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Imagined Ethnography and Cultural Strategies: A Study of Easterine Kire's *Sky is My Father* and *Don't Run, My Love*

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Abstract

Stuart Hall, in his 1983 lectures states, "people have to have a language to speak about where they are and what other possible futures are available to them….These futures may not be real; if you try to concretize them immediately, you may find there is nothing there. But what is there, what is real, is the possibility of being someone else, of being in some other social space from the one in which you have already been placed." (Hall, 2016, p.205) The literature from Northeast India puts forward the issue of systematic erasure and structural exclusion [institutionalized through legal mechanisms like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.] from the mainstream national imagination and literary space. Easterine Kire's primary agenda is to revitalize cultural practices that have been facing "historical elision." (Sarkar, 1997, p.359) This elision threatens the poly-ethnic, culturally vibrant, and tribal cultures by constructing and presenting the northeastern region of India as a conflict-ridden space. Situated within this ontology of existence, reality, and becoming, Easterine Kire's *Don't Run, My Love* (2017) and *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* (2018) revive and revitalize the folktales and cultural practices to assert the cultural economy of the Naga tribes. Her writings represent a politically conscious positionality of the characters, context, and the plot to assert the culturally constituted identity through the revival of vibrant cultural practices and tribal epistemologies.

Keywords: Imagined ethnography, colonization, culturally-constituted subject, folklore, vernacular, memory, erasure, revival

Introduction

Writers from Northeast India like Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai, Aruni Kashyap, and Easterine Kire, among others, deal with the issue of cultural conditions consequent upon Northeast India's encounter with the British invasion and exclusion from mainland India's political and literary imagination. Their writings contextualize the gradual and systematic erasure of indigenous tribal epistemologies and oral cultures. They question the structural exclusion from national and literary imagination and attempt to create their own unique space. The genesis of India's northeastern states' isolation and separation from mainland India can be traced back to colonial times when the colonizers refused to acknowledge their poly-ethnicity and social and cultural assertion[i]. The social and spatial otherization of the Northeast as a monolithic cultural space was achieved through "an undifferentiated picture of nameless insurgencies." (Baruah, 2007, p. 01) As a result, all the states of Northeast India share "a persistent indifference and neglect on the part of [the] mainstream." (Venkatesan, 1989, p.128) This crisis led to a desire to revive and recuperate their lost cultural moorings by producing alternative historiography. Easterine Kire deploys an imagined ethnographic approach in *Don't Run, My Love* (2017) and *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village*

Remembered (2018) to "questions about where one can speak from, to who one speaks, and why one speaks at all seem to be more immediately articulated within ethnography than elsewhere." (Elspeth Probyn quoted in Gray, p. 23)

The politics of cultural strategies through imagined ethnography, as a methodological tool to revive the cultural past, becomes evident in the opening of the text, *Don't Run, My Love* where the central characters are presented as a part of a culturally constituted space. The text is about Visenuo and her young marriageable daughter Atuonuo. The narrative begins with a description of the work that both women perform without any support from a male figure. It portrays a space where women are not dependent on patriarchs to survive rather, they together weave their lives around each other. Both are presented as belonging to some "ancient green valley" that to the outside world remains unknown and mysterious. (*Don't Run*, 05) It is from this same timeless and undefined space that Kevi enters into their lives. Kevi is described as "anyone who set eyes on him, man or woman, young or old, had to admit that he was a beautiful creature indeed, the young man who called himself Kevi and who walked into the lives of two women at harvest time." (*Don't Run*, 01) He describes himself as "a trapper and a hunter", a traditional Naga community activity. (*Don't Run*, 06) Through imagined ethnography, Kire engages in the task of rewriting cultural narratives, by using 'alternative signifying' (Schwab, 2012, p.02) symbols, to produce resistance to dominating powers through significant cultural intervention. In this context, Kevi is presented as an archetypal figure descended from a legend and called "*tekhumevi*", whose "face was completely covered with hair and he looked nothing like himself" when Atuonuo and Kevi spent a night in her mother's hut. (*Don't Run*, 78, 91) Their positionality, within a culturally defined space, determines the politics of recuperation and revival of a culture threatened by colonial experiences and modernity. It is the folkloric legend that is brought into context in this text where the lives of the central characters are integrated with oral tradition and a legend. Kevi's presence represents the Naga community's belief in lycanthropy, where one individual possesses dual souls of an animal and a man. When Visenuo asks whether he was a man or a tiger, Pfenuo, a woman who stays in the Village of Sheers, answers;

> 'they are both'... 'They have a foot in both the worlds. So long as they are alive, they belong to both the world of men, and the men that we call their owners grow more powerful and wealthy from this connection. But it is wrong to call them tiger-owners: the tiger and the man, they are one and the same. When the tiger eats, the man eats: we always say that. Some people insist that the man participates when the tiger is out hunting. We also say, when the tiger dies, the man dies. So they are very closely connected; they say the man is the body and the tiger is the soul. Some say they can interchange at will. (Don't Run, 92-93)

Kevi, a 'were-tiger', taken directly from a Naga legend and textualized in a plot, seems to jolt the dominant sensibility by remaining as mysterious throughout the text as he was in the beginning. It shakes the aesthetic sensibility of the reader who reads the text with the baggage of preconceived notions and beliefs. Such literary experiments open up a process of dialogic exchange. Strange objects emerge through language that negotiates the boundary between the self and the world which challenges what is considered known, and familiar. It opens up new

patterns of reading of otherness, something that remained beyond the mainland imagination. The narrative broadens the perspectives of readers about supernatural beings and how literature reflects on cultural representations. Barker (2000) calls such culturally-constituted expressions "signifying practices of representation" (p.08) that constitute and function as the cultural strategy to revive the lost folkloric tradition and legends to counter the stereotype.

Also, the village, which exists outside the reach of common people, and those who are in the dire need can only find it, seems to come from a legend "the village of Meriezou was legendary among the Angamis; it was the seat of culture, the birthplace of many famed seers, and people still sought it out for answers. But the more adventurous and the needy traveled to the Village of Seers." (*Don't Run*, 81) The northeastern region of India follows many ancient traditions of religious beliefs and spiritual practices that have been essential aspects of their culture. The village plays an important role as a repository of their cultural beliefs in the interplay between natural and supernatural, as the village erases the difference "between the natural and the supernatural." (*Don't Run*, 83) At the Village of Sheers, both mother and daughter witness the supernatural activities taking place at night which further reflects the Naga's belief in the parallel existence of the spiritual and natural world.

> They heard ululating in the distance and, as they waited, a group of warriors appeared waving spears and prancing about in mock battle steps. While one line of warriors jumped forward with spears upheld as if to challenge an invisible foe, the other group went a step forward at the same very moment as if to avoid a spear thrust. It was a macabre dance executed very slowly.'
>
> Pfunuo returned to their room.
>
> 'None of that is real, mind you. Don't be deceived, and don't ever run out to watch. It's hard to save a human life when a spirit spear finds its target. (*Don't Run*, 94)

Through the figure of Kevi and such belief systems from the folklore, the writer revives and establishes the Naga community's cultural economy. Through it, she also re-examines preconceptions, misconceptions, and erroneous stereotypes associated with the Northeast. Here Kire transforms the imaginary into reality in an attempt to hold together and make meaning to their existence in a situation of disintegration and fragmentation. According to Marcus, (1986) "ethnography originates in orality" (p.264-265), and it is actively "situated between powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilizations, cultures, classes, races, and genders. Ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes processes of innovation and structuration, and is itself part of these processes." (Clifford, 1986, p. 2-3) Through such strategy, she unsettles the dichotomous cultural narratives and "rewrite cultural narratives... [where she] use[s] alternative signifying practices and bold refigurations to undo cultural iconographies and unsettle the status quo of habitual cultural codes." (Schwab, 2012, p.02)

An identical political and cultural framework becomes evident in the *Sky is My Father*. Structurally, the novel can be divided into two sections, i.e., the first part is about the lost cultural past and practices that define the Naga communities' cultural rootedness and identity. The second part is about the narrative construction of colonial experiences. The first part leads towards the second

part when the reader experiences political and cultural developments. As a result, the text becomes more of a postcolonial text depicting colonial domination, the effects of conversion, and the slow death of indigenous culture.

In this text, Kire locates her subjects within a colonial phase and charts anti-colonial historiography through the means of historical events, language, conceptual framework, and experiences of the tribal people. The first part represents the lost cultural past that the text attempts to reclaim by textualization. It opens with an assertion that the Naga community is a male dominant community that does not take women as equal to males. It is a masculine society where women are kept in their designated places and not allowed to participate in issues considered masculine. Their patriarchal ideology gets further reflected when they hold important meetings or "talk at the thehou, the community house, often centered around what was called man's talk. No women were allowed to come to the thehou or enter the male dormitories. Reminiscing about hunts and battles in the past made the thehou a place where any youth with a man's heart inside him would linger and listen or add his stories as well." (*Sky*, 07)

Similarly, male dormitories, a central social and cultural institution of the Naga community, are used to inculcate social behavior and moral code among children to train them as socially responsible beings of the tribe. It is a communal place meant to help the young learn skills like hunting, crafting, building a house, etc., and the values of the tribe are passed on to the next generation. It provides a sense of security and a feeling of community that helps to ensure the longevity of the tribe and its culture. It brings the community together with a sense of relatedness. This place acts as a repository of collective and shared consciousness of the society that gets transferred among children of the tribe through educational pedagogy. The author shares one of the teachings of dormitories;

> the key to right living- avoiding excess in anything- be content with your share of land and fields. People who move boundary stones bring death upon themselves. Every individual has a social obligation to the village. When you are older and your hearts are strong within you, you will take on the responsibility of guarding the village while others will go out to earn a great name for our village. (*Sky*, 30)

Pedagogically, the children are educated in the history and cultural components of the tribe by recounting legends and events of the past, as "the past is an integral part of the present where the oral informs the written in that the creative writers redefine ethnic-cultural identities in reprocessing cultural memory." (Zama, 2013, p.06)

Memories constitute dialogic processes in public spaces. It articulates some particular past and brings together two different spaces and times. As a result, it is multi-dimensional and trans-cultural by nature. Remembering a specific event from the past reprocesses a cultural past and its practices. It is through their struggle against time and forgetfulness in an oral environment that such strategies become essential to remember, learn, and carry forward. The author recounts one such village gathering when Vipie states, "the village has not been feasted so well since Nikerhe's title-taking feast,'...... Nikerhe had feasted the village some fifteen years ago. But many were too young to remember that. Nikerhe's paternal relatives of Kigwe village had herded down five excellent cows for his feast." (Sky, 28) It is a close-knit community system where everyone

participates and contributes to village function as "Keviselie's kinsmen and friends had gifted him nine heads of cattle. The village talked about Keviselie's Feast of Merit for a long time to come." (*Sky*, 28) It is through recounting such events that the past is kept alive in the memories of people that later gets transferred to the young generation as the continuity of a tradition is "ensured by passing down shared traditions, customs, language and social norms or culture from generation to generation." (Mukhim 2006, p.183) This process of remembering needs to be understood within the context of colonization and the erasure of the Naga culture at the time of the high point of cultural colonization[ii].

Not only cultural practices but tales also get textualized where they are recounted and transferred to the next generation to bridge the gap between past and present, and to generate cultural consciousness among young minds. One incident of Vikhwelle, who "came back six days after he went missing, bone-thin and near death. He had a terrifying tale to tell. Tall, dark creatures had carried him off against his will, keeping him for days altogether", contextualizes the existence of the spirits that belong to folklore. (*Sky*, 37) Similarly, the folktale of Kirhupfumi, of "two women who could never wed" (*Sky*, 51) is used to exemplify the existence of a supernatural spirit and is used as an example of the consequences of disregarding *genna* days that would lead to death. The Naga community believes that both the human and spirit world exist together and various kinds of spirits that are believed to dwell in water bodies, stone, and the jungle, are worshipped by them.

Likewise, storytelling is an essential component of folk culture. As in almost every culture, storytelling is a quintessential part of the growing-up experience of every child in India. "Storytelling is a living art" and in many societies, it is a means of 'educating and training children from childhood. (Rollins, 1957, p.165) It acts as a pedagogical technique to impart cultural, moral, social, and historical literacy to the audience. Kire deploys the storytelling technique to bring into context the forgotten traditions and customs of the Naga tribe to assert their cultural economy. Atunuo tells the story of her deceased paternal grandfather who offered a feast to the four villages, and later "the four monoliths erected after each feast of merit were set up on the way to the fields. People passed them every day when they went to the fields. They rested at the foot of the monoliths and recounted the feasts of Kezharuoko, using those moments to recall the great man's name." (*Don't Run*, 08) The memory of the feast and the feast function as a process of building fraternity, collectivity, community, and also one's identity as individual memory transforms into collective memory after a point of time. Erecting a monolith acts as synonymous with the Feast of Merit, or what Jay Winter (2010) would call "sites of memory", which stands as a symbol of the living history of grandfather Kezharuoko and the rich cultural heritage of the Naga people. (p.312) As spoken by Visenuo, such cultural memories revive lost cultural traditions that most Nagas, especially the Angami-Nagas, have practiced for ages. In this story, cultural memory, legends, and past interactions with each other in a meaningful dialogic manner that produces a meaningful understanding of the Naga communities' vibrant cultural past and the importance of feast, as Easterine Kire puts it;

> the Feast of Merit was to the Nagas, what the educational degree is to present-day students… It was partly the generous philosophy of feeding the poor and sharing of [the] wealth of the entire population, but in most cases, the competitive spirit to climb the

> ladder of social recognition that prompted the tribal rich people to perform the series of [the] feast of merit and honor round which the wheels of Naga Society revolved.... it is on the feast he has given that his social status depends. (Cited in Patton. Contemporary Naga Writings: Reclamation of Culture and History through Orality)

Memory and identity are interrelated and complementary to each other. It is a way to examine an individual and a society within the context of present conditions, lost time, and history. For many thinkers, memory is socially constructed. (Halbwachs, 1968; Candau, 1996; Tonkin, 1992; Rampazi, 1991) Within cultural anthropology, Pool (2016) categorizes memories into two types, i.e., cultural memories- related to cultural practices and lost culture- and political memories- related to the effects of colonization that have caused the erasure of the indigenous culture. According to Cappelleto (2003), individual memories have the capacity to transform into collective memory. It broadens the scope of communication, and as performative, a dialogic process is shared among various groups. Collective memories represent the collective consciousness of the past that helps to understand and interpret the present and orients towards the future. Also, it preserves the events, incidents, images, symbols, etc., that help to counter the identity crisis. It is not only an expression but also performative in which identities are performatively constructed. It functions as the multiple modes of beings that shape the present and future as historically rooted, as Brady (1982) states "memory is used in literature to relate the present to the past." (p.200) It helps to chart a meta-historical account of Naga communities by bringing into the context the "transgenerational memory." (Schwab, 2012, p.04)

Storytelling disseminates the cultural epistemologies to the young in oral form. The cultural beliefs and knowledge associated with itis shared with the next generation to empower them with knowledge. Such transfers take place through the oral form in a conversational manner. Visenuo shares such knowledge with her daughter;

> 'Your grandfather used to say that a house needs a fire. The smoke from the fire strengthens the walls and helps it stay in place for a longer time. When a house is abandoned, it falls apart very soon. The house was missing its owner, that is what we say when that happens.'

> 'You know so many things Azuo,' Atuonuo said. 'I wish I knew half the things you do.'

> 'Well I only know the things that the village has taught me from childhood, and try to pass them on to you. Do you know that some people are called *thehou nuo*?

> 'What does that mean?'

> 'Since the *thehou* is the communal house where men spend their nights, *thehou nuo* means child of the *thehou*. The boys who have been brought up in that tradition learn things about our culture. They use it to guide them through life and when people see them behaving in certain way, people refer to them as *thehou nuo*. A girl can also earn such a title when people see that she knows the ways of the village.' (*Don't Run*, 18-19)

The author abundantly employs vernacular expressions in both the texts that reflect the creative richness of the culture and marks a creative disruption in the form of the reading experience of a

reader who does not belong to the Naga culture. Culturally-constituted native expressions like *tekhumevi, kepenuopfu, kichuki, thehou, thehou nuo, dahou, japan nha, kephou, Tekhumevimia, Kelipie, Terhunyi, Sekrenyi, nuou*, etc., reflect their cultural landscapes and cultural-specific-expressions. Walter J. Ong, in his *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (2002), contends that orality is a mode of consciousness. It is a distinctive method of acquiring, sustaining, managing, and verbalizing knowledge that he identifies as, "primary oral cultures." (Ong, 2002 p. 01). It is a culture "with no knowledge at all of [the] writing" (Ong, 2002 p. 01), as it is historically and culturally rooted and is not affected by the use of print culture, considered to be modern and progressive. His argument is based on the cultural differences between the two communicative orders, orality and literacy. According to Ong, changes in human thought processes and advancement have led to the spread of literacy. It has altered the human consciousness. In his model, once literacy is introduced the primary oral culture gradually disappears. For him, this transition from oral to literacy is based on a paradoxical process as he states, "this awareness is agony for persons rooted in primary orality, who want literacy passionately but who also know very well that moving into the exciting world of literacy means leaving behind much that is exciting and deeply loved in the earlier oral world. We have to die to continue living." (Ong, 2002, p. 14)

It is through this dialectical tension to preserve the oral form amid the spread of literacy that the writer employs such culturally-rooted indigenous expressions in the dialect form. Such local idioms of expressions, as values and practices, are embedded in the Naga community's social and cultural practices. Politically, such linguistic expressions provide authenticity of representation to the local realities. Also, it accentuates associated sensibilities and preconceptions around northeast India and functions as a tool of cultural critique to challenge the normative. Simultaneously, it plays an important role in establishing an identity based on language and culture. Language plays a paramount role in ethnographic studies to understand and establish the authenticity of a particular culture, as Barker (2000) states that "language gives meaning to material objects and social practices that are brought into view by language and made intelligible to us in terms which language delimits. These processes of meaning production are signifying practices. In order to understand [a] culture, one needs to explore how meaning is produced symbolically in language as a 'signifying system." (p.07-08) The relation of native language, its communal connection, and its relation to self-identity is the "key to cultural identity." (Thong, 2000, p.05)

Furthermore, vernacular, as a cultural component, functions as a challenge to cultural imperialism and exposes the limits of nationhood. Kire's usage of vernacular implies the dominance of orality in her culture that she politically and consciously textualizes in the text, as the purpose of ethnography is not only to represent but also it is the 'invention...of cultures' (Clifford, 1986, p. 2) that seem to have been lost in a mono-vocal representation of India's northeast. It involves a translation of a culture into a text that can be read as a representative text, as "ethnography is inescapably a textual enterprise[iii]." (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007, p.191)

Similarly, ethnographic ideology "draws attention to aspects of cultural description" (Clifford, 1986, p.100), that have been erased or minimized. Such descriptions indicate more metaphorical and allegorical meanings associated with events or incidents. It draws attention to the cultural representation through which the political gets embedded in the representation of temporal

events. This is reflected in the twist in the plot of *Don't Run*. The twist changes its narrative from a possible love story to that of a chase and pursuit narrative where a young woman refuses a male and his advances that result in his ego-hurt. In a patriarchal environment, any kind of resistance is not allowed, so Atuonuo's refusal to accede to Kevi's proposal led to physical violence. He clutched her from behind when she visited her hut and "blood spurted out from the cuts on her arm where he had sunk in his nails." (Don't Run, 69) In the mysterious and serene environment, the violence that percolates in the lives of central characters dissipates the naive structure of the plot. Rather, it allegorically represents the violence, literal as well as metaphorical, that has come to define the northeastern states of India in recent times. Allegory provides a double edge of meanings, of descriptive surface and deeper levels of meaning. Violence, which both, Atuonuo and Kevi experience, can be termed as an allegory[iv] of gender relationships and material reality. It is an attempt to dominate the 'other' that leads to violence that draws on the similitude in this context. Such violence and disturbing relationship can be read as symbolically representing the mainland politics, where the Northeast and its people have "undergone historical and political trauma of untold suffering and marginalization." (Zama, 2013, p. xi)

Similarly, in the second part of *Sky is My Father*, Kire politically locates the Naga tribe's colonial past in the heat of the anti-colonial struggle. It recounts historical events of the year 1879 when the Naga villagers countered the British invasion, and the war led to the burning of their Khonoma village, "the thatch roofs had burnt easily but the posts of houses took a long time to burn out completely. Finally, half-burnt posts and ashes were all that remained, blackening the whole site. This was the punishment of a proud people who had dared to control their destinies." (Sky, 108)

It depicts the heroic struggle of the Naga tribe against the British colonization and religious conversion that was initiated by the missionaries like Dr. Sidney Rivenburg. Kire archaeologically identifies a historical moment, in a widely shared story, that eventually leads to the spread of Christianity in the Naga community, and in the Northeast of India. It is captured through an experience of a soldier who witnesses spirits during his night shift while on duty. Next day when Dr. Sidney Rivenburg inquires him about his witnessing spirits during the night;

> The soldier confessed to a nightly experience of seeing, near the water source, a spirit that grew larger and larger till he stood as big as mountain before he disappeared from view. Rivenburg instructed the soldier to wake him if he saw the spirit again. The next night, when the soldier sighted the spirit, he woke Rivenburg and they walked to the river source together. The spirit showed itself again but this time, the spirit miraculously grew smaller and smaller till it disappeared altogether. The soldier was amazed by this and became a Christian thereafter. (*Sky*, 117-118)

This incident is marked as the beginning and spreading of the Christian faith in the Northeast of India. Levi's death, who stands for an archetypal Naga figure, who represented and followed the teachings and values of Naga culture, signifies the end of resistance to colonial powers. With his death, the Naga culture also started dying which is allegorically presented through his son Sato's conversion. Christian Missionary gradually wiped out the indigenous culture and people drifted towards them. It lured people in the guise of modernity as "in 1897, Sato was nearly nineteen when the first man of Khonoma was baptized. (Sky, 121) Levi's desire to maintain cultural

independence from religious colonization is juxtaposed with Sato's desire to convert to Christianity. Levi's death marks a symbolic shift from old tribal ways to new modern and Christian ways of the world. It is a society where norms of conduct, institutions of beliefs, and cultural practices are falling apart. The passing away of traditional Naga culture is presented from the perspective of a dying culture under the adverse impact of an alien culture.

Similarly, conversion into Christianity and not choosing any other mainland religion can be seen as a deliberate political stand that the people of the northeast take. It can be deduced from such action that the experiences of people of northeast India with mainland socio-political culture have not resulted in positive development. The continuation of conflict in various forms, political dissent, armed resistance, unprecedented levels of violence, dense militarisation, enactment of laws that transformed the Naga highland into a special state of exception, etc., and "the domination and overrule they experienced at the hands of the Indian state" (Wouters, 2018, xii) have given rise to disenchantment among the people of northeast India. Such repressive techniques/ methods of rules can lead to many forms of resistance where the massive acceptance of Christianity by the native tribes of Nagaland can also be seen as a collective act of resistance. This conversion to Christianity can be considered to be one of the most important historical events in the Naga imagination that fostered "a pan Naga identity" (Baruah, 2007, 106). Sato's conversion captures this historical process and the end of the text depicts the accelerated process of religious conversions as "the number of converts was steadily growing at the Mission." (*Sky*, 145) Sato, who wanted to be "a follower of Isu" (*Sky*, 120), finds similarities between their deities and Jesus and creates a discourse of religious compatibility and similarities that seemed to be used for conversion in northeast India. This conversion to Christian identity keeps them "apart from the mostly Hindu and Muslim population of the Indian heartland (and) has been partly an act of resistance that parallel the political and armed resistance." (Baruah, 2007, 110)

Conclusion

Kire reconstructs and recuperates Naga's past by deconstructing counterfeit or biased narratives that were imposed on them. It comes out as a kind of meta-historiography, representing cultural and historical tragedy. It is through the imagined ethnographic account of the Naga tribe, with a careful excavation of historical accounts and scholarly engagement with it, that Kire asserts a vibrant Naga culture and represents the politics of the region. Kire's texts come out as politically conscious attempts in terms of their historical-rootedness, ethnocultural struggle against the postcolonial situation, to counter popular misconceptions and mark its presence in the cultural and literary imagination of mainland politics. It focuses on the state of condition, contexts, experiences, and the limitation of what Benedict Anderson (2006) would call the 'imagined community' of a nation. As an ethnographic account of the Naga community and their ways of life, Kire can deal with various issues. Kire deploys an ethnographic framework to establish cultural epistemologies of the Naga community through the legend of 'were-tiger', folkloric tales, cultural symbols, activities, traditions, customs, historical accounts of anti-colonial struggle, and conversion to Christianity, etc. Through her writings, Kire not only rewrites cultures but also formulates culture by using discursive and aesthetic practices. "Textualization is at the heart of the ethnographic enterprise" (Marcus, 1986, 264) and her texts are based on "indigenous cultural

categories" and "folk models." (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007, 191 and 194) Her "texts (act) as imaginary ethnographies, that is as texts that write culture by inventing a language that redraws the boundaries of imaginable worlds and by providing thick descriptions of the desires, fears, and fantasies that shape the imaginary lives and cultural encounters of invented protagonists." (Schwab, 2012, 02)

This study helps to understand the connection between power and cultural politics that can be utilized to bring cultural changes. Kire establishes the Naga culture by representing various cultural epistemologies through her texts. Both the texts, act on a similar ground of recuperating, reviving, and establishing their gradually forgotten culture and historical past of their heroic struggle against the British invasion. She uses memory and remembering to contextualize and bring into context past epistemologies to consolidate a present sense of cultural rootedness. Cultural politics allows literature to intervene at a linguistic, cultural, and epistemological level. Through the methodology of imagined ethnography, Kire textualizes the indigenous struggle against stereotype and colonial domination, reclaims cultural epistemologies, and redefines the geo-spatial pluralities of the Northeast of India. By positioning her characters within a geopolitical situation, she attempts to decolonize the essentialized imaginary powers of hegemony that define the Northeast as primitive and a conflict-ridden space. The ethnographic framework helps her to establish the Naga community's cultural economy as the ethnographic framework "has provided [her] a vehicle for the voicing and preservation of stories and memories that have long been excluded from hegemonic discourses of cultural and collective memory" (Leggott, 2004, 13).

Declaration of Conflict of Interests

End-notes

[i] Baruah, Sanjib. *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*. Oxford University Press. (2007).

[ii] According to Indian Express-News of January 7, 2018, "Nagaland is known as "the only predominantly Baptist state in the world" and more than 90 percent of the Naga people identify themselves as Christian." https://indianexpress.com/article/north-east-india/nagaland/in-christian-nagaland-indigenous-religion-of-pre-christian-nagas-withstand-test-of-time-5010777/

[iii] Ethnography is a process of data collection for analysis. It is produced in written form through the medium of language. Similarly writing any imaginative text, or otherwise, requires data. In this sense, writing any text and writing ethnography involve textual enterprise as they both involve a process of textualization for analysis. Hence, the producer of an ethnography becomes a writer of a text, producing a narrative. See.

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iv Clifford, James. "On Ethnographic Allegory." *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus. University of California Press, London. 1986.

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