother grabs a stick to beat her and to silence her. This incident traumatized the daughter because she never expected her mother to hit her but to protect her. On another occasion the mother with a bloodied nose and disheveled hair asked her daughter to apologize to her father though she did nothing wrong. This indicates an acceptance of domestic abuse as a norm even by the women. When the wife was badly injured after the usual beating of her husband, the mother-in-law instead of coming to her aid smirked at her and said, “This is nothing! You are not experiencing anything new. He is not doing anything new. This is all part of marriage. Your father-in-law used to beat me much worse than this.” The suppression of women’s voices is carried out by women who have accepted their pitiable position and the roles that are assigned to them by the patriarchal system. In another instance she is rebuked by her mother-in-law, “You are always blaming him for everything! One of the kids is sick, it is his fault! You are sick, it is his fault! Your back hurts, it is his fault! Now you can't sleep properly and it is his fault again?” The mother in law failed to see and understand that the reason behind all the sleepless nights and sickness was her violent drunkard son who only knows how to abuse his wife and daughter.

Mepfhu-o’s *My Mother’s Daughter* is a gripping story of women who bore the brunt of domestic violence, verbal and physical abuses from their fathers and husbands. The novel narrates the stories of different women across generations who share the same experiences of domestic violence and abuse. It is a gripping take on the ugly realities that persist behind closed doors where a culture of domestic violence has been accepted as a

norm. The title *My Mother's Daughter* is revealing as it signifies the shared experiences of domestic abuse across generations. Domestic violence faced by wives and daughter in the hands of their fathers and husbands forms the central theme of the novel. Women suffered in silence behind closed doors because society has indirectly taught them that it is a shame 'to be abused' forgetting that it is a shame 'to abuse'. There is a certain sense of helplessness in the identification of the mother and daughter as they suffer from the same kinds of indignity from their fathers and husbands. Both mother and daughter suffer from the unrestrained assaults from the husband. In a horrifying description of an incident the mother is beaten mercilessly and dragged out of the house even as she screamed in pain and begged for forgiveness. The daughter is also slapped repeatedly by her father when she tried to tend to her mother's wounds. It is also ironical because the daughter finds herself in the same position as her mother even as though she thought she could escape the pitiful fate of her mother. The daughter nurtured deep resentment not only against her father for his abusive behavior but also towards her mother because she was not strong enough to protest. However, when she was physically assaulted by her husband the same way her mother was assaulted by her father and her daughter tried to protect her the same way she tried to protect her mother, she finds herself in the exact position as her mother years ago. The novel narrates a horrifying tale of continued abuse across generation and the helplessness of women as the daughter suffers the same fate as her mother.

The writings of these Naga women writers have written against the injustice in the society they live in. Their writings function as critiques of the social customs that curtail their growth and freedom. Often women's stories are not chronicled in history itself or at best only given slight references for their contributions or their sufferings. These pitiable stories of women are laid bare in a society that has normalized domestic abuse. It speaks volumes on the continued oppression of women across generations and the social roles within which their voice are silenced. By telling these stories, the plight of women is brought to the fore and their voices heard. Writings, therefore, have definitely created space for women in addressing their various struggle wherein they find themselves encountering different idea and forms.

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Naga society has a long and a complex history of political violence and conflict which has affected the indigenous Naga community in several ways such as loss of individual lives and community values, loss of peace, living under the reign of constant fear and terror, shift in geography and encroachment of indigenous land and culture. This political chapter of Naga history is quoted often and has been extensively studied by scholars across the world. Contemporary creative writings produced from the region mainly focus on topics of indigenous political conflicts that ravaged the state and presently there is commendable scholarship on these works. Tamsula Ao's debut work of fiction, *These Hills called Home* (2006), is an example of the lives of everyday ordinary men and women caught in the web of the social and political disorder. Easterine Kire's first novel *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003) is a historical novel that describes the battle between British forces and one Naga hamlet of Khonoma Village. Both these debut works tell us that writers from the region recognize the importance of recording the political narrative of the region through lived experiences. Having lived such experiences, it is natural that the issues and concerns of the Naga movement become one of the primary narratives of their work. However, the overwhelming political narrative of the region has blurred several other agendas that plague the state starting with gender justice in Naga society. Gender and empowerment is an ongoing discourse and is not a new topic in Naga society.

Easterine Kire and Tamsula Ao have used the literary art to weave the people's history and social realities in their works. They narrate experiences of individuals whose lives were interlaced by the destructive forces of violence and the fast enveloping modernity that was beginning to transform their reality. Easterine Kire is one of the most prolific writers from Nagaland. Her stories reflect deep social awareness and portray a cultural picture that invites us into the real life of the Naga people, their pain and struggles and the wounds and scars of their history. A recurring theme in Easterine Kire's novels is situating the encounter between everyday village life and unpredictable outside forces

such as the colonial encounter, social and political upheavals, and new cultural and religious forces. The element of social realism is unmistakable in her writings such as *Mari* where she depicts the real experiences of war through the eyes of a woman Mari. The battle of Kohima, perhaps the biggest and definitely the most significant battle on the eastern theatre of the Second World War, is presented not as a clash between two imperial forces but through the experiences of the local people on whose lands the war was fought. It is a realist depiction of war at the ground level away from the high tables of political masters in war offices and brings to the fore the authentic voices of the Naga people caught in a war not of their making. The element of social realism is however not limited to a critique of injustice perpetrated from the outside. It also actively engages with the injustice and corruption within Naga society. *A Terrible Matriarchy* wrestles with issues of social status and the growth of economic class, the distinction between the rich and the poor in a hitherto classless society. The lives of the Nagas were bound to nature in their social, cultural, ethical and religious values. Easterine Kire dynamically portrayed it in the novel *Bitter Wormwood*, how the livelihood activities of Nagas were closely related to nature. She titled the novel *Bitter Wormwood* because 'bitter wormwood' was a type of bitter herb traditionally believed to keep the bad spirits away. The novel showed the deep connection of Naga culture and tradition rooted in nature. The old way of life for the Nagas also contains wisdom and advices for the younger generations. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, the parents and elders of the society teach the younger ones all these wisdom so that they can be responsible individuals in the future. Against the failings of society are also presented tiny glimpses into the social ethos that cement relationships and bind the community. Easterine Kire brings this out very beautifully in her works as she highlights moral values practiced in the midst of tragedy

Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* discusses the social realities of Nagaland against the backdrop of the troubled relationship between Nagas and India. She writes on the political strife and turmoil of the land, the quest for separate political status and how the villagers survive in such a conflict prone area. Many of the stories are about 'bloodshed and tears' and it depict common people who are victimized by the conflicts, violence and politics of the state. Set in the early years of fervent Naga

nationalism there are stories of the unexpected raids and atrocities committed on the innocent Naga Villagers by the Indian Armed Forces, the precocious young girl brutally raped by the soldiers in front of the church and the old man reminiscing his underground days as a Naga Army to his grandson. What endures the most is the portrayal of how the common people cope with living in an uncertain time, the conflict being far from over. *Aosenla's story* talks about gender identity and the fate of a woman in a male-dominated society. The narratives give voice to the subaltern existence and experience of the female who is threatened by the socio-cultural powers. She pointed out that –as long as patriarchy exists, no one is ever truly free. Ao writes from a space that bears the scars of violence but also contains a space that allows interaction and introspection upon questions of the self in the context of the larger Naga identity

Naga society, which does not have class and caste divisions, enjoys a better social position than the other societies in India where the societal structure serves as a marker of an individual's identity. The absence of these factors is very appreciative and has given Naga society an image of being more advanced, inclusive and sensitive to social issues. The classless and casteless Naga society brings into discussion the principle of egalitarianism that is widely used to define the Naga way of life. The egalitarian principle that prioritizes and believes in equality as a tradition is often used as an identity marker to highlight the tribal 'others' from the gender inequality caste-Hindu societies in India. However, a close study of the gender roles in Naga society affirms that the term is contrary to the values of Contemporary Naga society with the concept of egalitarianism generally losing its significance

Naga women writers are conscious of their subordinate position and have used their writing to express how women are treated in Naga society, a community that is known for its egalitarian values. *A Terrible Matriarchy* (Kire, 2007), is among the few texts that reflects the ideals and values and how they shape the roles of a Naga woman. What contributes to the uniqueness of this work is the subtle ways in which Kire underlines the power and control of patriarchy. Kire carefully brings in maternal power as a primary subject in the novel which exerts physical and mental trauma on the girl child Dielieno. According to K.B.Vieo Pou in his book, *Literary Cultures of India's Northeast*, having

only women writers in the Naga literary scene could be attributed to their traditional role as storytellers and poet-singers. In contrast, to other spheres of Naga society where men hold predominant roles, women has made a name for themselves in this field. Pou goes on further to explain that in the field of literature, women preceding men can be looked as a “carved out space” to engage in matters where women were previously kept out (48). With a history of violence and customary laws that forbid women’s participation in political leadership, writing seems to be the most effective way to engage in issues of the present times. Education has paved the way for women empowerment and continues to make an impact. Pou is of the opinion that, “By writing women- centric stories, these Naga women have drawn the reader’s attention to the history that has left them in ignominy” (162). It is women who have been more vocal in the field of creative writing. The patriarchal set-up has no doubt restricted women’s freedom, yet Naga women writers, with a touch of their feminine sensibilities have emerged to address the issues of living in a patriarchal society.

Literary analysis of the work of emerging Naga authors is still very minimal. However, as Naga authors are steadily gaining recognition for their literary contribution it is pertinent to engage with their texts and glean the intricate stories that they tell. These writers have used the literary art to weave the people's history and social realities in their works. In a way, these writers narrate experiences of individuals whose lives were interlaced by the discomfiting forces of violence that continued to spiral with each day and the fast enveloping modernity that was beginning to transform their reality. While these writers may or may not have close association among themselves, they are contemporaneous and their writings are also reflections of the generation that has seen one of the most turbulent periods in Naga history. Naga society is still a society in transition and stories after all carry the imprint of collective experience

Naga writings in English is a fairly recent trend and though writers such as Easterine Kire and Temsula Ao has achieved literary acclaim for their works, there is still a long way towards recognition of Naga Literature in the Indian literary space. Naga Writers share in the marginalization of the NorthEast in general and one can notice shared themes which are prominent and also specific to the literature of the region. War and violence is a

recurring theme and this is particularly significant when one considers the fact that Kohima was the site of one of the most crucial battle of the Second World War. Easterine Kire's *Mari* is a tale of the people on whose lands the war was fought but who do not feature in the grand narratives of the war. Closely following the Second World War, the world of the Nagas was once again embroiled in decades long period of violence when the Nagas struggled for independence was met with the brutal suppression of the Indian Army. The traumatic experiences of this period of turmoil are given stark portrayal in the fictional works of Naga writers. However, the depiction of violence is not purely one of external aggression as Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* tells stories of internal turbulences leading to factional killings. What stands out in the fictional works of Naga writers is the narrative canvas on which the experiences of the common people are portrayed. There is less valorization and more focused on the unpleasant footprints of war and violence. An element of apologetic is also evident in the works of Naga writers where there is an attempt to provide an insider's perspective of Naga society. Traditional institutions, social norms and cultural practices provide the setting in which stories are woven and characters developed. There is an unmistakable effort to rediscover and present the old way of life against the tendency to dismiss the traditional way of life as uncivilized. However, far from the temptation of romanticizing Naga society as a haven of moral and cultural values and the celebrated high status of women, the fictional works of Naga Writers addresses the ugly social realities head on. Neikehienuo Mepfhu-o's *My Mother's Daughter* is a sobering tale of domestic violence and abuse with its unapologetic depiction of women living under the tyranny of patriarchy.

However the work does not limit itself to these. It is open for further research work.

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