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Internal Instabilities: Nationalism in the Context of Nagaland with reference to Select Novels

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to explore the internal instabilities within the idea of nationalism through a reading of Birendra Bhattacharyya's *Yaruingam* and Easterine Kire's *Bitter Wormwood*. It would look into Nationalism in the context of Nagaland which offers an alternative idiom in so far as any discussion on the idea of nation is concerned. Any discourse on nationalism in India would have to take into account the discursive contradictions of ideas inherent in it. Taking into consideration the views of Gandhi, Tagore and Ambedkar, the paper strives to begin with the premise that the idea of nationalism in the Indian context is inherent in its internal instabilities and inherent contradictions. As such, years after independence, India continues to deal with its effects as there have been autonomy movements as diverse groups within Northeast India find itself absent in the narrative of the nation. Nagaland, the focus of this paper, for instance, wanted secessionism. The Naga case through a reading of the texts taken for the study offers insights into this vexed Naga crises.

Keywords: Nation, Nationalism, Nagaland, History, Representation

This paper would look into nationalism in the context of Northeast India which offers an alternative idiom in any discussion on the idea of nation is concerned. Any discourse on nationalism in India would take into account the discursive contradictions of ideas inherent in it. In their essay "The Nationalism Debate, Concerns and Constitutional Response" Luthra and Mukhija rightly point out how "in India, nationalism was once synonymous with the freedom struggle" (2018, p. 1). They write:

For a colonized people, for whom unity was needed to weave together different peoples and regions with diverse cultures to obtain freedom from British rule, nationalism was a liberating force, a promise of equality and freedom from colonial subjugation. (Luthra & Mukhija, 2018, p. 1)

While Gandhi and Tagore's views on Nationalism were subtly different from each other, they both felt the need to unite the people against the throes of British colonialism. In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi writes: "The Congress brought together Indians from different parts of India, and enthused us with the idea of nationality" (1933, p. 22). While the Indian National Congress floated the idea of a homogenous nationalism taking into its fold all Indians, Tagore critically problematised the idea of homogenous nationalism as evident in his book *Nationalism*. To Tagore the basis of unity is not 'political', he calls for "spiritual unity of all human beings" (2015, p. 25). At a point he almost speaks of nationalism as a "great menace" and is cognizant of the contradictions in the idea of nationalism, especially in the context of the emerging nation. B.R. Ambedkar, after Tagore, in a more concrete manner posed the issues of internal instability within that idea of nationalism. He

brought in the question of caste which was inherent in Indian society. His demand for reservations in elections for the lower castes brought him in direct conflict with Gandhi. Therefore, from the very beginning, in India the idea of nation is inherent with its internal instabilities and contradictions.

The idea of nation undergoes periodic interventions contingent upon the political climate. After Independence, more so, this idea of nation has been questioned from multiple sites. Many groups within Northeast India found themselves absent in the narrative of the nation. Many groups in Nagaland for instance, wanted secession. As mentioned by Udayon Mishra in his essay, "The Margin Strikes Back" the Nagas "seemed psychologically unprepared to enter the Indian Union in 1947" (2005, p. 267). They were not ready to accede to the Indian union maintaining that since "the Nagas were never a part of India, the question of their secession from India did not arise" (2005, p. 267). To the Nagas "theirs was a national struggle for independence, and not a secessionist movement" (2005, p. 267). There was tentativeness on the part of the Indian nation to identify her own people as her citizens. The Naga case opened up possibilities of reconstructing the idea of nation with an alternative idiom. The Nagas did not conform to any one idea of Indian nation. As such they offered crises for the emerging nation and a new narrative of nation emerged, which is multivalent and decentred. This paper is an attempt to explore the internal instabilities within the idea of nation and nationalism as represented in fictions through a reading of Birendra Bhattacharyya's *Yaruingam* and Easterine Kire's *Bitter Wormwood* (2011). For an understanding of the nationalism debate in the Naga context, Udayon Misra's *The Periphery Strikes Back* (2000) as well as Sanjib Baruah's understanding of the entire Naga imbroglio as discussed in his works *In the Name of the Nation* (2021) have been referred to. Homen Borgohain's and Pradipta Borgohain's work *Scrolls of Strife* also offers a nuanced understanding of this entire Naga Nationalism issue taking us through the accounts of people whose reflections on the issue become pertinent. Charle Chasie's chapters on nationalism in his book *The Naga Imbroglio (A Personal Perspective)* also provide critical inputs and perspectives into the current reading.

I

As I write this paper, a particular region in Nagaland, Mon District is reeling in protests over the firing at innocent mine labourers by the Assam Rifles which has resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians. *The Hindu*, December 12, 2021 reported "at least 14 civilians and one soldier were killed in a botched ambush and retaliatory violence in Nagaland's Mon district on December 4 and December 5". The news report further states that "following the incident, protests erupted across Nagaland". The chequered normalcy prevailing in the region has once again been disturbed which brings back to reference the trust deficit the Nagas always had so far as being a part of the Indian Nation was concerned. To place my paper in the context of this internal instability I refer to Udayon Misra's *The Periphery Strikes Back* (2000) where he points out the fact that "the Indian nation-state is today facing some of its gravest challenges, with the entire process of nation-building being questioned" (p. 10). He observes that the idea of the 'mainstream' is constantly being re-defined. The question of mainstream always brings into reference the question of the 'other'. And as Misra observes, this binary has for long fractured the Indian nation. He writes time and again the Indian nation-state has had to work out new strategies and adjustments to deal with the issues raised by different autonomist and "secessionist" movements of the northeast region. To quote

him: "the idea of 'one nation' which gathered strength during the country's freedom struggle and which was buttressed up during the years immediately following the partition of the country and its independence, received its first jolt in the hills of the northeastern region" (2000, p. 10).

The Northeast was virtually untouched by the freedom struggle and historically it was 'outside the pale of Indian civilisation'. The Indian authorities failed to understand and appreciate the demands for autonomy that were raised in the Naga hills and other areas soon after independence (Misra, 2000, p.10). The Nagas challenged the nation-state by claiming independence even before the Indian independence. Charles Chasie's book *The Naga Imbroglia (A Personal Perspective)* offers an insider's perspective into the question of Naga nationhood albeit from a very personal point of view. In a chapter "Naga Nationalism", Chasie goes into the root of the Naga imbroglia tracing it to the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 as "the first British action that affected the Naga people" and "which, while demarcating the boundary between India and Burma, caused the vivisection of Naga country" (1999, p. 23). He goes on to add that "the people who would be so brutally affected and balkanized were given no opportunity of a say when the so-called boundaries were first demarcated from the drawing boards in distant places" (1999, p. 23). Misra observes that the Indian nationalist leaders never understood the Naga demand that since they were outside the ambit of Indian nationalism, they be allowed to shape their own destiny (2000, p.15). The authors of *Scrolls of Strife* capture in the "Introduction" to their work how the Northeast India has always been at the receiving end of misinformation that surrounds the people here: "Widespread ignorance and indifference has almost shut out the strategically crucial border regions from the mainstream consciousness with telling – and often tragic – consequences" (2011, p. 3). In the chapter "Mediators, Meddlers and Muddlers", the book takes into account the many parties that were at work to bring a resolution to the Naga crisis over time. The interventions of Gandhi, Nehru, Jayprakash Narayan, Rajagopalachari, Indira Gandhi, all have been analyzed to show their equations in finding a solution to the Naga deadlock. The authors observe that, if some like Gandhi and Jayaprakash Narayan, and to some extent Indira Gandhi, still stay in the hearts of the Nagas for their openness, the stubbornness of some of the leaders seems to have stood in the way for any kind of negotiations for a considerable period of time. They write and rightly so that "the Nagas have had to contend with the intrusion of outside forces. In fact, the 'endlessness' of the history of the Nagas is precisely because they have still not managed to come to terms with such outside forces" (2011, p. 5).

All too often there was a tendency to dismiss the Naga struggle as a secessionist movement inspired and abetted by foreign missionaries who had been exploiting the fierce feeling of independence of the hill tribes to break up the Indian nation (Misra, 2000, p. 16). Sanjib Baruah (2021) in his book *In the Name of the Nation* makes a similar point when he says that "there is ample expression in contemporary Indian popular culture of the Northeast as a place of danger located outside the effective boundaries of the nation" (p. 13). He goes on to reason the "commonly used phrase "Northeast policy" which is itself quite telling" and in this context he quotes Mrinal Miri, who once asked "To whom, or for whom do you have a policy? The Northeast is a part of this country and at the same time we think that the people of the Northeast should be made the object of a policy" (Baruah, 2021, p.13)." Baruah goes on to further reiterate that "to be made an object of policy implies that the peoples of the region are not in a relationship of" what Mrinal Miri calls "human concerns such as love, friendship, understanding of the other" but what

is actually to be “in a relationship of manager and managed” (Baruah, 2021, p. 13). The national leadership did not respond positively to the Naga apprehensions about their future identity in spite of their consistent demands of being separate from the Indian imagination of the nation. Right from the beginning of the Naga struggle, the Naga National Council, the political wing of the underground Naga Federal government, had been consistently maintaining that the Nagas form an independent nationality (Misra, 2000, p. 17).

Sanjib Baruah (2021) in his book, *In the Name of the Nation*, traces the history of the Naga movement very closely also insinuating an idea about the role that the missionaries could have had in fostering a “pan-Naga identity” (p. 106). He writes: “The idea of a Naga nation developed hand in hand with the process of conversion to Baptist Christianity...Christian proselytization is a key theme in the campaign for Naga nationhood” (p. 106). This is reinforced in the slogan “Nagas for Christ”, a fact that has been stated in the novels under study as well by the authors of *Scrolls of Strife* (2011). Therefore, in the project of nationhood, it becomes important for the Naga nationalists to promote a contingent Naga identity that is all-inclusive rendering the “tribal loyalties as residues of a premodern past and an obstacle to Naga solidarity” (Baruah, 2021, p. 107). Baruah observes that “the ‘enlightened and modern’ world of Christianity is inseparable from the idea of the Naga Nation” (2021, p. 107).

The narrative of Naga nationalism began way back in 1929 with the Naga Club’s petition to the Simon Commission and the Naga’s declared Independence on 14 August 1947, a day before the Indian Independence day. However, the Naga demand for recognition as an independent country still is caught up in a deadlock, and as Baruah observes “neither the Indian government is willing to accept its sovereignty clause nor do the Naga groups leave it aside in discussion tables” (2021, p. 125). In the 75 years since the beginning of the Naga imbroglio, the parties involved seem “ill-equipped to resolve this complex conflict with multiple stake-holders” (Baruah, p. 125). As this ‘endlessness’ continues, the fictional representations of the Naga struggle and their aspirations for an independent nation offer rich sites for critical scrutiny.

II

We find Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya’s *Yaruingam* as one of the first takes on the issue of Naga nationalism as far as fictional representation is concerned. Having worked as a teacher among the Nagas in the late fifties in the Venture Christian High School at Ukhrul in Manipur, his attempt at understanding the complex Naga problem offers an insider/outsider perspective to an issue that remains to be solved even today. Published in 2011, in the novel *Bitter Wormwood*, Easterine Kire once again enters this terrain to offer a perspective from within the community which to a reader appears to end almost on the same conciliatory note that *Yaruingam* ends in suggesting the need to move on but through writing, also suggesting the importance of remembering those struggles and what fighting for a nation means.

Yaruingam, first written in Assamese and published in 1960, was translated and published in English in 1984. As an early work, the novel gives the readers a sense of the movement that was to unfold years later as it became more violent and could muster up large-scale support towards a separate Nagalim. The author presents in his fiction the tension at play even as India was on the cusp of Independence fighting to throw the British rule. The novel is set just after the Second

World War when the Indians were a part of the Allied forces and how the Naga villages also came in contact with the Allied and the Japanese army. As Bhattacharyya writes in the "Preface" to the English translation: "The scars of the great Imphal battle were visible on the hilly land mass in and around Ukhrul. The war affected people's minds greatly, and changed their lifestyles. Their physical and moral sufferings were considerable" (Bhattacharyya, 1984, para 2).

The novel is, on the one hand, about the young people like Rishang, Phanitphang, Khating, Khaiko, Jivan, Sharengla and Khutingla who are trapped between tradition and modernity, between struggle and Independence, between community and the idea of a nation which is again extended to the rift between the old faith and Christianity which many Nagas had embraced. On the other hand, we have the old guard like Ngathingkhui and Yengmaso who cannot stand each other although their son and daughter are betrothed to each other. The leadership of the movement is led by Videssilie who stands as a sharp contrast to Rishang who is a Gandhian in the novel speaking for peace, harmony and understanding and who believes in non-violence.

Easterine Kire wrote *Bitter Wormwood* in 2011 soon after *Mari* which was published in 2010. While *Mari* was written in the backdrop of World War II in Kohima, *Bitter Wormwood* chronicles the Naga struggle for Independence. The preoccupation of Kire in war and violence in two consecutive novels itself speaks of the impact these events had in the lives of the people. In the early 20th century, the thought of nation and nationalism was nascent in the Naga community as the people were too happy to ally with the British in fighting the Japanese. In the Author's note to *Mari* Kire writes, "the Battle of Kohima came to be called 'the forgotten battle' and its veterans the 'forgotten heroes' (2010, p. x). She writes:

For *Mari* and the others of her generation, World War II and the Japanese invasion of our lands was the most momentous period of their lives. Everything happened at the same time. Growing up, falling in love, war, homelessness, starvation, death and parting and finally, peace. All my oral narrators told me this about the war: 'It altered our lives completely'. (2010, p. viii)

Kire further writes what was remarkable about the War by the Nagas, was "that people have very little memory of what they were doing before the war years" (2010, p. viii). Assessing people's participation in both the wars Kire writes: "The Naga freedom struggle that followed upon the heels of the war cast a dark shadow over our lands. In retrospect, there are many who continue to see the war years as the best years of their lives" (2010, p. ix). So, writing in 2011, Kire, in *Bitter Wormwood*, tries to make sense of Naga freedom struggle which she wrote "cast a dark shadow over our lands". A reading of *Bitter Wormwood* clearly shows that the novelist is attempting to write the history of Naga freedom struggle through her fictional text. It is more about the movement than about the characters and it reveals the amount of research involved for this kind of writing. The Author's Introduction to *Bitter Wormwood* is a statement of her intention in recovering "a story hidden for several decades" (2011, p. 2). The novelist demands a knowing reader to understand "the struggle for independence from India by the Naga people" (2011, p. 2). Though she gives a detail of the facts of the movement beginning from 1956 and what the struggle meant for the Nagas through available records, she maintains that the "book is not meant to be read as a history textbook" (2011, p. 6). She writes that the "book is not about the leaders and heroes of the Naga struggle" but it is about the ordinary people whose lives were completely

overturned by the freedom struggle" (2011, p. 6) She writes, "the conflict is not more important than the people who are its victims" (2011, p. 6). The Appendix at the end of the novel details some of the relevant documents crucial to finding a solution to the Naga deadlock ending with a very moving speech by Niketu Iralu where he seems to voice the growing uncertainty to the Naga crisis hoping for some change for the better for the generation of Nagas to follow.

In this paper, the attempt is to see how this idea of nation and nationalism is played in the Naga imagination through a depiction of the lives of the people during the World War II and the Naga freedom struggle as represented in the fictional texts under study. The Naga involvement in the Second World War is one of the central themes in *Yaruingam*. As noted by the authors of *Scrolls of Strife*, "Kohima and a few other parts of Nagaland were almost the only parts of India which became theatres of the World War" (2011, p. 76). Referring to Bhattacharyya's novel they observe:

Serving as a teacher in the troubled decade of the 1950's Bhattacharyya had an opportunity to study Naga life, first hand. He was also a member of the goodwill visit to the Naga Hills in the early 1950s, along with the then President of the Assam Congress Party and later chief minister of Assam, Bimala Prasad Chaliha, as well as other political leaders. (2011, p. 61)

Bhattacharyya, as they write, "was fascinated by the philosophies, customs, and habits of this proud and intrepid race. He attempts to deconstruct the notion of the unthinking, spontaneous tribal, leading 'a barbaric yet innocent and idyllic life' far from 'mad civilization'" (2011, p. 61). The authors note that though Bhattacharyya may seem nationalistic prescribing to Gandhian agenda still the very fact that "he makes many of the principal Naga characters contemplative, perceptive, and articulate, is in itself already an important achievement" and further "it succeeds in combating the stereotypes of either the bloodthirsty insurgent or the noble savage" (2011, p. 61). They go on to add, "In the novel, insurgency is depicted as only one aspect of a larger composite canvas of Naga aspirations and identity formation" (2011, p. 61). As we read in *Yaruingam*, when Rishang goes to Kolkota, this feeling of alienation from the majority is not so apparent but in Kire's novel *Bitter Wormwood* this estrangement from the mainland and the sense of otherness of the Nagas is much more obvious in the character of Neibou.

The challenges to the idea of nation are reflected very poignantly in Kire's *Bitter Wormwood*. The setting of the novel in the specific timeframe and the continued struggle of the Nagas for an Independent Nagaland makes such a reading possible. The perspective of the author/narrator becomes instrumental in destabilizing the otherwise grand rhetoric of the nation. In the novel the narrator exposes the factionalism among the Nagas that leads to killings and Neituo, Mose's friend in the novel, rues the fact that the main cause of the movement gets lost: "Don't you see that factionalism would fight India's war for her, simply pit Naga against Naga" (Kire, 2011, p. 120). It is a known fact that the "identity categories which the tribes hold dear... more often than not divides rather than unites" (Baruah, 2021, p. 107). The homogenizing attempt by the nation becomes a lost cause in the midst of diversities that it tries to divide and rule. In the novel we have rational voices like Neilhounuo, Mose's wife, who argues with Mose about how long the fight would go on. She squarely puts the blame on the British: "After all, it was them that gave our land to India...Oh, this conflict is eating us alive" (Kire, 2011, p. 122). The same is echoed by Neituo towards the end of Part Two which mentions the birth of NSCN that takes the Naga struggle to a

different level. The two friends see the emergence of factions among the Nagas as complicated and how it destroys the Naga cause. As Neituo thoughtfully observes: "I am quite sure it's the end of our Naga cause...When you begin to kill each other, you no longer have a cause left, do you? You have as good as destroyed your own cause" (Kire, 2011, p. 148).

The concept of nation and its definition has been conceived by various theorists. G. Aloysius in his book *Nationalism without a Nation* describes a nation as "an entity forming part of the compound concept nation-state, or to a linguistic ethnic community struggling for its own statehood" (1997, p. 11). He further extends the definition to "refer to a relationship that exists or is presumed to exist between individuals and groups with either equality or common cultural bond as the basis of common political consciousness" (1997, p. 11). He further observes: "Both as ideology and movement the concept could be used either in speaking of a state, a group of ethnic communities or a single ethnic community (1997, p. 11). In *Who Sings the Nation-State?* Judith Butler states that one of the pre-suppositions of the nation-state in the expression of national identity rests on the understanding of the nation as a homogeneous and singular entity. She writes that "the nation-state assumes that the nation expresses a certain national identity, is founded through the concerted consensus of a nation, and that a certain correspondence exists between the state and the nation" (Spivak & Butler, 2007, p. 30). In this view, according to her, nation is 'singular and homogeneous', that "it becomes so in order to comply with the requirements of the state" (Spivak & Butler, 2007, p. 30). So for Butler the nation derives its legitimacy from the state based on this very criteria of homogeneity. Aloysius and Butler and many others have as such pointed out some of the features that characterise functioning of a nation and that which brings the nation into existence, such as the premises of homogeneity and commonness, the condition of equality — to name a few. It is this idea of homogeneity as characteristic of a nation that is being contested by Kire in her fiction. Notwithstanding the feelings of independence that the Nagas harboured as a consequence of their chequered history, through the character of Neibou and his friendship with Rakesh, the author seems to be looking for a solution to the vexed Naga question. In the last chapter of *Bitter Wormwood* Neibou says:

We have to learn to let the past remain where it is. The trouble with us Nagas is that we have allowed the conflict to define us for too long. It has overtaken our lives so much that we have been colonised by it and its demands on us. But we do not have to let it continue to define us and limit us. It only otherises us again and again. (Kire, 2011, p. 236)

Here Kire does not talk about forgetting the past but it's more about "pushing history" as the chapter is titled. The younger generation like Neibou do not want to be 'othered' as they go to other places in India to pursue education and face what Neibou experienced during his early days in Delhi. The nation-state promoting the idea of homogeneity refuses to accommodate differences as seen in the case of Neibou in Delhi. The author very candidly brings in the character of Himmat who served in the army in Nagaland to bring about a sense of equilibrium and a sense of understanding of the Nagas. The author emphasizes the unique friendship between Neibou and Rakesh and tries to show how this kind of friendship can bridge sense of alienation.

Salman Rushdie in his essay "The Riddle of Midnight: India, August 1987" points to the fact that there never existed any homogeneous political entity that can be claimed as the nation of India before the formal hour of Independence. He writes:

Does India exist? ... It's when you start thinking about the political entity, the nation of India, the thing whose fortieth anniversary it is, that the question starts making sense. After all, in all the thousands of years of Indian history, there never was such a creature as a united India. Nobody ever managed to rule the whole place, not the Mughals, not the British. And then, that midnight, the thing that never existed was suddenly 'free'. But what on earth was it? On what common ground (if any) did it, does it stand? (Rushdie, 1991, p. 27)

Rushdie seems to suggest that there never was any homogenous idea of India. It is pertinent to mention what Rabindranath Tagore had to say much before Rushdie on nationalism. To Tagore the concept of nation was borrowed from the West. Noting the dangers of nationalism, Tagore warned against what Luthra and Mukhija observe as "excessive fetishisation of the nation, where any insult against the nation threaten our sentiments" (2018, p. 2). Tagore wrote: "In my country, we have been seeking to find out something common to all races, which will prove their real unity. No nation looking for a mere political or commercial basis of unity will find such a solution sufficient (2015, p. 26). What Tagore was advocating was a spiritual unity and a human solution. The view expressed by Tagore and Rushdie much later seems to be in place when we consider the internal instabilities in the idea of nationhood in the context of Northeast India, especially Nagaland.

Yaruingam and *Bitter Wormwood* can be read as novels that engage in finding human solutions to the never-ending Naga struggle for independence. The divisions among the Nagas are made prominent in Bhattacharyya's *Yaruingam* as Rishang stands opposite to Videssellie's ideology. Rishang and Jivan in the novel follow Gandhi's ideology of non-violence. It needs to be mentioned here that Gandhi was a figure acceptable to the Nagas and this finds mention in both the novels. Many Nagas see Gandhi's assassination as something that derailed the Naga peace process. Jivan's death in *Yaruingam* in a way marks the beginning of violence. He stood for peace but that seems to be rejected. The novel ends with more news of death as Phanitphang's killing at the hands of Videssellie's men is announced to Sharengla. The birth of Rishang and Khutingla's son almost towards the end of the novel and he being named 'Yaruingam' meaning 'people's rule' is symbolic. Bhattacharyya leaves the novel open-ended with a birth and a death leaving the novel inconclusive just as the Naga situation itself at that point in the 1960s. In a way, it was at the threshold of the imbroglio that was to follow. In *Bitter Wormwood*, on the other hand, written many decades later, we find a chronicling of the Naga struggle for independence with the author giving myriad perspectives through her characters offering a tangent critique of the very idea of nation and nationalism in a profound manner. The novel posits questions like – 'What is India? Where is India? Who is an Indian?' The novelist exploits the complexity involved in a state like Nagaland to challenge and analyse different meanings of nationalism and nation. As a child, Mose observes and experiences varied understandings related to these concepts, as a youth he joins the Naga underground with patriotic zeal and as an adult he keeps looking back at his childhood experiences and his perceptions over such issues: "The freedom

struggle that Mose had been part of, the struggle that the dead-eyed young man of today claimed to be a part of, had not always been like that. Memories flooded Mose's mind as he sat on the porch. No it had not been like that at all" (Kire, 2011, p. 12).

Neitou and Mose like many Nagas do not have answers to the myriad questions that every Naga person poses. Has their giving up the underground solved the problems? What is seen in the novel is the shape the movement takes — for the worse — in Neitou's and Mose's lifetime. Mose dies in tragic circumstances trying to save a Bihari boy from the emergent Naga militants. The values which they stood for and joined the movement for have taken a different turn. Ironically, he becomes a victim of a movement that he himself was a part of. Neitou and Mose were fighting for a Naga nation and so is the purpose of those that killed him. His death is symbolic of the arbitrariness and contradictions that characterise such notions of nation and nationalism. The author evokes scepticism regarding the unifying and homogenizing grand rhetoric of the nation and reflects multiple possibilities of reading it in alternative ways.

Through Neitou's grandson Neibou's friendship with Rakesh, Kire seems to desperately offer a ray of hope to the young generation of the Nagas who are trapped in between the past and the present in the Naga dream of an independent Nagalim. Distance provides Neibou the emotional detachment to see the struggle from an objective perspective. He talks of debrutalizing "those who are trapped in the conflict", "of rebuilding" lives of the cadres (Kire, 2011, p. 235). It appears from a reading of *Bitter Wormwood* that what people are looking for is peace in the land and to that end perhaps a solution needs to be sought keeping in mind the human factor while 'deferring the contentious issue of independence'. Homen Borgohain and Padipta Borgohain in *Scrolls of Strife* note, quoting a leader, "The Nagas are content to defer the issue of Nagalim" (2011, p. 196).

The idea of a nation is thus nascent with internal instabilities, making it almost impossible to come up with a conclusive definition of a nation. The novels taken for study address the inherent complexities in defining a nation and turning such terms into neat categories. Through the voice of Khreinou, Vilau, Neitou, Mose and Neibou, Kire attempts to reveal the contradictions inherent in the idea of nationhood. In her interview with Swati Daftuar, Kire speaks of the importance of 'telling' 'people stories' which according to her is part of 'his or her healing', especially 'people who have stories of deep pain and also wonder'. With respect to *Bitter Wormwood* she says that it is "about real people and their lives". She said that she "wanted to write a non-stereotypical book about Naga political history, and the story of the two grandsons of the two soldiers meeting up and striking up a deep friendship is not untrue". To her it is "a book that questions political ideologies, and their solutions and offers a human solution instead" (Daftuar, Interview with Kire, 2013). Kire's take on the issues that concern every Naga can also be seen as an authorial position on the changes that have happened in Nagaland and Neibou's articulation towards the end of the novel in *Bitter Wormwood* seems to be a reflection of that authorial stance too.

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