

**Tracing Naga Culture from the Nineteenth Century to the
Twenty-First Century in Easterine Iralu's
*A Naga Village Remembered And Bitter Wormwood.***

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Received : 10th Nov. 2018

Abstract

From her first historical novel, *A Naga Village Remembered*, which brought into focus the history of the last battle between the troops of the colonial power of Britain and the native warriors of Khonoma, her works reflect a rich cultural history. Her works record how the Naga culture, tradition-bound for centuries, underwent changes as it came into contact with and under administrative control of the British imperial power. Thereafter, it faced greater challenges during the struggle for self-determination leading to decades of insurgency. This article is an attempt to highlight culture as practiced by the Nagas in Easterine Iralu's *A Naga Village Remembered* and *Bitter Wormwood* from the 19th Century to the 21st Century, focusing on the cultural evolution through the centuries.

Keywords: Culture, taboo, revenge, Christianity, education, hybrid culture, ancestral land, gun, subjugation.

Easterine Iralu, a major poet and novelist from North East India, is a gifted story teller who has published several books in English including three collections of poetry and short stories. She published the first-ever Naga novel in English which is also her first novel - *A Naga Village Remembered*. Her works dwell on presenting reality as it was and is in Nagaland. Tribal life, the colonial rule and some of its atrocities coupled with discrimination find mention in her works. She also explicitly portrays the factionalism and the ideological differences between different groups of Naga freedom fighters which led to

internecine rivalry and loss of life. She brings the complex life of the tribal society of the Nagas to the forefront from pre-colonial times to the present day.

W. Green states, "Culture is the socially transmitted system of idealized ways in knowledge and practice and belief.... Culture includes all that is given by one generation to another in society such as, knowledge, religious beliefs, law, art, moral code, customs, manners, literature, music and language etc" (S. Thong 2012, 8). Culture "...has several properties: it is shared, learned, symbolic, transmitted cross-generationally, adaptive, and integrated. The

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'shared' aspect of culture means that it is a social phenomenon..." (Jamir 2015, 2). Thus, Thong writes that Naga Culture is "... way of life of the Nagas, the inherited behaviors and thoughts of their fore-fathers, passed on to the new generation, through oral traditions, and day to day practices and conservative life styles-in the form of customs, traditions, norms, values ...acquired through the process of time, change, innovation, evolution and growth; contact, diffusion, integration, imitation and acculturation" (Thong 2012, 8). Easterine writes with an in-depth understanding and knowledge of Naga culture from the Nineteenth through the Twenty First Century with its sociological changes, unfolding to the world a culture that was hidden in the North Eastern hills of India.

Since time immemorial, there is no record of the Nagas being subjugated. They were always independent and as Bendangangshi writes, it was "...an incontrovertible fact of history and admits of no argument." (Bendangangshi 2000,37). The Nagas and the Ahoms had contact but they both kept their way of living without influencing the other. When the British were necessitated to open a route that could connect Manipur with Assam Valley, they had to confront the Nagas. This was because the route had to pass through the Naga territory. The native people were hostile and consequently, battles followed. It eventually led to their subjugation. Therefore, the place was annexed to British India in the 19th Century. An Administrative Centre was set up by the British in Kohima by 1878. Likewise, a sub-centre was set up in Wokha in 1875. Another sub-centre was set up in Ao-Naga Area in 1889. A control Area was set up in the Sumi-Naga territory in 1887.

Political officers were appointed by the British for the administration of the Naga Hills Districts. However, the village chieftains and the elders were entrusted for the civic needs and the overall welfare of the villagers. With the establishment of the Naga Hills as a colony, the Inter-village rivalry and head-hunting practice was soon eroded. However, it is to be noted that the north-eastern part of the Naga territory bordering Burma remained independent until India got its independence from the British Empire.

A great number of young men from the Naga Hills were taken in as 'labour corps' to help the British against the Germans during World War I. World War II also saw many Nagas taking part in it as they defended the allied nations. Their own land fell under threat from the Japanese and this cost many precious lives. The Nagas were enrolled in the labour Corps (L.C) and this was made compulsory. Once the war was over, a huge amount of arms which were left behind by the Japanese and the allied forces were collected and used by the Nagas in their struggle for Independence from India.

During the Second World War, A.Z. Phizo spread the message of Naga liberation. A sense of brotherhood was awakened among the various Naga tribes. The Naga Hills District Tribal Council (NHDTTC) was eventually formed which was started by Sir Charles Pawsey in 1945.

The Naga Hills District Tribal Council changed its name in March 1946 to the Naga National Council. The Naga people were represented by them. When the Cabinet Mission was sent to India in April 1946, they waited upon them in New Delhi. The Nagas voiced out their

sentiments and told them that arbitrary decisions made by the British for them was unacceptable and that recommendations needed consultation with them. Different Naga tribes were represented on the principle of proportional representation in the council. Thong writes that "Every Naga citizen Was supposed to be a member of the N.N.C. and every family, contributed voluntarily toward the maintenance of the council" (Thong 2012 149).

The then Governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari, acting on the strength of the Constituent Assembly of India, made a new agreement with the NNC in 1947 in Kohima which carved out the Agreement, known as the 9-Point Agreement. It resulted in an increased administrative control of the NNC. The 9-Point Agreement covered the Judicial, the Executive and the Legislative powers as well as land, taxation, boundaries, Arms Act, regulations and the period of agreement. In spite of all the talks, "one evening, Sir Akbar Hydari warned several Naga leaders that if the Nagas refused to join the Indian Union, India would be compelled to use her force against the Nagas" (Bendangangshi 2000, 56).

In order to know the position of the 9-Point Agreement of June, 1947, a Naga delegation went to meet the Governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari in Shillong on the month of May, 1948. They were informed that it will be included in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India but not in the Constitution of India. However, when a three-man delegation of NNC went to meet the representatives of the Government of India in Shillong on November 1949, they were told by Sri Gopinath Bordoloi that the Agreement was not recognized by the Government of

India although multiple assurances were given earlier to the Nagas. Such moves by the Indian Government only alienated the people.

The Agreement being nullified, the Nagas were told that all the provisions of the 9-Point Agreement were incorporated into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. However, the deal being unacceptable, the NNC in its session on December 30, 1949, decided to establish a separate Sovereign State of Nagaland. This decision was made known to the Government of India, the U.N.O. and the foreign ambassadors in New Delhi.

In 1958, the second Naga People's Convention was held. Two bodies were constituted, namely, the Select Committee and a Liaison Committee. For preparing the Sixteen-Point Proposal, a Draft Committee was constituted by the former. Consequently, the state of Nagaland was carved out under the Union Republic of India on 1st December, 1963.

The Nagas were bent on self-determination for their future. However, as the NNC demanded for an independent Nagaland, it was "...not acceptable at all to the Government of independent India with the result that a sort of tussle between the leaders of the NNC and the Government of India began soon after India's independence..." (Singh 2004, 39). As Singh says,

...the Naga politics caught in whirlpool of two cross currents. One was the separatist tendency of the Naga political leaders who wanted independent Nagaland and another was the desire of the Indian political leaders to keep the Naga Hills an integral part of Indian political system and assimilate the Naga people in the mainstream of the Indian nationalism. The President of the NNC, Mr. A.Z. Phizo, took the lead of Naga

National Movement and organized the people to participate in freedom struggle...the Government of India applied the policy of persuasion to accept the constitutional provisions for the district of Naga Hills on the one hand, and exercised the armed force to suppress the Naga freedom movement on the other. Such conflicting situation led the Naga Hills towards armed conflicts causing loss of lives... (43-44).

Singh writes, "Once insurgency took place in Nagaland, neither the constitutional provisions for the Naga's autonomies nor the efforts applied by the Indian leaders to persuade the extremists to accept the mainstream of Indian nationalism could produce desired results with the result that the armed tussle continued taking thousands of lives of the Naga people and Indian jawans" (vii).

Before the advent of the European colonizers, Nagas had a rich tribal culture, one that was deeply connected with the land that they inhabited. They were basically farmers and almost every aspect of their lives rotated around their occupation. However, they met with the colonizers who wanted to occupy their lands and the resources which were very crucial to the survival of the tribes. Their lives had an impact on the economic front. The social and the political facets also went through changes brought about largely by the introduction of Education and Christianity. Benjongkumba writes, "In Naga society the beginning of a new era can be traced back to the year 1872, when the American missionaries landed in the Naga soil" (Benjongkumba 2014, 27). Imsong records, "The motives of the Christian missionaries were purely evangelization and preaching the gospel...The introduction of education,

church structure, and a common language all helped to express ethnic Naga identity..." (Imsong 2011, 62). Odyuo states that "Most of the Nagas today are no longer illiterate; even if they are, they are no longer confined to an unchanging world" (Heneise 2014,53). Thus, coupled with the coloniser's zeal for territorial occupation and administrative control over the Naga Hills, the American missionaries' efforts to evangelize the natives and make them literate brought about huge structural changes. Along with new influences coming in from outside, the struggle for independence altered the lives of the natives. Such changes which were taking place at a large scale eroded much of the age-old traditions and were replaced by a hybrid culture. The cultural transition that the society underwent was documented through the writings of Easterine Iralu Kire.

Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered* traces the transition of the Nagas from an enclosed tribal life to the colonial rule along with the new faith. These factors changed the socio-cultural life to such a degree that it could never go back to the way it was. This transition takes place through three generations; Kovi, Levi and Sato.

The narrative begins with a view of the village life through the eyes of Kovi, immersed in a blanket of age-old cultural practices:"Even as he walked outside in the morning he saw the women returning in small groups with their carrying baskets stacked with firewood...Ah, the old ways are good, he thought, our women do us proud when they show themselves so eager to keep the teachings of their fathers" (Iralu 2003,1). The culturally handed-down mind-set of the people is religiously followed without questioning.

The initial pages of the novel unfold before us the rich cultural texture when we find Kovi being informed by the messenger about the meeting which was to be held in the upper *thou*, or, the community hall. We are informed that “Many men never told their wives about the meetings of the clan and the women could only guess at what went on in the highly secretive all-men meets....” (Iralu 2003, 2). In the meeting, Pelhu of the Merhu clan addresses the gathered men carefully and narrates the events that led to the night's meeting. “Garipheju was noted for its brave warriors which was primarily why Khonoma had decided to go on an expedition against that famous village”(3). This village had killed many of the Khonoma warriors in the last battle. Here, what is brought to the forefront is the love of war by the men of this little village and how proud they were of their village and what it stood for among the Nagas. As the story eventually unfolds, we come to know more of the constant battles that the men of different villages and beyond engaged themselves with. This would set the tone for their prestige and honour among the villages. Another important aspect that this meeting throws up is the culture of revenge. “This meeting has been called to find out when are we going on the warpath to avenge our dead” (3). Another incident during the battle against the colonialists show the men of Khonoma being bound to take revenge even at the most difficult times: “However, while holding off the British troops, 55 warriors marched through the Zeliang territories into Assam, raided the Baladhan tea garden, killing Mr. Blyth, the manager, and 16 of his labourers.... the elders explained that this raid on a British territory and its subjects was

necessary because the men of Khonoma were culturally bound to avenge their fallen men” (85). Revenge was connected with honour as “A man is not a man if you let another man kill your kin and torch your houses and you do nothing about it”. They called such men “Thenumia”, a term used in a derogatory manner. As the speaker in the *thou* remarks, this drives the men to battle and earn ornaments of war. It, in turn, made it easier for the young men to approach and pay suit to the young women as it showed that he was capable of protecting her from the enemies.

An important cultural practice was that of the taboo factor. “The Tenyimia make no distinctions between secular and religious life....Religious life centers around the taboo and the taboo factor operates very strongly in the socio-religious life of the Tenyimia “(Iralu 2000,72). When Kovi's young wife died while giving birth, it became a taboo to mourn her death. “No, no mourning for a Lashu death, it is taboo” (Iralu 2003, 4). In the Tenyimia culture, it was believed that if this taboo was broken, then , one will meet the same fate. Therefore,” The strictest of taboos was upon the Lashu death. No mourning of the dead” (5). As Easterine Iralu writes in *Folk Elements in Achebe; A Comparative Study of Ibo Culture and Tenyimia Culture*, the displeasure of the spirit world is provoked by wrong actions and immoral actions. She adds,“The taboos operates to ensure that members of the village community do not disrupt the life of the society”(Iralu 2000, 72).

Thehou occupied a very important part of the lives of this little warrior-village. Here, through oral narration, the younger men “came to learn the stories of the village. It was good to be called a *thou no*, a child of

the *thehou*-it meant that such a person was well-versed in the stories and customs of the village”(Iralu 2003, 6). Talk at this place often dwelled “...round what was called man's talk” (6). This domain was only for the men folk.

As the novel progresses, we get a glimpse of history; the missionaries coming to Nagaland and bringing Christianity and education to the native people. Before the new faith was introduced to the people, they “...were animists by faith...These religious faiths helped them not only to understand the environment and universe but also to shape their social and cultural life” (Singh 2004,8). However, along with the new faith came a new culture which started influencing and transforming the age-old tribal culture, consequently producing a hybrid culture. As Bendangangshi writes, “...the first Naga Christian Church came into being on 23rd December, 1872 marking the dawn of a new era of peace and good will...their new faith quickly swallowed the old religion within half a century and along with it head hunting disappeared”(Bendangangshi 2000, 20).

Sato, Levi's son is sent by him to study in the Mission School run by Dr. Sidney Rivenburg in Kohima. He tells his son, “Do you know that I hoped you would learn the secret of his power and come back to teach me his art in battle?” (Iralu 2003, 102). However, Rivenburg had “...a deep commitment to soul saving which he shared with his wife...” (94). He was also “...austere in his dealings with the students and punctilious about their academic and moral education” (94). Eventually, Sato found himself attracted towards the “... gentleness of the man Chaha

called *Isu*...” and he longed to be back at the school every time he went to his village. He found himself “...repulsing the idea of being initiated into the religion of his father and grandfather” (97). Levi, on the other hand, was worried that his son was not yet initiated and was getting impatient. Sato was torn on this issue between his father and Chaha as the latter would not approve of this act. It is only after Nisier's baptism that he decides to be a follower of *Isu*, abandoning the old religion, one that was intimately connected with the socio-political life of the village. In spite of his decision, he could not escape the initiation as he feared his warrior father. Initially, he was torn between the two almost equal forces but as he got initiated, peace enters his heart “...the assurance that what he had done was not a mistake at all, but in a wonderful way, a fulfillment of a destiny that was just beginning to unfold” (99). Sato was convinced that his forefather's religion and the new religion were not so opposed to each other. “He thought of *Isu* on the cross as a chicken sacrifice much greater than all the chicken sacrifices the Angamis had made” (99).He goes on to contemplate,”How Sato wished that his father would come to see that the new religion was really a fulfillment of the old-answering the questions that the old was struggling with and giving meaning to the feasts and to life as the village knew it and lived it” (100). However, Levi was unable to adapt to the new religion till his death. Sato's mother Peno could never reconcile herself to the new religion as a sign of faithfulness to her husband although she was attracted to it. Her death at the end of the novel is symbolic of the death of the old order, giving way to the new hybrid culture that had seeped in gradually.

In *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), yet another historical novel, we witness this hybrid culture, a product of the intermingling of the old and the new culture. The narration traces the story of Moselie from his birth in the middle of the Twentieth Century until his death in the early Twenty-First Century. After Vilau gives birth to her son, Moselie, she tells the mid-wife that she did have a dream last night that signified that she was going to give birth to her child that day. The importance given to dreams is an age old belief that has survived in the Naga culture. The midwife exclaims, “Look at that wide forehead! It means he is going to wield a spear/'Or a gun', said his mother thoughtfully” (Kire 2011,18). He was born and raised up during a time when the gun culture was at its peak. His mother's words were nothing short of reality. As Moses grew up, he saw the atrocities that the Nagas experienced in the hands of the Indian army and the loss of life around him. A shooting takes place in Kohima town which consequently leads to closure of the school as the environment was deemed to be too dangerous for children to be “...walking to and from school”(82). A few days after this incident, a woman went missing. In accordance with the culture, a group of thirty men went searching for her with their daos, which is evocative of *A Naga Village Remembered*, where the community goes to search for a man who did not return home. “The missing woman had been raped and murdered and decapitated. There was great anger at her funeral. Men spoke loudly of revenge and no one quieted them because this had never happened before” (82). Here, what is highlighted is the revenge culture that has been symbolic of

manliness and honor for ages in Naga culture. This was the immediate incident that propelled Mose and his friend Neituo to join the “Naga Underground” (83). The larger picture was the love of land and its freedom from a yoke from without that pushed Mose and the other Nagas to fight against it. An Underground officer shouts at trainees on answering a question, “The Indians may have more men and more guns, but this is our ancestral land to which we are bonded. The Indian soldier does not feel for the land as we do. Sooner or later we will defeat them” (95). When the former takes permission from his mother, “Vilau remembered what the midwife had said at Mose's birth. 'This one is going to be a warrior one day'....” As it was taught and handed down through generations, she knew that a woman could not stand between a man and his destiny, even if he was her son, which echoes *A Naga Village Remembered* where the warriors were never stopped by their women as they went on expeditions. Mose, Neituo and the other trainees faced a difficult life as “Life in the Underground was rigorous.... After the period of physical training, they learned to use rifles, running with them and stopping to load them quickly. They never shot a bullet. One, because the sound would reveal their whereabouts, and two, because they had very limited supplies of ammunitions” (88). This warfare was not restricted to men alone, as in the olden days. Even women wielded guns. “Both Mose and Neituo were very surprised to see girls amongst the cadres”(86). There was a particular girl named Neilhounuo who was nicknamed as the “rifle girl” as she excelled in handling a rifle.

In the year 2007, when the protagonist had become an older man, he encountered a murder at the market. Just before the killer shot at his victim, he hissed at Mose, “Get out of the way, old man!”(7). He was roughly pushed aside by the killer's hand. This showed that the respect that one shows to an elder in Naga culture was being eaten away slowly by the current socio-political scenario. Also, killing one's own brethren became the order of the day for conflicting underground groups. Such incidents were an anachronism in Mose's eyes as Easterine Iralu notes: “All life is sacred in the Tenyimia world-view “(Iralu 2000, 72). As Mose remarks, “We grew up learning to respect life. Taboo breakers will come to a terrible end...” (Iralu 2011, 152). It appeared that, there was a lack of value for human life. It was slowly turning into a culture of violence with no respect for the elders and life itself. When the Naga Students Federation called for a rally to protest against the extension of the Disturbed Area belt from 5 kms to 20 kms along the Indo-Myanmar border, the police were pelted with stones by some of the students. This led them to fire at the students which quickly led to the death of two students. “ 'What's happening to us?' the women were heard wailing on the streets of Kohima.... 'We' began Neituo ominously, 'are dying. That's what is wrong with us....Human life is becoming worthless and utterly dispensable'” (151).

Culturally, taboos brought about an order in the socio-economic aspects of the people in earlier times. In the present time, it was less of the taboos and more of the enforcement of law and order as dictated by the administration that kept the society on its toes. As Neituo remarks, “We are losing all human decency

and sense of taboo.... 'Modern society has no room for the taboos anymore, Mose. It's just us old timers who think of things like that' ” (152) The fear that by breaking a taboo, the spirits would be angered and that a bad thing will befall the one who broke it kept the people in check. The novel reveals that the fear of what the Indian army would do if the local people displeased them kept them in constant check. The army “...went to each house in the village to do a head count...If any male members were in the Underground, they were to make a separate list.... The villagers fearfully submitted their names” (84). Whenever the Underground attacked the army, the civilians were the “soft targets”; they were at the receiving end. “The army had long discovered that terrorizing the villagers could yield some information on the undergrounds. Village elders were targeted and tortured until they confessed or died from the torture” (93). Those villagers who gave food to the Underground were tortured and were maimed for life. Many died. Thus, the fear psychosis was spread among the Naga people.

In *Bitter Wormwood*, the protagonist was a Christian, a religion introduced and propagated by the British missionaries initially. The old religion as practiced by the forefathers was intimately connected with the socio-economic life of the people. Iralu writes, “The Tenyimia make no distinctions between secular and religious life.... Communal and spiritual harmony is the goal of Tenyimia society which is attainable, it is believed, when all the taboos are carefully observed and the creator is worshipped in the proper reverential manner and the spirits are

also properly propitiated”(Iralu 2000, 72). But the change of religion brought many changes to the old culture. For instance, the people looked up to the Christian God for protection and also feared His punishment for a wrong-doing. In the most crucial time of Moses’s life, when he felt” vulnerable in a way he had never felt in his years in the underground”, he says, “The Lord will give me my due punishment if I have erred” (Iralu 2011, 129). This was a rare spiritual confiding which surprised his wife.

Mose, around whom the novel rotates, held an idealistic view which ultimately led to his death: “They continued to be Mose the idealist, and Neituo the realist, as they called themselves” (120). As his grandson Neibou testifies, “I remembered how he used to say that we fight wars in order to protect ourselves, not to force our will on others. The man who takes up the gun, must be sure he does it for the right reasons. That reason, he said, should be love, not hate” (237). When Mose heard a commotion outside his house, he saw that it was Jitu, the Bihari boy who was being beaten up by strangers. Thus, Mose, with the culture of his forefathers ingrained in him, sought to protect the victim. In a tragic turn of events, he was shot at and “Mose died instantly” (224). Once this happened, his clansmen were “....so upset over Grandfather's death that they began to plot to find the two men and kill them” (236). This was what was required of the clansmen culturally as “We are still allowing ourselves to be bound by cultural dictates and the culture of the conflict itself” (236). However, the family asked their village council to step in and take control of the situation. Neibou

states, “It would have been a manly thing to just take a gun and shoot somebody in revenge” (236). It was his grandfather's teachings that stopped him from going the violent path as he believed that it would have only dishonored the latter's memory. On being asked by her grandson whether he had failed in his duty for not avenging his grandfather, Neilhounuo replies, “That is the old culture, my child. We cannot live like that anymore. It will destroy us. Before our people came to Jisu, we did that. But now, we are to take our burdens to Jisu and leave it with him. Some men take it upon themselves to minister judgement. When they do that, nothing good can come of it. Leave it with Jisu, I say” (241). It should be noted that revenge, a duty to be fulfilled, was being culturally upheld in *A Naga Village Remembered*, whereas, it was gently brushed aside by the new culture and the new religion in Bitter Wormwood.

When Khrienuo gave her grandson the name 'Moselie', which meant “....one-who-will-meet-life-without-guile....It means that he will never plot to harm another person” (17), it foretold how his life would be. Eventually, Neibou follows suit. When his grandson returns from Delhi and visits his grave, Neituo recalls what the pastor had said about forgiveness and adds, “I have forgiven..’ Neibou replied, 'not so much the men...but the act itself’ ” (242). Thus, a culture of violence was being slowly replaced by a culture of forgiveness, which is intimately connected with the new religion.

As Neituo bent to pluck a leaf of a plant that grew beside the grave, he explains that it was called bitter wormwood and adds, “When I

was young, Grandfather would pluck that and put it behind my ear on our way to the forest. ' That will keep the bad spirits away from you....' "(243). Rakesh, his friend from Delhi comments, "I guess the Nagas of today have forgotten to use it" (243). To this, he replies, "We sure could do with some of that old magic now" (243). As the novel ends, Neituo tucks the leaf behind his ear and symbolically walks into the lighted door.

The novel, which sheds light on the Indo-Naga conflict, is a stirring insight on how the decades' long freedom struggle has changed the lives of the common people in Nagaland. Despite a grim situation, the people had not lost hope for a brighter future where the culture of violence and destruction was transforming slowly to love of peace and forgiveness. This novel chronicles the transition of the change in values, giving birth to new cultures to adapt to and intermingle with the old.

Besides *A Naga Village Remembered* and *Bitter Wormwood*, her other works like *Mari*, *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *When the River Sleeps* harps on the rich cultural heritage of the Nagas while throwing light on the changes that was seeping into the social fabric. *Mari*, Iralu's bestselling novel explores the true story of a young mother who after losing her fiancé in the war bravely makes the decision to live on for her child. In doing so, she finds happiness again. It also sheds light on some unknown facets of the World War II, a lesser known but ferocious battle fought against the Japanese troops in Nagaland. While doing so, the novelist paints a faithful picture of the evolution of the Naga society in all aspects. *Mari* narrates, "Our little town was the

headquarters for the British administrative office in the Naga Hills"(Kire 2010,3). She narrates a little ahead, "we also stored stacks of magazines with pictures of the royal family and movie stars" (11). *A Terrible Matriarchy* sheds light on the position of women that was culturally handed down through generations and the changes that were taking place through the arrival of Western Education. A society that once relied on the oral system of imparting education had taken to reading and writing due to the advent of education which came along with Christianity. Imti narrates, "...late Imtilepden was one of the very few local teachers at Impur Mission Middle English school at that time..."(Imti 1988,1). In the novel, the protagonist manages to go to school despite her grandmother not wanting her to go. She narrates, "School was the best thing that could have ever happened to me" (Kire 2007, 31). *When the River Sleeps* has Vilie, a lone hunter, as the protagonist who sets out to find a stone from a river which will bring him untold power. This quest brings him face to face with unquiet spirits, vengeful sorceresses and other dangerous enemies on his trail, consequently, explicitly bringing out the rich cultural beliefs of the Nagas while throwing light on the new administration that had come to stay in the Naga Hills: "The Forest department asked if he would like to become the official protector of the rare tragopan that liked to nest in Vilie's part of the forest. He agreed to this as well and they paid him a small salary in addition to monthly rations of rice and salt, tea and sugar. Sometimes they would add a bottle of rum"(Kire 2014,4).

In her writing, Easterine Iralu Kire unveils a deep respect for the age old traditions of her

ancestors bringing forth stories that are a product of the culture itself. In doing so, she has captivated the imagination of the modern readers. Coupled with this, she portrays how the age-old culture of the Nagas is being precipitously thrown into an evolution by coming face to face with colonialism and Christianity along with Western education.

Unable to go back to the purity of the culture that was once the very life of the people, Kire's works show that the Nagas of the Twenty-first Century, having imbibed new cultural values, ideas and meanings, have balanced the old with the new, consequently, giving birth to a hybrid culture.

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