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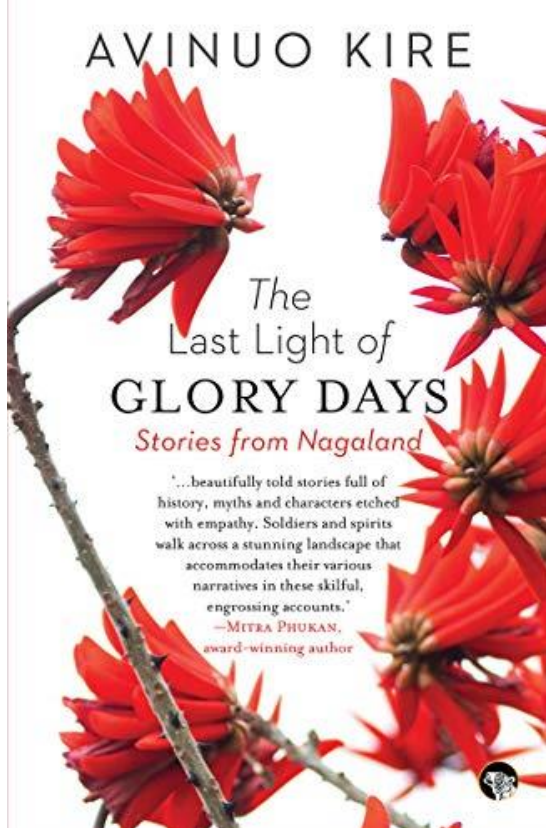
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Book Review

***The Last Light of Glory Days: Stories from Nagaland* by Avinuo Kire**

Publisher: Speaking Tiger. Date of Publication: 2021. Language: English. Price: Rs.350/- Number of Pages: 184. ISBN: 9789390477456



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"The times, how strange they were" (p. 9). The opening sentence of Avinuo Kire's *The Last Light of Glory Days: Stories from Nagaland* plunges its readers straight into the book's unforgettable perspectives on the lived experiences of the Naga communities, which are often referred to as 'people stories'. Kire's portrayal of the Naga lifeworld offers tales of terror, magic, myths, cultural rituals, spiritualism, and traditions that are interwoven with contemporary Naga narratives.

The Indo-Naga conflict has had a lifelong impact on the Naga tribal community; the devastating effects of border politics on tribal culture have led to the intrusion of mainland India into people's

lives and scarred the Nagas and their relationship with the Indian government for decades. The Indo-Naga conflict is an ongoing dispute; Nagaland was declared a “disturbed area,” extending power to the AFSPA since 1958.

What spectators, critics, academicians, and even the media have failed to recognise and represent is the lived reality of the Nagas. Examining lived experiences illuminates the resilience of people for whom political horrors are an everyday reality: terror and magic coexist with military occupancy in the Naga hills. *The Last Light of Glory Days: Stories from Nagaland* is divided into two sections: ‘The Disturbance’ and ‘New Tales from an Old World’. The end of the colonial era was indeed the beginning of the actual war, termed ‘The Disturbance,’ for the Nagas. ‘The Disturbance’ clubs together three women’s intergenerational family stories, set against the backdrop of the Indo-Naga conflict. ‘New Tales from an Old World’ introduces the Naga lifeworld imbued with nativised Naga Christianity, myths, and folklore.

The titular story, “The Last Light of Glory Days,” offers a historical perspective on Naga history narrated through women’s eyes. A young, naive Angami woman, Neimenuo speaks about how the Nagaland in which she grew up in the 1960s was infused with terror, love, marriage, family, and the enthusiasm for the Naga nationalism. As the conflict between the Nagas and the Indian military intensifies with the formation of the state of Nagaland in 1963 under the Indian Union, Neimenuo’s dream of a normal life is disrupted when her young fiancé joins the Naga Army. “I remember thinking the colour of happiness must be sanguine,” (p. 16) she says of her wedding day, implying how the term also etymologically invokes bloodshed. What is particularly devastating is the murder of Zhabu by another Naga factional group; Naga nationalism drifts completely from its original ambitions as more factional groups are formed. The silencing of women in such meta-narratives is highlighted by Neimenuo when she asserts, “I like to think that I have also served our nation in my own way” (p. 17).

In the second story, “Flower Children,” the little girl Pete is taken away by the Indian army on her way back from school for interrogation, leaving her traumatised for life. The author emphasises the representation of Nagaland in the 1990s through the perspective of Neimenuo’s granddaughter, focusing on the continued disturbance in the state within the Naga factional groups or with the Indian paramilitary forces. People’s lives are defined by encroachment of the centre in the form of unannounced raids and the torture of the family members of the Naga Army.

In “Sharing Stories,” the author examines the stigma of racial hatred, xenophobia, and the unresolved generational trauma between the Indian and Naga races. The protagonist marries a mainland Indian, breaking generational trauma but scarring her relationship with her grandmother. The author reinstates the ongoing tension and mistrust between the mainland Indians, the ‘tephremia,’ and Nagas: “For Grandmother, India was synonymous with the army; with the sweaty men in green” (p. 46). The grandmother and granddaughter’s conflicting ideologies towards British colonialism underscore how racism is faced by the later generations of migrant Indians in Nagaland and by Nagas in mainland India. Kire’s writing powerfully explores the longstanding psychoses that characterise racism and xenophobia.

The second section of the book, “New Tales from an Old World,” consists of seven stories about ordinary people and their extraordinary lives, delving into the Naga lifeworld and tribal philosophy, epistemologies, and spiritualism. Storytelling as an art and life form for the Nagas is

believed to have psychological values, especially for oral communities. "The Memory Healer" authenticates the value of storytelling and listening in the contemporary Naga world through Neinu, the memory healer who epitomises a repository of traumatic memories. The nightmares of the war veteran, the wounded look of a single mother with her three children, and the stoic child who is sexually abused by her neighbour are examples of the many untold stories in Naga society that come to life through Kire's skillful blending of magic realism and political realities.

"The Visitors" plunges the reader into the lifeworld and tribal belief systems in Naga societies, deconstructing the binary between the human and the spirit worlds as human beings wage wars with the spirits. Neibou hosts the spirits, and the little girl Khriesinuo witnesses the warrior spirits demonstrating that spirits and humans can interact despite occupying different worlds. "When the Millet Flower Grows" investigates the dilemma of Christianity and traditional faith in the Naga lifeworld. The native faith finds its place in the contemporary Naga world through traditional rituals and the "Tekhumiavi" or were-tiger. "Tekhumiavi" is more than a myth in the Angami community: it is portrayed as a reality that breaks the binaries of the human and the non-human, linking the two worlds.

"The Light" powerfully represents the issue of sexual abuse in Naga society and the importance of being informed about sexual harassment. The child is abused by her tutor, but her parents are ignorant of the situation; the light saves her from further horrors. The notion of the Spirit always finds its place in the lived realities of the Nagas, and one such is the forest spirit. "Forest Spirit" narrates the story of a schoolboy named Olio who possesses a magical stone and his spiritual journey with the gemstone. Olio possesses something that belongs to the forest. The author enlightens her readers on environmental consciousness through the forest spirit and tribal practices, which reflect the belief that one should take from nature only what is needed. "Longkhum" represents a village in Mokokchung, believed to be a place where the souls of a person go before their final transition to heaven. The story is about the last journey of Keze with her husband Sato before his demise, extending towards Naga spiritualism on the meanings of life and death.

From the academic perspective, *The Last Light of Glory Days: Stories from Nagaland* is an extraordinarily incisive contribution to contemporary narratives on Naga studies. It formulates detailed historical information, specifically on people's experience of the Indo-Naga conflict, and expands the Naga worldview. Besides scholarship, the book offers an insider's perspective on the Naga community. Kire's didactic execution of the stories about her people and implementation of the Tenyidie dialect in the stories propagate a decisive commitment: the volume is described as "both a political declaration and a personal love-note to her land" (the back cover blurb).

Another invaluable way in which this collection is significant is in its representation of the many Naga women, barely mentioned in history books, who are war survivors, freedom fighters, and single, economically independent parents. The anthology is a seminal affirmation of the Nagas' lived experience against the backdrop of the Indo-Naga conflict, hence for researchers from the disciplines of history, literature, and cultural studies, the book is an indispensable source of information offering critical assessments on the Indo-Naga conflict and its long-term impact on the Naga community. Writing in English blended with distinctly Naga sociolinguistic elements

simultaneously contributes authenticity and aids in inviting a larger global audience to participate in the act of gathering and narrating 'peoplestories'.

The first short story, "The Last Light of Glory Days," is perhaps the most haunting of the collection, with its constant reminders that experiences are replete with paradoxes: the terrible political turbulence of 'The Disturbance' is personally "a time of sublime happiness" (p. 12) for Neimenuo because she's in love. Her narrative ends with the image of her biting into a cherry tomato from her garden: "It burst into flavour inside my mouth, unmistakably sweet and sour, all at once" (p. 27). The book is ending with an evocative image in the final story, "Longkhum," in which Keze's "hot, happy tears" (p. 183) wet the petals of the red rhododendron cupped in her hand as she closes her eyes and relives the past. Kire's prose vividly juxtaposes the personal and the political, blurring the lines between the binaries of epistemic categories to remind us that ambiguities are ubiquitous, especially in conflict-ridden times and places.

Lucy Keneikhrienuo Yhome is presently a PhD scholar in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at Christ (Deemed to be) University, Bangalore working on the thesis titled, *Intersecting Gender and Ecocriticism in the works of Naga writer, Easterine Kire*. She also obtained her M.Phil on Elie Wiesel and Yael Dayan from the same university.