

Cultural Preservation and Resistance in Easterine Kire's Text

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Abstract

Easterine Kire's works demonstrate the diversity and regional voices in Indian literature; they are firmly anchored in the unique cultural environment of Nagaland. Her work amplifies the voices of Naga tribes, who have been historically marginalized in mainstream Indian narratives, by embedding their myths, traditions, and world views. Kire's writing deconstructs colonial and nationalist stereotypes about the Northeast by offering representations created from an indigenous perspective rather than an external one. Her texts blend myth, oral traditions, and the spiritual world, which depicts the use of regional mythology to create layered narratives that address contemporary issues. The objective of the paper is to investigate the ideas of counterculture, subculture, and power. In this process, the paper is an attempt to interpret Easterine Kire's texts 'When the River Sleeps' and 'Bitter worm wood' using Gramsci's theory of hegemony. 'When the River Sleeps' (2014) acts as a textual archive, documenting rituals, myths, and landscapes that were traditionally transmitted orally. The text's attempt to preserve and convey cultural stories through the inscription of orality into text is its polemic. In a similar vein, 'Bitter Wormwood' (2007) chronicles the Naga people's trauma, resilience, and evolving traditional traditions. In order to challenge hegemonic histories and contemporary Indigenous world views, these texts prioritize Indigenous storytelling structures, communal rituals, and ancestral knowledge, which is a counter cultural act that questions hegemonic histories and re-centers Indigenous world views. Kire's works involve the concepts of power and hegemony. 'When the River Sleeps' portrays the power of spiritual and customary practices that govern the community. 'Bitter Wormwood' directly interrogates the dominance of colonial and post-colonial states over the Naga people. Female characters in her texts display "quiet resistance," defying patriarchal and militaristic norms through their emotional fortitude and survival tactics.

Introduction

Easterine Kire, a trailblazing storyteller from Nagaland, has a major role in contemporary Indian literature. Within the larger Indian Literary milieu, Kire's work highlights the local, regional and often unheard voices. Indian English literature is traditionally focused on stories from traditional civilizations and large cities. In literature, the northeast region which includes Nagaland has paid very little attention. Kire's literature changed it by emphasizing the history, beliefs and daily existence of the Naga communities. This improves the understanding of Indian literature. Her tales are not just stories; they preserve and spread a deep bond with local customs, mythology and nature that are usually not found in most traditional functions.

In many cases, the work of Kire can be seen through the subaltern voice lens which is often ignored. According to the theory of Antonio Gramsci's on how power molds human perceptions can be used to demonstrate how Indian literature often establishes national and identity concepts as universally accepted.

The attitude of people like Naga has been left from this, it was chosen by Kire, which gives importance to Naga story, rituals and spiritual beliefs as important literary elements. By converting oral traditions into written narratives, her text 'When the River Sleeps' (2014) helps in cultural protection. 'Bitter Wormwood' (2011), delve into pain and struggles of Nagaland people, illustrating how past and present conflicts have affected their lives.

Kire also connects with modern feminist and environmental writing. Her female heroes often consider the task of remembering and staying strong, opposing military forces and male authority. His depiction of nature as a living, sacred aspect, especially in 'When the River Sleeps' (2014), is associated with the Naga beliefs and comprehensive Indian history that cherish the environment. This indicates how universal subjects in local stories, and it helps situate Nagaland on the global map of Indian literature. As a prominent voice from the Northeast, Kire faces traditional knowledge about memory, strength and cultural existence, introducing fresh concepts and literary forms for Indian literature. Her innovations exhibit how weak communities can find strength in their stories, which presents an alternative approach that refers to both prevalent perceptions and the silence of the nation. By doing this, Kire defines Indian literature again and reminds everyone that it is a collection of many voices instead of one.

Gramsci's Hegemony and Easterine Kire's Countercultural Intervention

Antonio Gramsci's description of the theory of hegemony in 'The Prison Notebooks' (1971), could be applied in most of the Kire's texts.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony represents a method that ensures the dominant group maintains dominance not just through coercion but also by forcing others to accept their viewpoints as the standard. This ideology is broadcast by various types of social outlets including media, literature, schools and religious organizations; Hegemony is an ongoing conflict in which conflicting viewpoints may surface. Kire's writing contributes to this conflict by giving voice to individuals and concepts that are typically ignored. Her texts explore Naga history, beliefs, and daily living, providing fresh perspectives on the world that contradict conventional wisdom. Her work consequently serves what Gramsci referred to as a "polemical function," challenging prevailing narratives and facilitating the sharing of individual perspectives on history and community by members of weaker groups. Her 'When the River Sleeps' (2014) text honors storytelling and animism. The narrative depicts a society in which humans coexist peacefully with the natural world. This disproves the notion that only contemporary and scientific viewpoints are sound, demonstrating the depth of an indigenous way of thinking. According to Gramsci's, this is a counter-hegemonic movement that challenges the superiority of the prevailing body of knowledge.

In his 'Bitter Wormwood' (2011), Kire examines the politics of history and the crafting of official narratives. The Naga war is depicted in the text from the perspective of the people who are experiencing it, not from the standpoint of the government, which refers to it as "rebellion" or "terrorism." Kire questions the official narrative of history that downplays or avoids uncomfortable or controversial tales by bringing attention to the struggles and decisions of common people. This is a further instance of Gramsci's counter-hegemonic resistance since she provides an inside perspective that alters our perceptions of control, aggression, and belonging.

'Bitter Wormwood' (2011) and 'When the River Sleeps' (2014) demonstrate together how literature may have a significant impact on society. They challenge the prevailing ideologies by resurrecting indigenous knowledge systems and unearthing lost tales. According to Gramsci, Kire's writing is a struggle for meaning against the systems that mold our perception of the world, in addition to being a work of artistic expression.

Power and Hegemony

Hegemony, in Gramsci's view, is upheld by winning over subordinate groups through ideological and cultural leadership as opposed to coercion. Power is wielded through cultural and spiritual domains, as demonstrated by this dynamic in both of Kire's texts. Throughout *'When the River Sleeps'*, the Naga people's cosmological ideas serve as a vehicle for power. Vilie, the protagonist, illustrates how animism, taboos, and rituals affect individual decisions along with how the society operates.

Here, spiritual authority, which regulates daily life and interactions between humans, spirits, and the land, is the source of power rather than an administrative structure. Further, the community is empowered by this spiritual framework, which aids in their resistance to the outside influence of modern thought and logic. In *'Bitter Wormwood'* (2011), the balance of power turns more political.

The impacts of state aggression, military operations, and conflict in Nagaland are detailed throughout the text. In this instance, hegemony remains to be both colonial and postcolonial powers that govern indigenous lands and people. Kire exposes how people, particularly women, fight against this through subdued actions including upholding cultural customs, fostering family ties, and exhibit resilience in the face of patriarchal and authoritarian structures. Power is not a distinct force but rather permeates social, political, and spiritual spheres in both the texts. Another aspect of Kire's works relates to what may be referred to as the struggle for representation. According to Gramsci, this struggle for supremacy takes place in civil society, including in literary and other artistic forms, where opposing viewpoints compete for acceptability.

Polemics of Representation

From the literary incorporation of oral tradition, myth, and indigenous memory, Kire's texts become engaged in this conflict. *'When the River Sleeps'* (2014), functions as a type of written chronicle that converts oral traditions, ceremonies, and stories from the Naga people into writing. This calls into question the notion that oral culture is less significant or "primitive." Here, the argument is more about knowledge than politics: the text makes the case that spiritual ties to nature and animism are legitimate perspectives on the universe. *'Bitter Wormwood'* (2011), questions nationalist history by demonstrating how the government applies the terms "terrorism" and "rebellion" to defend military operations during the Nagaland conflict. Kire responds to this by emphasizing individual accounts of violence, moral decisions, and the resilience of common Naga people. By drawing attention to what lacks, the text contradicts the conventional narrative of history. Kire's strategy is to allow the story to be shaped by indigenous voices and ways of knowing.

Counterculture and Resistance

As proof of countercultural activism, *'When the River Sleeps'* (2014), and *'Bitter Wormwood'* (2011) both contradict prevailing cultural narratives. Gramsci held that in opposition to dominant ideals, subordinate groups may develop new ideas about life and society.

Native mysticism and environmental issues feature in *'When the River Sleeps'* (2014), which makes it countercultural. By emphasizing animist beliefs and myths, the text rejects modern ideas of progress that ignore traditional practices.

The assertion that ecological ties, oral traditions, and spiritual landscapes are authentic kinds of knowledge rather than holdovers from the past is countercultural. In *'Bitter Wormwood'* (2011), the unearthing of lost history demonstrates the emergence of counterculture. By employing literature to maintain cultural memory and provide an alternate perspective on history, the text challenges colonial and postcolonial neglect by highlighting the hardships and tenacity of common people under military authority. These texts reclaim Naga traditions and turn them into resistance against nationalist history, patriarchal authority, and the state. In addition to preserving cultural identity, Kire's tales address larger power dynamics in Indian and global debate.

Kire's Counter to Hegemonic "Common Sense"

Postcolonial Indian mainstream narratives often promote expansion, modernism, and reason as universal principles. Conversely, indigenous cosmologies are viewed as traditional or superstitious. Kire examines this by accentuating ecological connection and animism as the central concepts of *'When the River Sleeps'* (2014). The protagonist Vilie's voyage is considered important rather than exceptional, driven by spiritual taboos, myths, and knowledge that remain passed down through the generations. *'When the River Sleeps'* (2014), defends the legitimacy of animist rituals and oral traditions by embedding them as literary forms.

This casts emphasis on the notion that nationalist modernity or Western rationality is the sole source of truth. As demonstrated by Kire, indigenous spirituality in Naga culture has its own version of "common sense" that is both legitimate and essential to daily existence. Nationalist history in India usually presents the insurgency in Nagaland as resistance against the nation-state, making state power seem legitimate and universal. This narrative argues that suppressing indigenous resistance is essential to maintain national cohesion. Kire's *'Bitter Wormwood'* (2011), confronts this by narrating the tale through the lens of the Naga community.

By featuring individual recollections of struggle, displacement, and survival, the text illuminates the true experiences of suffering, oppression, and fortitude that are obscured by official interpretations. In this context, Kire's approach seeks to overturn the dominant "common sense" that the nation-state's values like territorial unity, military control, and a shared identity are universal. She elevates the experiences and stories of the Naga people, showing that these perspectives are essential to understanding the region rather than being seen as exceptions.

Indigenous Storytelling Structures

One key way Kire challenges dominant narratives is through the use of indigenous storytelling styles. In "When the River Sleeps," the narrative is structured like an oral story, where Vilie's journey is not based on a straight timeline but on a series of encounters with spirits, landscapes, and myths. Each part involves meetings with spirit beings, hunters, or protective women, and these scenes are like bits of a spoken story, rich with moral and spiritual lessons. This style resists the dominant belief in rational, chronological history that is central to colonial and nationalist narratives. In contrast, *'Bitter Wormwood'* (2011), uses memory as its structured principle. Through introspection, personal memories and collective memory, the story spreads until time. This fragmented structure comes from oral testimony rather than official historiography. While the "general knowledge" of the state reduces the history rebellion or rebellion for terrorism, it is rebuilt through individual voices by telling the story of Kire, offering people's history.

Comparative difference lies in loud: *'Bitter Wormwood'* (2011), uses the Tests story to argue against the official historical narratives, while *'When the River Sleeps'* (2014), using the mythical story to emphasize cosmology.

Communal Rituals

Kire's texts are rituals only cultural markers, but central forces that maintain community and identity. In *'When the River Sleeps'* (2014), the discovery of ritual frame willy around the appeasement of the soul and forbidden observation. Their encounters with spirit-land require careful adherence to ritual practices, becoming a belief that the survival is bound to respect for the cosmic order to survive. Unlike contemporary criticisms of indigenous belief as superstition, these functions depict ecological and spiritual morality.

In *'Bitter Wormwood'* (2011), rituals come in the practices of remembrance and kinship. Funerals and social occasions-and storytelling itself-often appear as ritualized occasions within the text that serve to uphold cultural unity. The actual process turns into a recital of past sufferings at family gatherings, transforming memory into a ritual of survival and continuity. It has direct content with the hegemonic erasure of insurgency from nationalist discourse by preserving it in lived, embodied forms. Whereas *'When the River Sleeps'*

(2014), emphasizes more on ritual as cosmological defense, *'Bitter Wormwood'* (2011), stresses more on the same as cultural preservation against political silence.

Ancestral Knowledge

Kire's novels raise ancestral knowledge as another form of countercultural authority. In "When the River Sleeps", ancestral voices and spiritual warnings narrate to Vilie. His whole quest for the ethereal river is delivered as a generation-to-generation transmission of enlightenment. This challenges the dominant epistemology that put ancestral faith down as unscientific. Rather, guidance from ancestors is presented as a pragmatic and vital type of knowledge that ensures survival. *'Bitter Wormwood'* (2011), reveals the memory of conflicts for centuries. The stories of existence, displacement and fighting are passed for characters, which use them as caution and lessons for the current. In this text, the memories of the ancestors of previous suffering serve as an intermediary in the knowledge of the protagonist's political pain. A method of information transmission challenges the hegemonic state narratives that want to eradicate rebel history. *'Bitter Wormwood'* (2011), presents ancestral knowledge as a historical witness, but *'When the River Sleeps'* (2014), interprets it as a spiritual universe. The two styles challenged the hegemonic history through the protection of the truth of the margins.

Conclusion

The fact that Easterine Kire's writing influenced historical and cultural contexts, it is one of the most important initiatives in contemporary Indian literature. Kire expands an alternative collection contained in indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, and history at a time when myths of national unity, development and modernization often disregard or neglect the sounds of groups of margins. Her texts reflect the worldviews of the Naga people, not as peripheral for Indian literature, but as central for the task of imagining an inclusive literary landscape.

On the basis that the major cultural criteria, whether rationalist modernity or nationalist historian writings, reflect universal truth by recovering silent history in Kire's *'Bitter Wormwood'* (2011), and confirming indigenous mysticism in *'When the River Sleeps'*. Instead, she describes the Naga epistemologies and the validity of experiences as a counter-hegemonic worldview. In doing so, her work transforms literature into a site of ideological resistance, where the so-called "Common Sense" of the ruling culture is unstable and appears alternative possibilities.

Every tale of Easterine Kire is once in conservation, polemic and cultural reorganization. It reinforces a place for indigenous voices in Indian literature, challenges official accounts to protest against major elimination, and preserves indigenous traditions, which describes them as texts. Her works serve as counter-hegemonic interventions, forcing readers to reconsider the underlying beliefs in major narratives, ensuring the ongoing prominence of instant culture. As a result, Kire secured its place as a major literary voice, whose job is not only regional, but also at the national and world level.

In contempt of the hegemonic pressures, Easterine Kire's texts make an important mission to preserve indigenous culture. Works Like *'When the River Sleeps'* reaffirm the significance of myth, animist spirituality, and ecological interconnecting elements that are often transcribed as superstitious as in previous discourses. Similarly, *'Bitter Wormwood'* (2011), Memorializes Decades of Political Violence and Trauma, offering a Counter-Narrative to State-Authored Histories that frame insurgency as illegitimate rebellion. Kire's contribution to Indian literature, not merely in expanding its thematic and regional scope, but also in redefining the boundaries of its epistemology. Kire showcases that Indian literature is not an unbroken tradition bound for major cultural values, but a place of plural and rivalry where many voices, universe and history co-exist. By promoting the subculture of Nagaland for the national and international literary view, Kire re-focused indigenous approaches and confirmed her significance to more general discussions of existence, identity and history.

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