NARRATIVE IDENTITY: A HERMENEUTIC STUDY OF SELECT NAGA NARRATIVES

(Thesis submitted to Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English)

By

TEMJENRENLA OZUKUM
Registration No. 692/2015

Under the supervision of
Dr. Lemtila Alinger

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES & EDUCATION
NAGALAND UNIVERSITY, KOHIMA CAMPUS
MERIEMA
2022

DECLARATION

I, Temjenrenla Ozukum, do hereby declare that the subject matter of my thesis entitled ***Narrative Identity: A Hermeneutic Study of Select Naga Narratives*** is a bonafide record of work done by me under the supervision of Dr. Lemtila Alinger. This thesis has not been submitted either in full or in part, or has previously formed the basis for the award of any research degree, fellowship, associateship, etc. in any other university or institute.

Kohima

Dated: 30th June 2022

Temjenrenla Ozukum

Regn. No. 692/2015

COUNTERSIGNED

Head
Department of English
Nagaland University
Kohima Campus, Meriema

Prof. Jano Sohlose

Professor & Head

Department of English

Nagaland University

Kohima Campus, Meriema

Dr. Lemtila Alinger

Supervisor

Nagaland University

Kohima Campus,

Meriema

NAGALAND UNIVERSTIY

(A Central University established by the act of parliament, 35/1989)

Department of English

Kohima Campus, Kohima – 797001

NU/ENG/2022

30th June 2022

CERTIFICATE

This is to verify that the thesis entitled ***Narrative Identity: A Hermeneutic Study of Select Naga Narratives*** is a bonafide record of research work done by Ms. Temjenrenla Ozukum, Regn. No. 692/2015, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2015-2022. Submitted to Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English. This thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship, or other title and that the thesis represents independent and original work on the part of the scholar under my supervision. It is also certified that the research has been undertaken as per UGC regulations 2009 and 2016 and the scholar has fulfilled the criteria mentioned in the University Ordinances-OC-4, sub-section 5(i) of the section-9 for submission of the thesis.

The 30th of June, 2022

Kohima

SUPERVISOR

Dr. Lemtila Alinger

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Nagaland University,

Kohima Campus, Meriema

Kohima – 797001, Nagaland

Mob: +91 8787624224

Email: alingerlemtila@yahoo.com

Fwd: [Ouriginal] 2% similarity - lemtila@nagalanduniversity.ac.in

1 message

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **Lemtila Alinger** <lemtila@nagalanduniversity.ac.in>
Date: Thu, 30 Jun 2022 at 20:56
Subject: Fwd: [Ouriginal] 2% similarity - lemtila@nagalanduniversity.ac.in
To: <aren.lanu@gmail.com>

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: <noreply@urkund.com>
Date: Thu, Jun 30, 2022 at 8:50 PM
Subject: [Ouriginal] 2% similarity - lemtila@nagalanduniversity.ac.in
To: <lemtila@nagalanduniversity.ac.in>

Document sent by: lemtila@nagalanduniversity.ac.in
Document received: 6/30/2022 5:14:00 PM
Report generated 6/30/2022 5:20:07 PM by Ouriginal's system for automatic control.

Student message: Temjenrenla Ozukum Ph.D. thesis "Narrative Identity: A Hermeneutic Study of Select Naga Narratives"

Document : Temjenrenla Ozukum, PhD thesis, Narrative Identity, A Hermeneutic Study of Select Naga Narratives.docx[D141520532]

About 2% of this document consists of text similar to text found in 71 sources. The largest marking is 42 words long and is 100% similar to its primary source.

PLEASE NOTE that the above figures do not automatically mean that there is plagiarism in the document. There may be good reasons as to why parts of a text also appear in other sources. For a reasonable suspicion of academic dishonesty to present itself, the analysis, possibly found sources and the original document need to be examined closely.

Click here to open the analysis:
https://secure.urkund.com/view/135041876-640302-929199

Click here to download the document:
https://secure.ouriginal.com/archive/download/141520532-839040-917173

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis would have never seen the light of day without my supervisor, Dr. Lemtila Alinger. Through my long journey of self-doubt, her gentle but firm reassurance gave me the push that I needed. For all the critical insights, patient redirections and genuine care, I will remain grateful. Thank you ma'am, for helping me recognize the value there is in pursuing after wisdom.

I also express my profound gratitude to Prof. Jano S. Liegise (HOD), Prof. Nigamananda Das, the faculty members of the Department of English, the Dean of the School of Humanities and Education, and the University for the privilege and invaluable opportunities given to me along the way.

I thank my dear colleagues at the Department of English, the Principal, Vice-Principal, and the Kohima College family for their many encouragements.

I acknowledge the many storytellers whose works have inspired this study and have deeply shaped my own perspectives on the power and responsibility of storytelling.

To my dearest parents and my parents-in-law, my siblings and spouses, my extended family and dear friends, thank you for believing that I could do this, for all the help rendered, and especially for your prayers. To Oya Atu, Sam and Keta, a special mention of gratitude.

To my loving husband, Among, for holding the fort and giving me the space to grow, and to my daughter Yayang for being so accommodating beyond her years, I would not have been able to do this without you both.

And to the Grand Weaver of all stories including my own- my God, my strength forever. Thank You.

Dated: 30th June, 2022

Temjenrenla Ozukum

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Stories and storytelling have been an integral part of the Naga way of life. Stories told and retold over generations were crucial in establishing, maintaining and legitimizing a sense of identity and of belongingness to land, community, and history. The rich heritage of the Naga oral tradition attests to this. In the present day, stories continue to shape our understandings of who we were, who we are and who we want to be. Although modernity greatly disrupted and altered the modes of traditional storytelling, the impulse to tell stories has not been stifled, evidenced by the growing body of writings now known as "Naga Writings in English". In reading many of these works, one cannot escape engaging with the history and culture of the Nagas. These writings are deeply embedded in the history of the people. In the last few decades, the contemporary literary scene in Nagaland has become an important site of critical inquiry into the idea of Naga identity, articulating the many ways in which the concept of identity is being re-visited, negotiated, and re-imagined in modern day Nagaland. What role does contemporary Naga Writings in English play in the re-imagination of a collective Naga identity? An interest to seek answers to this question has led to this study.

Narrative identity is a concept that foregrounds the idea that humans, across cultures, understand themselves and the world they inhabit in terms of narrative. Contemporary narrative hermeneutics define narrative as "an interpretative activity of cultural sense-making", and narrative identity as how we understand our being in the

world in narrative (Meretoja, *Ethics* 48). This understanding of identity is based on the premise that we exist in "a state of constant becoming through a temporal process of reinterpretation" (Meretoja, *Ethics* 65). It is the act of "making sense of the haphazard happenings" around us into narrative that we "become full agents of our history" (Kearney 3). This study is an attempt to explore how contemporary Naga Writings in English engage with the nexus between the past, present and their future, and assess the importance of memory in particular as playing a significant role in the shaping of a collective identity among the Nagas.

As writers from Nagaland have creatively sought to engage with their past in the quest for identity, the concept of memory has become crucial because it is what links the present with the past. Contemporary writers can be said to carry the burden of memory to record, reimagine and commemorate the past in their writings. Thus, rendering their works as texts that feed into the cultural memory of the Nagas. As a consequence of colonialization and modernity, writers from the region have also been faced with the challenge of recording the stories of their oral traditions in their writings. In the process, a distinct kind of literature has emerged. In our reading of contemporary writings from Nagaland, an engagement with the culture of orality and the history of the people is inescapable. The oral tradition also continues to be a vast pool that is feeding the imagination of contemporary writers and their works, and in turn give new meaning to the old stories. In the process, it is also found that the writers have begun to write with the realization that Nagas are "no longer pathetic victims or noble messengers from lost worlds, they are visible actors in local, national, and global arenas" (Clifford 13). While living in a moment that is global, Naga Writings in English explore the many intersecting identities and the resulting

emerging consciousness because of the multiple socio-political realities that they are embedded in (Bhumika 583).

1.1 Identity Matters

In the modern history of Nagaland, "three powerful waves" are recognized: the wave of British colonial rule, the wave of the Christian Mission, and the wave of the Indian state. These waves continue to create ripples that affect us today, making the (re)negotiation of identities an ongoing project (Oppitz 9). Scholars from across disciplines have studied the concept of Naga identity and its different facets. The Naga identity has been said to be "political" and "born out of blood" (Tunyi 15), "amorphous" (Ao, "On Being" 9), "shifting, to some extent voluntary concept" (Arkotong Longkumer 7), etc. As mentioned earlier, in recent scholarship, there is a growing attempt to reimagine the Nagas as being more than just passive objects but as active agents who exert their agency in shaping their identity, adapting, and reinventing themselves. Stuart Hall's definition of identity as a concept that is always operating "under erasure"- in between reversal and emergence- is useful in understanding that the quest for identity is not so much about a recovery of the past ("Introduction" 2). Identity is rather, as he says, "the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 112). The Naga identity is, in many ways, an incomplete and on-going process. Many of the contemporary writings attempt to engage with the complexities of such positioning. The attempt to understand narrative identity in the Naga context is not an attempt to define or arrive at a fixed essence. Rather, taking a cue from Hall, we may understand such identities as a "positioning" rather than an essence.

In her seminal essay "On Being a Naga," Temsula Ao, one of the foremost poet-writer to document and write about Nagas, ruminates on the complexities of the present Naga identity. As she traces its development from insularity to an imposed identity in a modern set-up, she points out how the question of identity continues to become all the more pertinent. She asks, "Is the call for asserting our ethnic identity a call for primitivism, even sedition? In the quagmire of uncertainties that beset Naga society today, the most essential question that needs to be asked is: What does it mean to be a Naga?" (6). She goes on to say that "it is not the mere geographical location of the tribes, racial traits and history, nor is it a common language that lies at the heart of this blanket identity" (8). From such observations, we can come to an understanding that despite differences, for the Nagas to have still managed to exist and survive as a coherent group of people despite surface differences, there are certain commonalities amid the differences that have enabled this amorphous nature of the Naga identity to survive many upheavals through the centuries.

1.2 Brief Overview of Naga History

The notion of Naga identity is multi-faceted and by no means unproblematic. In tracing the origins of the usage of the term "Naga", we find that the current understanding and implication of the term lies in the colonial history that is fairly recent- a term used by outsiders. People used to identify themselves by their clans or villages. The British colonial powers were largely responsible for entrenching the term "Naga", insensitive to the nuances that existed, and eager to create simpler and general identities to make administration easier for them (Stockhausen, "Naga: Lineages" 140). However, the use of the term "Naga" also gave "certain fixity that was earlier unfounded" and it has become a useful term for the Nagas themselves

(Thomas 1). As some scholars would argue, the question of oneness of the Nagas as one people is not negated just because the term was imposed on them, and that "the fact that Naga people did not know they were called Naga did not mean that they were not related to one another as one people" (Lotha, "Naga Identity" 54).

In their introduction to *Landscape, Culture, and Belonging: Writing the History of Northeast India,* historians Neeladri Bhattacharya and Joy L.K. Pachuau write that the identities of people and their sense of belonging need to be historicized by "unpacking the complicated historical processes through which the naturalness of identities is constituted" (9). The Naga identity, like any other identity, has been the result of many complicated historical processes. A brief account of some of the significant moments is summarized below.

1.2.1 The Pre-British Period

Much of the history of the Nagas of the pre-British period remains unknown. The oral accounts of different present-day "tribes" offer theories of their migration to the mountains they now call home, and varying origin myths. It is widely accepted that the Nagas are of the Mongolian stock having migrated in waves from Mongolia through China and Burma. The mention of Naga country as "the realm of the Naked" in Claudius Ptolemy's *Geographia* in 150 A.D., the mention by Huang Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim who visited Assam in 645 A.D., and the records found in the Ahom Buranji in the thirteenth century are cited to testify that the Nagas had been in these hills for a long time. Speaking different tongues and having cultural practices that are as similar as they are sometimes peculiar to different groups, the Nagas are known to have been autonomous, living in considerably self-sufficient existence within their villages-states. Their rich oral

tradition encompassing the customs, knowledge systems, beliefs and practices pertaining to every area of their lives governed them, rooting their belonging to their land, and defining their identity over generations.

1.2.2 British Occupation

In the modern history of the Nagas, the Treaty of Yandabo that was signed in 1826 at the end of the First Anglo-Burmese War is considered as hugely significant because Burma ceded control of Assam and Manipur to Britain, thus bringing the British closer to the Naga Hills and marking "the entry of the Nagas into the written history of the world" (Oppitz et al. 11). Naga historian Charles Chasie argues that the signing of this treaty was "the first event that was to change the world of the Nagas forever" ("Nagaland in Transition" 254). It is believed that the British did not have much interest in occupying the Naga territories because they offered no prospects of economic gains. However, in order to rein in the frequent raids by the hill dwellers on the plains people, and apprehensive about possible losses of their own resources, the colonial state decided to intervene (Bhattacharya and Pachuau 4).

The Naga Hills came under British occupation from 1832, which lasted up to 1947. The Battle of Khonoma of 1879 is considered as the last battle of resistance against the British. The contact with British colonialism began a process through which the Nagas and their territory were peripheralized. This was done through practices such as surveying, mapping and codifying, a process that continued under the India state. In the process of classification, the hill people came to be termed as primitive "tribes", a contested term today, but nonetheless an identification marker that has come to stay. Presently, the state of Nagaland under India has 17 recognized major tribes and several sub-tribes.

1.2.3 Arrival of the American Baptist Missionaries

The American Baptist Foreign Mission Society had set up base in Assam on the invitation of the chief commissioner, Francis Jenkins, who felt that the pacification of the Nagas could only be done with the aid of the civilizing mission of the missionaries (Yonuo 113). The work that was started in the 1840s by the pioneering missionaries gradually transformed the history of the Nagas in ways beyond their reckoning. Modern scholarship has been critical of the colonial frameworks through which the missionaries viewed the locals- as savages and barbaric, which then entrenched a definition of the Nagas that continues to this day. As the Nagas embraced the new religion, they were taught to severe ties with their cultural beliefs and practices.

Although modern education came to the benefit of the Nagas as they began to be exposed to the world outside at an accelerated pace, and although the new religion was gladly embraced to become a part of their identity, the repercussions of the culture-shaming has truly been great. These encounters resulted in the loss of the people's traditional knowledge systems. For instance, the morung was central to the cultural life of the Nagas. It was not just a physical structure as it stands today devoid of its former significance, neither was it merely a dormitory for young men. Knowledge pertaining to every aspect of their life that was crucial in the definition of their identity was shared and passed down from one generation to the next in the morung. With the arrival of modern education, the morung was gradually rendered redundant. A noteworthy cultural facet of pre-Christian Naga practices was the grand Feast of Merit which conferred social status to a person. It was a significant practice by families that had accumulated wealth to host the feasts of merit. The feast of merit was among the first cultural practices to which the missionaries put an end.

1.2.4 The First World War and the Nagas

The conscription of about 2000 Nagas who were sent to France as part of the Labour Corps is considered as significant in the way in which the exposure gained during this time began the first stirrings of nationalism among the Nagas. The formation of the Naga Club in 1918, comprising members of the Labour Corps and other educated Nagas cutting across tribal lines is understood to be a direct result of this (Chasie, *Naga Memorandum* 44). Nations, as Benedict Anderson famously theorized, are imagined communities. This period saw the beginnings of the Nagas imagining themselves as one people and led to the submission of the Naga Memorandum to the Simon Commission on January 10, 1929. This memorandum is considered as the first written document expressing the common aspiration of the people to be kept under the control of the British and to be excluded from the changes proposed in the Indian constitution. Paul Pimomo explains,

> the signatories in effect introduced a relatively unknown people to the rest of the world, identifying the Nagas as an indigenous group who stood up to speak for freedom and self-determination in a world then ordered and organized for colonial exploitation and domination. (107)

Today, this significant event is commemorated as the Naga Day led by the initiative of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation.

The Government of India Act 1935 demarcated the Naga Hills as “Excluded Areas”. The Japanese invasion during World War II was also significant as the Nagas gave unyielding support to the British, in the hopes to prove their loyalty. A more detailed contextual analysis will be done in the later chapters. Before the retreat of the British

from the Naga Hills, the Naga Hills District Tribal Council was formed to foster understanding and communication among the Nagas. In 1946, it was renamed Naga National Council, a common organization for the fight for Naga independence. The Nine-Point Agreement or the Hydari Agreement of June 1947 was made between the governor of Assam and the Naga leaders. The misunderstandings resulting out of this saw the beginnings of the underground movement under A.Z. Phizo that would then lead to unabated killings, catapulting into one of the most bloody and misunderstood conflicts.

The NNC was created under Phizo in 1946 to establish a sovereign Naga state. The more moderate among the Naga leaders signed a Nine-point agreement in June 1947 with Sir Akbar Hydari, the Governor of Assam, wherein more autonomy to freely develop themselves was to be granted to the Nagas. However, there were differences in the interpretation of Naga sovereignty. The Constituent Assembly refused to ratify the Hydari Accord and the agreement was also rejected by the NNC. The NNC under Phizo declared Naga independence on August 14, 1947 one day before India's independence from the British. A Referendum was conducted in May 1951 wherein it was shown that 99% Nagas wanted Nagaland to be a separate country. However, India rejected this plebiscite. There was a reorganization of the NNC, and the previously peaceful struggle became an armed conflict in the mid 1950's. To come down strongly, the Indian government imposed a Disturbed Area Act in 1956, which has become the present day AFSPA or the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. A separate state of Nagaland was formed in 1963. After formation of the state, a Peace Mission consisting of Nationalist Jayaprakash Narayan, CM of Assam BP Chaliha and Anglican Churchman Michael Scott, was formed in 1964 with the hope to find lasting peace in Nagaland and a ceasefire began. However, violence soon took over and the peace mission was abandoned.

Another major effort at finding a peaceful solution was the signing of the Shillong Accord in 1975 wherein NNC members agreed to surrender their arms and accept the Constitution of India. However, there were leaders such as Isak, Muivah and Khaplang who felt that the Shillong Accord was a betrayal and swore to fight for sovereignty and created the NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland) in 1980. In the years that followed, there was factionalism and the NSCN was split into two factions, the IM and K. In 1997 a ceasefire was signed between the NSCN (IM) and the Government. Ceasefire was also soon signed with the NSCN (K). In the years that followed, the ceasefire agreement ensures that the violence and bloodshed seen in the earlier years was not repeated again. In August 2015, the "Naga Peace Accord" was signed between NSCN (IM) and Indian government. Talks of peace continue as the future still remains uncertain.

1.3 A Brief Overview of Naga Written Literature

Written literature about the Nagas begins with the advent of the British contact with the Nagas and much of the recorded history of the people can be found in the writings of the British administrators, anthropologists, and the American missionaries (Yonuo 35). Charles Chasie gives a comprehensive overview of the history of Nagaland as it is reflected in its literature ("The History"). He broadly divides the period of growth of books and literature in Nagaland in this manner:

1. The British period: Some known publications during this period were by E.W. Clark, who had set up the first printing press in Ao country in 1884 at Molungyimsen where he was based. Translations of hymns, parts of the Bible were printed for the first converts. Very soon, such efforts by other missionaries

also initiated literacy and education in this manner. Besides some anthropological writings, there were official documents of British administrators. Chasie also notes the interesting translation of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* into the Angami language by three educated Angami Nagas during this period.

2. Post-British period to early 1970s: Chasie notes that this period saw the publication of many travelogues and British anthropologists during the 1960s, most notable among which is Verrier Elwin's *Nagas in the Nineteenth Century* in 1969. This period also saw the publication by a Naga, *A History of Anglo-Naga Affairs* by Tajenyuba Ao in 1958.

3. 1970s to turn of the century: This period saw a notable increase as this was the time after the creation of the state of Nagaland, an increase in the number of educated Nagas. This period is also marked by the beginning of newspaper publications which gave a platform for many to write and publish their ideas.

4. The new millennium: Chasie remarks this period marks the beginning of "the dawn of writing in Nagaland". Writings by Nagas on a diverse range of issues in both fiction and non-fiction has begun to proliferate the literary scene in Nagaland.

Many of these pioneering writers engaged in writing books about the history and politics of Nagas. Religion was also another topic of interest. Given the fact that they were the generation who had experienced momentous transitions in the history of

Nagaland, it appears the right thing to do that they took it upon themselves this task of documentation. These years were also the most tumultuous in Naga history.

Chasie rightly equates the paucity of writing during this time to the political conflict that the people were embroiled in. In questioning the lack of creative writings during this period, it would be wrong to assume that storytelling was something that people did not engage in, or that there was no one engaged in creative writings during this time. Surely there would have been writers and storytellers of these generations. It is just that there were no avenues for publication and readership. There are two notable points that Chasie highlights with regards to this. One, writing and reading was not so much a priority when survival during times of conflict was the only thing on their minds. Second, writing was a new thing for them. Moreover, writers had to be very cautious about writing anything that would be considered as offensive or going against popular opinion or commonly held beliefs especially pertaining to their history. To some extent, this is still true in the present day. It is not uncommon to hear of village councils issuing letters summoning writers who have written on topics that are deemed controversial. Whether this is a possible reason why contemporary women writers today mostly take to fiction to write about their lived experiences and voicing out against the injustices of patriarchy will be explored in one of the chapters.

Until Nagas themselves actually began to write their own stories, we see "outsiders" doing much of the writing and thereby, creating narratives of Nagas and their history that are problematic, either out of sheer neglect or because of the failure to understand the many peculiarities and complexities that actually exist. In doing so, there has been a tendency to create sterotypical ideas of who the Nagas are, and simple

readings of what their history is to say the least, so much so that there is also an uncritical acceptance and expectation upon Naga literature to be about certain things only. For instance, up until recently, Naga writings were expected to be about conflict and insurgency given the political scenario in Nagaland- a "disturbed area." This is not to say that there is anything wrong in such an expectation, but such ideas emerge from stereotypical images that have been constructed over the years and continues to operate in them. Images such as that of the savage Naga with his headhunting ways or the exotic Naga in his world of pristine beauty before contact with the outside world are only recently being challenged in emerging writings on the Nagas.

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the number of books that are being written by Nagas, and there is a remarkable diversity in the range of narratives. In the new writings, we find that the dialogue with history continues owing to the dynamics of the socio-political environment in which the Nagas find themselves situated and there is a deliberate attempt to reinvent identity by offering new perspectives (Elizabeth, "Negotiating" 64). There is a critical self-awareness as writers find new ways to negotiate and situate one's identity. Anungla Zoe Longkumer, in her editorial introduction to *The Many That I Am,* writes of "an incomplete inheritance" that contemporary writers have inherited (6). By this, she means the rich heritage of an all-encompassing oral tradition that is in danger of being forever lost, but which has also become a reservoir that these writers try to access and draw inspiration from, thereby, forging new ways of keeping the tradition alive. The point to note here is that in order to study Naga writings, we cannot make a demarcation between literature that is oral and that which is written because the past continues to be revisited, kept alive, although not intact, but it is something that speaks into the present and helps in reimagining the future.

Below, a brief overview of two of the main pioneering writers has been done. Both women have in their own ways made significant contributions to the field of literature. Breaking the proverbial glass ceiling, they have paved the way and have made Nagaland and stories from Nagaland heard to the national and wider global audience.

1.4 Easterine Kire and Her Works: An Overview

Easterine Kire (1959-) is one of the most powerful and prolific literary voices from Nagaland. The creation and nurturing of a creative literary space in the state is largely to her credit. Both her collection of poems *Kelhoukevira* (1982) and her novel *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003) are the first published works written in English in these genres by a Naga writer. One cannot talk about Naga English literature or Naga Writings in English without engaging with the works of Kire. Over the past decades, she has written a number of novels, poetry, essays and opinion pieces that have had a tremendous impact on Nagaland's literary culture, inspiring younger writers and academics alike. She has also written children's books and performs jazz poetry. Her works have drawn interest in writings from Nagaland, both from the mainland and abroad. Kire, as Paul Pimomo says, is "the keeper of her people's memory." She has been vocal about the need to decolonize our ways of thinking about ourselves and to tell our own stories unapologetically. Over the years, her writings have resisted the expectations and pressures, especially from publishers, to play into stereotypical notions of who Nagas are presumed to be and have truly pushed the boundaries of storytelling in the process. The conservation of the richness of the Naga oral literature and the commemoration of the history of her people, from the first encounters with the

British to the later decades of political turmoil, are the most notable features of her writings. Her style is simple, and her storytelling is honest. She has won several awards like the Governor's Medal for excellence in Naga literature in 2011, the PEN Catalan Free Voice Award, the Bal Sahitya Puraskar Award for Children's Literature by the Sahitya Akademi in 2018 for *Son of the Thundercloud*. *Bitter Wormwood* was shortlisted for the Hindu Prize in 2013, and in 2015, *When the River Sleeps* won the Hindu Literary Prize. Her works have been translated into many languages. Some of her most notable works besides the ones mentioned above are:

A Terrible Matriarchy (2007), *Mari* (2010), *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), *Life on Hold* (2011), *Son of the Thundercloud* (2016), *Don't Run My Love* (2017), *Walking the Roadless Road: Exploring the Tribes of Nagaland* (2019), *When the River Sleeps* (2014), *Spirit Nights* (2022), *Forest Song* (2011), *Thoughts After Easter* (2014), *Naga Folktales Retold* (2009).

1.5 Temsula Ao and Her Works: An Overview

Temsula Ao (1945-), a poet, writer, academic and ethnographer, is a staunch figure whose contributions to the literary and cultural life of the Nagas have been invaluable. Along with Kire, Ao has pioneered the growth of the field of literature in Nagaland. She has published five collections of poetry- *Songs that Tell* (1988), *Songs that Try to Say* (1992), *Songs of Many Moods* (1995), *Songs from Here and There* (2003) and *Songs from the Other Life* (2007). Her collection of short stories, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from the War Zone* (2005) has particularly gained attention. Other notable works include *Laburnum for My Head* (2009), *Aosenla's Story* (2018), a memoir, *Once Upon a Life: Burnt Curry and*

Bloody Rags (2013). *The Tombstone in My Garden* (2022) is her most recently published work. Her ethnographic work *Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999) is considered as one of the most important documentation of the Ao Naga community. It is the culmination of her extensive and in-depth ethnographic study of her community. She has been honoured with the Padma Shri in 2007, the Governor's Gold Medal in 2009, and the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2013. She was also awarded the Kusumagraj National Literature Award for Poetry in 2015. Her works have been translated into several languages.

Besides Kire and Ao, two other pioneers of Naga Writings in English in the early years were Monalisa Changkija and Nini Lungalang. Changkija has authored two poetry collections- *Weapons of Words on Pages of Pain* (1993) and *Monsoon Mourning* (2007). A journalist and Editor of *The Nagaland Page*, Changkija is also a strong feminist voice in the state. Nini Lungalang's only published book of poetry *The Morning Years* (1994) made her a pioneer of the emerging field of literature. Today there are a growing number of writers. With the interest from publishers outside the state, and also the local publishing houses, there are many new voices that are now emerging and finding the platform to have their works published.

Having given an overview of the context of the study, in the next section, what follows is a brief discussion of the philosophical underpinnings and theoretical frameworks for the study.

1.6 Hermeneutics: A Philosophical and Interpretative Methodological Approach

A commonly accepted definition of hermeneutics is that it is a theory of

interpretation. While one meaning of hermeneutics is that it is "a basic human activity of interpretation concerned with understanding the meaning of communications or life situations", there is a second meaning, in the discipline of philosophy, that implies the analysis of "the conditions of understanding". (Zimmermann 34) Hans-Georg Gadamer's definition gives a comprehensive understanding of hermeneutics:

> The best definition for hermeneutics is to let what is alienated by the character of the written word or by the character of being distantiated by cultural or historical distances speak again. This is hermeneutics: to let what seems to be far and alienated speak again. But in all the effort to bring the far near … we should never forget that the ultimate justification or end is to bring it near so that it speaks in a new voice. ("Practical Philosophy" 83)

As a discipline, hermeneutics emerged in the nineteenth century as a reaction to positivist scientific approaches towards understanding the world. It gradually began broadening its scope, from being traditionally concerned with the interpretation of sacred texts to being concerned with the issue of textual interpretation as a whole. Hermeneutics has now become "a cross-disciplinary academic and intellectual buzzword", bringing much more than texts within its ambit (Ong 14).

Although F. D. E Schleimacher is largely credited to have systematized the discipline of modern hermeneutics, it is Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer who developed modern philosophical hermeneutics. With them, there was a shift from the earlier preoccupations with the process of understanding to a focus on the conditions or contexts in which understanding occurs. In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger made a departure from the earlier philosophy of his teacher Husserl's transcendentalist notion of

the human subject, and instead proposed that understanding is "radically historical", as human existence is constituted by time with language being "the dimension in which human lives move" (Eagleton 55). The most significant contribution made by Heidegger's philosophy was that it brought a shift in the view that human existence is essentially historical, and that "knowledge always emerges from a context of practical social interests" (Eagleton 56). Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology found a successor in Hans-Georg Gadamer. In *Truth and Method* (1960), Gadamer developed a philosophy of interpreting art and texts based on the historical situatedness of human life, which was always mediated through language. The pursuit of knowledge and the attempt to interpret meaning is essentially mediation, which is the central belief of hermeneutics. The act of interpretation brings new insights that lead to a changed and enlarged perspective of the interpreter about the texts and about himself. This is what Gadamer's idea of the "fusion of horizons" means. The act of interpreting a text always entails a meeting of the horizon of the interpreter situated in her context and the horizon of the text that is situated in the historical period in which it was written. Meaning is what comes about when there is a fusion of these horizons. The idea of the "hermeneutic circle" remains a key principle in hermeneutics. It refers to the dialogical process of understanding that takes place when a reader attempts to interpret a text.

Hermeneutics as a philosophy thus lends itself as a significant qualitative research approach because it serves as "a mode of reflecting to question the meaning of being and to clarify the interpretive conditions for understanding the meaning of human experiences by attending to the roles of language, culture, historicity, and pre-understandings" (VanLeeuwen et al. 3). In our attempt to understand concepts such as identity and texts, a hermeneutic approach that foregrounds the importance of context becomes very

important. The 20th century philosopher Paul Ricoeur further developed the discipline of philosophical hermeneutics. By building on the existing principles of philosophical hermeneutics, Ricoeur uses the concept of narrative to explain how individuals interpret their experiences and make sense of seemingly disconnected elements of life by turning them into stories. If self-understanding is an interpretation, it is in narrative that we find a "privileged form of mediation" (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 114). Below, I will attempt to elaborate on the concept of narrative as understood in contemporary narrative studies, which was deeply influenced by Ricoeur's philosophy.

1.7 Defining Narrative and Narrative Identity

Richard Kearney in his book *On Stories* writes, "Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating. More so, in fact, for while food makes us live, stories are what make our lives worth living. They are what make our condition human" (3). The ability to use language to tell stories is what sets us apart. Every life is in search of a narrative and an aspiration towards what he terms a certain "unity of life" (4). Stories have been told by people to themselves and to others to explain themselves to themselves and to others. Narratives help coordinate an existence which would otherwise be scattered over time. Kearney importantly argues that narrative provides us with "one of our most viable forms of identity- individual and communal" (4). Today, narrative is as ubiquitous as it is indispensable. Barbara Hardy writes, "For we dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future" (5).

There has been a "narrative turn" that has extended beyond the field of the humanities. This turn indicates a significant shift. Hanna Meretoja notes this shift as one that underscores the importance of literature. She explains, "As literature plays a pivotal role in renewing and transforming these narrative models, this shift entails seeing literary narratives as crucial to the process by which we interpret ourselves and our situation in the world" (*The Narrative Turn* 2). Meretoja, in *The Ethics of Storytelling: Narrative Hermeneutics, History, and the Possible,* defines narrative thus:

> Narrative is an interpretative activity of cultural sense-making in which experiences are presented to someone from a certain perspective (or perspectives) as part of a meaningful, connected account; it has a dialogical and a performative dimension and is relevant for our understanding of human possibilities. (48)

A mapping of major trends in scholarship on narrative in the discipline of narrative studies suggests two distinct approaches: the classical and the postclassical. David Herman explains that while the former owes itself to the tradition that is built on Russian Formalist literary theory and structuralist narratology, the latter has made a departure from the earlier view by expanding its boundaries, drawing from many fields like philosophical ethics, critical theory, philosophy of language, and so on (12). As a consequence of this, in the past few decades, the understanding of narrative has undergone a change from being taken to mean accounts of something that happens to someone that results in something, to being understood as a basic human strategy of negotiating time and change. We can thus understand narrative to be "a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change – a strategy that contrasts

with, but is in no way inferior to, "scientific" modes of explanation that characterize phenomena as instances of general covering laws" (Herman 3).

The philosophical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur has been particularly significant in influencing this kind of understanding of narrative. Best known for his study on the ways in which the concepts of time, narrative and human identity are inter-related, Paul Ricoeur's ideas on narrative and narrative identity, developed in his series *Time and Narrative,* have been particularly influential for contemporary narrative studies. It came to be understood that there is no direct access to knowledge of the self. It is always mediated. Accordingly, the understanding of identity takes place in and through a temporal process that involves a reinterpretation of narratives that are always embedded in culture. Narrative must be understood through the lens of time- how we experience time and how we make sense of the past, present and the future.

In his important essay, "Narrative Identity", Ricoeur writes that narrative identity was the answer to his question of whether there existed a fundamental experience that is capable of integrating the two great classes of narrative- fictional and historical. He says that human lives become more readable when they are interpreted in function of the stories people tell about themselves and that these "life stories" are rendered more intelligible when they are applied to narrative models- plots- borrowed from history and fiction ("Narrative" 188). By building on the principles of philosophical hermeneutics, Ricoeur foregrounds narrative in human understanding because it is in narrative that we find a "privileged form of mediation" (*Oneself* 114).

With his main interest being the relation between temporality and narrative, in his essay "Life in Quest of Narrative," Ricoeur formulates a theory that explains the relation between life and narrative, which is useful in our understanding of texts. In the essay, using the idea of "muthos", Greek for "plot", he suggests the term emplotment, meaning "a synthesis of heterogeneous elements", as being crucial to the way in which we make sense of our lives (Ricoeur, "Life in Quest" 21). Just as a plot brings together a cohesive story out of many heterogenous elements, we make sense of our lives and who we are through a narrative process of emplotment. From the perspective of hermeneutics, Ricoeur argues that a text has three dimensions- referentiality, communicability and self-understanding. Referentiality means that a text is a mediation between man and the world, communicability means a text is a mediation between man and man, and self-understanding means a text is a mediation between man and himself (27). It is in the act of reading that a text, say a work of fiction, achieves its relevance for life.

The narrative turn in the humanities and beyond, if anything, has only foregrounded the importance of literature. Since the 1980s, narrative theory has undergone what is termed "the ethical turn". This has been the result of an interest in narrative from the field of moral philosophy and a growing interest in the interrelationship of ethics and literature. Ethics and the novel form in particular seemed a good fit because both concerns with reflections on human action, character, conflicts and desires, that presents moral dilemmas to the readers, etc. I argue that such an approach towards reading the texts selected for the analysis in this study is relevant. Although it must also be noted that such ethical approaches have also received a fair share of criticism from the fields especially influenced by deconstruction, raising their suspicion of any universalist or humanistic ethics as being forms of legitimizing oppression and power, this ethical turn has brought

about a shift in the discourse around the value and the role played by literature in any society. In recent decades, there has been the emergence of narrative hermeneutics, a discipline combining narrative studies that in informed by a philosophical hermeneutic approach. Meretoja offers a theoretical-analytical framework of narrative hermeneutics exploring the complex interplay of narratives in our lives, one that acknowledges both the ethical potential of narratives as well as the risks of storytelling (Meretoja, *Ethics* 2). As practices of sense-making, narrative is always embedded in our social and historical webs of understanding. She writes,

> Each cultural and historical world functions as a *space of possibilities* that encourages certain modes of experience, thought, and action, and discourages or disallows others, and stories play a constitutive role in establishing the limits of these worlds- both enabling experience and delimiting it. (2)

From this theoretical outlook, we understand that narratives operate within this space, and directly deals with what she terms, our "sense of the possible." It enables us to approach narratives as increasing our "perspective awareness" or "perspective sensitivity". Meretoja elaborates that narrative, especially fiction, can not only help see the past in a new light but also helps imagine what is to come. This is what she means by the "sense of the possible." She writes, "Such exploration cultivates our understanding of where we come from, where we are now and where we could go. This in turn, affects who we in fact are" (*Ethics* 5).

1.8 Memory Studies

Astrid Erll, in her seminal work, *Memory in Culture* (2011), defines memory as "an umbrella term for all those processes of a biological, medial, or social nature which relate past and present (and future) in sociocultural contexts" (7). Memory has come to occupy an important subject of interest in academic discourse especially starting from the latter half of the twentieth century. In the last few decades, Memory Studies has become a significant inter-disciplinary phenomenon that seeks to explore the connections between memory and culture in particular. Erll attributes this to three factors. Briefly summarized, the factors she points out are:

1. Historical transformations: The passing of a generation of people who had first-hand experiences of events that are of international importance like the Second World War, the Holocaust, etc. has necessitated a reliance on forms of remembrance.

2. Changes in media technology and the role of popular media: Erll notes a paradoxical state of cultural amnesia on one hand, and the digital revolution. The arts and media's role in determining what to remember and what to forget has become of crucial importance.

3. Developments within academia: In the wake of poststructuralist and postmodern philosophies, the ways in which we understand history and the past has undergone a change. The role of humanities in engaging critically with culture has further gained currency.

1.9 Memory Studies and its Intersections with Literary Studies

The early twentieth century saw the first sparks of growing interest in the academic study of memory. In the 1920s, two influential concepts of memory were developed. One was Maurice Halbwachs' theory on *memoire collective* or "collective memory" in his influential work *On Collective Memory* (1925). His argument was that memory, even individual memory, was constructed within social structures. Besides Halbwachs, the art historian Aby Warburg's ideas on the social nature of memory have been especially significant in inspiring a host of other researchers on memory in later decades. Both remain foundational figures in the ways in which they shifted the discourse around memory from being a solely biological concept, as it was largely understood until then, to being a cultural phenomenon.

By the 1980s, historian Pierre Nora shared his theory of *lieux de mémoire* or "sites of memory". Nora defines sites of memory as that where memory crystallizes and secretes itself. These sites of memory have come to mean "the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists" (Nora 7). In recent years, the idea of "sites of memory" has been critiqued, notably by Ann Rigney, who instead proposes that rather than collective memory becoming "tied down to particular figures, icons, or monuments," collective memory is something that is "constantly in the works", thus suggesting that the importance of the dynamics in which collective remembrance takes place ("Dynamics" 345).

Jan Assmann, an Egyptologist, and his wife Aleida Assmann, a professor of English Literature, developed the theory of "cultural memory." Jan Assmann defines cultural memory as "a form of collective memory, in the sense that it is shared by a

number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective, that is, cultural identity" ("Communicative" 110). He further elaborates it thus:

> Cultural memory is the 'body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity. ("Collective Memory" 132)

These theories have generated wide-ranging interest from various academic fields, literary and narrative studies being one of them. Literary memory studies are developing into a burgeoning field that explores the intersections between literature and memory. Of particular relevance is the ways in which memory studies and narrative studies have converged and have been concerned with the understanding and interpretation of identity. More than ever, the power of literature to contribute to the understanding of cultural memory and collective identity is being recognized. Erll points out three main ways in which literature and memory intersect. The first is the way in which both are involved in a process of condensation through which ideas about the past are created and transmitted. The second point is narration. Both literature and memory depend on narrative structures to create meaning. The third similarity is the way in which both literature and memory, in representing the past, use of genres that are culturally available to them (Erll, *Memory* 145).

In using theories, a word of caution especially for researchers conducting studies in indigenous literature and knowledge forms is to be careful in testing these theories against the context and using the theories more as "critical vocabulary" (Pulitano 11) that is

indispensable in the interrogation of any literature, and not subsume the "voices" of the texts and that of the context in which they are embedded. The research should allow room for the texts to speak of "discursive modes that in most cases challenge the parameters of Eurocentric theory itself" (Pulitano 11). While the indispensability of critical theory is accepted, instead of merely relying on Western critical discourses to help us in interpreting these texts, it becomes most pertinent to pay close attention to what these writers seek to do and acknowledge them as discursive strategies in their own right. In doing so, the study proves to a more rewarding and enriching experience.

1.10 Chapterization

Each chapter of the thesis is an attempt to engage with questions that hinge on the concept of narrative identity vis-à-vis selected works written by some of Nagaland's best contemporary storytellers. Like many of their counterparts from the other neighboring states of the North-east, Naga writers draw inspiration from their cultural heritage of oral storytelling for their works. "Writing orality" by way of re-telling folklore, myths and legends or infusing orality into written words are just some of the ways in which they seek to keep them alive.

Chapter 2 seeks to explore the dynamics of re-telling oral narratives and history. In examining selected works written by Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire, I will attempt to answer why retellings are important to the question of identity today. While the links between memory and narratives undergird all the chapters,

In Chapter 3, I will attempt to examine how fiction as "cultural memorial forms" (Laanes and Meretoja 3) play important roles in creating and maintaining cultural

memory and thereby a sense of collective identity.

An important and distinct feature of many contemporary Naga writings is the blurring of genres of fiction and non-fiction, and in the process, a common thread that can be seen running through many of these works is the foregrounding of "people stories". Chapter 4 is an analysis of such writings as subversive acts of testing the limits of life-writing which becomes crucial to not only cultivate a sense of history but also of collective identity.

In Chapter 5, I address the issue of the politics of writing and identity considering the fact that women writers dominate the field of contemporary Naga literature. By analyzing narratives that speak of the lived experiences of women under a deeply patriarchal Naga society, this chapter will show how the space of creative writing is being used as a tool of empowerment while raising questions of identity.

1.11 Delimitations

The literary works chosen for analysis in most of the chapters have been limited to ones written by Easterine Kire and Temsula Ao. Since they have written the bulk of literary writings in English, it is mostly their works that have been the primary sources for this study. The use of the term "Naga" while referring to writers of contemporary literature, is being limited to those hailing or belonging to the state of Nagaland.

CHAPTER II

Re-Inscribing Meaning: The Dynamics of Retelling, History and Identity

2.1 Introduction

For many of the contemporary Naga writers, folktales, myths, and legends that formed an important part of the Naga oral tradition have served as a deep pool of inspiration. Either these tales have been "retold" by way of collecting, translating, and putting down in writing what has been transmitted orally, or such tales have been the basis of inspiration for writers of fiction, fusing together imaginative elements with oral stories of the past. Recent years have seen the publication of many such works. This is an important indication that contrary to the belief that modern changes would lead to the dying of the oral tradition, they are, in fact, continuing to exist, albeit in different modes and forms. Anungla Aier, in her book *Studies on Naga Oral Tradition: Memories and Telling of Origin Myth and Migration (*2018), points out that the essence of folklore and oral traditions lies primarily in their quality of acquiescence to the changes in the contours of culture and society. Further, it is because of this quality of being acquiescent to change that they are rendered culpable of being altered and modified in the process (2).

Retelling these tales continue to play the function of transmitting the cultural knowledge systems, traditions, sustaining the community's beliefs, etc. through remembrance. Jan Vansina, in his seminal work *Oral Tradition as History* (1961) writes, "Whether memory changes or not, culture is reproduced by remembrance put into word and deeds. The mind through memory carries culture from generation to generation" (xi).

While this is a most valid point, it augurs well for us to take note that such retellings are informed by the present "cultural moment in which that retelling is produced" and in fact, it is this quality that renders new life into the old stories (Stephens and McCallum ix). In such ways, the old tales of the past, as they continue to be told, find their relevance in the present time.

It is important to read these stories as interpretations that have been informed by the writers who are also enmeshed in different cultural webs of narratives, just as the stories in the original were created out of the webs of narratives in the past. No story is created in a vacuum. It is important to have the awareness that "the process of retelling is always implicated in processes of cultural formation" to make sense of culture (Stephens and McCallum xi). Thus, in our reading of such retellings, the present historical contexts in which the writers are situated becomes as important as the past which they interrogate, and in the process, there is a reshaping of both along with the stories that are being retold. Since there is no way of actually finding out or recreating the world in which these stories were told, a more fruitful way for us in the present to engage with them is to ask what relevance they continue to have today. In this sense, our examination of these tales is not so much to do with retrieving or extricating something from the past.

This chapter is an attempt to explore how stories change over the retellings based on the "cultural moment" in which these retellings are taking place. As Gadamer theorized, the act of interpretation involves a fusion of horizons, and it is through the process of this fusion that meaning arises. Secondly, if folktales are stories of the community and have been mediums through which a sense of collective identity has been forged through generations, changes in retellings must then be an important indicator of

how collective identities are being reimagined. The latter half of the chapter will explore this point.

In *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century*, James Clifford writes that indigenous people around the world have begun to come to terms with their identities and they have become global players (13). Like many of their counterparts around the world, Naga writers also reflect this sentiment in their writings even as many of the works negotiate issues such as identity. This chapter is an attempt to explore how such negotiations of identity are reflected in literature by analyzing Temsula Ao's collection of poems *Songs from the Other Life* from *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*, Easterine Kire's novel *Son of a Thundercloud* (2016), *When the River Sleeps* (2014), *Journey of the Stone* (2021) and *Spirit Nights* (2022). In each of these works, we can find retellings of a folk tale or myth. As a result of the "fusion of horizons" of the past in which these narratives are situated and the present in which the retelling occurs, new understandings emerge.

2.2 Interruptions and Silences

The world of the ancestors of the present-day Nagas was one that was traditionally oral. Almost every aspect of their way of life was encapsulated in the form of stories- folklore, myths, legends- and passed down orally from one generation to the next. This practice continued uninterrupted until the colonial encounters with the British and then the American missionaries, which accelerated a change out of this traditionally oral society into a culture of letters, a culture of writing. This set off a process of silencing. The subsequent decades, as the cultural world of the Nagas underwent tremendous changes at an accelerated pace, were marked by the loss of the stories that had been passed down for generations. Easterine Kire, in her essay "The Narratives Silenced by

War: The Barkweaver Project of Peoplestories and Folktales", explains, "Of all the many narratives silenced by war, the folktales of the Nagas suffered a long period of being silenced. This was because folktales require certain settings in order to be told" (97). However, not all is lost, as efforts have been made to conserve these stories and writing orality is a conscious effort that can be seen in many of the contemporary literary writings.

In her seminal essay, "Writing Orality", Temsula Ao, discusses the term "oral tradition" and its implications. She turns to Native American writer N. Scott Momaday to foreground the depth of meaning that the term "oral tradition" actually implies- that we are made of words and our essence consists in language (Ao 100). She further questions how or what we have done with the inheritance of this oral tradition. Commenting on the literature that is produced in the process of writing orality, Ao asserts that it is a new kind of writing that does not follow models that are euro-centric but writing that is steeped in "traditional sensibilities but at the same time imbued with contemporary perceptions" (103). Ao affirms that such writers "…are not only writing orality but also creating a new literature of their own in a language which though not their own, nevertheless lends a kind of universality to the literature" (107). Among other concerns, the conservation of oral stories and the oral modes of storytelling have been a significant contribution that is being made by contemporary writers.

2.3 Retellings as Alternate History

As mentioned earlier, there have been a good number of collections of oral stories that have been published in recent years. Nzanmongi Jasmine Patton's *A Girl Swallowed by a Tree* (2017) is a collection of translated Lotha-Naga folktales. It is "literature that she

has written in her own terms" as Kire describes in the foreword to the collection (Patton vii). It is a work that reaffirms the centrality of oral narratives to the Naga identity. She draws attention to the ambiguous role that memory plays because such an endeavor obviously involves selectivity. However, what she highlights is how deeply connected these stories are to a collective sense of identity. So, what is at stake is the loss of this sense of identity. For Patton, documenting the folklore of her community has been done with a deep sense of responsibility in correcting the ways in which ethnographic accounts have portrayed her people. As products of their time, the works of the early ethnographers, administrators and the missionaries created an image of the Nagas as savages and barbaric. Retellings of stories from the past, then, serve the purpose of "writing back" (Ashcroft et s al.) and setting the record straight.

In Easterine Kire's introduction to the collection *Naga Folktales Retold* published in 2009, she makes a similar point when she states that the retelling of the stories has been done so as to make them more reader-friendly, and less anthropological. The objective behind the retellings is to make these folktales "become stories in their own right to a global readership" (Kire). Such writing is part of the project of decolonization.

It is important to recognize these retellings as attempts to foreground an alternative history. As Patton points out, her collection of folktales is her attempt to bring a model of history that would counter "the concept of history as standardization of date-based empirical research" (15). Similar to how Temsula Ao re-interprets Ao myths with new lenses, Patton too recognizes the patriarchal ideologies that have shaped many of these folktales whereby many women in the stories only play peripheral roles. Either they

are cast in stereotypes or if they challenge societal norms, represented as erring characters.

By retelling these stories, contemporary writers seek to reaffirm their identity. It is not true that folklore and myths only relates to the past. Even in contemporary times, societies can be see engaging in the (re)creation of folklore and myths.

2.4. An Analysis of Temsula Ao's Collection of Poems *Songs from the Other Life* (2007)

This collection of poems that appears in *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007* begins with an epigraph entitled "History". It reads:

These songs
From the other life
Long lay mute
In the confines
Of my restive mind
Unrelenting in their urging
For new vocabulary
To redraft history

They now resonate
In words of new
Discernment
To augment the lore
Of our essential core.

Ao is one of the writers whose works have drawn inspiration from the great reservoir of the oral tradition. The history of her people is one of the biggest concerns that she deals with in both her fiction and her poetry. This collection in particular is worth paying special attention to because it raises many important questions about the ways in which we engage with history through narratives, the role of memory and the shaping of our identity through such a dialogue.

The "songs" in the collection are "from the other life"- a life which the poet finds herself separated from. These songs are the many myths and legends of her community to which she no longer has direct access. However, it seems that these stories can be born again, but only in "new vocabulary", and with the power to "redraft history." Two important points can be noted here. One is that stories can be reborn, but something happens in each retelling, in that they do not remain unchanged with each act of retelling. Two, stories have the power to "redraft" or reimagine history. The collection then is to be read as re-tellings of stories that have been a part of the collective memory of her people. These are tales that are being accessed through memory, being retold "in words of new discernment". The poet states the purpose of these retellings in clear terms- "to augment the lore of our essential core". If there is an "essence" of a collective identity that needs to be preserved, it is through remembrance of and retelling of these stories that have become a part of the people's collective memory. Thus, the poet's need to retell the stories.

All of Temsula Ao's volumes of poetry have the term "Song" in them. GJV Prasad suggests that this could be because in most North Eastern languages, there is no other word for poetry; that poems are songs in oral cultures (xvii). The use of the term can also be interpreted as the poet's attempt to subvert the distinctiveness characteristic of

Western genres- fiction, poetry etc. This is a shared similarity with other postcolonial writings where such attempts of subversion allow for new ways of articulating the postcolonial experience. The language of writing the songs may be in English, the medium may be written, but the poet finds ways to articulate the cultural roots of these songs. This is a way of acknowledging the oral tradition and ensuring its continuity. These retellings become "signifier(s) of a new sensibility" (Ao, "Writing Orality" 109).

Each of the poems in this collection deals with specific Naga myths. Each poem can be read as the poet's attempt to retell these myths. In "The Old Story-Teller", the poet speaks of storytelling as being a part of her legacy. The poem begins with a brief appendage about the Ao-Naga myth of how the community once had a script inscribed on a hide but how a dog ate it up, and thus, every aspect of their life had to be retained in the memory of their people. A sense of loss permeates the poem as the poet tries to assert her right to tell stories as her "racial responsibility" as with each retelling, her "life-force" gets revitalized. She remembers her grandfather warning her of the dangers of forgetting. The consequences are disastrous. It would be "catastrophic", and they would lose their history, territory and their "intrinsic identity." The poet speaks of a new era that has dawned where her own grandsons pay no heed to the value of these stories. Her retelling of these myths is her response to her "bestial craving" to consign these stories to writing.

"Soul-Bird" is inspired from the Ao-Naga belief that after the death of a person, the soul takes the form of a hawk. In some variations, it is an insect or a caterpillar, but the most commonly held belief is that it takes the form of a hawk. In the poem, the appearance of a lonely hawk gives comfort to the speaker's grieving grandmother as the encircling bird overhead above the fresh mound of the grave is taken to be a sign that the

soul of the speaker's deceased mother has transitioned well into the afterlife. This myth passed down from memory is still believed by many. Sighting a soul bird would still bring comfort to a bereaved person, showing how such myths still have relevance in contemporary times. Old beliefs continue to coexist with new ways of living.

Ao re-visits other myths in "Nowhere Boatman" where the poet re-imagines the myth about how the souls of dead people are ferried from the land of the living to the land of the dead by a boatman. In the reimagination of this myth, the poet gives voice to the boatman who sees himself as "an ageless, nameless indispensable anomaly." He laments that no one has ever enquired about who he was or to where he belongs. In a similar vein, in the poem "A Tiger-Woman's Prayer", a figure that appears in many a folklore is given voice. In this retelling, the tiger-woman cries out to the "capricious powers" who have bequeathed her to such a predicament. The tiger-woman's prayer is to be released of her plight which is "an un-seemly mesh of spirit, human and beast." Ao's retelling demonstrates that these myths do not remain as unchanged relics but her retelling renders a new interpretation where previously unaddressed issues are brought to light.

A sense of loss permeates the poem "The Leaf-Shredder" where the poet gives us a glimpse of a lost world through the life of an old "arasentsur". Arasentsur were women endowed with prophetic powers and the poet remembers a life that has now been rendered redundant. The powers that she once possessed and the authority she once wielded have lost their meaning in the new world. She to whom people flocked- fierce warriors in need of potions before battle, barren women in hopes of bearing children- is now a diminished figure with matted hair and rags for clothes, sitting on a rickety platform engaged in a mundane act like shooing chicken away from the paddy. The poet uses this myth to

reimagine the "surreal history" of her people that is "beyond the range of human computation", so far removed from modern life. However, despite Ao's suggestion of a sense of loss, it might be pointed out that the role of the arasentsur still continues in the present day. Even within the new dispensation of a new religious belief, this role has been reinterpreted in a different avatar. Many women have assumed the role of prophet-seer. Known colloquially as "prayer ladies" or "prayer warriors", they wield significant influence in the ways in which people go to them to seek answers, from matters pertaining to decision-making, or healing in the body.

"The Other World" is a retelling of the Sangtam Naga legend of a girl named Momola who was turned into a fish. As the legend goes, Momola's mother promised her hand in marriage to a fish-king in return for a plentiful harvest of fish. When the mother does not keep her end of the deal, the fish-king threatened to submerge the entire village under water. Momola had to thus be sacrificed to the fish-king. In the retelling, this legend becomes more than just a tale about the dangers and consequences of not keeping promises. In her retelling, the poet speaks in the voice of this girl who had to suffer as a consequence of her mother's "reckless promise." Through Ao's retelling, the legend gains contemporary relevance in which issues of fragmented identities and belonging are highlighted. The poet articulates the predicament of her people as being unable to go back to their original form and the chasm that now separates their current world from the other world. However, it is ironic that in so doing, such legends and folklore still continue to remain relevant to the contemporary contexts through such retellings.

Using the myth about tigers congregating to pay homage to the tiger king, "Night of the Full Moon" is the poet's political commentary on the changing political scenario of

Nagaland. The tiger king finds himself faced with a predicament where "the old decorum that ruled his father's court" no longer finds relevance in the new world. Amid the discord, however, the king agrees to do away with monarchy and agree to a democratic election. On deciding to have an election, the king is still elected as the leader:

Slowly and almost painfully
Reluctant forepaws labour upwards
Signalling acquiescence
To re-named subservience (266)

The newly "elected" leader reminds his subjects to remember their "primal custom." He says, "We may have altered Our name/ But Our Person remains the same." Temsula Ao's craft in rendering old tales relevant to the present is evident in the ways in which she draws from memory such tales and makes them speak to the current predicaments of her people. As long as stories can speak to the present, they continue to remain alive and relevant.

In the poem "Trophies", Ao revisits the custom of headhunting where the head-takers would be valorized for their success and be endowed with great prestige and honour. Ao tells the story from the perspective of a woman whose warrior-husband is out on "one of those crazy nights yet again." She anticipates with dread the return of the "blood-caked warriors", high on their exploits and drunken in their celebratory stupor. To her, these warriors were "an absurd lot/ rejoicing over some ugly/ Severed heads". She is weary of being witness to "this senseless pursuit/ after vain glory/ And vacuous reward".

Through this poem, Ao views this aspect of her culture and fills the gaps by imagining it from the perspective of a woman.

The poet being in dialogue with the past does not mean that the past is an entity that remains unchanged. The present continues to interrogate the past. The poet comments on issues such as gender inequalities that existed unquestioned in the old world. The customary laws of the Ao-Nagas dictate that women refrain from partaking in such important assemblies that were the sole prerogative of the menfolk. In the poem, the tiger king is aghast at the sight of the new changes where a mother frolicking with her cubs is seen among the congregation. The act of remembering the community's past world does not involve a mere romanticizing of it, but also highlighting the cracks and fissures that existed then. This old myth gains relevance as the poet artfully ties it to the present. The poet questions how much Naga society has changed if the "primal custom" is still harked back upon and names are all that have altered. Oral narratives are characterized by their adaptability. These stories could be revised and changed as their societies transitioned through change. They "could evolve as their contexts changed" and this is why "stories were central to the functioning of Indigenous societies" (Episkenew 4).

In her first collection of poetry, *Sopfünuo*, released in 2018, T. Keditsü draws inspiration from the Angami folktale of a woman by the name of Sopfünuo. The legend goes that Sopfünuo, who was a beautiful woman, hailing from the village of Rüsoma fell prey to the wiles of other women who were jealous of her. The story goes that even though she was loyal to her husband and was also known as an excellent weaver, her husband drives her and their child away from their home. Carrying her child on her back, and a torch made out of bitter wormwood, Sopfünuo leaves for her ancestral village in the

night. As people watch the flickering flames of her torch in the night, at a point, the fire dies out. Legend has it that she was struck down dead by a spirit spear. Her infant child is also pierced to death by one of her rib bones. The bodies of Sopfünuo and her child then turned into stones. Legend has it that when some villagers tried to move the stones apart, a strong wind blew, and it was not until they left the stones together that the fierce wind died down. This is one of the popularly remembered folktale of the Angamis.

T. Keditsü takes this story and retells it from several viewpoints in her poetry collection. As Dr. Kevileno Sakhrie in her foreword to the collection points out, the main purpose behind Keditsü's retelling of the Sopfünuo story is corrective. It is "to fill in the blanks"- blanks that are found in the traditional version. She notes,

> For her, the most important aspect that is missing is that there is no mention of the interior life of women like Sopfünuo who never got the opportunity to write or voice their painful experiences. Through imagination, memory, and drawing from lived experiences- hers and that of others, Keditsü intends to rip that veil drawn over proceedings too painful to relate. (viii)

A more detailed analysis of the poems will be done in Chapter 5 which will deal specifically with writings by women. However, for the purpose of this chapter, it is worth noting that in the hands of contemporary writers, a tale like Sopfünuo is re-inscribed with new meaning. Sopfünuo's fate and the ways in which she has been doubly silenced- in life as in the telling of her story, is reexamined and redeemed as Keditsü's powerful rendering of the story to be the theoretical framework of her thirty-seven poems where

she brings up issues of the Naga women's identity in a deeply patriarchal society. Dealing with themes such as motherhood, marriage, domestic violence, etc. Keditsü questions the place that is accorded to women in the society and underscores the violence of silencing women through the covert mechanisms of culture and patriarchy in Naga society.

2.5 The Hornbill Spirit in Contemporary Literature

Gerald Vizenor, the Anishinaabe cultural theorist, popularized the term "survivance" in Native American Studies. He uses the term to talk about stories that are "renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry" (1). This kind of narrative reflects attempts of native and indigenous writers to move away from having themselves and their works constantly stereotyped as victims. Instead, it foregrounds attempts to have their writings viewed not just through the narrative of survival but as "active presence" which goes beyond just survival and mere subsistence (Vizenor 11).

In a different context, although not vastly dissimilar, noted Naga anthropologist and scholar, Abraham Lotha, alludes to the hornbill- a bird that has been significant for the Nagas, increasingly so in contemporary times. In his ethnographic study of Naga nationalism entitled *The Hornbill Spirit: Nagas Living Their Nationalism* which won him the Gordon Graham Prize for Naga Literature (Non-fiction) in 2019, he notes that the hornbill represents values that Nagas have held dear through generations. He writes, "The birds fly in whichever direction it wants, living according to its nature and whatever the natural environment allows, being true to itself, in struggle and defense, in order to stay alive" (Lotha 1). Lotha then uses the term "the hornbill spirit" to speak of the resilient history of Naga nationalism. In our attempts to articulate indigenous frameworks and

native metaphors to theorize our literature, perhaps, we might suggest that contemporary writings from Nagaland reflect "the hornbill spirit", much like the concept of survivance. There is increasingly a growing body of works that is marked by a spirit of resilience, wherein there is a conscious and unmistakable act to defy expectations to write in a certain way or write about certain things. Instead, reflective of the resilience that marks their identity, contemporary literature is marked by a deliberate attempt to articulate this spirit. In the field of Biblical studies and theology, noted Naga theologian and Biblical scholar Renthy Kietzar had argued for a need to articulate a tribal hermeneutics that is rooted in the Naga context (310). This idea of indigenizing Christianity led him to write about a belief that was "Naganized." In the field of literature too, we can see that there have been many attempts to Naganize.

2.6 An Analysis of Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud*

Kire's novel *Son of the Thundercloud* (2016) was awarded the "Book of the Year Award for fiction at the Tata Literature Live Awards 2017. Then again in 2018, the novel was awarded the Sahitya Bal Puraskar by the Sahitya Akademi. The Bal Sahitya Puraskar is a prize that is conferred annually to outstanding children's books. Critical reception to the book by the now many-laurelled Kire has described the book as an allegory of love and hope, being reminiscent of Paulo Coelho's work, or that it invokes magic realism in its reading. For all its merits, what is most interesting about the novel, and what seems to be often overlooked, is that it is a remarkable example of Naganising the story of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as Kire fuses it with the Angami folk tale of a widow's immaculate conception after a raindrop falls on her. It is the story of the gospel that has been reimagined in a Naga context. Kire in an interview writes that the story is a

representation of nativized Christianity where there is a combination of folk wisdom and biblical prophecies.

The first part of the novel is a retelling of the Angami folktale which is also found in Kire's *Naga Folktales Retold.* The tale is about a sad old widow whose husband and seven sons had been killed by a tiger. One day, as she was drying paddy, a raindrop falls on her and she conceives of a child. The child turns out to be a son who then grows up to avenge the widow of the death of her husband and seven sons by killing the tiger.

The prologue to the novel introduces the story as a story about "the saddest person alive" living in a small village of the Angamis; a story about a widow who had suffered the tragedy of having not just her husband husband but all of her seven sons killed by a tiger. However, when a raindrop falls on her from the sky, she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son. Readers unfamiliar to the Christian story may not immediately draw the connections but as the narrative unfolds, despite the many fantastic elements, there are many parallels to the biblical story. Kire herself mentions in an interview that the book was her imagination of Jesus growing up as a Naga boy playing, as many young Naga boys did, with slingshots ("Beyond the News").

The story is often told from the perspective of Pele, who leaves his village after the tragic deaths of his wife and children because of a famine that wipes out most of his village. The traveller Pele meets two strange women clad in coarse black cloth, their gaunt features and paper-thin flesh giving them a ghostly other-worldly appearance. Kethonuo (meaning truth) and Siedze (meaning future) tell him of a prophecy, a prophecy about the "Son of the Thundercloud". They tell him that the birth of the awaited son

would fulfill the promise of redemption and transformation, and it is this hope of waiting for this promised child that kept them alive. Pele finds out that of the two women, one being seven hundred years old, and the other four hundred, have lived on this hope. To his question "How have you survived all this time", they reply "Hope, sir, we have been living on hope" (Kire, *Son of the Thundercloud* 20).

Kire's storytelling is captivating as she seamlessly alludes to Biblical terms and concepts. For instance, when Pele notices the change in the sisters' appearance, they respond that it is one of the promises being fulfilled- "the latter rain will replenish the earth and all its creatures." This is a reference to Joel 2:23 where the prophet Joel speaks of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is Mesanuo, meaning "the pure one", who conceives of this promised son. Kire weaves in biblical prophecies into this Naga narrative. For instance, the prophecy of the birth of Christ- "A virgin shall conceive and give birth to a son, and he will save his people. Signs and wonders shall accompany his birth, and the land shall be rejuvenated" is quoted in the text (Kire, *Son of the Thundercloud* 41). In essence, the story of the gospel remains the same- an awaited child of promise is born, there is the fulfillment of prophecies along the way, restoration, deliverance, hope, redemption and so on. However, though at the heart of it, the story remains the same, the novel reflects the ways in which the story can be told in a way that is distinctly Naga.

In many narratives of the coming of Christianity, especially studies done by outsiders, there is a tendency to view it in terms of binaries. The Nagas are often projected as victims. The harsh consequence of Christianization is often talked about, while the benefits are often forgotten. Similarly in such narratives, the agency of Nagas is

often completely undermined of subsumed under larger narrative agendas. That there was an exercise of agency on the part of the Nagas as they chose to convert to the new religion because it was seen as a "fast track" to a modern identity has been pointed out (Thomas 4). Although Kire's retelling does not speak about the ways in which Christianity has played an important role in the forging of a modern political identity, this retelling serves as an important reminder of the efforts to view the Naga identity in a light that is different from the usual.

Such a novel also brings about a view that does not view the old religion and the new as in strict dichotomization. It recognizes the continuities and acquiescence to fluid boundaries. Lanusangla Tzudir in her essay "Appropriating the Ao Past in the Christian Present", she explores the ways in which Ao Christians have found ways to appropriate their past and have thus found ways to authenticate their traditional practices, in the light of the "new" religion (265). This is a common occurrence in other societies with similar histories of colonial encounters. Rather than the interaction between the new religion and the local beliefs being only one-sided, i.e. the former having no agency, recent studies show that Christianity too, to a large extent, underwent processes of reconfigurations as it came into dialogue with the local cultures and local histories (Bhattacharya and Pachuau 14). Such studies show how the local cultures and practices influenced the ways in which Christianity was interpreted, thus forging "a complex sense of cultural belonging and sense of identity" (14). Thus, even though *Son of the Thundercloud* may, on the surface, seem like a simple tale (even classified as a book for children), it is grounded in the context of the complex cultural dialogues that took place between the Christian belief system and the native Naga identity. Outsiders may read it as "fantasy" or "magic realism", but it is rather an imaginative rendering of a native articulation that fuses

together Christian as well as local values. In the same vein, it may also be read as an attempt to articulate the idea of a Naga Christian identity.

Kire states in an interview that *Son of a Thundercloud* is "a story about love and forgiveness and it points to the world beyond this, which is part of the Christian tradition and also has a place in Naga tradition" (Pou, "'Years of Listening'"). As in many of her other works, Kire explores issues that go beyond the expectations that are often put on writers from this region of the country. Writers like Kire have had to resist such limitations by showing that their literature deals with so much more than just political strife and violent histories. What a novel like *Son of the Thundercloud* does is that while it is definitely a writer's personal imaginative rendition of stories that now belong to the community's memory and identity, it is an invitation to its readers to have a deeper engagement with the worldview of the Nagas and presents the possibilities of more nuanced ways in which issues such as identity can be understood and interpreted. True, there have been changes in the cultural practices of the Nagas through the coming of Christianity, but the fact remains that "there is not concurrent loss of their essential 'Naganess' " (Lotha, *The Hornbill* 279).

2.7 An Analysis of Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps*

Another example of re-inscribing meaning through the retelling of old tales is found in Kire's novel *When the River Sleeps,* which was shortlisted for The Hindu Prize in 2015. Like *Son of the Thundercloud,* Kire masterfully interlaces folk elements with the new. It is a story about Vilie, a hunter, who is on a quest to find a "heart-stone". Local legend has it that he can find it only if he can catch a river "sleeping". The story that Vilie had heard and which Kire weaves into the novel is that when the river sleeps, it has the power to turn stones in the riverbed into a charm. And should one succeed in catching

hold of such a stone, anything he wishes would be granted to him- "cattle, women, prowess in war, or success in the hunt" (Kire, *When the River* 3). The narrative follows Vilie's quest for this "heart-stone", and more interestingly, his journey after having succeeded in finding it. Kire notes in an interview that the seed of this novel came from stories she had heard from hunters about how at a certain time at night, rivers "went to sleep". As she does in other works, the spirituality of the Naga identity forms the basis of the novel. Nagas are deeply spiritual. The oral stories attest to this. Through the transitions into modern life, this aspect of their identity has continued. For instance, even in their new identities as Christians, Nagas continue to exhibit a propensity towards spiritualism, in that there is an awareness or concern about things spiritual. Their outlook remains so.

Spirits, mostly unclean spirits, following people home as they return back from the forests is common in most Naga folklore. In the novel, Mechüseno, whom Vilie had cared for, dies a painful and sudden death when she contracts fever after having returned back home from the forest where she had gone to gather herbs. Mechüseno had seen a tall, dark man climbing down from the tree and following her home. Such instances are commonly held beliefs even today and it is not unusual to hear of such happenings.

What makes for an interesting retelling of folklore is Kire's representation of the two sisters whom Vilie meets after he gets hold of the heart-stone. This is when he enters the village of the Kirhupfümia. The two sisters, Ate and Zote, whom Vilie meets are Kirhupfümia. In Angami folklore, they are certain females who are believed to possess powers to poison people, as a result of which they were greatly feared. On meeting them, Vilie recalls an old story about an old woman in his ancestral village. Such women were

greatly feared, and people would bring her offerings of their harvest. In Kire's retelling, however, we see a representation of these females, who were traditionally perceived as evil, in a rather poignant light. Ate tells Vilie of their plight- a plight that they never chose. The Kirhupfümia are cast out from every village that they are born into. Ate tells him, "We never chose to be the way we are. It is the destiny life chose to give us" (Kire, *When the River* 132). She tells Vilie of the cruelty that their kind are subjected to because of something that was not of their own doing. She narrates the incident about the time when her sister Zote was spat and cursed on by a woman. In anger and retaliation, Zote points her finger at the woman's pregnant belly, resulting in the immediate death of the unborn baby and their consequent ostracization from the village. She also recounts how her aunt had pointed her finger at a man and blinded him because he was trying to rape her. Like them, she too was chased out of the village.

In retelling this story of Kirhupfümia, Kire carefully brings out the hidden lives of such figures. She not only makes them visible, but also humanizes them. At the same time, Kire is also careful only to point out the nuances that exist in such stories without deviating from the lore of the Kirhupfümia. Rather than pitting them as victims of their fates, she imbues them with a sense of agency. Both the sisters, Ate and Zote, have been born into the cursed life of being Kirhupfümia. However, Kire shows that it ultimately comes down to their individual choices on how they deal with this plight. While Zote chooses the path of anger and revenge, which ultimately leads to her destruction, Ate chooses the path of non-violence and forgiveness, which ultimately leads to her redemption. Vilie encourages Ate and convinces her that she should not allow anyone to use her past and the past of her ancestors to condemn her. "You should not just accept what people say about you. It may not be true", he tells Ate (Kire, *When the River* 137).

Kire has publicly spoken about her writings and why she writes. Always rooted in the history and context of the Nagas, she has argued for the need to resist expectations and definitions that are imposed on and puts limitations on who the Nagas are and who they can be. She has been outright in speaking up against the tendency of the national media especially to project the Northeast as a place of violence and violence only. In writing a book like *When the River Sleeps,* Kire deliberately attempts to make the statement that there is so much more to this region than what is commonly believed. Although interpreted by outsiders as "magic realism" or "fantasy", for the Nagas, it is a part of their reality, one that they continue to embrace.

2.8 An Analysis of Easterine Kire's *Journey of the Stone*

Journey of a Stone (2021) is sequel to *When the River Sleeps.* The protagonist Vilie returns but in a part-human and part-spirit form. Kire's exploration into the Naga spirit world continues in this novel as she takes the readers in and out of the spiritual and physical world. The boundaries between the two worlds are rendered even more fluid, with each acquaintance with different kinds of fantastical spirits. As in *Son of the Thundercloud,* there are many Christian elements that are subtly weaved into the narrative. The spirit world of the Naga past is brought to life but it might be said that there is no over glorification of it. For instance, in the chapter "The Village of the Widow-Spirits", Vilie is taken by how deeply immersed the widow-spirits were in their rituals, which seem futile in his eyes. He asks,

> Why do people perform any rituals in their daily lives? Why do they conduct a religion of rituals? Isn't it because they hope to gain salvation if

> they have performed all the appropriate rituals all their lives? (Kire, *Journey* 76)

Such a critique can be interpreted as a Christian understanding of old world rituals. According to Christian beliefs, no amount of works can earn a person his salvation. The writer, from her present horizon of being steeped in Christian beliefs and morals, appear to interrogate the old practices in her culture. This same point is reiterated later in the novel when an old man tells Vilie that "no number of rituals can change the heart" and that the "heart has to learn kindness" (Kire, *Journey* 106)

The concept of faith is also prevalent in the novel. Interweaving folk wisdom and Christian beliefs, the novel highlights that humans are only finite, yet of great value. Through the novel, Kire reiterates that there is a spiritual dimension that humans are not aware of. Alebu explains to Vilie that it is because humans are "too preoccupied with the physical" that they remain aware of the influence of the spiritual world that affects them. The mention of the "Shining Ones" at the end of the novel as a fierce battle wages in the skies, can only be understood to be Kire's interpretation of angels. "Shining Ones are the army of *Kepenuopfü.* If humans could see the grave nature of the battles fought on their behalf, they would see how much they are valued" (Kire, *Journey* 180) In a subtle yet unmistakable ways, Kire, through her retelling, keeps the tales from the old world alive but also imbues them with new interpretations, which can only be understood as manifestations of the complex historical processes that makes up the Naga identity.

2.9 An Analysis of Easterine Kire's *Spirit Nights*

In her most recent novel, *Spirit Nights* (2022), Kire continues to explore the spirit world that was an inextricable part of the reality of the Nagas. As in her previous works, she takes inspiration from stories from the oral tradition, this time from a Chang-Naga story.

For the Chang-Nagas, Naknyulum is one of their biggest festivals. Unlike many other Naga tribes whose major festivals revolve around agricultural cycles, Naknyulum is a festival that celebrates the coming of light out of darkness (Ao, *Folklore* 145). Typical of myth and folklore, there seem to be no explanation of the sudden darkness that descended for six days and six nights. As documented in *Folklore of Eastern Nagaland*, the story goes that everything came to a complete halt as a darkness so deep as they had never known before covers the earth. As a result, people could not go about their daily lives. Going to till their fields, hunting, fetching water, etc. came to a grinding halt. It was a brave warrior named Namumulou who took up his sharpened arrows and braved the darkness. On noticing a deeper shadow looming in the distance, Namumulou took aim and began to shoot his arrows. It is said that the dark shadow fell from the sky, revealing the light of the sun once again. Naknyulum is the festival that commemorates this event.

Kire's novel is inspired by this folktale. The names and incidents in the novel are as they are in the folktale, however, as stated in the beginning of the novel, Kire "follows the path of fiction to achieve its telling." Namumulo or Namu remains a central figure in the novel as he is in the folktale. It is Namu who brings an end to the darkness that envelops their village. It is Namu who shoots down the colossal tiger that had six tails. However, integral to the story is Tola, Namu's aged grandmother. It is through Tola that the window to the world of dreams and spirits is opened for the readers. Like her father,

Tola was a “dream receiver”. Her father was the seer of the village. After his death, even though the gift of this other knowledge gets passed on to her, she is bypassed, as the mantle of seer could not be given to a female. Thus, it is her cousin Chongshen who is made the official seer of the village even though he does not possess the gift. Tola second-guesses herself and her gift even when the vignettes of the future and of things to come are clearly revealed to her in her dreams. She dismisses off her disturbing dreams and attributes them to the trauma of her husband’s death, unaware that “the gift had now passed from her father to her, and the dreams were not visitations from the past, but warnings for future time” (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 25). After Chongshen becomes the official seer, Tola finds herself trying her best not to cause offence or undermine his official authority even when she would be sought after to interpret or give her spiritual insights.

Her first experience of a visitation is when she sees a man dressed like a warrior silently entering her house in the middle of the night. The spirit emissary then reveals to her a scene of a village which she recognizes to be hers. As she watches in silent horror, she sees a giant tiger leaping out into the sky and then beginning to eat the sun. She then sees a great darkness falling upon the village, children and grown people alike begin to scream in terror. Tola being uncomfortable with having to carry the burden of such dreams and visions, and having Chongshen’s insecurity to be mindful of, is only able to share with Sungmo, the old childless widow. However, by the time Tola has a second and third vision, each time the terror of the village shown in greater detail, Sungmo, her only confidante, passes away. In the dream-vision, Tola is made to experience the pervasive darkness and is made to hear voices singing dirges for the dead. Tola is only left with many unanswered questions of what these dream-visions meant. Kire also interweaves the

folktale of Tiger, Man and Spirit- how they were once brothers but Tiger's jealousy eventually leads them to go their own ways.

Kire opens up the world of dreaming and prophecies that has continued to inform the Naga way of life. Dreams, visions and prophecies form an important aspect of Naga culture in general. They form an important way in which Nagas have traditionally sought to understand themselves and the world they inhabit. It is common practice for people to resort to dreams and prophecies to access knowledge about their future and such knowledge also helps navigate their everyday living. Among the Nagas, relying on knowledge that is mediated through dreams is not a thing of the past. It continues to be a reliable source of basing one's decisions pertaining to the present and the future even in modern day Nagaland. For instance, it is not uncommon for people to anticipate good or bad news because of certain dreams that they have had. Anthropologist Michael Heneise, who in his works explores the phenomena of dreaming among the Angami Nagas, rightly points out that even with the coming of Christianity, the practice of "communicating dream-mediated knowledge has entered new ritual modalities and form new meanings", still retaining many continuities from the pre-Christian era (Heneise 79). The most significant and consistent of such beliefs have been the belief that supernatural forces- "God", "Satan", etc.- have "the potential to influence or 'bleed' into waketime reality (77).

Such stories continue to attest to the validity of such knowledge systems and a sense of agency of those who practice them. It shows people trying to understand themselves, and life as they know it in their own terms. It reflects the reliance on traditional forms of knowledge and attests their legitimacy.

In *Spirit Nights,* Tola's dreams become significant for the entire village. As in many other communities around the world, dreaming and the foreknowledge accessed through dreams were important and indispensable ways of knowing. In the novel, Tola receives the foreknowledge of the dark time that would descend upon their village through a dream. In the novel, we see a representation of a dream that foretells of a cataclysmic event that would befall the entire community. This is, however, just one among the many instances of dream-knowledge. Early ethnographic accounts of J.H. Hutton and J. P. Mills mention the important role that dreams, and dream-knowledge played in the lives of Nagas. In a largely secularized world, the validity of such knowledge has been held in suspect, so also the communities that live by such knowledge and ways of knowing. The world that Kire presents in *Spirit Nights* portrays a different epistemological order and offers a muti-perspectivity through which reality can be experienced and known.

What is the purpose of such literary representations of dreaming and prophecies? Works like *Spirit Nights* that are so enmeshed in the spirit world and Naga cosmology are powerful in that they unsettle easy readings of Nagas and their history. In many ways they challenge and push the boundaries of definitions of who Nagas are. It can be understood as an invitation to understand the worldview of the Nagas, and an attempt to bridge gaps between differences in worldview. It is important for readers to locate such literary representations within the ongoing struggles of demystification and decolonization of the ways in which Nagas have been projected. More than ever, in the current moment, there is a need for willingness to dialogue with cultures and views different from our own. Essential to the process of decolonization is the need to resist imposing one over the

other, particularly with regards to "epistemology, belief systems and different ways of knowing and researching" (Ruwoldt 2) In "The Politics of Recognition", Taylor explains that much of the contemporary politics of multiculturalism deals with the idea of recognition, which stems from the belief that the recognition or rather, non-recognition of our identities by others "can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (25). Through literature, such issues of image production and distortion can be challenged.

Hartmut Lutz in his essay "'Theory Coming Through Story': Indigenous Knowledges and Western Academia" raises concerns over why indigenous knowledge needs to be accredited and corroborated by Western science in order to be deemed legitimate (96). He attributes this to the legacy of colonialism and race by explaining that because the relationship of the West to indigenous cultures have been primarily colonial and racist, the colonial subjects and their knowledge have always been denigrated and dehumanized. He further cites the tradition of Enlightenment empiricism that makes it even more difficult for accepting indigenous forms of knowledge (100). There needs to be an engagement in "epistemological hybridism" (Duran 15). Such literatures also contribute to not only helping readers from the community to decolonize their own thinking about themselves but also challenge the perspective from outside. There is a need to decolonize our approaches and reading of such literatures. In the context of native literature, Thomas King argues against placing such literature within the discourse of postcolonial writing because

> …the idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question, traditions which have come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonization and it

> supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression. (12)

Is dreaming used as a metaphorical plot device? It must be argued that more than using it as a literary device, it is Kire's attempt to portray the lifeworld of the Nagas and their worldview, dreaming as time-honoured tradition of knowing the world that is the thrust of the narrative. Debates of whether they are valid forms of knowledge aside, the fact that despite many cultural changes as the communities have transitioned into modernity, dreaming continues to be a reliable source of navigating through life challenges and problematizes easy definitions of "legitimate" forms of knowing.

Although dreaming is an individual act, the interpretation, especially in the Naga context, is done in a social context. It is a "profoundly social act" (Heide). Rather than imposing Western theories on dreams like Freud's psychoanalysis, an attempt has been made to engage with the interpretation of the texts by placing it within the broader cultural context within which dreams, and visions are understood.

Tola convinces herself that such "pre-knowledge" must not remain in her hands, she being a widow. She is doubtful of whether even if she shares her dreams, people would pay any heed to her- a woman and widow. In the third visitation, the spirit emissary leaves Tola with the words to "get wisdom" as fear is bred on ignorance, and courage can only be born by wisdom. After the third visitation, Sungmo also appears to her in a dream. She reminds her to "pass wisdom and courage" to Namu. Tragically, when Tola shares the dreams and visions to Chongshen, he is unable to overcome his jealousy that she, and not him, was the chosen one to whom such revelations had been

made. He quietly listens and tells her not to share the information with anyone else. He then proceeds to sow the seeds of doubt in Choba the headman by mentioning in passing that Tola's old age was making her say incoherent things. However, when the prophetic darkness does befall on the village, it is the wisdom revealed to Tola through her dreams that become instrumental in injecting courage and boldness to the people in their time of confusion and disarray. When Namu pleads with her in fear of what to do, she tells him that they must stay brave as it is their only weapon.

Tola tells Namu,

> The worst thing is if a village is unprepared when an attack comes- if the spirits had not given any warning beforehand, it means it is to be the death of the village. But if the spirits have been giving us prior warning, it means the thing will not kill us. We are destined to survive it. (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 73)

Such statements are grounded in the theoretical beliefs about dreams and dream interpretation shared among many Naga tribes. It is commonly held that dreams are received for a purpose. This connects to the idea of agency.

Another interesting point to note about how the retelling of "old" stories are told with contemporary relevance. Many parallels can be drawn between the depiction of the period of darkness during which everyone in the village is confined to their homes and the period of lockdown and quarantines that the recent covid-19 pandemic brought about all around the world. In the novel, as darkness envelopes their world, the fear of the unknown cripples everyone in the village, confining them to their homes. Similar to how the experience was a test of the resilience of the human spirit, and the reminder of the core values that hold together any society, Tola's singing dispels the fear and silence

imposed by the dark time as she sang to them their history, their story, and in the singing, she reminds them of hope. Tola sings,

> Let us stop hating, stop fearing, most of all, let us stop all complaining and all ill speaking. A village cannot be killed if its people continually choose to speak words of life into it. Death may try to come from outside; but real death begins internally, in the heart of man. Choose life, my children, choose wisely, choose the power that is there in life. (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 102)

Tola's song reminds the listeners of their capability to make the right choice. They are brought to the realization of the futility of their quibbling and selfish ways, and for the first time, "a sense of excitement had been generated at what they would find after the darkness" (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 104).

To conclude this section, two interconnected questions that *Spirit Nights* invite readers to engage with are: What is the function of dreams in Naga culture, and what is the function of Kire's literary representation of it in the novel? The literary representation of dreams and dreaming first and foremost can be understood as the writer's attempt to show the Naga worldview. Further, by doing so, there is an attempt to bridge the gap between differences in worldviews, in that it is an invitation to understand how the Naga worldview has been shaped by such factors. At one level, it is to educate readers from within the community, especially the younger generations. At another level, it is to educate and inform perspectives from outside. Such writings can also be seen as efforts at self-determination. The use of dreams in the narrative of the novel is unapologetic. Kire presents the important role of dreams and visions and the reliance on them for the characters' agency as very natural.

In this way, we can say that the function of such literary representations of dreams and visions are subversive as it does not subscribe to or resists the imposition of hierarchies of knowledge which privileges one over the other. Kire's novel is a quiet assertion of such knowledge systems as valid, and in the process, validates the people who ascribe to such ways of knowing.

However, central to the novel is the exploration of the possibility of how stories that are so embedded in such cultural specificities can add something of value. While such writings can be interpreted using the lenses of postcolonial theory, is seems rather limiting to place the novel as "marginal" writing. Over the course of her career as a writer, Kire has explicitly stated in many interviews of the need to move beyond writing from a position of victimhood, but rather write unapologetically from the center. In an interview, she states, "That is the secret: write about your life, your people, your land, but look for the beauty in it and you will give so much more to readers in addition to your sad stories" (Longkumer and Menon 4).

First Nations writer Jo-Ann Episkenew gained much renown for her book *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing* which was published to much acclaim in 2009. Episkenew's inquiry into the potential of storytelling as a means of healing sprung from her realization as a student that "all knowledge worth knowing" seemed to be "created by the Greeks, appropriated by the Romans, disseminated throughout western Europe, and through colonialism, eventually made its way to the rest of the people of the world" (1). She argues for the healing power of

stories, and examines the ways in which stories, especially indigenous literature, challenges the master narrative that misrepresents the indigenous peoples. She states,

> Indigenous literature acknowledges and validates Indigenous peoples' experiences by filling in the gaps and correcting the falsehoods of this master narrative. Indeed, Indigenous literature comprises a "counterstory" that resists the "oppressive identity [that the settler myth has assigned Indigenous people] and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect." (2)

Meretoja and Lyytikainen suggest that the ethical value of literature cannot be separated from the ways in which literature helps in our understanding of ourselves. Just how does this contribution take place? It is not through a directly didactic teaching of morals but rather through what they term as "cultivating our sense of the possible and our sensibility to moral ambiguities and complexities that challenge our everyday moral certainties" (10). Engagement with literary works need to be more nuanced. While acknowledging the complexities and ambiguities of literary texts, they argue that it is both through form and content that the ethical potential of literature is realized. Meretoja's understanding of the value of literature stems from the hermeneutic tradition. In this line of thinking, "the value of literature can be conceptualized in terms of its power to engage in the exploration of different ethical positions and visions of human existence" (*"Sense of History"* 34).

At the heart of it, *Spirit Nights* is an example of such literature. Kire takes inspiration from the folktale of Namumolo and transforms it into a story about the triumph of good over evil. The tiger that Namumolo kills becomes the very symbol of evil and darkness, each of its six tails representing different forms of pride- rebellion,

arrogance, greed, hatred of all that is good, self-seeking, and envy. Cutting off each of the six tails becomes a symbolic act of cutting off all connections that the tiger had to the spirit world, and a severance of all bonds of influence that darkness had over the village. As much as *Spirit Nights*, being based on a Naga folktale, serves the purpose of keeping such stories alive in the collective memory, taking the path of fiction, Kire is able to celebrate the best of values that had been held dear through generations, and remind its readers of traditional wisdom that has been handed down through the ages. As the spirit emissary in his final visit to Tola tells her, "The great disaster of your day is over. But a village that disregards or forgets the wisdom of its ancestors becomes a village deprived of weapons to fight threats in the future" (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 145).

As in many of her other writings, which is also echoed by other contemporary writers, Kire is always mindful of the need to remember the past, but not at the cost of being incapable of engaging with the future. The spirit emissary tells Tola that the future is always more important than the past. Reminding her to teach Namu that "the only way to walk into a strong future is to leave the past behind", and this needs to be started with himself (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 146). Namumolo is chosen as the next seer because he has the qualities of greatness. To answer the question of what is understood as greatness, it is to have a teachable heart, "a listening heart", that makes Namu great. In the final pages of the novel, there is a beautiful conversation that takes place between the powerful seer of the village Mvüphri and Namu. The seer asks Namu what he learned when he killed the spirit-tiger. Namu replies that he was overwhelmed with a sense of freedom and pure happiness that came with being able to help others. The old seer is pleased as he replies that that is the definition of seership. It is told that "because Namu had the humility of the listening heart, the ability to learn from his elders, he grew in strength and wisdom." The

qualities that Namu embodies become exemplary and a timely reminder of the heart of living. Namu can be understood as a representation of the values that have defined the Naga sense of identity over generations. Works like *Spirit Nights* become timely reminders for the present generation of Nagas. As the Naga society continues to undergo fast-paced changes, there is a need to introspect on the values that have been central to the definitions of who they are and values that have held them together. The retelling of stories like that of Namumolo not only keeps folk stories alive but also underscores the role that stories can play in building a sense of collective identity.

The function of such storytelling seems to be tailored towards the end of "awakening spiritual eyes" as Lhütü Keyho terms it, as evidently "our world is in much need of communication, of acknowledgments, not just among ourselves but between all the worlds that exists within us, so that we may finally repair, heal and bridge the gaps that we have wrought into our culture" ("To the Awakening").

2.10 The Politics of Remembering

Temsula Ao remarks that there is a difference between how orality or orature is being used here as opposed to writers in Africa. Writing orality in Africa was very political and was used in rousing feelings of nationalism among the readers. However, in the context of Nagaland, as in other parts of North East India, this process of writing orality has more to do with finding native metaphors for their writing, than their African counterparts. ("Writing Orality") However, we may still note that even though this may not appear to be overtly political, writing orality is undoubtedly political. By searching deep within the oral past, a form of writing that perfectly reflects the changing idea of

Naga identity is being produced. And that it is mostly women who are actively participating in this field merits closer attention, which will be dealt with in chapter 5.

In her essay "Origin and Migration Myths in the Rhetoric of Naga Independence and Collective Identity," Marion Wettstein makes an interesting observation about the tensions between the migration stories and the origin myths of the Nagas. She points out how the migration stories are used for political leverage in the narrative of a collective Naga identity and claim of an independent nation for the Nagas. In the ongoing process of consolidating a collective Naga identity, myths and legends have played an important role. In the claim for their uniqueness and difference from the mainland, origin and migration myths have played an important role. Wettstein points out the two strands of arguments in this matter. While one is largely accepted by a majority of Nagas, it remains rather vague, the other, although containing more details, harbours possible dangers of controversies and hence, not popularly used. It is noted that while detailed and precise myths of origin that can be located to places within Naga territory exists, for political uses, the vague narrative of distant Mongolian origins is preferred (Wettstein 222). This is attributed to the fact that owing to the differing points of origin that different tribes claim, such narratives cannot work in favour of the grand narrative of one indivisible Naga identity. For instance, for not only the Aos, but also the Sangtam, Chang, Phom and Konyak tribes, Chungliyimti is considered as the place of origin. However, Wettstein points out that in the discourse of Naga nationalism, another place of origin becomes more instrumental. Makhel is considered to be the place where at one point of time all Nagas lived, and from where the dispersion began, eventually leading to settlements in different directions and places. The problem, however, is that such stories are contested from within different tribes. Even within a single tribe, there are variations in origin

stories. In the discourse of collective identity especially in connection to the discourse of an independent nation, there is a process of strategic employment of such myths. As Wettstein rightly notes:

> The precise and detailed myths of oral tradition, which are sung around the hearth fire and are considered the mythological heritage of the Nagas, would be a brilliant argument for the claim that the Nagas demand nothing other than the land they have inhabited since time immemorial. But they are not so suitable as an argument for the unity of Nagas because they tell of very diverse origins. (234)

As such, contemporary literary writers, besides oblique references, are more concerned with retelling of tales that forge a sense of oneness. Charles Taylor in his book *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* traces the many strands that have gone into the making of the modern notion "of what it is to be a human agent, a person, or a self" and argues that the ideas of selfhood and morality are "inextricably intertwined themes" (3). His argument is that the "background picture of our spiritual nature and predicament" is crucial to our understanding of self and identity, and to answering the question of what makes our lives meaningful and fulfilling (4). Contemporary writers can be said to bring to life and stress on the importance of this "background picture" that goes into shaping a sense of collective identity with a shared past and shared values.

CHAPTER III

Memory, History and Identity

Literature has proved to be an important medium through which wars have been remembered. In Naga literature, we find the representations of the experiences of the Nagas adding to the collective memory of the people. What role has literature played in the process of collective remembering? Astrid Erll explains that acts of remembrance of the past by societies do not happen literally. Rather, much like individual memory, the process of reconstructing the shared past involves a selectivity that is done according to the needs and knowledge of the present. (Erll, "Wars We Have Seen" 30)

This chapter is an attempt to look at the links between memory and identity and the ways in which it contributes to the forging of a collective Naga identity. It will examine how contemporary writers use their writings to invoke a sense of historical memory and how such literary works become important to maintaining a sense of collective identity.

Jo-Ann Episkenew writes,

> Indigenous peoples understood that language has the power to change the course of events in both the material and the spiritual worlds. Furthermore, because Indigenous societies shared and transmitted their collective truths by way of oral narratives, Indigenous peoples placed high value on memory and honesty. Women or men were only as true as their words. (4)

In what can be said to be a major preoccupation, the works of contemporary writers in Nagaland have increasingly focused on memory. This can be understood in the light of the passing on of the older generations who were the direct links to the old world. Memory became crucial to access that lost world. This also includes the generation that had direct experiences of wars. Memory, especially in this case, gains even more importance, as it becomes the basis on which the ongoing fight for self-determination continues.

Theories like Jan Assmann's argue for the power of memory to shape a culture's identity. In his seminal work on cultural memory, Assmann illuminates the interconnectedness between memory, identity and cultural continuity. (*Cultural Memory* 2) Works like that of Kire and Ao can be read as attempts at, to use Assmann's phrase, "fashioning a culture out of memory" for indeed it is out of this memory that a sense of identity can be maintained. (4)

To explore how narrative fiction can contribute to cultural memory and also explore the connections between the two, we observe that what both narrative and memory studies share in common is that both are interpretive acts. Just as narrative does not involve a simple narration of what is out there, memory too is not a simple act of retrieving memories. Rather, it is primarily through narrative that the past is made sense of. Memory is an indispensable part of our understanding of narrative identity. Our narrative identities bring together our past, present and our future. Narratives contribute to cultural memory by interpreting the past from the perspective of the present, and they can thereby open up new possibilities and visions of the future. Literary narratives frequently prompt us to address the question of who we are in relation to the cultural traditions that

mediate our efforts to make sense of our past, present, and future possibilities. (Meretoja, *Ethics* 95).

Tilottama Misra, in her essay, *Women Writing in Times of Violence*, makes a strong case for the suitability of fiction or literary discourses in representing violence. She points out that the effect of trauma is such that the line between the knowable and unknowable, truth and fiction begin to blur. Therefore, rather than the official accounts of history, literature renders itself as more suitable, and "memory with all its wonderful possibilities, forms the main basis of all the 'truth' that it may represent" (Misra 628).

3.1 "Harvesting Memory"

In her talk "On Memory", given online organized by Mahja House, Kire talks about the importance of memories in understanding the past and also our identities. She uses the term "harvesting memories". Stating that she has been in the business of harvesting memories for many years, she asserts that history, experience and memory are three categories that cannot be understood in isolation. In her talk, she classifies memory into two categories. One is community memory and the other is family memory. She describes the former as a "vault" that holds the treasures of native wisdom. Community memory is basically that which encompasses all aspects of the oral tradition. Kire attributes community memory as the source for many of her writings. She further asserts that in order to write narratives that are Naga-centric, it is crucial for writers to "harvest" the memories of the communities that they belong to. She underscores the wisdom there is in community memory. In her writings, Kire draws from things like the traditional knowledge of healers, spirit sightings that shape the contours of the "spirit landscape" of the Naga identity.

Memory becomes crucial given the paucity of written literature about the past. As Chasie points out, the early educated Nagas could not prioritize writing as all their energies were directed towards surviving. And for the few who wrote, their writings focused mostly only the political developments or the political history of the Nagas ("The History of"). Thus, there is a huge vacuum when it comes to literature that reflects and is grounded in people's experiences.

How does one "harvest" memory? *A Respectable Woman* is a remarkable example of how memory becomes central in our understanding of history and identity.

3.2 Re-imagining Identity through "Fictions of Memory"

Birgit Neumann, in "The Literary Representation of Memory", states that the term "fictions of memory" proves to be a useful term to discuss texts that represent processes of remembering. "Fictions of memory" is an emerging genre designation for such texts. She elaborates thus,

> The term "fictions of memory" deliberately alludes to the double meaning of fiction. First, the phrase refers to literary, non-referential narratives that depict the workings of memory. Second, in a broader sense, the term "fictions of memory" refers to the stories that individuals or cultures tell about their past to answer the question "who am I?", or, collectively, "who are we?" These stories can also be called "fictions of memory" because, more often than not, they turn out to be an imaginative (re)construction of the past in response to current needs. (334)

With this understanding, an analysis of Easterine Kire's *A Respectable Woman* (2019) and Temsula Ao's short story from her collection *These Hills Called Home* has been done below.

3.3 An Analysis of Easterine Kire's *A Respectable Woman*

A Respectable Woman is a novel that can be read as a "fiction of memory" because the novel not only demonstrates the workings of memory, but also becomes a significant work that reconstructs an important part of history of which the present generations know very little about. As readers, we follow the labyrinthine lanes of Khonuo's memory led by Kevinuo's narration. With the telling of each fragment of memory that resurfaces in Khonuo's memory, we are able to piece together an understanding of our collective history. In the discussion that follows, I will analyze the novel as a fiction of memory. Before that, a brief discussion on the historical context follows.

3.3.1 "Britain's Greatest Battle"

The Battle of Kohima was the first decisive victory of the British over the Japanese, fought from 4 April- 22 June, 1944. The Japanese advance from the east via Manipur under the commander Lieutenant General Renya Mutaguchi is said to have caught the British stationed in Kohima ill-prepared. Although it was known as the "Forgotten War" and the troops called themselves "the Forgotten Army", the battle has come to be known as the "Stalingrad of the East", drawing parallels to the decisive battle in Europe that was the beginning of defeat for Nazi Germany. Codenamed Operation U-GO, under the commander General Renya Mutaguchi of the Japanese 15th Army, the

siege of Kohima began. The ousting of the Japanese from Naga territory was hard-won with battles such as the "battle of the tennis court." The Battle of Kohima is now considered as the most decisive battle that brought into question the invincibility of the Japanese as the British defense pushed the advancing Japanese army back into Burma, eventually leading to its defeat in the War. In the year 2013, British historians adjudged the Battle of Kohima as "Britain's greatest battle." The contest, organized by the National Army Museum, had as its criteria the political and historical impact, the challenges faced by the troops, the strategies and tactics employed. (MacSwan) As battles and wars get commemorated and enter the annals of history, one cannot help but wonder how the stories of ordinary folk, in this case the stories of the Nagas, remain largely forgotten. Histories of war, often written by men, offer factual accounts of military tactics and strategies of war. What a text like Kire's novel does is to fill the lacuna with stories of lived experienced of the people who found themselves in the thick of a war that they did not anticipate nor invite.

The novel allows a resurfacing of memories of what had been repressed for years. *A Respectable Woman* becomes especially significant because personal narratives such as these never find their way into "official" versions of history. Kire privileges oral testimonies to counter official historiography. Not only is the novel based on real personal accounts but accounts that have been gathered mostly from women. Writing in the context of the neighbouring state of Manipur, Leisangthem Gitarani Devi points out, "If India's military, economic and logistical contributions, apart from the privations suffered by the people of India, are 'dimly remembered' in the larger narrative of the Second World War, even more unremembered are the experiences of people in the far-flung corners of the country" (*How Women Remember* 3). What Kire sets out to do in this novel

is to dig into the memories of "ordinary people" especially women who find themselves doubly marginalized in such situations. In any war, the experiences and memories of "non-combatants" are as important as the "battlefield experiences" (6).

In *The Road to Kohima: The Naga Experience in the 2nd World War,* which is an important account of the war from a Naga perspective, Charles Chasie remarks on their discovery that many of the direct descendants of those who had fought in the war had very little tangible things to remember them by. In many cases, the awards or medals had either been lost, or the families were unaware of such things. There was also the tragic "break-down in communication" where the descendants had no idea of their fathers or grandfathers having fought in the war (19). Today it is accepted that the impact of the Second World War in the form of the Japanese invasion in 1944 has actually been tremendous in not just affecting the psyche of the people but also the consequent consolidation of a collective Naga identity. Chasie notes that the war and even the Battle of Kohima "had never been considered as a Naga fight by the Naga people and they did not think this was a part of their history" (19). Even up until recent years, the Second World War was brushed off as "a war that was not ours" (19). However, in recent years, it is gradually being accepted that this war greatly altered the Naga society, the effects of which we continue to feel today. Kohima became the stage for a war that would forever alter life as they knew it. The Naga village-world that had been so central into defining a collective identity would be shaken and a new modern political notion of collective identity would take form. A going back to things as they were was made impossible.

Kire notes that her curiosity of what Kohima was like especially in the periods

before and after the Second World War affected it, prompted her to write the novel. She states, “Recreating pre-war Kohima using their memories was a challenging task but it was not impossible” (Kire, *A Respectable* 164). By drawing from personal family narratives to illuminate this significant period of Naga history, she “intertwines the personal with the political” (Sarkar and Gaur 5). And in doing so, she elevates the memories of her family to the level of shared collective memory because personal memories can gain “social relevance only when they are medially externalized” (Erll, “Wars We Have Seen” 31). As Astrid Erll and Ann Rigley point out, “Stories, both oral and written, images, museums, monuments: these all work together in creating and sustaining ‘sites of memory’” (111).

3.3.2 “Mimesis of Memory” in *A Respectable Woman*

Novels can create new models of memory by a process that Neumann terms “mimesis of memory” by drawing on hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s concept of mimesis. Fictional texts combine the real with the imaginary and imaginatively explore the workings of memory to then present the past in a new light. Such works then influence the readers of these texts to have a better understanding of the past (Neumann 335). “It took my mother, Khonuo, nearly forty years before she could bring herself to talk about the war.” With these words, the novel begins as Kevinuo’s promptings gently leads her mother Khonuo to remember and narrate fragments of her memory of a life before the War.

> Azuo remembered things in a fragmented manner and her stories were narrated without a beginning, middle, and an end. You would just have to be around at the right moment to catch the story as it appeared, dredged up

> from her memory bank, and pondered upon as though it had been another lifetime altogether. (8)

The narrative of the novel follows a non-linearity that imitates the processes of memory and remembering. Much like memory, the narrative is marked by fluidity, elusiveness and lucidity all at once. By adopting such a style, Kire privileges and foregrounds the traditional form of oral storytelling. So, in between chores, sometimes after a gap of days, Khonuo's memories are told to her daughter as they resurface in her mind. We are offered vignettes of Khonuo's memory that are not necessarily in chronological order. The narrative is also interspersed with Kevinuo's own memories of her family, friends, and places.

Khonuo begins to recollect her memories bit by bit from the time when the Japanese invaded the Naga Hills in 1944 thus, forcing them to evacuate their homes and seek refuge in other villages. It is not until 1979 that Khonuo begins to speak of the war days. The memories are also woven together with spirit sightings which reflect the deeply spiritual world of the Nagas. Kevinuo remembers that most of her mother's stories were about ghosts of young soldiers who came back to haunt people. In the afterword, Kire notes that the instances of spirit sightings mentioned in the novel are actual references to spirit sightings by people known to her. In this way, Kire grounds her narrative in the lived experiences of people. As Kevinuo says,

> We were not interested in the military strategies used to oust the Japanese from their positions. But the human struggles that our people endured- those things were more interesting to us. And most of all, how did they rebuild Kohima after the war? (Kire, *A Respectable* 6)

Pierre Nora explains that the nature of memory is marked by its multiplicity yet also its specificity, and that memory does not just remain abstract but becomes tangible as it takes root in "the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects" (9). Through Khonuo's memory, we find a mapping of pre-war Kohima and significant places in the town that was and still is a part of the shared memory of its residents. For instance, the opening of the first pharmacy in town by Dr. Neilhouzhu Kire in 1953, the first bookshop by Benjamin Sekhose, the opening of the famous Jadial bakery that still exists to this day. We also find snippets of memory of other prominent personalities of the time like the District Commissioner C.R Pawsey, Mrs. Tanquist who was the wife of the missionary, Khrielieu Kire, the first Naga lady doctor, etc. In her other novel *Bitter Wormwood*, which will be discussed later in the chapter, Kire in a similar manner, specifies the memory of place by the mention of the bombing of Ruby Cinema on February 4, 1973. For the Kohima citizens of that time, Ruby cinema was not merely a movie hall. It was one of the cultural centres of the town. It was the place where schools organized various programmes, new rock bands held their concerts, and a place that housed other activities that formed a part of the cultural life of the town. As Neituo in the novel remarks, "In a way, they have struck at the lifeline of the town" (Kire, *Bitter Wormwood* 125).

Khonuo's accounts tell of the time when the face of Kohima changed with heavy bombings day and night. There was lack of food because most of the traders in the city like the Marwaris and Bengalis had abandoned the town. Many of the local residents had also fled to their villages. Amid the ruins of the houses were strewn corpses of the dead soldiers. Yet, the resilience of the people is also remembered as they began to rebuild their homes, returned to their neglected paddy fields, and children returned to school. In

her essay “Did your first Christmas cake come out of an ammunition box too?” in her collection of essays *Thoughts After Easter* (2014), Kire recounts the rather unusual baking equipment that her mother used to bake cakes. As the British troops left the Naga Hills, empty ammunition boxes were among the items that were left behind. And ingenious women found a way to repurpose these boxes into oven to bake their cakes. Having learned how to bake cakes from the missionary Tanquist’s wife, Kire’s recalls the ammunition box, their “cake box” as a heavy rectangular box that would be placed atop the fireplace. Even though the abandoned ammunition boxes may seem like scrap metal, the repurposing of the boxes that once contained ammunition into something as far removed from it as Christmas cakes speaks about the nature of human resilience. It is an example of how inanimate objects are imbued with meaning as they become catalysts of memory. Kire draws from this family memory and weaves it into the novel. “I knew the ammunition box Azuo was talking about. In my childhood, nearly every household in Kohima had one such box for baking cake”, recounts Kevinuo (22). As Khonuo remembers the past, the narrative of the novel does not dwell only on the pain and devastation of losses suffered. In the midst of the sorrow, there were still ways to find love, ways to continue making the most of life. Khonuo tells Kevinuo,

> Ours is a generation that has seen the devastation of war. We are people who know what it’s like to lose everything almost overnight, homes, loved ones, and life as we knew it before the ear. When death is so imminent, some things in life simply stop being important. That is what war does. Love in all its different aspects come into play during wartime. (37)

The resilience of the human spirit is reflected in such memories of wartime where it is not just the memories of the pain but also stories of joy amidst sadness that shine through. People tried their best to live as normal lives as possible, remembers Khonuo. Even in the troubled years that ensued after the British left, people still found ways to get a semblance of normalcy. Khonuo thus, recalls marrying in 1959 despite the on-going political conflict. Through Khonuo's memory, we also get an insider's perspective of what life was like in the days that followed the war. As the time for the British to leave finally came, and rather abruptly, Khonuo expresses the sentiments felt by the people of Kohima. "It was a strange feeling," she says, because not having known any other government than the British, "many people felt orphaned, including grown people" (Kire, *A Respectable* 57). In the novel, Khonuo recounts the rebuilding of Kohima after the war. Memorials were erected to commemorate the battle of Kohima. Plaques were placed for the soldiers who lost their lives in the war. In the absence of any memorials for the countless ordinary people who also died or suffered huge losses, Kire's text becomes a "site of memory".

The novel also records the transition period after the departure of the British from the Naga Hills. Khonuo struggles to describe the period that was marked by a sense of fear and apprehension as great political changes began to take place. As the movement for Naga sovereignty began to gain momentum, the people found themselves caught in yet another war, this time, more long drawn-out and more devastating in its consequences. Khonuo's accounts speak of the resentment against the Indian soldiers as she notes a difference in this new war. Never being targets of the attacks during the "Japanese War", there was no fear of soldiers. However, in the new war, people began to fear the sight of the soldiers.

3.4 Counter-Narratives of Memory and Identity in Ao's *These Hills Called Home*

Temsula Ao begins her collection of stories *These Hills Called Home* with a prologue entitled "Lest We Forget." She begins, "Memory is a tricky thing: it picks and chooses what to preserve and what to discard" (ix). She writes about how an invisible sieve seems to sift through memories and thus, some memories get retained, while some get discarded. She then asks,

> But what do you do when it comes to someone else's memory and when that memory is of pain and pain alone? Do you brush it aside and say, it does not concern me? And if you do that, are you the same person that you were, before you learnt of the pain of a fellow human being? I think not, and that is why, in these stories, I have endeavoured to re-visit the lives of those whose pain have so far gone unmentioned and unacknowledged. (ix)

Ao writes a kind of disclaimer where she states that the stories written by her are not to be taken as "historical facts" but rather as stories that testify to the losses brought on by war and bloodshed where there are "no winners, only victims" and the cost measured "only in human terms." Ao's writings have been marked by what we can call a *burden of memory*. *These Hills Called Home* is a seminal piece of writing because it is a collection of stories that have the turbulent history of the Nagas beginning from the 1950s as the backdrop against which the writer shows how the harshest of the consequences are borne by ordinary people. It is clearly a work that has been written with a sense of responsibility to reflect on the impacts of the Indo-Naga conflict.

Aleida Assmann points outs that when thinking about memory, we must first begin with forgetting, because the dynamics of memory consists in what she terms as

"a perpetual interaction between remembering and forgetting" (97). Memory is highly selective. There are many reasons for this. For instance, in individual memory, there is a tendency to repress or efface those memories that are painful. Assmann points out that a similar dynamic is at work even in cultural memory. According to her, there are two forms of forgetting- active forgetting and passive forgetting. The former act implies intentional acts of forgetting- destroying, deliberate effacement, etc. The latter involves non-intentional acts- losing, hiding, neglecting, etc. Similar to forgetting, Assmann points out that remembering also has an active as well as passive side. Active memory preserves the "past as present" and passive memory preserves "the past as past" (98). *These Hills Called Home* is an example of active memory where through their writings with the realization that such remembering is crucial to our identities. Failing to remember these stories amounts to losing a part of our collective identity. History has the tendency to empty out such stories. Literature and history remembers differently.

In the story "An Old Man Remembers", a young boy prods his old grandfather to remember and share memories from a painful past that had been kept repressed for years. Old man Sashi, a former "rebel" in the Naga underground army, lives with the excruciating pain in his right leg- an unforgettable, jabbing, physical reminder of the horrors of his youth. The death of his lifelong friend Imli brings him great sadness but it is what his grandson asks him after the funeral that catches Sashi off-guard. "Grandfather, is it true that you and grandfather Imli killed many people when you were in the jungle?" asks his young grandson Moa (Ao, *These Hills* 92). With that question, Sashi is made to revisit the painful memories of a period of his life which he had "consigned to a dark place in his heart" and which he had vowed "would be buried with him when his time came" (92). The disillusionment of the years that followed and the futility of the many

sacrifices made as the long drawn-out conflict began to take different directions had become a commonly-felt sentiment. Although Imli had told Sashi that it was important for them to share their stories to the younger generation because it was a part of their history, Sashi had never been convinced, instead, taking to silence and choosing not to speak about the atrocities he had witnessed. However, when his grandson hurls the question at him "from the other side of history," Sashi begins to realize that the chasm between the younger generation, ignorant of their history, could only be bridged if he chose to remember and tell his story. And so Sashi finally sits down with his young grandson Moa and the memories gush forth like a waterfall, threatening to "drown both the storyteller and listener" (97).

Of all the things that Sashi recounts to his grandson, what speaks the loudest is the sense of loss that permeates his story. Sashi is representative of a generation that had to live through one of the most horrific experiences in living memory. He is representative of the generation of boys who, from being carefree schoolboys planning for their holidays turned to gun-wielding men, foot soldiers of destructive ideologies. Sashi and his friend Imli, while still in school, hear the shrieks and crying of their village being attacked by Indian soldiers. Fleeing into the jungle, their fates are changed forever as they are found by the Naga army who then take them to their training camp. It was there that the boys learned how to "forget family, friends and everything to do with our former life." Within a year, the boys learn the ways of living a life on the run. From being innocent schoolboys, they become "enemies" and "rebels", being a danger to their own kin because if found harbouring them, the consequences would be borne in the form of beatings, "grouping" of villages and often, being razed down to ashes. The price was always paid in blood and tears.

While the story is definitely a counter-narrative to challenge the hegemony of the Indian State's narrative of one nation, branding people like Sashi and Imli as enemies of the state, Ao does not present a glorified version of this part of Naga history. In representing this troubled period in her fiction, Temsula Ao foregrounds the need to remember responsibly. This is best exemplified in the story when the young grandson did not understand why his grandfather was crying silently as he recounted his memories. Why would his grandfather be sad about lifting his gun and shooting an enemy soldier in the head? Why would he be sad about killing an enemy? As Sashi recounts his story, it becomes clear how the boys quickly learned the language of war, perpetrating injuries and conducting killing raids. By the time they surrender and return back to their village, many of their peers had died, some maimed, and others choosing to live their lives on the fringes of society because after having gone through what they did, "normal" was just not something that they just could be. These poignant lines sum up the moral dilemma and unease felt by Sashi,

> Our youth was claimed by the turbulence, which transformed boys, like Imli and me into killers. Yes, we did kill many people but the truth is that till today, I cannot say how I feel about that, which sometimes makes me wonder if I have turned into a monster. (111)

To remember the past is not a mere re-visitation. How and what we remember is determined by the colour of the lenses through which the past is viewed from the present. The ideals that the Naga army or the freedom fighters initially fought for soon became diluted and a sense of disillusionment set in among the general public. In the story, Sashi almost falls into the pitfall of thinking that his experience was irrelevant. "But I was wrong," he asserts, as he tells his grandson, "I had to tell you this because it is the secret

of our lost youth and also because I realize that once in a lifetime one ought to face the truth. Truth about the self, the land and above all, the truth about history." In the larger discourse of the nation, the history of the Nagas has always remained marginalized, existing always in the peripheries of the nation's imagination. Writers like Ao foreground memory and remembering because in the on-going process of imagining new identities, reflecting on the ways in which memory, history and identity are bound together become all the more pertinent, for the process of imagining identity is "simultaneously a process of reflexively mobilizing memory" (Veber 82).

"The Jungle Major" is a story that highlights the experiences during the initial years of the Naga struggle for independence and the growing sense of patriotism among many. Against this backdrop is the story of newly married Punaba and Khatila- an unlikely match that was frowned upon by the other villagers because Punaba lacked both the physical as well as social stature to be seen as a fitting match for beautiful Khatila. As Punaba eventually joins the underground army, visiting Khatila becomes very difficult as the Indian army would clamp down on the villages caught associating or helping the "rebels". On one particular day when Punaba visits Khatila after a long period of absence, the army manages to track him down. Being caught between the options of being shot down like a dog and his refusal to ever surrender, it is Khatila's presence of mind amid such mortal danger that saves not only Punaba but also the entire village. Although the story ends well, in that Punaba escapes arrest and in later years comes overground and lives a 'normal' life, Ao makes the subtle point of the possible dangers and horrors of what could have gone wrong is undeniable. The story highlights how words take on new meaning. The word "grouping" for instance. To an outsider, such a word may not mean much. But in the collective memory of the Nagas, the word "grouping" has come to mean

the group incarceration of villages where unimaginable horrors were unleashed by the security forces. Similarly, words like "curfew" also evoke a sense of fear and terror among many even to this day. In another story entitled "Soaba", Ao writes,

> …a new vocabulary also began to creep into the everyday language of the people. Words like convoy, grouping, curfew and 'situation' began to acquire sinister dimensions as a result of the conflict taking place between the government and the underground armies. (Ao, *These Hills* 10)

As Erll and Rigney point out, "collective memories are actively produced through repeated acts of remembrance." Rather than being concerned with the differences between the ways in which history and literature play roles in the production of cultural memory, their approach is to consider literature as a "memorial medium in its own right" (112). To answer the question of what role literature plays in the production of cultural memory, Erll and Rigney highlight three important points. The first is that literature plays the role of being a medium of remembrance. The second role it plays is as an object of remembrance. The third is the way in which literature is a "medium for observing the production of cultural memory" (112).

3.5 An Analysis of Easterine Kire's *Bitter Wormwood*

Bitter Wormwood, published by Zubaan in 2011, is one of Kire's more overtly political works, in that in terms of subject matter, it deals with the history of the Indo-Naga conflict. Although the narrative is deeply embedded in the political history of the state of Nagaland, in the author's note, Kire writes a disclaimer that the book is not to be read as a history text book (6). She instead suggests some other books on Naga history. She then goes on to say,

> This book is not about the leaders and heroes of the Naga struggle. It is about the ordinary people whose lives were completely overturned by the freedom struggle. Because conflict is not more important than the people who are its victims. (6)

Such a statement can be interpreted as a subversive move in undermining the failure of official historical accounts that do not pay attention to the lives of the people who are usually the ones to bear the brunt of suffering during such armed conflicts. In an interview with The Hindu, Kire states that *Bitter Wormwood* is her attempt to write a book that does not play into the usual stereotypes about Naga political history. In the book she also attempts to raise questions about the political ideologies and their flawed and inadequate solutions. She rather offers one that is human and humane (Daftaur).

As in many of her other novels, the central character Mose is based on her own uncle who had served as a soldier in the Naga army. The narrative of the novel begins in 2007 when old Mose witnesses a young man being chased and shot in broad daylight. It was yet another inter-factional killing. Back at home, Mose recalls the manner in which the killer had pushed him aside and called him an old man. This triggers his memory of his past. As memories begin to flood in, Mose remembers that the Naga freedom struggle had not always been the condition it had now deteriorated to.

Mose's grandmother gets shot by Indian soldiers while in the fields. The family mourning the death of the matriarch is rendered even more poignant by these lines,

> They didn't know that the shooting had been documented in the army files and the soldier in question would not face prosecution. He was protected

> by the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act 1953. (Kire, *Bitter Wormwood* 73)

As sightings of unabated harassment, rape and torture by the Indian soldiers became more common, and with the "cold grief" of losing his beloved grandmother in the hands of the perpetrators who would never be brought to justice, Mose at 19 decides to join the Naga Underground. He assures his mother, "mother, you do understand that I have to help our people, don't you? I am going so that this will not happen again" (83). Mose represents the many of the older generations who joined the cause either out of a sheer belief in their right to self-determination or in response to the repeated atrocities that were being inflicted on their families. In emplotting the story of the Naga fight for independence, Kire provides a rationale, a story to counter the narrative that threatens to subsume or dismiss it.

Kire reflects on the losses suffered and how much of it goes unacknowledged. She reflects on the role played by women during the conflict. They did not think their role mattered much as what they did were not as heroic as all the brave things that men did. However, not wielding a gun, writes Kire, did not make those who stayed at home any less brave:

> Carrying messages hidden in the fold of their clothing past army checkpoints. Sharing their food with the ones in hiding, tilling the extra fields when they could, cutting trees for firewood, repairing houses and taking on the works of men. Not many remembered what the women had done to keep their families alive in those dark years. Because war was men's business, not women's. (114)

As much as Kire makes room in her fiction about the political conflicts of Naga history, the resilient spirit of the ordinary people is never subsumed under it. It celebrates human relationships, the values that have defined the culture of the Nagas, and in doing so, gently but firmly resists any imposition on their identity. The identity of Nagaland, as other states in the north eastern region of India, has been defined in terms of violence and conflict. It has been reduced to just one thing.

The biggest price that has been paid in the midst of the long drawn-out conflict has been in terms of the loss of human life and also the hatred that has been created among the Nagas themselves. The disillusionment of the later years and the dilution of ideals became all the more apparent in the decades that followed. There were many who went from "freedom fighters" to "rebels" to "extortionists". The inhumanity of something like AFSPA is also brought to light as Kire recalls the "March 5th incident" as it is remembered in collective memory. It was on this day in the year 1995 that an army convoy of the 16 Rashtriya Rifles opened fire on civilians because of misjudging the sound of a bursting tyre as an ambush. On the basis of mere suspicion, people could be killed. The perpetrators were fully protected by the law. The impunity granted to the military and limits to which it can be tested can be seen even as recently as the December 5, 2021 when fourteen innocent unarmed coalminers returning back to their homes were brutally shot to death by the 21st Para Special Forces. The families of the victims of the Oting incident, as it is now infamously known, still await justice.

The years after the Japanese incursion bring some semblance of peace. In Kire's narrative, the radio becomes an important piece of material memory. After having

deliberated about buying one, Mose's family finally acquires one for a sum of twenty rupees. Kire writes,

> On the street, when there was no-one about, Mose played the radio a couple of times. His mother shushed him at first, but when he turned it on accidentally, they both looked at each other conspirationally. Vilaü was just as excited as her son and once they were home, they quickly turned the knob on. (38)

As mother and son fiddle with the radio knob, tuning in to the four channels that was available, giggling through the sound of the static, laughing at the sound of the voice of a woman speaking Chinese on the Chinese station, the nostalgia of the years when owning a radio was a novelty is clear. The object becomes a part of the family's daily evening ritual. Kire shows the ways in which seemingly mundane objects can become memory objects.

3.6 Texts Becoming a Part of Collective Memory

Where do we go to learn about our history? It has only been in recent years that Naga history is being taught in schools. Even up till the 2000s, there was just a slim textbook which was known as the "Nagaland Book" with scant mention of the flora and fauna, the names of governors and chief ministers of the state, and some information on the geography of the state that was taught. For literature to turn into a medium of collective memory, there needs to be publishers willing to publish such literature and also a readership interested in reading the works. Ao and Kire's works have been born at a crucial moment in the history of Nagaland, where there is more awareness and interest in

knowing about one's past.

Ricoeur's concept of mimesis as explained in his seminal work *Time and Narrative I* offers an understanding. Ricoeur does not use the term to mean mere reflection. In fact, he explains how literary texts have the ability to create extra-literary realities which he calls mimesis 1. Mimesis 2 is the process in which the text configures and creates a fictional object. Mimesis 3 is the process in which there is a refiguration as the reader reads the work. The point to note is that the literary process is an active process that involves not just the writer but the reader as well. It is a process in which "cultural systems of meaning, literary process and practices of reception are equally involved", rather than being just a mirroring of reality (Erll and Nunning, "Where Literature" 281). Andreea Paris' essay "Literature as Memory and Literary Memories: From Cultural Memory to Reader-Response Criticism" similarly draws attention to the reader as playing an instrumental part in the process of forming cultural memory through literary texts by appropriating these texts (96).

Individuals and communities remember their past and construct their identities on the basis of these recollected memories. Our memories are highly selective which indicates that "the rendering of memories potentially tells us more about the rememberer's present" than the actual past events (Neumann 333). What do we make of texts like *Bitter Wormwood* that recall so much of stories of experiences of trauma? Do such literature simply act as mediums of memory in the sense of recalling the past, or do they offer anything beyond that? Part three of the novel *Bitter Wormwood* is interesting in the ways in which the writer suggests a way forward through the unlikely friendship between Neibou, Mose's grandson, and Rakesh whom he befriends as he newly joins

college in Delhi. As they become friends, Neibou is surprised to find out that Rakesh's grandfather had been in the police and had lived for some years in Nagaland. This knowledge makes Neibou uneasy as he hesitates to tell him about his grandfather's past in the underground. As the friendship grows, both Neibou and Rakesh visit each other's families and their homes, and in the process, they learn about each other's histories and cultures, suggesting that the rift created by an us/them dichotomy can be bridged. The tragic death of Mose at the end of the novel is steeped in irony. He dies defending Jitu, a Bihari-Indian paan shop owner, fatally shot by two underground extortionists.

Mieke Bal, in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (1999), writes:

> The memorial presence of the past takes many forms and serves many purposes, ranging from conscious recall to unreflected reemergence, from nostalgic longing for what is lost to polemical use of the past to reshape the present. The interaction between present and past that is the stuff of cultural memory is, however, the product of collective agency rather than the result of psychic or historical accident. (vii)

This indicates that memory is something that we perform. The commemoration of days like Naga Day on January 10, marking the day of Naga Memorandum to the Simon Commission expressing their will to self-determination, can be understood as the performance of memory where the collective aspirations of people to remember the past but also ways on how to now move forward are articulated. Works like *Bitter Wormwood* captures the collective desire to remember but also to move forward.

Kire's writing encapsulates one of the most important periods in modern Naga history with ordinary human beings at the centre of her narrative. Spanning the decades that saw the transition from a largely traditional way of living and documenting details of the trysts with modernity. As the face of townscapes began to change, so did the ways in which people thought about themselves, as they experienced terror from close quarters from forces that were sometimes out of their control. Yet, the writer does not present these things from a stance of victimhood. The small victories of every day living of everyday people, seemingly mundane yet extraordinary in retrospect, are celebrated and commemorated in collective memory.

In *A Study of History*, Arnold Toynbee talks about the concept of challenge and response. According to him, a society is bound to succeed or fail depending on how it responds to its challenges. The works of writers like Kire and Ao can be taken as a creative response to the challenge faced by the people- in seeking dignity and recognition. The transformative power of literature is put to test as readers, both from the writer's community and those from outside, are invited to engage and respond. Memory simply for the sake of remembering is meaningless. Remembrance is always an intentional act.

3.7 Values of Literature

Memories of the past in and through these writings are not simply regurgitated. But they stem from the writers' values. What are these values? For instance, bitter wormwood is traditionally used to ward off evil spirits. The reference to this in the book is significant. It is only by introspecting into the past and the values that have been passed down to us that can restore a sense of identity. It becomes a metaphor for the intrinsic

values which will be indispensable in the process of reimagining a collective identity. However, it is important to note that these cultural values are not just values that are "traditional" in the sense of that which comprises of the oral tradition, but also Christian values such as forgiveness, which have now become a part of the Naga culture. For instance, at the end of the novel *Bitter Wormwood*, Neibou asks his grandmother if he had failed in his duty to avenge his grandfather's death, because after all, was that not what their culture taught them? To take revenge on those who kill our loved ones. However, his grandmother Neilhounuo simply replies,

> That is the old culture, my child. We cannot live like that anymore.it will destroy us. Before our people came to Jisu, we did that. But now, we are to take our burdens to Jisu and leave it with him. Some men take it upon themselves to minister judgment. When they do that, nothing good can come of it. Leave it with Jisu, I say. Mark my words, child, I have seen it in my own lifetime. Several times. (241)

Kethoser Aniu Kevichusa, in his book *Forgiveness and Politics: A Critical Appraisal*, explores the role of forgiveness in the resolution of the Naga political conflict and whether forgiveness would have "political import" in bringing tangible solutions to the ongoing conflict (8). He argues, "Christianity in Nagaland contributes significantly to the way Nagas interpret and respond to the world, and the predominance of Christianity also means that it's resources, not least the concept of forgiveness, can be tapped into the search for peace and reconciliation in the Naga situation" (9). Kevichusa even suggests, "While the term forgiveness is not used at the Indo-Naga level, a move towards political negotiation between the nationalists and the Government of India can also be understood as a politics of forgiveness" (74). What the novel suggests is that there is a need for a

deep introspection. Forgiveness is the way forward according to Neilhounuo, not revenge. In this we can find an important articulation of the commonly-felt sentiment in the present-day Naga society. In such ways, literature can be said to extend critical engagement with moving forward.

As Erll points out, memories, whether it is individual or collective, do not mirror the past. Rather, memories are "an expressive indication of the needs and interests of the person or group doing the remembering in the present" and critical inquiry needs to be directed towards the "particular presents of the remembering" (*Memory* 8) As the analyses of the literary works above have shown, these works invite critical engagement with the troubled past, but also does not do so at the cost of forgetting the lives of the people who lived through the trauma. In recalling the past and shared history through literature, a sense of collective identity is forged. This recall is shaped to a great extent by the collective aspiration for peace in the present.

CHAPTER IV

Writing Lives: Countering Silence through People Stories

4.1 Introduction

One distinctive feature about contemporary Naga writings in English is the blurring or blending of the genres of fiction and non-fiction. Writers often draw from "real" historical events and write about the lives of "real" people. A novel like Easterine Kire's *Mari* (2010), for instance, is based on the life of the writer's aunt Mari and her experiences through World War II. Based heavily on the diary of her aunt, *Mari* appears to challenge the boundaries of life-writing and raises interesting questions about how this novel destabilizes the genres of fiction and history. Similarly, *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), Kire's famous first novel and also the first novel written in English by a Naga writer, also straddles history and fiction. Based on the Battle of Khonoma, the last Naga resistance against the British, Kire brings to life an almost forgotten but significant period of Naga history. In such works, the "centrality of plausibility and verisimilitude" (Dalley 52) must be read as more than just a literary style of writing but one that is deeply informed by the contexts in which they have been written.

While both these novels can be understood as "fictions of memory" (Neumann 334), conflating history and such fictions of memory may be erroneous. The claims to verisimilitude in these kinds of narratives can be understood in the light of the context in which these texts have been written and what they seek to represent. Both these novels deal with significant periods of Naga history that is marked by the absence or dearth of written records. The first section of this chapter will be an attempt to analyze the two novels and argue that in reading these novels, we come to understand that rather than

viewing fiction and history as antithetical or incompatible, a more fruitful engagement comes about when we understand fiction and history as complementary to each other. One augments the other. The second part of the chapter will take a look at an emerging genre of storytelling that has been termed as "peoplestories" or "people stories".

In what is another instance of writing that resists strict categorization, in Kire's *Forest Song* (2011) and *People Stories: Volume One* (2016) by Avinuo Kire and Meneno Vamuzo Rhakho we find extraordinary stories- real accounts- of the lived experiences of ordinary people. Viewed through the critical lens of cultural memory studies, we find that all these writings are life narratives that feed into the cultural memory of the community. Such a perspective helps us recognize these texts as narratives that shape the cultural memory and thereby, identity of a people. In his essay "Life-Writing, Cultural Memory, and Literary Studies," Max Saunders argues that the destabilization of genres rather than being a problem can be viewed as an opportunity. He suggests that if other genres of writing like novels, poems, short stories, etc. can be read as life-writing, then their potential "as routes into cultural memory" can be realized. (322) As such writings show, there is not only a distinctive "Naganized" (Kietzar 2003, Bhumika 584) form of writing that is emerging, where traditional storytelling forms are being incorporated, but there is also the privileging of a kind of writing that has at its centre the stories of ordinary everyday people. History, as it is recorded in official records, only serve as the backdrop in the telling of these stories. A common thread that runs through all these narratives and binds them together is the ways in which they each foreground the importance of "people stories".

4.2 Writing Mari

Kire bases her novel on the life of Mari or Khrielieviü Mari O'Leary, her maternal aunt. The Japanese invasion of the Naga Hills in 1944 serves as an important backdrop to the story. The narrative begins with Mari, in her old age, finding her diary as she cleans her attic. As she begins reading, the "mad whirl of living, living and dying" of the war years unfold. The Second World War has been largely undocumented in Naga history because it was largely considered to be a war that was not theirs (Chasie and Fecitt 19). However, the significance of the war especially in the ways in which it changed the Naga society and led to the shaping of a collective Naga identity has been acknowledged. The Battle of Kohima, as it came to be known, was fought from 4 April to 22 June in 1944. It was a decisive battle of the Burma Campaign. In later years, it has come to be known as the "Stalingrad of the East", and the Battle of Kohima has even been commemorated as "Britain's Greatest Battle". War, however, serves as the backdrop in the novel. It is, as Kire states in the Author's note, "the story of Kohima and its people" (xii).

The narrative spans the time starting from February 1943 down to 1998. War seemed unlikely and a distant probability to Mari when they first hear rumours of the advancing Japanese army. Living with her family of seven, we get a glimpse of life in pre-war Kohima through the life of young Mari:

> In these pre-war years, there was a steady rhythm to our lives in our little town. Every morning we saw the same sights. On our way to school, we met the villagers of Kohima on their way to the fields. They carried their spades and daos in their baskets. Their terraced fields lay both east and

> west of the village. Every evening, as they returned home, we exchanged greetings. (Kire, *Mari* 14)

The narrative is interspersed with accounts of real persons, real places and real events like the first time they saw aeroplanes, Dakotas on their way to the British airfield in Imphal, flying over the Kohima skies. The nuances of the experience of living through a period of transition are captured through the account of people's lived experiences. By 1943, they witness droves of Burmese refugees entering Kohima which were "the first sights of what war could do to humanity." The school that was run by the Baptist mission under Rev. Supplee closes down, and "normal" life as they knew it begin to rapidly change. In the novel, we find instances of tender moments in the midst of wartime, like Mari falling in love with Staff Sergeant Victor or Vic, happiness amid uncertainty and sorrows, hope amid loss and despair as Kohima and the people become caught up in a war that they did not invite. Mari and her family, like others in the village and town, go into hiding, having become refugees in their own land. They go through periods of hunger as they resort to scavenging for edible herbs found in the woods. Mari suffers a great loss as news of the death of her fiancé Vic arrive. By the end of the battle, the face of Kohima is unrecognizable, and in many ways, so were her people. Villages surrounding Kohima like Viswema, Khuzama, Phesama and Jakhama were also heavily bombed. With hardly any houses left standing, the debris of war and dead bodies of soldiers littered the roads. The novel recounts the memories of people as they began to pick themselves up and rebuild their homes, this time with tin and corrugated iron roofing, and life slowly limped back to normal.

Mari, even though it is based on a personal diary, can be said to represent the collective experiences of a community. By drawing on a private mode of writing- the diary, written by a young Naga woman, Kire legitimizes not only her story but also the genre. Diaries, as reliable accounts of history, are usually doubted owing to the subjective nature of the genre. Such subjective accounts do not figure much in official historiography. However, Kire's choice to rely on it says much about the privileging of the specific experiences of people as legitimate and insightful in our understanding of the past. The history of what happened to the people of Kohima is remembered not through traditional authority figures (read, men of power), not through "authoritative" texts, but through young Mari and her diary. A novel like *Mari,* is subversive in the ways in which it not only questions notions of legitimacy but also that of what can or cannot be considered as "literature".

Aparna Lanjewar Bose, in her introduction to *Writing (Them)Selves: Women's Autobiographies around the World*, points out that life writings have emerged as "a major source of collective memory, some qualifying as social and literary documentations of alternate histories and resistance movements thereby debunking available dominant histories recorded by privileged groups of historians" (28). Mari's account also gives insights about the general sentiments of the people towards the Japanese and the British. Even though the Japanese may have looked more like them than the British, the Japanese soldiers were seen as "ruthless" in the ways in which they behaved with the local populace. The Nagas were loyal to the British and "wanted the British to win the war and chase the Japanese out of our land as soon as possible" (84).

The novel also raises interesting questions, as even if it is considered as fiction, the entire narrative, starting with Mari, are real historical figures. Thus, it is a novel that resists being easily categorized as just fiction or history. The author's note, with details about the writer's relationship with Mari, mention of the interviews and phone calls it took for her to get the details right and the detailed historical account of the battle of Kohima undermines the novel's fictionality. *Mari* transforms "the generic convention of historical novel to the use of constructing a historico-biographical narrative" (Devi, "Writing Lives" 40). Hamish Dalley explains that such claims to historical referentiality that are appended to historical novels establish "plausibility and potential verifiability" as "key criteria against which the representation asks to be read" (54). According to Dalley, this feature of realism, what he calls "paratextual framing", is something that has not been properly addressed in the postcolonial study of historical novels because the popular trend in postcolonial readings of novels ignores "the ethical commitments to historical plausibility routinely expressed by many postcolonial novelists" (53).

A novel like *Mari* gains in significance because even if it is written in the genre of the fictional novel, the historical referentiality of the narrative makes the story plausible. Further, Kire's "ethical commitment to historical plausibility" must be understood as a specific response to fill the void between the present and the past of which not much is known. For one, the writer has an ethical commitment to her aunt to represent her life with as much authenticity as she can. The writer also has the ethical responsibility to present a period of history of her people that has been so significant in determining not only the course of their history but also the shaping of the collective identity of her people- a task that comes with pressure and expectations.

In *Autobiographies of Others: Historical Subjects and Literary Fiction* (2012), Lucia Boldrini writes about a literary phenomenon that is still not widely recognized. According to Boldrini, "writing the autobiography of another can become a powerful literary and intellectual tool to reflect on cultural, historical and philosophical constructions of the human" (6). Further, doing so enables reflections on the formations of identity not just for the one represented but invites reflections on the "social, political and cultural role of the literary writer" (Boldrini 6). It is interesting that a text like *Mari* is subversive on many levels as it invites critical reflections on considering personal or individual narratives to be as valid testaments of the past as official historical records are. Further, it is the account of a young woman that is privileged, thus legitimizing such marginalized figures.

4.3 An Analysis of Easterine Kire's *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*

A Naga Village Remembered, published in 2003, has the distinction of being the first novel to have been written by a Naga writer in the English language. The Naga village that is "remembered" in the novel is the Western Angami village of Khonoma. This village has come to be of historical importance, not just for the Angamis but for the Nagas as a whole. In the years between 1832 and 1880, Khonoma put up a fierce resistance against the British raids into their lands. The novel records in accurate detail these events, especially that of the Battle of Khonoma. However, as much as the novel is based on this history, what shines through is the depiction of the lives of the people before the colonial encounters that would completely change their world forever. The novel is deeply embedded in the culture of the people. The rituals, festivals, social taboos, village history, and various aspects that defined the people's sense of identity are

interwoven into the narrative in minute detail. Drawing heavily from the oral tradition, the novel is a counternarrative to the "grand narrative of history by the colonizer" (Elizabeth, "Nativising" 27).

In the introduction to the novel, Kire gives a detailed historical account of the events leading up to the Battle of Khonoma. The first incursions into the hills began in the 1800s. Led by Captain Jenkins and Captain Pemberton, the first expeditions made by the British into the Naga Hills began in 1832. Encroaching upon Angami territory was met with fierce resistance from the warriors of Khonoma. It is recorded that since 1839, led by Lieutenant E.R. Grange, punitive expeditions were started. In the process, the village houses were frequently burnt down. In subsequent years, there were many such expeditions and retaliatory attacks from both sides. The killing of the Political Agent Mr. Damant in 1879 leads to a major attack on the village. After a long siege for four months, in March 1880, a verbal treaty between the British and Khonoma representatives ended the conflict. Khonoma was completely burnt down. It was only after a year that the dispersed villagers could come back and rebuild their village once again. Soon, with the arrival of the American Baptist missionaries, conversions started to take place, which was initially met with ostracism. However, in the span of just a few decades, the life world of the people underwent tremendous changes.

The cultural life of the village is given prime importance in the novel. The characters are deeply defined by the social codes of conduct and religious beliefs. Spanning over three generations, the narrative focuses on Kovi, his sister Vipiano, her son Levi, and Levi's sons, Roko and Savi. From the beginning, the narrative delves readers into the community life defined by strict adherence to a system that informed every area

of an individual's life. The day-to-day affairs of the village are depicted in careful detail. For instance, the centrality of "thehou" or community house in the cultural life of the village. This was where stories would be passed down from one generation to the other, and there was great value in being known as a "thehou no" or "child of the thehou". There are other instances of community life like the Feast of Merit that is told through characters like Keviselie, detailing the rituals involved in this unique practice where a rich man earns favour and status in the village by giving the feast of merit and dispersing all his wealth. The observance of genna days, beliefs and practices concerning births, marriages and deaths are also interspersed in the narrative.

When Levi and his clansmen are intercepted by the British while on their way back after an inter-village feud, they are beaten and taken to Tezpur Jail. When Levi regains consciousness, he wonders, "Could these be the proud warriors of Khonoma? Who could reduce them to this? He thought that the white man must indeed be very powerful if he could capture these men with hearts of stone who had battled with tigers and bears" (45). This incident brings Levi great sorrow and a changed perspective as he is faced with the obvious might of those who spoke a different language of power. By the time Levi returns back to the village six years later, he could not view the village with the same eyes as before. Everything looked smaller. The impact of the encounter with the world outside is told through Levi. The growing mistrust of the white man and his government in subsequent years is given a lot of context.

Kire's narrative offers a corrective to official history, that it was not a savage people just performing random attacks on the British. Understood against the life world that they belonged to, and how much they valued that way of life, we gain a deeper

understanding of the history of the battle and see it in a much better light. On 14 October 1897, the political agent, Mr. Damant left for Khonoma, determined to bring the defiant village into submission. Kire mentions in the introduction that according to oral narratives, the interpreter in Jotsoma where the convoy had halted, fell in front of Damant and begged him not to proceed (xii). Damant proceeds and gets killed. The killing of Damant greatly emboldened the villagers to descend on the Kohima garrison under G.J. Cawley, the District Superintendent of Police and Assistant Police Officer. They wanted to oust the British for good. The novel seeks to set the record straight by writing history from the perspective of the Nagas: "Paradoxically, Cawley felt, too the justness of the attack for they had occupied Angami lands, cut down their forests, taxes them and forced them into labour which they hated" (90-91). However, on hearing the news that Colonel Johnstone was approaching with 2000 troops from Manipur, the warriors ceased the attack on Kohima, and chose to retreat rather than face a massacre. On 22 November 1879, the British with their singular aim to crush Khonoma launched a major offensive. The village held out against the British until both sides agreed to come to terms with a treaty. General Nation insists on the elder Pelhu to come as the representative of the village. When General Nation asks Pelhu if they needed a written treaty, Pelhu shakes his head firmly. He replies, 'If we have said there will be peace between us, there will be peace. We do not need to write it down'" (107). The Naga culture, as in other oral cultures of the world, placed high value to the spoken word. Words were not taken lightly.

Kire supplements the novel with oral narratives of the Semo clan and narratives of the Khwünomia, narrated to her by different people. As a novel that straddles both fiction and history, *A Naga Village Remembered,* much like *Mari,* fills the gaps in official historical accounts of this period in Naga history. A narrative hermeneutic approach, as

argued by Hanna Meretoja, puts things into perspective. She argues for the uses of both fiction and non-fiction, as both are narratives that have "the potential to cultivate our sense of history as a sense of the possible" (*Ethics* 35). Rather than being in opposition, a more fruitful way of engaging with it is to understand that fiction actively augments historical imagination, and vice-versa. The approach of narrative hermeneutics is useful in getting past the fact/fiction debate.

The philosophical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur places great importance on the role of fiction and the ways in which it can shape our lives. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur refers to literature as "the great laboratory" where we can explore "in the realms of good and evil" (164). Meretoja and Lyytikäinen trace three strands in the surge of ethical criticism since the late 1980s, all arguing for the ethical value in literature. One follows Neo-Aristotelian thought. For instance, moral philosophers like Alaisdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum, etc. The second strand is the post-phenomenological and poststructuralist thinking, especially inspired by Derrida, with the belief that "radical alterity" must be "the starting point for ethics". The third strand is the one inspired by cultural studies. This encompasses the approaches of the postcolonial, feminist, ecocritical, queer, etc. that privileges the "embodied experience of situated subjects marked by identity categories such as gender, sexuality, race, class, and age" (Meretoja and Lyytikäinen 9). Meretoja and Lyytikäinen argue that there is a need to move beyond the approaches taken by these three strands because all three approaches fail to take into account the dynamics between ethics and aesthetics. What they suggest instead is that the ethical value of literature cannot be separated from the ways in which our identities are shaped by literature (10). Rather than literature directly presenting moral truths, literature invites us to see "the sense of the possible" (10). They argue for specific means through

which this sense of the possible is articulated in literature. Rather than understanding this ethical potential from a simplistic viewpoint of readers identifying with literary characters, narrative hermeneutics argues for a more nuanced understanding of this process, in that both form and content play a role. It is not simply identification with literary characters but identification with the interpretation of the world that readers encounter in literary works. So whether the literary work is written in realist genre or not, what is more important is the readers' engagement with the vision of the world that is portrayed in the work.

A novel like *A Naga Village Remembered* is significant in the ways in which it invites readers to see "the sense of the possible". By choosing the fictional mode, Kire is able to include details of everyday people and emplot them in the narrative world. She is able to fill the gaps that historical accounts of the Battle of Khonoma do not. Historical writing is bound to present only facts. In recalling the past, it is bound to representing past events and historical figures with accuracy. However, through the fictional mode, Kire succeeds in achieving so much more. Fiction and non-fiction complement each other and makes for a more enriching understanding of the past.

To further reiterate the point, in the later half of the novel, the narrative shifts its focus to Sato, Levi's younger son, and his decision to convert into a Christian. In chapter 14 of the novel, we encounter Dr. Sidney Rivenburg, a real historical figure. Rivenburg, trained as a doctor, had served as a missionary for forty-two years. In 1936, on hearing about his death, Niser, the first Angami convert, in a letter of condolence, fondly gave him the title "Star of the Naga Hills" (Rivenburg 144). In the novel, Sato begins his education with Rivenburg. Known to the Angamis as "Chaha Ketsau" or the old sahib,

Rivenburg was known for his strict and austere ways, especially in his dealings with his students. Sato finds favour with him and begins to consider accepting the new faith. Through the way of fiction, Kire brings out the inner tensions and conflicts that early converts like Sato must have undergone. As he neared the time of his initiation into the religion of his father and grandfather, the "gentleness of the man Chaha called Isu and the longing to be back at school" only makes Sato consider becoming a Christian. The novel also depicts the baptism of the first man in Khonoma, Nisier, in 1897. Sato's inner turmoil is similar to Chinua Achebe's depiction of Nyowe in *Things Fall Apart.* In both novels the dilemma of the sons, as they are caught between wanting to convert and the fear of rejection from their fathers, is played out. For Nyowe, it is the "poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow" (Achebe 139), while for Sato, it was the "incredible sweetness" (Kire, *A Naga Village* 122) that attracted them to the new religion. Through her fiction, Kire elaborates on Sato's understanding that the old religion and the new were not "diametrically opposed to each other". Sato thought of all the chicken sacrifices as typologies of Christ. He understood the new religion, much like the old, as binding them by taboos but by "taboos that had meaning." Sato wishes that his father would see the new religion as "a fulfillment of the old- answering questions that the old was struggling with, and giving meaning to the feasts, and to life as the villages knew it and lived it." (Kire, *A Naga Village* 123) These lines are poignant not only because the fictional narrative gives a face to the many early converts who would have faced similar dilemmas, but in the light of how unrepresented they are or appearing only as mere statistics in historical records even when they do, the writer imbues them with a sense of agency. Even when caught between forces that were much beyond their comprehension- colonialism and its other civilizing projects, Sato could choose for himself the path that he wished to take.

4.4 An Analysis of Easterine Kire's *Forest Song*

Kire introduces *Forest Song* (2011) as a collection of stories that are based on "true stories of people" which had either been narrated to her personally by the storytellers or through other oral narrators. The book is a collection of unusual stories that reflect the deep spiritual connection that Nagas have with the spirit world. Traditionally, the Nagas have always believed that there is more to life than just the physical tangible world. They believe in the existence of a spiritual realm that co-exists with the physical world. Each story in this collection highlights aspects of Naga spirituality that is important in the understanding of Naga identity. Many of these stories seem too fantastical to be considered true. Kire is careful to clarify the difference between folktales and what she calls "peoplestories."

In her essay "The Narratives Silenced by War: The Barkweaver Project of Peoplestories and Folktales", Kire explains why Barkweaver, the publishing house run by her, felt the need to begin this project of collecting and sharing stories of ordinary people. Besides the aim of retrieving folktales, she states that this project aims to collect peoplestories, which she describes as "not mythical tales but the accounts of ordinary people and their lives", stories that "popularly deal with spirit encounters" (99). For Kire, this project of retrieving folktales and collecting peoplestories is important because these are narratives that have been silenced by long decades of war, starting from the first colonial encounters. While both folktales and peoplestories belong to the collective memory of the people, Kire points out that peoplestories have another level of significance. This comes from her belief that peoplestories can bring healing, not just to the reader but also especially to the teller. She says,

> For the elderly, sharing their stories, and discovering they are being listened to gives back value and meaning to their lives. Peoplestories make the statement that ordinary people and their lives and destinies are important, because that is something that the machinery of war completely disregards. (100)

"Forest Song", the first story in the collection, is a story based on strange but real incidents of people who are spirited away into the forest for many days. Most return but are never the same again. Some, like Zeno in the story, never return again. Being lured into the deep forest by hearing forest songs is an "inexplicable phenomenon". It was considered unusual but not uncommon to hear of people who go missing for days. Such people, on their return, would recount having heard sweet music, which had lured them as it grew louder into a deafening trance until they approached the heart of the forest.

"New Road" recounts the phenomenon of spirits following people home. These spirits were believed to be spirits of the roads. While some are known to be gentle, some are malicious. In the story, Nino's mother-in-law tells Nino that she has been having trouble sleeping because "spirits of the road" had been disturbing her. She explains to Nino that these spirits had followed home Nino's brother and his kinsman who had come home late after a night out drinking. Most of these spirits are harmless, she tells Nino, however the ones that had followed the men home were of a new breed. She chides Nino telling her, "You live in the town and have forgotten the ways of the village. But the spirits never forget, they are the same whether they are in the village or in the town" (*Forest* 22). Through her mother-in-law, Nino learns that the most dangerous are the river

spirits whose presence could moisten even the air in the room and saturate it with the smell of river mud.

The next story “River and Earth Song” details a type of spirits that Kire points out are common to both the Tenyimia of Nagaland and the Igbos of Nigeria. These spirits were river-spirits- of great beauty, capable of endowing one with great wealth, but also brought death. In the Ibo story, it is Josephus, a young, smart man who meets the “mammy-wota” or mother of the water, a river spirit in Nigerian folklore, at an office party. Kire then adds a second part to the story, where it is Balie, a young Angami man, who has an encounter with two river-spirits. Interwoven in the story are accounts of other similar encounters.

In “Trespasses”, a father who had experienced terrible encounters with spirits in his youth tries to warn his wayward son to not test the spirits by staying out late every night. He remembers how he had lost his way in the forest only to be found days later, wavering between life and death for an entire month, petrified by all that he had seen. The adamant son finally has a terrifying encounter and narrowly escapes death calling on the name of Jesus. In his dreams, he sees the spirit swinging its black body cloth over their pigsty. The next morning, they awake to find their pigs dead.

In “Love Potion”, Pusa recounts to his friend his experience of being fed “paan” by a girl in a shop. Unbeknownst to him, the girl, wanting his affections, had mixed a love potion inside it. It is only when he goes to the doctor as his health deteriorates that they find out that something had been done to him. Strangely enough, it is not the doctor, but a “herbal man” to concoct an antidote for him. Instances of such (mal)practices of

herbal potions are not common, but also not unheard of. "The Man Who Lost His Spirit" details the account of a rather unusual tale of how a man had to go back into the forest to call back his spirit that had forsaken him.

What is the significance of telling such stories? At one level, there is an attempt to resist easy genre definition. All these stories are as fantastical as they are true. For readers unfamiliar to the culture in which these stories are embedded, these stories may be interpreted as fiction, fantasy, magic-realist, and so on. However, they are much more than that. These are insider perspectives of the Nagas and the Naga way of life (Elizabeth 50). All of these stories are grounded in the specific lived experiences that are deeply embedded in our culture. The International Encyclopedia of Human Geography defines indigenous knowledge as "knowledge which is spatially and/or culturally context specific, collective, holistic, and adaptive" (Mistry). Such stories are part of the Naga indigenous knowledge system. Giving voice to these stories must be understood as a form of resistance through which Naga beliefs and their understanding of the world are legitimized. It is reclamation of the right to tell our own stories in our own ways. Kire has often invoked Fanon in stating that there is a need for Nagas to decolonize their thinking. "The accumulated effects of psychological colonization over the years come into play when we try to write ourselves", she writes in her essay "Shared Memory: The Project of Writing Ourselves" (107). While such a positioning can be interpreted as a postcolonial reaction, it is also important to recognize the ways in which these narratives articulate a unique Naga response in resisting and defining their identity through stories.

4.5 An Analysis of Avinuo Kire and Meneno Vamuzo Rhakho's *People Stories*

People Stories: Volume One is a collection of stories of lived experiences as they were narrated to the writers, Kire and Rhakho. In the introduction to her section, Kire writes,

> Some of these personal experiences and accounts may seem like isolated tales which have no direct bearing on collective heritage and culture. However, it is imperative to point out that these human stories offer the reader a glimpse into another world, way of life and belief system which is forgotten today. (7)

The first section comprises of stories of different people who were mostly born in the 1920s and 1930s. Each brief narrative offers insightful stories from the lives of people who lived seemingly ordinary lives. Dr. Satuo Sekhose recounts his painful childhood years, knowing hunger and rejection at the unfortunate ill-treatments received from his step-mother. He recalls incidents like leaving for Calcutta for his higher education on a Dakota which was used to carry equipment during the war. Dr. Sekhose's story is reminiscent of other stories of his generation who were among the first young Nagas to leave to distant places in search of education. "In Another Life- Reminisces" has accounts of Kohima in the early decades of the 20th century as narrated by Zechaneiü Mepfhü-o. Experiences of encounters with "tekhumiavi" or weretigers is also recounted. Zechaneiü recounts being stalked by a tekhumiavi and her infant son. It was only when she uses garlic to repel the weretiger as was traditionally believed that she was able to get rid of him. Zechaneiü speaks of a time when the Nagas had become divided amongst themselves. She recounts putting herself in danger as she smuggled letters and other

essentials to her husband who had joined the Naga Army. She remembers how her husband had served the Naga nation for fifty years before he passed away. Before his death, he was conferred the "Nagaland Star", the highest Civil Award by the Federal Government. Poignantly, she says, "When I look back at my own struggles for our people, I think I should have been given that award as well" (49) There are other stories that recount ancient practices especially from the headhunting era. For instance, Luothouü Keretsu recounts the exploits of her grandfather Sielhou, who was known to have been a brave warrior, and his exploits. The writer also includes accounts of the last hangings in Kohima which was a common form of punishment during British rule. The narrative recounts how Lhousare Kithe, a mentally challenged man, was hung to death as punishment for torching down many houses in the village when the villagers were away in the fields. In another story, we find the story of Venei who was blessed with incredible wealth by a "miawenuo" which are benevolent spirits according to folklore. Nizotuoü Solo recounts her early years. Denied to become Christians and also denied from going to school, she and her friend Bounou decide to join the Naga army. She recounts the early years in training- living in the jungles, being taught survival skills. We get glimpses of the lives of women in the Naga army, of friendships forged, making perilous journeys to China, walking through rivers and rough terrains.

Similarly, in the stories collected by Rhakho, we find unusual stories such as that of Khawhimütülü. Told to the writer by ninth generation descendants of Khawhimütülü, the story recounts her extraordinary life as a healer and prophesier. Some of the things she had prophesied were the coming of money economy, aeroplanes and trains. Her prophecy of the Japanese coming to their lands also came true. We also find stories like the one about Lhoupezü-u Nuh who had many experiences of being spirited away. Lhoupezü-u

was known to have cured many of the villagers of sicknesses and other ailments with medicines given to her by her spirit friends. She had also introduced a new kind of spirituality. She spoke of "Nihova", "Isu" and "Meshilo" which can only be interpreted as names similar to "Jehovah", "Jesu"/"Jesus" and "Messiah". She had also taught the people about a type of Sabbath, to observe a genna day on the seventh day. Among other things, Lhoupezü-u's arrest by the then Kohima D.C., J.H. Hutton is also mentioned on suspicion of her being a rebel. As the writer points out, Lhoupezü-u's teachings were pre-Christian but are considered as a precursor of what was to come.

There are also other stories like that of Khritso Pienyü and the Japanese soldier. Narrated by Pienyü, it is a story that recounts a time in 1944 at Chedema village when Pienyü as a young man had had an encounter with a Japanese soldier. The soldier being hungry had agreed to trade some rice for his medal. What is extraordinary about the story is how the medal was returned back to the soldier many decades later. Pienyü's family friend Chalie Iralu on his travels to Japan, finds the Japanese soldier and returns back the medal. In return, the soldier sends fine Japanese scarves. Rhakho also records the story of Teli Kivelimi Kiba, the first Naga GB or Gaonbura. She married GB Ghopfüna. Both her and her husband were among the earliest Sümi converts to Christianity. They were known to have sheltered and protected other early converts who were subjected to persecution. Teli had no formal education but her wisdom and capabilities as a leader earned her great respect. After the death of her husband, during a meeting with the then DC of Kohima, Charles Pawsey, Teli's intelligence and confidence impressed the DC so much that he made her the GB. She is also remembered for taking to court the matter of her right to inherit her dead husband's property. Teli also introduced several reforms in their customary laws, some of which are still applicable. Another story is that of Tunuo

Liezietsu, a wise woman who was known for her extraordinary resourcefulness. During the years of the Indian Army's attacks on Naga villages, Tunuo and her friends would find ingenious ways of smuggling food to the Naga Army. As Rhakho notes in the end, her life "embodies the characteristics of her contemporaries, who may go unnamed, but they served their society and generation well" (180).

4.6 Conclusion

In his essay "Life in Quest of Narrative", Ricoeur explains that a text is "the projection of a new universe distinct from that in which we live" by which he means that a text, contrary to structuralist thought, is not self-contained or closed in on itself (25). He further explains that to read a work means to allow ourselves to be open to the world that the text projects. To read and understand a text is to let the horizon of the text and that of our own fuse together. Engaging with such texts as the ones discussed above is to engage with the world that they project. All these narratives offer us "a possible way into understanding that which is absent" (Rigney, *Imperfect* 25). In the absence of written records of the past, these narratives help the readers in the present to have a more tangible understanding of the past. Even though some of the narratives only seem as fragments, they give "a face, a name, and a story" (Eakin 3) to the unrecorded past and thus, renders it more legible and more meaningful.

CHAPTER V

The Politics of Writing and Identity: Contemporary Naga Women's Writings

5.1 Introduction

If contemporary Naga literature is a site where identity is being explored, it is a very curious fact that it is women who dominate this field. What does this indicate? What are they writing about and how are such writings negotiating a space within the larger discourse of Naga identity? These are some questions that this chapter seeks to explore. A common narrative of the status of women in Nagaland is that they are privileged. A look at a diverse range of narratives being written by women brings this under question. That it has been mostly women in the creative literary space further raises the question of whether this space is being viewed as a gendered space dictated by the identity politics of gender, and whether that is desirable at all.

While it may be a good indicator that women in Nagaland do enjoy the freedom to write and express themselves, it can also sometimes be conveniently made to play into a counter-narrative that renders redundant talks of gender disparities in Nagaland as though to say, "What's the fuss about when women are doing so well or even better than men?" However, such indicators of performance can often point towards deeper underlying reasons that have given rise to such developments. A look into what these writers are writing about tells us that writing by women writers in Nagaland is a conscious political act of storytelling and that their writings seek to address the lived realities of women in a patriarchal Naga society. Contemporary writings by women in Nagaland invite critical engagement with the ways in which violence based on gender has been understood in the

Naga context, and how the creative literary space is being used to explore the complexities of many intersecting identities. Storytelling is their way of responding to gender bias and gender violence in its varying forms.

5.2 Why Do Naga Women Write?

Why is it that women write? Speaking of the context of Nagaland and responding to why the intellectual achievements of women eclipse that of their male counterparts, Monalisa Changkija in a newspaper interview rightly points out that such questions need to be viewed and understood through "the prism of Naga customary laws." Similarly, in the same interview, Toshimenla Jamir also notes that the reason why women take so keenly to directing their creative energies towards some or the other form of intellectual pursuit is that they are denied participation in the decision-making processes and institutions in the society (Das). Even though women are the forefront of many quarters of society, they are still "circumscribed by strong male-centric mores" (Walunir 24), and it is within this that they have to negotiate their identities.

One might argue that creative literary writings by women are not always informed by the politics of gender and so it might also be the case that their writings are motivated by reasons other than this. While this may be true to a certain extent, the unmistakable attempt to address the many instances of oppression under a patriarchal society through creative (re)tellings based on the lives of women is quite telling. A look at what women writers in Nagaland are writing about points us to an answer to the whys of the matter. As much as a significant preoccupation of the writings that make the bulk of Naga Writings in English is to do with the act of remembering the past, these writings are also important testaments to the present realities of women.

As seen in the previous chapters, the burden of memory and the perceived dangers of forgetting a troubled history inform much of these writings, and still continue to. These works explore the ways in which the Naga identity has been shaped through time. The oral tradition has also been the most significant basis of inspiration for many of these writings. As discussed in the earlier chapters, the retelling of old stories has brought about a continuum and keeps the dialogue with the oral traditions alive. However, as rightly pointed out by Vizovono Elizabeth, many of the contemporary works reflect the transition from themes of politics or folk culture to themes like that of the suppression of the female voice in a patriarchal society ("Of Women" 118). In seeking answers to the question of what role contemporary Naga Writings in English plays in the re-imagination of a collective Naga identity, we cannot ignore the fact that this body of writing has been largely championed by women writers, and the issue of gender politics cannot be side-stepped. K.B. Veio Pou also remarks on the rise of a feminist consciousness where through the "might of the pen", women writers are voicing out injustices done to their gender (*Literary Cultures* 162). Perhaps, to extend the metaphor, it might be said that women writers in Nagaland are putting the might of the "dao" (a machete that is a traditional symbol of might) to test by the might of their "pen".

Thus, a narrative that has taken a place of prominence especially in the works by contemporary writers is one that addresses the actual realities of women that has been largely determined and dictated by the deep-seated patriarchal customary laws. It is evident how literature has rendered itself as a space where such problems can be addressed. Such writings also call for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of violence than has been traditionally understood. While certain works address issues like

rape or forms of physical abuse traditionally accepted as "violence", there are others that explore issues that often remain unaddressed or shrugged off because they are not as visible or have not been problematized because they have been considered the norm "since time immemorial"- a phrase that has come to justify anything to do with Naga customs and traditions and used to deflect critical questions. Zizek's theory of violence shows that the lure of visible forms of violence- "subjective" violence- distracts us from identifying the symbolic and systemic violence because they are not clearly identifiable as the former with a clear identifiable agent (Zizek 2). Violence thus understood, many of the contemporary texts call for a reexamination of our understanding of violence in the Naga context. Dolly Kikon's work on this subject helps put things into perspective. She writes that in order to understand sexual violence and the culture of impunity that exists in Naga society, one has to contextualize it in the history of militarization, and also the ways in which Naga "culture" and existing customary laws are (mis)used to propagate the existing impunity thereby, engendering a culture of impunity (Kikon, *Life and Dignity* 17, 19).

A story like Temsula Ao's short story "The Last Song" highlights how in places of conflict, women become the most vulnerable. Through the story, Ao situates gender-based violence in the context of the AFSPA, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (1958) that gives unabated powers to the security forces in these areas. Literature, as Tilotamma Misra in her essay "Women Writing in Times of Violence", becomes better suited to represent the trauma of violence because the very experience of trauma blurs "the boundaries between 'the knowable and the unknowable'" (628). What happened to Apenyo and her mother Libeni represents many countless stories of such horrific acts that women were inflicted upon by the armed forces over the years of conflict.

In the sections below, a briefly analysis of some narratives written by women writers that deal with issues of gender and gender-based violence will be made.

5.3 An Analysis of Neikehienuo Mepfhü-o's *My Mother's Daughter* (2019)

Neikehienuo Mepfhü-o's novel *My Mother's Daughter* published is an important piece of writing, in that it is one of the first novels that explicitly deal with gender-based violence, specifically domestic abuse. The novel brings to the open in harrowing detail the realities of domestic abuse which is a much more common occurrence in Naga society than it is openly acknowledged. In a two-part tale, *My Mother's Daughter* is the story of two women- a mother and a daughter- caught in the cycle of violence and abuse. This novel shatters the narrative of abuse being alien to Naga culture and challenges the location of the perpetrator of violence on the "other." Sexual violence, as Kikon notes, has often been inscribed on others- the Indian security forces, migrants, or the larger non-Naga population (Kikon, *Life and Dignity* 76). Mepfhü-o's novel deals with the complications that arise when the perpetrator of violence is squarely located not outside but within institutions that are traditionally held as sacred- that of marriage, of family. The novel uncovers the culture of impunity that absolves abusers because of how domestic abuse in Naga society has always been viewed as a private affair. The novel further challenges the myth that such abuse and violence do not happen to or is not perpetrated by the educated. It also raises uncomfortable questions when an educated, church-going Christian man who professes to be a "Jesus freak" turns out to be the abuser. What makes a really interesting point is that this book, although classified as "fiction" makes no pretense that the violence and abuse documented in the novel are fictional. In the author's note, Mepfhü-o writes that almost all the sections on violence- verbal, physical, emotional- are real stories of real women, which had been narrated to

her. She further states that her choice of having nameless characters was so that the focus of the book would remain on the issue of violence and abuse. The choice of the title of the book is also significant as the writer states that daughters tend to become like their mothers, and if mothers do not stand up to abuse, it only sets off a cycle of normalizing it for the daughters.

In the first section of the novel, we see a young daughter living as a witness to her mother being physically abused by her father in their home. The girl herself was already a victim of abuse, having been molested by a cousin at the age of four. She recalls that when she shared about the incident with her mother, her response was to not talk about it. Although the mother does share with the daughter about her own incident as a young girl with a male teacher in school, Mepfhü-o highlights how the fear of societal shame that such things will invite dissuades many women from speaking up. So when the daughter grows up into a woman, she still finds herself trapped in a similar relationship, accepting the abuse silently just as her own mother had. Mepfhü-o contextualizes the stories of the abuse against the patriarchal society that enables and even justifies such abuse. Issues such as domestic abuse, in Naga society, are accepted as a private affair. Very rarely would neighbours or families intervene because such things were thought to be matters best settled between the husband and the wife. It is important to recognize that the misogyny exemplified in the male characters does not come out of nowhere, nor are they isolated instances. Such behaviors stem from the deep-seated belief that women are inferior to men. Mepfhü-o also highlights other aspects that have indirectly gone into perpetuating such beliefs and abuses. In the novel, the woman refuses her grandmother's offer to take her child along and start living with her. The woman is unable to accept this offer because she convinces herself that she, as a Christian, had made a pledge before God. Moreover, the fear of being ex-communicated from the church was something to

consider. She convinces herself that her grandmother, because she was not a Christian, did not understand the sanctity of marriage. It is true that many, like the woman, choose to stay married in abusive marriages, rather than to endure the shame and rejection by the church and society. In the Naga society, many churches, especially tribal churches, function with the same patriarchal set of cultural beliefs. This combined with a theology of unquestioning subservience to husbands proves to be a dangerous combination where the church that is to be a safe haven sadly becomes instead an enabler of abuse in many cases.

In the second part of the novel, which deals with the story of the daughter, Mepfhü-o continues to undermine certain myths of domestic abuse as it is understood in the Naga context. Wanting a life that was different from her mother's and thinking that such things as she had witnessed in her family only happened because they were poor, the daughter pushes herself towards becoming an educated woman. The daughter thinks that her mother had borne all that abuse because she was uneducated. She thinks to herself, "She doesn't know what domestic violence or abuse was because her education does not extend beyond the initial ABCs- which she had even forgotten. She had not read any books which might have informed her about these things" (Mepfhü-o 107). She marries a man who, in her eyes, was nothing like her father. He was "educated, soft-spoken, God-fearing, kind, and a gentleman in every sense of the word" (Mepfhü-o 111). However, very soon, she finds out that he was as much an abuser as her father was, just as she was as much a victim as her mother was. Mepfhü-o juxtaposes the stories of the mother and the daughter, vastly dissimilar in circumstances in terms of the second generation being educated people, rich and well-to-do, yet vastly similar in being caught in the same vicious cycle of abuse. For ten years, she stays in the marriage, making excuses and

unable to leave. The possibility for many women to leave their husbands is hindered by the fact that in the patriarchal Naga society, more often than not, if the woman leaves, she would never see her children again. In the novel, she finally breaks out of the cycle and leaves her husband, and taking to the court of law, she is permitted to have her children visit her on the weekends.

5.4 An Analysis of Kire's *A Respectable Woman*

The later parts of *A Respectable Woman* focus on the lives of Kevinuo and her childhood friend Beinuo. Growing up together from being school girls to young women, Beinuo confides to Kevinuo that she had accepted the marriage proposal from their classmate Meselhou. When Beinuo gets pregnant, she hopes that it will be a boy because "Meselhou's family needs boys to take on the family business after him" (Kire, *A Respectable* 122). When she delivers a girl, Meselhou's disappointment is evident. Beinuo rejects any offer of intervention from her friend Kevinuo. When Beinuo has another baby, it is a boy but he suddenly dies. A week later, Kevinuo is asked to rush to the hospital as Beinuo had been admitted there. It is then that she confesses to Kevinuo that Meselhou had been beating her as soon as they were married. Beinuo confesses that she could never leave the marriage because she was afraid of being condemned by society, and she stayed for the sake of her daughter Uvi. Beinuo soon succumbs to her injuries. Kire situates Meselhou's toxic masculinity as something that is rooted and enabled by their culture. As Ato explains, "The whole problem with Meselhou is that he is an only son… He always had his way and its possible that his parents spoiled him thoroughly as a child" (Kire, *A Respectable* 147) Ato further explains that after the death of his father, Meselhou assumed the role of power of the patriarch. The status of women in Naga society as being secure only as far as they have brothers or male family members

to protect them is also highlighted. Ato continues to explain to Kevinuo that if Beinuo had brothers or close male relatives, Meselhou would not have dared mistreat her. Kevinuo is frustrated as she is met with the logic that since Beinuo's own father did not interfere, they should just let things be. Through Beinuo's story, Kire critiques the commonly held attitude of non-interference. Furthermore, she situates the problem within the ways in which customs and traditional roles have been interpreted.

5.5 An Analysis of Avinuo Kire's "The Power to Forgive"

The writings of indigenous women often deal with the negotiation of different intersecting identities- of gender, religion, nation, etc. Avinuo Kire's "The Power to Forgive" that appears in her first collection of stories, *The Power to Forgive and Other Stories*, is a story that not only locates the perpetrator of the violence closer home, as Mepfhuo's novel does, but also brings out the issue of negotiating conflicting identities through the protagonist. Having been raped by her paternal uncle, the story draws attention not only to the long-lasting psychological and emotional effects of the rape, but also the protagonist's struggles to come to terms with her father for rendering her doubly denied of agency as he forgives the uncle without her consent. Painful memories, stored away like the old documents in her cardboard file, come back to haunt her as a newspaper clipping slips out reminding her of the time her father had forgiven the man who had raped her "in a supreme act of Christian forgiveness". For sixteen years of her life, she had secretly built her resentment against her father for taking away the right to forgive a crime that was committed against her. The protagonist being left unnamed seems deliberate on the part of the writer because such a story would resonate with many women, for it is not uncommon for such instances to happen where things are hushed-up or a quick-fix solution is resorted to in the form of a call to such "forgiveness". The

uproar from society that such forms of violence can elicit, as opposed to matters of domestic violence, is also highlighted. However, in doing so, Kire is careful to point out that such uproars only assumes and perpetuates the notion of helpless victimhood and loss of agency. The story shows how in such cases, it is the woman who has to bear the burden of the shame and blame, and have social stigma attached to not just her but her entire family. She recalls her mother never allowing her to forget the incident, dissuading her from living a happy life by telling her "People will think you have no shame!"

What ensued after the rape torments the protagonist in almost equal measure as she wonders if life would have been simpler if she had just kept the rape a secret. When she learns that her father, without even asking for her consent, had forgiven her uncle, a sense of betrayal overwhelms her. The story through this incident highlights how many victims of such abuse face disappointments when the very people who need to rise to their defense make choices that render them even more alienated and abandoned. It further highlights the ways in which a patriarchal society offers redemption to men far too easily than to women. The uncle, after serving only seven years in jail, goes on to relocate to a different town, marry and have a family of his own. The mother suffers through her own share of pain as the mother-in-law blames her for what had happened, telling her that she was a bad mother. Such instances of misplaced blame only points to the culture of impunity that the society gives access to men, but not women. Reconciliation happens at the end of the story as the daughter and the father embrace, both broken by the tragedy of long ago, and her act of throwing the newspaper clipping into the fire becomes a symbolic act of reclamation of agency. "The Power to Forgive" is a story that underscores forgiveness as an act of agency and empowerment that needs to be in the hands of the one who has been violated.

5.6 An Analysis of Avinuo Kire's "The Light"

Another story by Kire- "The Light" from the collection *The Last Light of the Glory Days: Stories from Nagaland* (2021) also articulates a similar point. In the story, the perpetrator is Mr. Panduta, the math teacher who comes for home tuition every morning to teach young Khriemenuo, and gradually starts trying to touch her. The story details the second-guessing of young Khriemenuo as she oscillates between disgust and self-doubt- "Had Sir Panduta done anything wrong really?" she wonders. "Maybe they were all really 'accidents' as he called them or maybe she was the one who had a 'dirty mind'?" In the absence of her parents, Khriemenuo is saved from Mr Panduta's advances by "a benevolent presence" as the room is flooded with light that makes Mr Panduta flee in terror. This story highlights how there is a greater natural tendency to doubt and distrust the accounts of women or children by those immediately in position to help them that only further enable the predators. Despite Khriemenuo having told her mother about Mr Panduta's advances, her mother carelessly leaves her home alone, thus emboldening him to prey on her. In her parents' absence, he starts to make advances towards but a blinding light floods into the room. Khriemenuo senses it to be "a benevolent presence". Terrified, Mr. Panduta flees. The "light" that saves Khriemenuo may be interpreted as divine intervention. However, what is most troubling about it is that it points to the uncomfortable possibility that not many have been fortunate to be saved like Khriemenuo, and perhaps not many will be.

5.7 An Analysis of T. Keditsü's *Sopfünuo*

That violence is systemic and that being silenced is a kind of violence find clear articulation in T. Keditsu's *Sopfünuo* (2018) that she dedicates to "fellow keepers of silence" in shared solidarity. Keditsü situates instances of systemic violence within the

every day lived experiences of ordinary Naga women; systemic because they have been so naturalized and ingrained in the day-to-day lives of women. While the theme of negotiation of conflicting identities can be seen in this collection, through the explicit narrations of many instances from their roles as daughters, sisters, wives or mothers where suffering is understood to be borne in silence, Keditsü's poems point out that being silenced is in fact an infliction of violence. What Keditsü problematizes through her poems is that this act of silencing is not even identified as violence. Through her poems, Keditsü invites readers to "disentangle" from what Zizek terms "the fascinating lure of the directly visible 'subjective' violence" (1) and instead turn our attention to the "systemic" violence that is deeply ingrained in the fabric of Naga society.

In the Foreword to the collection, Dr. Kevileno Sakhrie points out how the issue of identity is one that brings out a lot of complexities. She explains, "on one hand they cannot simply override their commitment to their ethnic heritage, and, on the other, they need to be who they are" (vii). In Naga society, the subject of women's rights is often perceived with suspicion as it is seen as an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the social order as protected by customary law. It is such a context in which Keditsü embeds her poems. "Shame" is a poem that addresses the issue of how society attaches shame to a woman who is unable to bear a son. The speaker's recollects her mother being shamed for bearing only daughters. Being a patrilineal society, sons are valued over daughters because they are the ones who would carry on the family name. As pointed out in the Foreword to the collection, the veneration of traditions that continue to enable the oppression of women by perpetuating a culture of silence is brought into question. The poem "Woe" highlights how a woman's worth is so tied up to her (in)ability to bear sons- "Her worth is her womb and her womb worthy/ Only if it bears a son" (*Sopfünuo* 9).

Through her poems “Breastfeeding” and “Stitches”, the poet speaks of the painful initiation into motherhood. The culture of shaming continues when a woman- even when she bears a son- finds herself in a situation when her body is unable to produce milk. She is asked, “What kind of a woman becomes a mother without milk?” and the tirade against her continues as she is blamed for having married too late or for being too old, given unsolicited advice that “breast milk is best” and that “sores and blood” are meant to be borne in silence as it was only natural. Keditsü writes of the experiences that are only much too familiar for many Naga women. They are meant to endure the pain in silence. The poet draws attention to the lack of support that many young mothers face as they enter motherhood. Women are expected to just know how to be mothers and are met with much berating. In such ways, Keditsü critiques the notion of the ideal Naga mother.

It is her poem “Hibiscus” that truly sums up the predicament of Naga women. It is true that women are not subjected to “things as barbaric and heartless as burning brides for money or killing/ fetuses because they are female”. Such kinds of visible kinds of oppression is unheard of in Naga society. However, Keditsü draws attention to how women are taught to “bend without breaking”, and even if they do break, to do so “without a fuss, silently/ In stealth, in secret, in solitude”. The poet draws attention to this culture of silencing that has become so normalized as women for generations are taught “resilience” to “bloom without months of rain like the hibiscus”.

Similar concerns are expressed in Rosumari Samsara’s collection of poems *memorographia*, “Midlife-Female” is a poem about how a “non-childbearing female” is of no worth in society, “Crucify Her” gives voice to the excommunication of divorced women from the clan, church and tribe. “NoNoNo Woman” is another such poem of

resistance where the poet asserts her right to think for herself instead of being coerced into being someone she doesn't want to be.

5.8 An Analysis of Temsula Ao's *Aosenla's Story*

Temsula Ao's most recent novel, *Aosenla's Story* (2017), is another important work that is a testament to the pressures and struggles faced by many women under the weight of patriarchy. Aosenla, a young college girl, whose dreams of higher education and a career come crashing down when she her mother informs her that they had arranged for her marriage. Aosenla, despite her protests, has to resign to her fate as nothing would change her father's mind. Although the mother sympathized with her, she eventually aligns herself with him because "she was brought up to believe that it was the bounden duty of a wife to support her husband" (Ao, *Aosenla* 6). That no one seemed the least bothered that the proposed match for Aosenla was a "reformed alcoholic" is what is most striking. Such attitudes are prevalent in Naga society. While for a woman, once her reputation is sullied even by the slightest of mistakes, for men, they find easy redemption and forgiveness in the eyes of the society.

Women can be a party to the subjugation of their own kind. Much like the matriarch in *A Terrible Matriarchy,* Aosenla's manipulative grandmother reprimands her, "A woman, no matter how educated or rich or well-placed, needs the protection of a man all her life. A man may be blind or lame or ugly, but he is superior because he is a man and we are women and helpless." (Ao, *Aosenla* 18) Aosenla finally submits to her role as a pawn on the chessboard of powers stronger than her- of family, clan and village alliances. Initially she even feels a sense of excitement at feeling a sense of being wanted and liked, but this does not last for long.

Women are often blamed for the way their husbands are. The commonly held narrative is that it is up to the woman to shape her husband. While such narratives seem to be empowering women, what it actually does is to shift the blame on to women, while the men are absolved of their weaknesses. In Naga society, it is not uncommon for families to look for a suitable wife for their alcoholic sons thinking that marriage will solve the problem. In the novel, Aosenla is told that as a wife, it was her responsibility to help her husband become a good husband. She is given many instances of wives restoring drunk husbands and transforming abusive partners. To make matters worse, despite the tumultuous marriage, the strained relationship with his family and the birth of two daughters that was met with disappointments, the third child who happened to be a boy dies during childbirth.

The narrative follows the trajectory of Aosenla finding her own voice and exercising her agency, despite her tragic predicament. She slowly becomes more independent and forges a new identity for herself, one that is not restricted to the domestic space alone.

5.9 An Analysis of Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*

A Terrible Matriarchy is a novel that has patriarchy as the visible structure of power, but draws attention to the less obvious "under-structure" of matriarchy, which operates within the available structure of patriarchy, making abuse within the same gender possible. (Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* ix)

From a very young age, Dieleno was convinced that her grandmother did not like her. She knew this because whenever the grandmother served food to her and her brother,

the best portions would go to her brother. Chores were carefully divided between her brother and Dieleno by the grandmother. Dieleno's mother was reprimanded for sending the son to fetch water because it was the job of a girl. Her grandmother never addressed her by her name. To her, she was always "girl", thus, refusing her individuality and reducing her to her gendered identity. Kire's novel does not offer a simple reading of it as a text that represents the discrimination against women in a patriarchal set-up. Instead, by making the grandmother, a woman herself, as the main perpetrator, Kire brings insights into the deeper working of the ways in which patriarchy operates. Temsula Ao argues that the traditional power structure with its hierarchy of gender where women are always subordinate to men originates from the village. ("Benevolent" 46) The roles of men and women have been strictly dictated by this tradition. This tradition is one of exclusivity where women have not been allowed any role in almost all the decision-making institutions of the society. This structure has been imported to other aspects of the society like the church, and permeates every aspect of the society, so much so that there has been an internalization of these values by women themselves. Grandmother's dismissive remarks such as "boys will be boys" justifying Vini and Pete's behaviour exemplifies how these values get internalized over time.

Dieleno's grandmother did not want her to go to school. To her, it was unnecessary for a girl to get education. She thinks that girls going to school would make them get "fancy notions" about themselves and soon they would forget their traditional roles.

For a long time, addressing the issue of gender bias in Naga society was difficult because such a conversation would always be decried because there were not many there

were not many "issues" of abuse. (Ao, "Benevolent" 51) The novel brings up the nuances in which patriarchy operates. That while the most obviously-disadvantaged are women, it would be unfair to say that men are not entirely affected by it. The way patriarchy functions in Naga society is that it demarcates and limits the agency of both genders because of the strict definitions of what is masculine and what is feminine. Kire illustrates this in the novel through Dieleno's friend Vimenuo's father. His drinking is attributed to his frustration of having only daughters and no sons to carry his name. Bano explains to Dieleno that daughters are never considered to be real members of the family as the sole purpose of their lives is to marry, be wives, be mothers but never carriers of their father's name. His inability to father sons is understood as a definition of his failure as a man in his society.

Grandmother's indulgence of Vini is greatly to be blamed for the way his life began to spiral down as an alcoholic especially after the death of Pete. Slipping him money and simpering around him. Vini's outburst at the family is indicative of the frustrations: "Go to school. Go to church. Get a job. That's all you want from life. I want more, you hear me? I want more! I'm not like you and I don't want to be like you." (Kire, *A Terrible* 183)

The understanding of the role of a wife in Naga society is also exemplified in the way in which marriage is seen as a solution to "tame" men like Vini. Grandmother herself makes arrangements for the wedding, selecting the bride, paying for the grand wedding celebrations. Her hypocritical treatment of Vini to the point of deciding to bequeath her field to him and not Leto all because Leto went against her wishes by marrying Vimenuo.

Dieleno's grandmother had lived her life based on her interpretation of the traditional power structure as she had experienced it in her own life. She was a product of a system that placed more value on sons because traditional customary law dictated that with having no sons, a widow could lost all her husband's property. At the end of the novel Dieleno's mother explains to her why her grandmother was the way she was. And this is where an understanding of the how there the cycle of oppression works can be gained. At the end of the novel, Dieleno's mother explains to her that Grandmother was the way she was because she had been subjected to many humiliations in her life, being excluded from many aspects in society because her mother had borne no sons.

In "The Naga Male as Storyteller," Easterine Kire asks, "Who owns the domain of storytelling? Is it a male activity or a largely female activity?" She counters the general sentiment that only stories told by men are valid. But Kire goes on to say that storytelling should not be an activity that is dictated by gender. As Cixous theorizes, patriarchy is upheld by and operates through binary thinking, with clear demarcation of roles along gendered lines. While keeping in mind Kire's thoughts, it is also worth considering whether the creative literary space in Nagaland is itself being viewed through the lenses of patriarchal binary thinking, whereby it is not being given due attention because it is not considered to pertain to matters "serious" or "important", and therefore, undermined. In recent years, there has been a bit more diversity as more young male writers have also made their foray into this field.

5.10 A Hermeneutic Approach to Understanding the Question of Gender

Drawing on the philosophical ideas of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Lauren Swayne Barthold proposes a hermeneutic approach to the question of gender. Barthold identifies

two opposing approaches to gender that feminists have taken in recent decades. One on hand, some argue for a rejection of traditional definitions of gender identity, while on the other hand, others argue for a complete rejection of the very concept of identity itself. She argues thus,

> A hermeneutic approach to social identities proves useful for avoiding both the metaphysically dubious efforts to defend the real or essential nature of identities and the politically problematic attempt to deflate any notion of identity at all. A hermeneutic approach thus esteems the relevance of social identities while at the same time offering a positive feminist social critique. (2)

Barthold's theory is based on the claim is that "social identities are a form of intersubjective interpretation, that is, a means of "understanding and forging meaningful connections with others" (3). Following a hermeneutic approach, she argues that interpreting another does not entail a domination of another, neither does it mean submitting to ideas that are assumed to be natural or given (3). The hermeneutic approach to identity, as explained by Barthold, is to view it not as fixed labels that limits and oppresses agency, but rather to view identity as "sites of meaning-making" while upholding the social relevance of identities. This kind of theory is helpful in understanding the context of the issue of gender in Naga society. The many voices against injustice and inequality that are being raised by women from different sections of the society go to show that there needs to be a deeper critical engagement.

5.11 Conclusion

The huge uproar that the society witnessed back in February 2017 was sparked off by protests against the issue of 33% reservation for women in the urban local body (ULB) elections. It was decried as an attempt to undermine Article 371 (A) of the Naga customary laws. When it comes to representation and participation in actual decision-making bodies, women are still unwelcome. This stems from the fact that women have never been accepted by traditional institutions as primary decision makers. Dolly Kikon in her essay "Gender Justice in Naga Society- Naga Feminist Reflections" argues, "If Naga customary law is seen as the foundation of justice, the exclusion of women from these powerful decision making-bodies negates the entire notion that these are pillars of justice." In the reimagination of a collective Naga identity there needs to be a deep introspection into these bedrocks of our societies. Customs and traditions remain indispensable in the process of ensuring the conservation of a sense of collective identity. However, by deflecting and decrying any attempts of a dialogue in the name of customary law will only cause a deeper rift.

To conclude, what does writing mean for the indigenous Naga woman? As mentioned earlier, Naga women writers grapple with the complexities that come with being pressured into subsuming issues of gender under the larger interest of their cultural or national identity. Like other indigenous women writers, the marginalization that they face on several fronts is echoed in their works, bringing them into conversation with each other. In *Violence Against Indigenous Women: Literature, Activism, Resistance,* Allison Hargreaves' statement on the role of literature and storytelling in these contexts is apt for the predicament of the Naga woman writer as well. Through their writings, they can invite critical engagement with various issues, and also offer strategies and solutions (Hargreaves 19) The creative pursuits of such women are a testament to how literature

has the power to initiate conversations in the hope that they will lead to social change. Writing is then a politically conscious act of assertion and agency; writing becomes a means of negotiating their identities and a safe space to imagine alternate possibilities.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the role that contemporary Naga Writings in English play in the re-imagination of a collective Naga identity. Based on the concept of narrative identity that foregrounds the idea that the way we understand ourselves and make meaning of the world we live in is through narrative, the study has been an attempt to look at how contemporary Naga English literature has become a site where the negotiations of identity are represented. Narratives have always been central to the ways in which we negotiate with our past from the present. In the first chapter, the study has been contextualized in the culture and history of the Nagas. I have attempted to trace the journey of the formations of the modern Naga identity by looking at key aspects and important moments in its recorded history that have been influential in shaping and defining it. The modern Naga identity has been shaped in response to the "three waves" or three most significant encounters with the colonial, the American Baptist missionaries, and the Indian state. It has been argued that without engaging with these historical processes, the Naga identity as well as contemporary literature in which we find its best expressions, cannot be fully understood. The first chapter has also given an overview of the literature or the lack of it in the early years. The rise of Naga Writings in English has also been attributed to the efforts of two women writers, Easterine Kire and Temsula Ao, both of whom in their own ways have made extraordinary contributions to Naga literature and continue to. The philosophical underpinnings of the study has been discussed by giving a brief overview of the philosophical discipline of hermeneutics and how it has also evolved from the interpretation of texts to ontological concerns. With the conviction

that human existence is constituted by time and language being an indispensable dimension, hermeneutics as a philosophy becomes an important approach in any qualitative research. Paul Ricoeur's approach to narrative that makes a departure from earlier structuralist narratology that brackets off anything outside of language, and instead grounds narrative as always being embedded in history, in culture. Further, his theories on how a text achieves relevance for life has also been discussed. The chapter has also discussed in brief the connection between narrative studies and memory studies. Literary memory studies is a developing field that considers the nexus between literature and memory, as a result of which the potential of the literary field to contribute to our understandings of cultural memory and thereby collective identity has been highlighted.

Chapter II is an analysis of retellings of folktales that we find in many contemporary writings. In recent years, there have been many publications of folktales that have been collected. In the chapter, it has been pointed out that one of the features of contemporary writings is that they draw inspiration from these stories. Thus, a continuum between the old and the new can be seen. Through the analysis of Temsula Ao's collection of poems *Songs from the Other Life*, I have attempted to show how stories do not remain the same, and how they undergo a process of being re-inscribed with new meaning with each act of retelling that happens in the present. It has also been have further highlighted how the quality of being adaptable or the quality of being acquiescent to changes over time is what ensures the survival of these stories. Otherwise, they only become redundant and relics of a time long ago. Stories continue to speak and remain relevant to contemporary times only if they are inscribed with new meanings. In the later part of the chapter, an analysis of four of Easterine Kire's novels, *Son of the Thundercloud, When the River Sleeps, Journey of the Stone* and *Spirit Nights* has been

done. Folktales such as the ones that have been retold in the novels are stories that belong to the community and stories that define collective identity.

The analyses have been done with aim to show how changes in retellings are important indicators of how collective identity is being reimagined in the present. I have interpreted the retellings of folktales in these novels as instances of "survivance" whereby the determination of the Nagas to imagine their own identities and define it on their own terms is represented. In the reading of *Son of the Thundercloud*, the argument has been that the retelling of the Angami Naga folktale of a widow's immaculate conception of a boy child after a raindrop falls on her as a reimagined story of the Biblical story of Jesus Christ is an example of how the writer creatively represents the historical process of local cultures coming into dialogue with the new. I have argued that the novel is much more than a simple children's story but rather an example of how literature articulates the complex processes of negotiations of identity. *Son of the Thundercloud* can be read as a novel that articulates the idea of a Naga Christian identity. In analyzing *When the River Sleeps,* it has been examined how in Kire's retelling of the story of the Kirhupfümia, literally poison women, the hidden lives of such women have been looked at in a different light from the present moment of retelling. Traditionally perceived to be dangerous figures and ostracized from their villages, Kire imbues them with agency while also dealing broadly with the spiritual world of the Nagas. In *Spirit Nights,* Kire takes inspiration from a Chang Naga folktale. Through her fiction, Kire brings to life the coexistence of man with the spirit world. Kire's exploration of the experiences of dreaming, visions and prophecies, which have always had an important role in Naga culture, and still continue to today has been highlighted. Kire, by emplotting these aspects

into her narrative, foregrounds and validates native wisdom. In a rational and secularized world, such knowledge systems are seen to hold little to no value. Kire presents a different epistemological order and in so doing, invites her readers to understand the worldview of the Nagas. Such retellings also attempt to recall the morals and values contained in these folktales because these form the bases of the collective Naga identity.

Considering that memory plays a crucial role in the understanding of our identities, and considering that a call to remember the past has been a central preoccupation of the contemporary Naga writers, Chapter III has been an attempt to analyze how literary works become testaments of collective memory and how crucial they are in the shaping of a culture's identity. Writers like Kire have urged the need to "harvest memory" and this is precisely what she does in her novel *A Respectable Woman*. In this chapter, I have thus analyzed the novel as a "fiction of memory" (Neumann 334) where the novel not only depicts the workings of memory but also becomes an important text in the ways in which it tells of an important period of Naga history.

The novel privileges insider's perspectives and insider accounts over official historiography. An analysis of Temsula Ao's story "An Old Man Remembers" has been done to show how literature plays the role of being counternarratives. Through the story of Sashi, a former member of an underground faction, it has been argued that such stories do not merely revisit the past but also do so to show both sides of the story. Through the analysis of Kire's *Bitter Wormwood*, an attempt has been made to show how even though the narrative dwells on the political conflicts that have shaped Naga identity and the bitter memories of the past, such literary works do not just act as mediums of memory but reflects on the ways in which there can be a way forward. Such writings articulate the

need to memorialize the past but also exemplify the transformative potential of literature in helping imagine new ways of being and moving out of the quagmires of the past.

Chapter IV focused on the tendency of many contemporary Naga writers to blur the genres of fiction and non-fiction, novels like *Mari* and *A Naga Village Remembered* being examples. In the first section of the chapter, through the analyses of these two novels, it has been argued that such novels that resist easy categorization point to the potential in fiction to complement our understanding of history. Fiction enables the writers to fill in the gaps that historical accounts cannot. In the second part of the chapter, attention has been drawn to a new genre of writing called "people stories" where writers like Easterine Kire, Avinuo Kire and Meneno Vamuzo Rhakho have written real stories of real people. The foregrounding of the stories of ordinary people in literature reflects the efforts of the writers to reclaim the power of storytelling, something that had been silenced as a result of the decades of conflicts. The process of storytelling as these texts encapsulate- as the writers listen to the stories narrated to them by the tellers, the act of writing them, and the readers reading them- is seen as essential to the process of understanding the past which is not just a monolithic entity but is made up of all these individual stories. And in such ways literature can truly bridge the gap between the past and the present.

In Chapter V, the focus has been on the politics of writing and identity by drawing attention to women's narratives in contemporary Naga writings. Women dominate the field of creative writing in Nagaland. In many of the contemporary works, the issue of gender and gender-based abuse feature prominently. Through the textual analyses of several narratives written by women, an attempt has been made to analyze how such

works raise important questions about the place of a woman in a patriarchal Naga society, and how in the larger narrative of reimagining a collective Naga identity, such works draw attention to the dangers of such views that sees gender rights as being a threat to what is a parochial interpretation of Naga identity. Literature, in this way, has given women a space to give voice to the many stories of lived experiences. From stories of rape and domestic abuse to less overt forms of silencing women and keeping them in their place, contemporary Naga women writers find in literature a space to negotiate conflicting identities.

The field of creative writing in Nagaland is growing every year. With the support of local publishing houses like Barkweaver, Pen Thrill and Heritage Publishing House, as well as other publishing houses from outside the state, there are now many more writers writing books of diverse genres. Identity being an on-going process, there can be many more avenues of research in this topic with many more works to engage with than this study has managed to do.

In conclusion, narrative is crucial to our understanding of our selves. Without it, we cannot begin to engage with the world around us. Our efforts to make sense of our lives, and to interpret everything that comprises this thing called “life” and beyond are always enabled by the cultural narratives that are available to us at different moments in time. Whether it is through poems or songs, folktales or myths, the ancestors of the Nagas made use of what forms were available to them, and told stories that encapsulated every aspect of their beings. Told and retold over generations, over the hearths or in the morungs, they committed to memory these stories that gave them a sense of community, belonging and collective identity. Much has been lost in the long decades of conflicts that

rendered silent this integral aspect of the Nagas. However, as this study has attempted to show, in contemporary times, the field of literature has become an important site where questions about identity are being explored. Contemporary Naga writings not only invite its readers to imagine the past, but in the act of remembering, it also suggests ways in which we can reimagine a shared future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(A) PRIMARY SOURCES

Ao, Temsula. *Aosenla's Story.* Zubaan, 2017.

--. *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007.* Heritage Publishing House, 2013,

Publishing House, 2013.

---. *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone.* Zubaan, 2006.

Keditsü, T. *Sopfünuo.* Heritage Publishing House, 2018.

Kire, Avinuo. *The Last Light of the Glory Days: Stories from Nagaland.* Speaking

Tiger, 2021.

---. *The Power to Forgive and Other Stories.* Zubaan, 2015.

Kire, Avinuo, and Meneno Vamuzo Rhakho. *People Stories: Volume One.* PenThrill

Publication House, 2016.

Kire, Easterine. *A Respectable Woman.* Zubaan, 2019.

---. *A Terrible Matriarchy.* Zubaan, 2007.

---. *Bitter Wormwood.* Zubaan, 2011.

---. *Forest Song.* Barkweaver Publications, 2011.

---. *Journey of the Stone.* Barkweaver Publications, 2021.

---. *Mari.* Harper Collins, 2010.

---. *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*. Speaking Tiger, 2018.

---. *Son of the Thundercloud*. Speaking Tiger, 2016.

---. *Spirit Nights.* Simon & Schuster India, 2022.

---. *When the River Sleeps.* Zubaan, 2014.

Mepfhü-o, Neikehienuo. *My Mother's Daughter.* Heritage Publishing House, 2019.

(B) SECONDARY SOURCES

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart.* Penguin Books, 2010.

Aier, Anungla. *Studies on Naga Oral Tradition: Memories and Telling of Origin Myth and Migration Volume 1*. Heritage Publishing House, 2018.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* Revised Edition, Verso, 2006.

Ao, Temsula. "'Benevolent Subordination': Social Status of Naga Women." *On Being a Naga: Essays,* Heritage Publishing House, 2014, pp. 45-53.

---. *Folklore of Eastern Nagaland.* Heritage Publishing House, 2017.

---. "On Being a Naga". *On Being a Naga: Essays,* Heritage Publishing House, pp. 1-13.

---. "Writing Orality." *Orality and Beyond: A North-East Indian Perspective*, edited by Soumen Sen and Desmond L. Kharmawphlang, Sahitya Akademi, pp. 99-112.

Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial*

Literatures. 2nd ed., Routledge, 1989.

Assmann, Aleida. "Canon and Archive." *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook,* edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning in collaboration with Sara B. Young, Walter de Gruyter, 2008, pp. 97-107.

Assmann, Jan. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique,* no. 65, Spring-Summer 1995, pp. 125-133, *JSTOR,* https://www.jstor.org/stable/488538.

---. "Communicative and Cultural Memory." *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook,* edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning in collaboration with Sara B. Young, Walter de Gruyter, 2008, pp. 109-118.

---. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination.* Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Bal, Mieke. Introduction. *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present,* edited by Mieke Bal, et al., University Press of New England, 1999, pp. vii-xviii.

Barthold, Lauren Swayne. *A Hermeneutic Approach to Gender and Other Social Identities*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.

"Beyond the News and Headlines, Easterine Talks of God's Grace, Discipline and Humility." *The Naga Republic,* 23 Nov. 2017, http://www.thenagarepublic.com/features/beyond-news-headlines-easterine-talks-gods-grace-discipline-humility/.

Bhattacharya, Neeladri, and Joy L.K. Pachuau. Introduction. *Landscape, Culture, and*

Belonging: Writing the History of Northeast India, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 1-20.

Bhumika, R. "Engaging with the Specific Realities of Postcolonial Literatures: A Discussion of the Complex Socio-Cultural and Political Contours of Contemporary Naga Literature in English", *Asian Ethnicity,* vol. 22, no. 4, 14 Oct 2019, pp. 538-599. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2019.1677453.

Boldrini, Lucia. *Autobiographies of Others: Historical Subjects and Literary Fiction.* Routledge, 2012.

Bose, Aparna Lanjewar. "Introduction: Writing (Them)Selves: Women's Autobiographies around the World." *Writing Gender, Writing Self: Memory, Memoir and Autobiography,* edited by Aparna Lanjewar Bose, Routledge, 2020, pp. 25-47.

Chasie, Charles. "Nagaland in Transition." *India International Centre Quarterly,* Monsoon-Winter 2005, vol. 32, no. 2/3, *JSTOR,* pp. 253-264, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23006032.

---. "The History of Nagaland Reflected in its Literature." *Eastern Mirror,* January 4, 2015. www.easternmirrornagaland.com/the-history-of-nagaland-reflected-in-its-literature/

---. *The Naga Memorandum to The Simon Commission, 1929.* Standard Printers & Publishers, 2017.

Chasie, Charles, and Harry Fecitt. *The Road to Kohima: The Naga Experience in the 2nd*

World War. Barkweaver Publications, 2017.

Cixous, Helene. *The Newly Born Woman.* University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Clifford, James. *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century*. Harvard University Press, 2013.

Daftaur, Swati. "For Easterine Kire, Bitter Wormwood is an Exercise in Catharsis." *The Hindu,* 11 Feb. 2013, https://www.thehindu.com/books//article59826756.ece.

Dalley, Hamish. "Postcolonialism and the Historical Novel: Epistemologies of Contemporary Realism." *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, vol. 1, Special Issue 01, March 2014, pp. 51-67, https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2013.3.

Das, Yudhajit Shankar. "Why Women Dominate the Entire Intellectual Spectrum in Nagaland." *The Times of India,* 18 Sept. 2019, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kohima/why-women-dominate-the-entire-intellectual-spectrum-in-nagaland/articleshow/71181512.cms.

Devi, Leisangthem Gitarani. *How Women Remember War: Unearthing Memories of the Second World War in Manipur.* Zubaan, 2019.

---. "Writing Lives, Re-membering History in Easterine Kire's *Mari.*" *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics,* vol. 44, no. 4, Winter 2021, pp. 34-44. *JCLA*, http://jcla.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/JCLA-44.4_Leisangthem-GitaraniDevi.pdf. PDF Download.

Duran, Eduardo. *Healing the Soul Wound: Trauma-Informed Counselling for Indigenous Communities* 2nd ed., Teachers College Press, 2019.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction.* 2nd ed., Blackwell Publishing, 1996.

Eakin, Paul John. *Writing Life Writing: Narrative, History, Autobiography.* Routledge, 2020.

Elizabeth, Vizovono. "Nativising Our Narrative: Tenyimia Worldview as Reflected in Easterine Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered." Insider Perspectives: Critical Essays on Literature from Nagaland,* edited by Vizovono Elizabeth and Sentinaro Tsuren, Barkweaver Publications, 2017, pp. 27-41.

---. "Negotiating a Meaningful Existence: The Quest for Identity in Contemporary Naga Narratives." *Insider Perspectives: Critical Essays on Literature from Nagaland,* edited by Vizovono Elizabeth and Sentinaro Tsuren, Barkweaver Publications, 2017, pp. 64-80.

---. "Of Women and Poetry: Finding a Voice through Verse." *Insider Perspectives: Critical Essays on Literature from Nagaland,* edited by Vizovono Elizabeth and Sentinaro Tsuren, Barkweaver Publications, 2017, pp. 115-131.

Erll, Astrid. *Memory in Culture.* Translated by Sara B. Young, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.

---. "Wars We Have Seen: Literature As A Medium of Collective Memory in the 'Age of Extremes.'" *Memories and Representations of War: The Case of World War I and World War II,* edited by Elena Lamberti and Vita Fortunati, Rodopi, 2009, pp. 27-43.

Erll, Astrid, and Ann Rigney. "Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory:

Introduction". *European Journal of English Studies*, Routledge: Taylor & Francis, Aug 16 2006, pp. 111-115, DOI: 10.1080/1380/13825570600753394.

Erll, Astrid, and Ansgar Nünning. "Where Literature and Memory Meet: Towards a Systematic Approach to the Concepts of Memory Used in Literary Studies." *Literature, Literary History, and Cultural Memory*, edited by Herbert Grabes, Gunter Narr Verlag Tübigen, pp. 261-294.

Episkenew, Jo-Ann. *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing.* University of Manitoba Press, 2009.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington, Grove Press, 1963.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method,* 2nd revised edition, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, Continuum, 2004.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, and James Risser. "Practical Philosophy as a Model to the Human Sciences." *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 9, Brill, *JSTOR*, 1979, pp. 74-85. https://www/jstor.org/stable/24654329

Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. Edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser, The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Padmini Mongia, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 110-121.

---. “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?” *Questions of Cultural Identity,* edited by Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, Sage Publications, 1996.

Hardy, Barbara. “Towards a Poetics of Fiction: An Approach through Narrative.” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction,* vol. 2, no. 1, Duke University Press, *JSTOR,* pp. 5-14, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344792.

Hargreaves, Allison. *Violence Against Indigenous Women: Literature, Activism, Resistance.* Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2017.

Heide, Nienke van der. “When dreams shape our day.” Leiden Anthropology Blog, 15 April, 2015, www.leidenanthropologyblog.nl/articles/when-dreams-shape-our-day, accessed 13 June 2022.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time.* Translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, Basil Blackwell, 1985.

Heneise, Michael. “Making Dreams, Making Relations: Dreaming in Angami Naga Society.” *The South Asianist,* vol. 5, no. 1, 2017, pp. 66-82, www.southasianist.ed.ac.uk.

Herman, David. *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative.* Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Hutton, J.H. *The Angami Nagas.* OUP, 1999.

Kearney, Richard. *On Stories.* Routledge, 2002.

Kevichusa, Kethoser Aniu. *Forgiveness and Politics: A Critical Appraisal*. e-book, Regnum Books International, 2021.

Keyho, Lhütü. “To the Awakening of Spiritual Eyes: A Review of Easterine Kire’s Journey of the Stone.” *The Morung Express*, 17 Feb 2022, www.morungexpress.com/to-the-awakening-of-spiritual-eyes.

Kietzar, Renthy. “The Indigenisation of Naga Christian Theology.” *In Search of Praxis Theology for the Nagas,* edited by V.K. Nuh, Regency Publications for Research Dept., Council of Naga Baptist Church, Kohima, 2003.

---. “Tribal Perspectives in Biblical Hermeneutics Today.” *Indian Journal of Theology*, vol. 31, 1982, pp. 293-313.

Kikon, Dolly. *Life and Dignity: Women’s Testimonies of Sexual Violence in Dimapur (Nagaland).* North Eastern Social Research Centre (NESRC), 2015.

---. “Gender Justice in Naga Society- Naga Feminist Reflections”. *RAIOT,* 23 Feb. 2017, https://raiot.in/gender-justice-in-naga-society-naga-feminist-reflections/

King, Thomas. “Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial.” *World Literature Written in English,* vol. 30, no. 2, 18 Jul 2008, Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 10-16, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449859008589128.

Kire, Easterine. “Did your first Christmas cake come out of an ammunition box too?” *Thoughts After Easter*, Barkweaver Publications, 2014, pp. 79-81.

---. Introduction. *Naga Folktales Retold,* 2nd ed., Barkweaver Publications, 2016.

---. “Shared Memory: The Project of Writing Ourselves.” *Thoughts After Easter,* Barkweaver

Publications, 2014, pp.107-111.

---. "The Naga Male as Storyteller*:* Narrative by Easterine Kire." *The Morung Express,* 15 Sept. 2018, pp. 7.

---. "The Narratives Silenced by War: The Barkweaver Project of Peoplestories and Folktales." *Thoughts After Easter,* Barkweaver Publications, 2014, pp. 97-101.

Laanes, Eneken, and Hanna Meretoja. "Editorial: Cultural Memorial Forms." *Memory Studies,* vol. 14(1) 3-9, 2021, Sage Publications Journals, https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698020976455.

Longkumer, Anungla Zoe. Introduction. *The Many That I Am: Writings from Nagaland,* edited by Anungla Zoe Longkumer, Zubaan, 2019, pp.1-8.

Longkumer, Arkotong. *Reform, Identity and Narratives of Belonging: The Heraka Movement in Northeast India.* Continuum, 2010.

Longkumer, I Watitula, and Nirmala Menon. "Return of the Spirits: An Interview with Easterine Kire." *English: Journal of the English Association, vol. 0, no. 0,* pp. 1-12. *ResearchGate,* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356285168. Accessed 15 May 2022. PDF Download.

Lotha, Abraham. "Naga Identity: Enduring Heritage." *Naga Identities: Changing Local Cultures in the Northeast of India,* edited by Michael Oppitz, et al., Snoeck Publishers, 2008, pp. 47-54.pp

---. *The Hornbill Spirit: Nagas Living Their Nationalism.* Heritage Publishing House, 2016.

Lutz, Hartmut. "'Theory Coming Through Story': Indigenous Knowledges and Western Academia." *Performance and Knowledge*, edited by G.N. Devy and Geoffrey V. Davis, Routledge, 2021, pp. 96-116.

MacSwan, Angus. "Victory Over Japanese at Kohima named Britain's Greatest Battle." *Reuters,* April 21 2013, https://www.reuters.com/article/britain-kohima-imphal-nagaland-manipur-w-idINDEE93K04W20130421.

Meretoja, Hanna. "A Sense of History- A Sense of the Possible: Nussbaum and Hermeneutics on the Ethical Potential of Literature." *Values of Literature*, edited by Hanna Meretoja, et al., Brill, 2015, pp. 25-46.

---. *The Ethics of Storytelling: Narrative Hermeneutics, History, and the Possible*, Oxford University Press, 2018.

---. *The Narrative Turn in Fiction and Theory: The Crisis and Return of Storytelling from Robbe-Griller to Tournier.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Meretoja, Hanna, and Pirjo Lyyttikäinen. "Introduction: Why We Read: The Plural Values of Literature." *Values of Literature*, edited by Hanna Meretoja et al., Brill, 2015, pp. 1-22.

Mills, J.P. *The Ao Nagas,* Oxford University Press, 1973.

Misra, Tilottama. "Women Writing in Times of Violence." *The Peripheral Centre: Voices*

from India's Northeast, edited by Preeti Gill, e-book, Zubaan, 2010, pp. 627-683.

Mistry, J. "Indigenous Knowledges." *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. *ScienceDirect,* 2009, https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-008044910-4.00101-2.

Neumann, Birgit. "The Literary Representation of Memory." *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook,* edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning in collaboration with Sara B. Young, Walter de Gruyter, 2008, pp. 333-343.

Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations,* No. 26 Special Issue: Memory and Counter Memory, Spring 1989, *JSTOR*, pp. 7-24, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2928520.

"On Memory: A Talk by Easterine Kire." *YouTube,* uploaded by Mahja House, 19 Jan 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=4puETceacx8.

Ong, Walter J. "Hermeneutic Forever: Voice, Text, Digitization, and the 'I'." *Oral Tradition,* vol. 10, no. 1, 1995, pp. 3-26.

Oppitz, Michael. Preface. *Naga Identities Changing Local Cultures in the Northeast of India*, edited by Michael Oppitz et al., Snoeck Publishers, 2008, pp. 9.

Oppitz, Michael, et al. "The Nagas: An Introduction." *Naga Identities Changing Local Cultures in the Northeast of India*, edited by Michael Oppitz et al., Snoeck Publishers, 2008, pp. 11-28.

Paris, Andreaa. "Literature as Memory and Literary Memories: From Cultural Memory to

Reader-Response Criticism." *Literature and Cultural Memory,* edited by Mihaela Irimia, Dragoş Manea and Andreea Paris, Brill Rodopi, pp. 95-106.

Patton, Nzanmongi Jasmine. Introduction. *A Girl Swallowed By a Tree: Lotha Naga Tales Retold,* adivaani, 2017, pp. 1-22.

Pimomo, Paul. "The Simon Commission Memorandum and 21st Century Nagas." *The Naga Memorandum to the Simon Commission, 1929,* edited by Charles Chasie, Standard Printers & Publishers, 2017, pp. 107-112.

Pou, K B Veio. *Literary Cultures of India's Northeast: Naga Writings in English.* Heritage Publishing House, 2015.

Pou, Veio. "'Years of Listening to Stories Grows a Wealth of Knowledge Within Your Spirit': Easterine Kire." *Scroll.in,* Aug 23 2020, https://amp.scroll.in/article/971141/years-of-listening-to-stories-grows-a-wealth-of-knowledge-within-your-spirit-easterine-kire.

Prasad, GJV. "Temsula Ao: An Introduction." *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007,* Heritage Publishing House, 2013, pp. xiv-xxxix.

Pulitano, Elvira. *Towards a Native American Critical Theory.* University of Nebraska Press, 2003.

Ricoeur, Paul. "Life in Quest of Narrative." *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation,* edited by David Wood, Routledge, 1991, pp. 20-33.

---. "Narrative Identity." *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, edited and translated by David Wood, Routledge, 1991, pp. 188-199.

---. *Oneself and Another.* Translated by Kathleen Blamey, The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

---. *Time and Narrative: Volume 1,* translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

---. *Time and Narrative: Volume 2,* translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, 1985.

---. *Time and Narrative: Volume 3,* translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Rigney, Ann. *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism*. Cornell University Press, 2001.

---. "The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing." *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook,* edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning with Sara B. Young, Walter de Gruyter, 2008, pp. 345-353.

Rivenburg, Narola, editor. *"The Star of the Naga Hills": Letters from Rev. Sidney and Hattie Rivenburg, Pioneer Missionaries in Assam, 1883-1923.* voicelessvoice, 2014.

Ruwoldt, Lena. *Dreams and Nightmares in First Nations Fiction*. 2017. University of Greifswald, PhD thesis.

Sakhrie, Kevileno. Foreword. *Sopfünuo,* Heritage Publishing House, 2018, pp. vii-xiii.

Samsara, Rozumari. *Memorographia.* Heritage Publishing House, 2020.

Sarkar, Ivy Roy, and Rashmi Gaur. "Memory Novels as Lieux De Mémoire: Reading Cultural Memory in Easterine Kire's *Mari* and *A Respectable Woman.*" *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies,* Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, July 2021, pp. 1-17, https://doi.org/10:1080/1369801X.2021.1931935.

Saunders, Max. "Life-Writing, Memory, and Literary Studies." *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook,* edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning with Sara B. Young. Walter de Gruyter, 2008, pp. 321-332.

Stephens, John, and Robyn McCallum. *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture*. Garland Publishing, 1998.

Stockhausen, Alban von. Naga: Lineages of a Term." *Landscape, Culture and Belonging: Writing the History of Northeast India,* edited by Neeladri Bhattacharya and Joy L.K. Pachuau, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 131-150.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity.* Cambridge University Press, 1992.

---. "The Politics of Recognition." *Muticulturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition,*

edited by Amy Gutmann, Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 25-73.

Thomas, John. *Evangelising the Nation: Religion and the Formation of Naga Political Identity.* Routledge, 2020.

Toynbee, Arnold J. *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I-VI,* edited by D.C. Somervell, Oxford University Press, 1987.

Tunyi, Venusa. "What Makes Me a Naga?" *Nagas: Essays for Responsible Change*, edited by Eyinbeni Hümstoe-Nienü, Paul Pimomo and Venüsa Tünyi, Heritage Publishing House, 2012, pp. 11-19.

Tzudir, Lanusangla. "Appropriating the Ao Past in the Christian Present." *Landscape, Culture, and Belonging: Writing the History of Northeast India,* Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 265-293.

VanLeeuwen, Chalene A., Lintuan Guo-Brennan, and Lori E. Weeks. "Conducting Hermeneutic Research in International Settings: Philosophical, Practical, and Ethical Considerations." *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics,* July 19 2017, pp. 1-23, https://doi.org/10.11575/jah.v0i0.53309.

Vansina, Jan. *Oral Tradition as History.* The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

Veber, Hanne. "Memories, Identity, and Indigenous/ National Subjectivity in Eastern Peru." *Dialogos Latinoamericanos,* no. 12, Nov. 2007, pp. 80-102. *Todsskrift*, https://tidsskrift.dk/dialogos/article/download/113618/162211. PDF download.

Vizenor, Gerald. “Aesthetics of Survivance: Literary Theory and Practice.” *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence,* edited by Gerald Vizenor, Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, 2008.

Walunir. “Cultural Grammar and Gender Relations: A Study of Female Utterances Within Power Structures in Nagaland.” *Gender Narratives: Reinterpreting Language, Culture and Tradition in Nagaland,* edited by Bendangsenla et al., Heritage Publishing House, 2021, pp. 24-32.

Wettstein, Marion. “Origin and Migration Myths in the Rhetoric of Naga Independence and Collective Identity.” *Origins and Migrations in the Extended Eastern Himalayas,* edited by Toni Huber and Stuart Blackburn, Brill, 2012, pp. 213-238.

Yonuo, Asoso. *The Rising Nagas: A Historical and Political Study*. Vivek Publishing House, 1974.

Zimmermann, Jens. *Hermeneutics: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford University Press, 2015.

Zizek, Slavoj. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections.* Picador, 2008.