

**INTERPRETING ONE'S HISTORY AND SOCIETY: A STUDY OF
EASTERINE KIRE'S NOVELS**

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MIZORAM UNIVERSITY**

INTERPRETING ONE'S HISTORY AND SOCIETY: A STUDY OF
EASTERINE KIRE'S NOVELS

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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DECLARATION

I, Chingbiakmawi, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the result of the work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis for the award of any degree to me, or to anybody else to the best of my knowledge, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University or Institute.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Interpreting One’s History and Society: A Study of Easterine Kire’s Novels” written by Chingbiakmawi has been written under my supervision.

She has fulfilled all the required norms laid down under the Ph.D. Regulations of Mizoram University. The thesis is the result of her own investigations. Neither the thesis as a whole or any part of it was ever submitted to any other University for any research degree.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ANVR</i>	<i>: A Naga Village Remembered</i>
<i>ATM</i>	<i>: A Terrible Matriarchy</i>
<i>LOH</i>	<i>: Life on Hold</i>
<i>BW</i>	<i>: Bitter Wormwood</i>
<i>WTRS</i>	<i>: When the River Sleeps</i>

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Nagaland as well as its sister states of the region are, more often than not, absent from any mainstream discourse on literature, though news of the instability of its political situation in national and international media is a frequent occurrence. Nagas in Nagaland and Nagas in newspaper pages and other medium of social media can be quite contradictory at times. This is mainly because the insiders seldom have the platform to narrate their story(s). This thesis attempts to give an interpretation of Naga history and society as interpreted through the novels, of a woman writer from Nagaland, Easterine Kire (henceforth referred to as Easterine) who was born in 1959.

The term ‘interpreting’ (as used in the title of the thesis) or ‘interpretation’ in the theoretical sense generally means “a formulation of the principles and methods involved in getting at the meaning of all written texts, including legal, historical, and literary as well as biblical texts” (Adams and Harpham, 178). The theory of interpretation was first formulated by German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) in 1819. According to him the theory of general hermeneutics is the art of understanding texts of every kind. Schleiermacher’s views were further developed by some notable critics like Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), E.D. Hirsch (1928-), Jay F. Rosenberg (1942-2008) and Charles Travis (1943-) among others. Though they conceived diverse opinions on the subject, their main standpoint is that there is an intended meaning in a text determined by the author. A departure from this author-oriented view of a determinate intended meaning happens with Structural and Poststructural theories. These new theories reject control of interpretation by reference to the author. The phenomenon does not designate one critical theory but rather focuses on the process of reading a literary text called ‘reader-response criticism.’ Reader-

response critics propound that the meanings of a text are the ‘production’ or ‘creation’ of the individual reader, hence there is no one correct meaning for all readers. Notable critics of this criticism are Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007), Jonathan Culler (1944-), Stanley Fish(1938-), and others.

Therefore, ‘interpretation’ as a literary term mainly signifies the derivation of the meaning(s) of a text (intended by the author or derived by the reader). However, in this thesis, the act of writing itself is considered as a process of interpretation. Accordingly, Easterine is interpreting Naga experiences down the ages through her creative works.

Easterine, a prolific Naga writer of the Angami Naga tribe has so far, authored more than 20 books in English to her credit consisting of poetry, fiction and non-fiction works as well as books for children, several of which have been translated into Norwegian, Croatian, Uzbek and German languages. This shows that her readership covers not only the national but international sphere as well. In 2011 she was awarded the “Governor’s Medal for Excellence in Naga Literature” and the “Catalan PEN International Free Voice Award.” In 2016 she won “The Hindu Literary Prize” for her novel *When the River Sleeps*. Again, in 2017 her novel *Son of the Thundercloud* was awarded “Book of the Year” by Tata Literature Live 2017, and the same novel won Sahitya Akademi’s children specific award “The Sahitya Bal Puraskar” in 2018. Her writings include folktales, children stories, essays, poetry and novels, and she is also well known for her jazz poetry which she performs with her band, *Jazzpoesi*. Aged 22 in 1982, she published her first volume of poems, *Kelhoukevira*. It was the first volume of poetry written in English published by a Naga poet. Her historical novel, *A Naga Village Remembered*, published in 2003 was again the first novel in English by a Naga writer. Six novels written by Easterine are selected for study in this research. They are:

1. *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003)

2. *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007)
3. *Mari* (2010)
4. *Life on Hold* (2011)
5. *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), and
6. *When the River Sleeps* (2014)

The selected works are studied as both historical and sociological novels. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* (2003) defines “historical novel” as:

A novel that makes use of historical personages or events in a fictitious narrative. True-to-life elements may be added to lend a sense of authenticity to the novel, but in serious examples of this **genre**, historical events, processes, the issues are central to the storyline rather than providing peripheral or decorative touches. Historical novels are often vehicles for their authors’ insights into historical figures and their influences or into the causes and consequences of historical events, changes or movements. (201)

The same dictionary defines “sociological novel” as:

A novel detailing the political and economic conditions prevalent during the period in which the work is set. Sometimes called a *problem novel*, *social novel*, or *thesis novel*, a sociological novel usually implicitly or explicitly advocates some kind of social or political changes. (449)

The selected novels indeed deal with history of the Nagas and their society in one way or the other; for instance *A Naga Village Remembered* is an account of the last battle between the colonial forces of Britain and the little warrior village of Khonoma in the year 1879. *Life on Hold* and *Bitter Wormwood* are about Naga society during the troubled years of their freedom struggle, which covers the decades following Indian

independence in 1947. Again, *A Terrible Matriarchy* is a story of the patriarchal structure of Naga society which is underlined by a very strong matriarchy. The book contains flashbacks into the Naga past, a colonial history under British administration, the Second World War and the Japanese invasion as well as the struggle for freedom of the Nagas after Indian independence. *Mari* is the story of a young Naga girl in Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, caught in the midst of the terrible Second World War. Lastly, in *When the River Sleeps*, Easterine Kire transports her reader to the remote mountains of Nagaland in northeastern India, a place alive with natural wonder and supernatural enchantment. The novel is unmistakably a Naga story in its sense of place, time, and oral traditions. A brief discussion of the Naga history and society is given in the following paragraphs. This will better situate both the Nagas and the novels under study in this thesis.

The term ‘Naga’ is in fact an exonym and its derivation is obscure. There are several theories regarding the origin of the term. It is believed that the name ‘Naga’ was given to the Tibeto-Mongolian settlers who occupied the territory northeast of the Brahmaputra River and the Irrawady River of upper Burma by the plains people of Assam and Bengal (Elwin, *Nagaland* 406). While John Owen in *Notes on the Naga Tribes: In Communication with Assam* (1844) writes:

The word “*Naga*,” (a Sanskrit one) appears to be identical with “snake” – whence perhaps *Naja*, applied by Zoologists to the Cobra or hooded snake; for, on the authority of a good Sanskrit scholar, it may be translated not only into a snake, but a swiftly travelling one too, a derogatory term applied in all probability by the natives of the plains to them, from their notoriously shy, stealthy habits, and wandering life. Not recognizing the word themselves,

makes it the more probable, as they themselves distinguish one another by other appellations.... (3)

Again, J.H. Hutton believed that “the word “Naga” ... is merely a European lengthening of the Assamese “naga” (pronounced “noga”)” or Hindustani “nanga” meaning “naked” (5).

At the same time, it is important to note that the people did not identify themselves as “Naga” until other people called them so. This is clarified by R.R. Shimray in his book *Origin and Culture of Nagas* (1985). He writes:

When the Japanese retreated from Kohima during the Second World War, they passed through my village day and night like floods...

... The earlier batches had been crossing the village peacefully for the last many weeks in 1945 summer but this last one did not listen to the pleadings of the village Elders and made forced entry into the houses. They knocked at the door of my house and said “NAGA, NAGA.” My father put a strong beam of wood against the door and refused to open. Now they shouted louder ‘NAGA, NAGA, NAGA,’ What’s that NAKA NAKA! I said to myself. My father too did not know. One of the local interpreters later on told me that we were known as ‘NAGAS’ and we were ‘NAGAS.’ I said “NO, we are TANGKHULS.” He touched my shoulder with a smile and said “TANGKHULS are also NAGAS.” As a boy, I could not reconcile with the name. It is difficult to say as to when the word ‘NAGA’ came into existence. (39)

R.R. Shimray, while elucidating on different theories on the origin of the term “naga” gives another possible theory. He writes:

The most plausible theory as to the origin of the word 'NAGA' is one which has Burmese connections as the Nagas had migrated from Burma to the present hill country... The Nagas, men and women, had the tradition of making holes in the ears for ear decorations. The Burmese called that group of people with holes in ears as 'NA KA' meaning pierced ears. The anglicised word for NAKA became NAGA. (41)

In fact there are many theories regarding the origin of the term. "However" as R.R. Shimray asserts, "much as the Nagas might wish to establish once and for all the origin of the word 'NAGA', it is for sure that many more scholars will in future do research on this particular subject" (42). Whatever may be the origin, the term is a generic name given to several ethnic groups sharing common historical roots and socio-cultural, political and economic affinity but speaking distinct languages, inhabiting the northeastern states of India like Nagaland and Manipur and the western border of Myanmar. Physically, the Nagas are predominantly Mongoloid and linguistically all the languages of the Nagas belong to a large language family called Sino-Tibetan.

The Naga society is egalitarian and traditionally they lived in a close knit village. Villages were composed of a number of clan territories or khels. Each village is a well-defined entity with distinct land demarcation from neighbouring villages and a dialect which foster a strong sense of social solidarity within the village. The people of the village are held together by social, economic, political and ritual ties. There are fourteen major tribes in Nagaland viz.: (1) Angami (2) Ao (3) Chang (4) Chakhesang (5) Khiamniungan (6) Konyak (7) Lotha (8) Phom (9) Pochury (10) Rengma (11) Sangtam (12) Sema (13) Yimchungru and (14) Zeliang, and as many as forty eight dialects spoken within these 14 major tribes in the multi-lingual Naga society according to 2001

census (Nyekha). About the Nagas, Verrier Elwin in “Nagaland: A Fine People” (1961) writes:

They are an Indo-Mongoloid folk living in the north-eastern of India, divided into over a dozen major tribes, speaking more than a dozen languages and dialects, formerly notorious for head-hunting, which is almost the only thing most people know about them, but today awake and stirring, anxious to progress. They are a fine people of whom their country is proud. (314-315)

In spite of their differences in language use and other factors, Naga scholars today are asserting the one-ness of the many Naga tribes. Temsula Ao writes:

When we look deep into our hearts and try to compare ourselves with our fellow Nagas, we come to the realization that we do share an intrinsic one-ness in our way of thinking and living. That is why, in spite of the many surface differences we have continued to exist as a coherent group of people. (9)

Mar Imsong also articulates the common bonds holding the Nagas together in these words: “Their common religiosity and spirituality, their common reverence for the land as sacred and as a place of their origin bolster the Nagas’ common foundation as an ethnic group” (31). Hewasa and Venusa Tinyi too assert:

The fact that various Naga groups/tribes differ in language or dress or in certain traditional and cultural aspects does not mean that we are ethnically different people...Our visible differences on the basis of which we construct our modern tribal and Naga identities emerge as artificial and immaterial

when compared to ground reality values and notions that underlie our common identity. (qtd. in Ao, 10)

Though Easterine's characters are mainly from the Angami tribe and the society in which the novels are set in is predominantly Angami society, due to the similarities and affinities with all the other Naga tribes, the term 'Naga' will be used in this research to denote the people, their history and society as a whole, and references will be stated when particular cultural or other distinctive traits of certain Naga tribes are mentioned.

On the other hand, Nagas are quintessentially a hill people. They are known to have migrated southward to their present settlement which is shown by the fact that they belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race and have been grouped with the Tibeto-Burman language family. Charles Chasie in his book *The Naga Imbrolio (A Personal Perspective)* (2005) asserts:

Perhaps, the possible migratory routes of the Nagas, and legends, would shed more light. From all accounts, the Nagas reached their present geographical locations from, possibly, three eastern routes: one from the southeast and south to north, one from straight across the Irrawady-Salween-Chindwin region and a possible third from the northeast. But all the routes come through present-day Myanmar... But, where did they come from before reaching Myanmar? Certainly, everything points north. (30)

Today, the Nagas are spread throughout the Indian states of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, and parts of Burma. The majority of them live in Nagaland, with approximately nineteen lakhs population, according to 2011 census, and it is with this Naga population that this thesis is mainly concerned with.

The people of the hills and of the plains or valleys are culturally and linguistically different. “The geographical distinctiveness of the hills and the plains is matched by the cultural distinctiveness of their respective populations” (Jackobs 9). The tribal Nagas share little in terms of politics, economics, religion and culture with the early Plains kingdom of India and Burma. Prior to the introduction of script, there were no written evidence of the history of the Nagas, still, each tribe of the Nagas had and still have oral lore(s) of their origin and migration to their present settlement which are basically handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation.

With regards to the past history of the Nagas, it is what J.H. Hutton said, “The history of how the Naga tribes came precisely to occupy their present position has, of course, passed into the dim obscurity of vague traditions” (6). Here, “vague traditions” seems derogatory, but the rich oral traditions of the Nagas which features their past history are crucial to obtain their past history as they were primarily an ‘oral culture’. J.H. Hutton also continues to write, “But enough of them remain to give some indication of the course which the migration took” (6).

Oral culture or the term “orality” according to *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory* (2010) “describes a condition of society in which speaking and listening form the only or principal channel through which linguistic communication takes place” (512). Walter J Ong also defines oral culture as “a culture with no knowledge whatsoever of writing or even of the possibility of writing” (31). The perception of oral cultures on writing according to Walter J Ong is “A present-day literate usually assumes that written records have more force than spoken words... Earlier cultures that knew literacy but had not fully interiorized it, have often assumed quite the opposite... Witnesses were *prima facie* more credible than text because they could be challenged and made to defend their statements, whereas text could not” (95). Easterine reflects

this oral culture of the Naga past in *A Naga Village Remembered*. While the narrative throughout the novel connotes the orality of the society found in the text, there is one instance which clearly illustrates Walter J Ong's speculation above. It is when the representatives of Khonoma and representatives of the British Government conducted a treaty at Mezoma on 27th March 1880. She writes:

With the help of an interpreter, the General asked Pelhu "Why did you come?" Pelhu's reply was very straightforward "I came to make peace." He spoke with a calm dignity that the white man found himself admiring. The General asked again "Do you need a written treaty?" Pelhu shook his head and said firmly "No, if we have said there will be peace between us there will be peace. We do not need to write it down." (86)

"Verbal memory skill is understandably a valued asset in oral cultures," writes Walter J Ong (57). Therefore, in oral culture the power of memory embodies the whole corpus of knowledge. Due to the absence of reference texts, the narrator must narrate his/her stories (s)he stored in his/her memory. This is exactly what Easterine does in her writings. She takes her substances from the memories of oral narrators. She says that *A Naga Village Remembered* "goes as far back as the memory of my oral narrators could take us" (Elizabeth 27). When asked what inspired her to write *When the River Sleeps*, she answers:

I have many hunter friends. My own son is a hunter. They would tell me stories, and in particular this one about rivers that 'went to sleep' at a certain time at night. No one knew when the river would fall asleep, but if they were fortunate enough to find it asleep, they would quickly take out a stone from its depths and it would act as a charm. This story stayed with me a

long time and surfaced when it was time for it to be written as a book.

(Daftuar “No Division”)

The vitality of referring to oral traditions of the then oral cultures in order to study their past cannot be over emphasized. In the context of Northeast tribes, G.P. Singh asserts, “It will not be incorrect to state that the folklore of the tribals of North-East India constitutes the bedrock of the higher philosophy, higher literature, higher history and higher art” (qtd. in Elizabeth and Tsuren, 19). Easterine incorporates numerous folk/oral literatures in her writings, and in fact she is creatively fusing folkloristic elements and socio-historical facts and settings of her tribe and thereby redefining its history and society.

Reference to the Nagas in written records is traced back by Naga intellectuals like Kaka D. Iralu, to Greek philosopher Claudius Ptolemy’s *Geographia* (150 A.D) which contains a report on the so-called land of the “Nagalothae” meaning “the naked”. Mention is also made of the Nagas in early Chinese writings. “Cursory references to our existence in our hills appear in the chronicles of Chinese historians dating back to the 13th century (Easterine, *Thoughts* 108). However, more extensive presentation of the Nagas in writing was done by western anthropologists like James Philip Mills (1890-1906), John Henry Hutton (1885-1968) and Christoph von Furer-Heimendorf (1909-1995) and some others of the colonial era. They were among the first to give detailed records of the Naga society, their culture and tradition.

Like many cultures in Northeast India which did not have any script of their own until given to them by the Christian missionaries, the few pre-colonial references and a handful of colonial records were the only written accounts the Nagas had of themselves. It is only in the late twentieth century that Nagas particularly in academia started a discourse through their writing about their culture and customs. The number of Naga

writers writing in English has multiplied and today they are among the richest in terms of literary production in English among the tribal communities of Northeast India.

Nagaland along with Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim make up the geo-political 'Northeast' India which is often misrepresented by the outside world as a homogeneous region, inhabited by ethnically and culturally homogeneous people. In reality the region is home to different ethnic tribes with distinct history and unique cultural heritages, and speaking diverse languages. Moreover, the political scenario of each state is different from the others. The struggle for independence from India by the Naga people is well known to the rest of the world. Amidst their struggle for independence, Easterine asserts that the Naga people suffered, and continue to suffer two levels of violence in their homeland, that is, the atrocities committed by both the Indian army and the different factions of underground fighters (Iralu "Easterine").

Bordering the state of Assam to the west, Arunachal Pradesh to the north, Myanmar to the east and Manipur to the south and covering an area of 16,579 square kilometres, and lying between the parallels of 98 and 96 degrees east longitude and 26.6 and 27.4 degrees north longitude, Nagaland state came into being in 1963, when the then President of India Radhakrishnan inaugurated it to be the sixteenth state of the Indian Union. Ironically, when India was freed from the British yoke in 15th August 1947, Nagas were caught under India's yoke at that point in history. Prior to the nineteenth century when the colonizers extended their rule over their land, the Nagas had little contact with the outside world.

Following the Treaty of Yandabo of 1826, in 1828 Britain annexed Assam under its colonial umbrella. From the 1830s the colonizers sent expeditionary forces to the land of the Nagas, and in 1845, they succeeded in concluding a non-aggression pact

with some Naga chiefs. But this pact was repeatedly violated by the Nagas by continuing their raids in Assam. The colonizers attempted to annex the Naga areas under their rule were met with fierce and sustained resistance from the Nagas. Undeterred, the colonizers dispatched military expeditions and succeeded in establishing a military outpost at Samaguting (present day Chumukedima) in 1866. In 1878 the Nagas mounted raids on British camps. The British responded with brutality, burning several villages and killing hundreds, and greatly outnumbered the Nagas fled. Eventually, the Naga region came under the British rule. This deciding battle came to be known as “The Battle of Khonoma.” Even then, a large area inhabited by the Nagas remained “un-administered area” of the British. During the First and the Second World War, Nagas remained loyal to the British and fought as their allies. In the Second World War, the Nagas help the British to halt the advance Japanese forces.

During the hundred or so period of colonization, the Nagas were, in the word of Antonio Gramsci ‘hegemonized’ culturally, ideologically, politically and economically. The relationship between the colonizers and the Nagas is akin to what Edward Said said of the relationship between the Occident and the Orient in *Orientalism* (1978), that is, “a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (5). Even the term “Naga” is a colonial construct. Until the end of colonization, all extensive writings concerning the Nagas were done by colonizers and were therefore ‘colonial invention’ without consent from the Nagas.

The dominant narratives or colonial writings seek to establish a Eurocentric hegemony of knowledge and power to the cultures of a larger part of the world. This has been painstakingly critiqued by a new group of writers rightly called native writers who are at the ‘periphery’. Through the lens of Postcolonialism, the politics of writing fiction of native writers whose history and society had been written previously by

outsiders have a totally different intention. This thesis is a study of a woman writer's interpretation of a multi-layered conflict ridden society and intriguing history of her own through her novels.

In one of his seminal essays on the role of the writer in an emerging nation, Chinua Achebe had argued that a writer should have a strong sense of history in order to deal with the human suffering that (s)he encounters everyday in the present. Easterine, born and brought up in Nagaland, writing in contemporary times, has rooted herself in the history and tradition of her people in order to locate her own place in that tradition. She also voices the relevance of African writers like Achebe for writings from Northeast India:

They placed value in the tribal society. They proved that the stories of the indigenous people were beautiful, unique and yielded meaning. Achebe infused courage in tribal writers by writing unashamedly about his culture and his village world and exposing colonial lies. He Africanised the English language peppering it with Igbo words and borrowing the structure of Igbo in the dialogues of his colourful characters. For the first time, both western and non-western heard the voice of the colonised and got to understand the cultural meanings of the practices that were dismissively labelled savage by the coloniser. (*Thoughts* 136)

This is what Easterine does to her writings. She derives inspiration from the Naga's rich cultural heritage and has made extensive use of their oral lore in her writings.

In the selected novels Easterine shows not only a deep concern for the loss suffered by her people during the colonial period and after, but the beautiful life of her

people in the real as well as spiritual world, and also the need to search for the historical and cultural roots to define the 'Naga identity', not as perceived by 'others' but as viewed from within their own society. She attempts to educate her readers by giving the insider's view of the Naga history and society in her novels.

Again, Nagas are a nationalist lot even from earlier times. They would do anything to protect the integrity of the land and their people (clan). But in the modern sense of the term, Naga nationalism started some decades before British colonizers left the Indian sub-continent. The Naga Club submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in January 10, 1929. In the memorandum they stated their wish that Naga areas remain untouched and not be annexed to Indian Union at the event of their departure from India. On 14th August 1947, a day prior to India's independence the Naga National Council (NNC) declared Naga independence and informed the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York. However, the negative response of the Indian government caused the outbreak of a fierce and prolonged conflict between the Nagas and India. Unfortunately for the Nagas, the issue remains unsettled even today after more than half a century of fighting for sovereignty. In the course of this conflict things got complicated. Factions broke out within the Naga movement for independence, infighting occurred and the people continue to suffer. Easterine is deeply pained by the prevailing situation of her people. She pens down the suffering of her people due to their struggle for independence and the effect it has on the society in her writings.

Like other writers from Northeast India such as Sanjoy Hazarika, Temsula Ao and Tanyenjam Bijoykumar Singh, to mention a few, Easterine Kire is a 'writer with a conscience.' Easterine gives voice to the situation in which Nagas are placed in her writings. For her, writing is a tool through which she educates her readers around the globe to the insights of the Naga identity with the numerous social and cultural

elements coping with factual historical events. In her writings, Easterine interprets the different ideologies, conflicts and dilemmas prevailing within Naga society.

When asked about others' conception of the homogeneity of writers from Northeast India in projecting insurgency and conflict in their works, Easterine answers:

I think one really gets to know a people only when reading or hearing about their world view. The national media has a tendency to project the Northeast as a region simmering with violence that could erupt at any given moment. But there is much more to the Northeast than just political conflict; there is a whole undiscovered world of ordinary people and their not so ordinary lives. We writers from the Northeast are refusing to be defined by the political conflicts that are an unhappy presence in our lands. We are saying there is more: there is great beauty, not just the breathtaking landscapes of mountains and rivers and cloud covered villages but the beauty of the people who live there and the stories they have to share. The spiritual world is a big part of the Naga world-view and it comes naturally to me to write about it. (Mallick "In Conversation")

Another acute challenge addressed in the thesis is the region's unique historiography and distinctive culture found in the selected novels which in colonial discourse of the past engaged with an exclusive readership acquainted with the region. The thesis seeks to engage with some notable theories, particularly Postcolonial and Feminist theory to discuss such challenges hindering writers from the northeast. It also aims at addressing these challenges with the intention to propagate writings by insiders to reach a wider reading public, both within and outside of its present confines; increase the prospects of indigenous writers by providing them an equal foothold with other

contemporary writers; addressing the bias felt regarding these writings, and finally to access the untapped wealth of indigenous writings.

The thesis is divided into five chapters with 'Introduction' in the first chapter, and the intriguing history of the Nagas, and other aspects concerning their history as interpreted by Easterine in her novels is studied in detail in chapter II of the thesis, entitled "Interpreting History." Moreover, focus is given to the numerous oral traditions she incorporates in her novels, and the manner in which Easterine writes back to the representations of the Nagas given by the colonizers who affirmed the dominion trends of colonial discourse by labeling Naga people as 'head-hunters,' 'primitive,' 'savages,' and the likes. Therefore, Postcolonial theory serves as the main interpretive tool in the second chapter. This is an attempt to give an insider's perspective of the Naga history.

Easterine's writings showcase the reality of the situation in Naga society. Colonialism made profound changes in the societal setup of the Nagas, as was the case in other parts of the Northeast region as well. With Christianity and education the Naga society was inevitably geared towards 'modernization' and the rapid transformations that such change entails. Modernization continues to slowly erode the centrality of villages as a social unit. Large commercial towns are rapidly developing and this has brought about dramatic changes in the values, lifestyle, and social setup of the people. The Morung and other traditional cultural and ritual practices that went against the dictates of Christianity were done away with to be replaced by modern institutions and new practices. It is interesting to note how far the Nagas have adapted with these changes. A question can arise here, as to whether the Nagas Christianise their traditional practices or rather "Naga-ise" Christianity? Most of her novels are set in the period when the Naga society was in the process of transition; in the process of entering a globalized and modernized world which is further intensified by their struggle for

independence and their subsequent infighting. Her writings often reflect a sense of nostalgia; reminiscing the past, cultural loss, but at the same time a strong sense of rootedness. These aspects of loss, violence, suffering, multi-layered conflicts and others concerning Naga society as interpreted by Easterine in her novels is studied in detail in chapter III of the thesis, entitled “Interpreting Society.”

Another important aspect of the study given space to comprise chapter IV, entitled “Locating Naga Women in History and Society” is to address “écriture feminine” or feminine writing, given that Easterine is a female writer. By tradition Naga society is patriarchal; the father is the head of the family, only male members of the household can inherit the family ancestral property, and women have always been subordinate to men. It is fascinating that a female writer became the first to publish both poetry and novel in English in a predominantly patriarchal society riddled with tribalism and numerous dialects preserved and in use. Moreover, most creative writers writing in English from Nagaland are women such as Temsula Ao, Monalisa Changkija, Nini Lungngalang, Avinou Kire and a few others, while the male writers appear to mostly concentrate on writing non-fiction. Easterine’s portrayal of female characters in her novel is ambiguous and at times verge on the contradictory. Without compromising on the fact that her society is indeed patriarchal and male-centric, her novels subtly project the women as stronger, often wiser, and more far-sighted. Yet an obviously dominant strong matriarch like Delieno’s paternal grandmother in *A Terrible Matriarchy* is found to direct all her authority and influence towards upholding the male hegemony in her family. Is there a female way of writing that distinguishes the writing of Easterine in portraying not only the female but the worldview in essence, will also be one of the important aspects dealt with in chapter IV of the thesis.

Chapter V as Conclusion will not only sum up the arguments and findings put forth in the preceding chapters, but will delve into further possibilities of future research work generated. The future of writers from Northeast at the national platform and beyond is indeed a prospect riddled with geo-politics and identity issues. The differing gender output and acceptance of writers of the region, within their own communities, impact of their works is another aspect worth exploring as well.

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CHAPTER TWO

INTERPRETING HISTORY

History, by and large, is a discourse wherein events of a given community or nation are recorded chronologically. At the same time, history can be written and rewritten, over and over again with new or different interpretation(s) of the same account. One main concern among contemporary writers of fiction is the recovery of lost histories. Using the medium of fiction to explore the history that have been already written and those not written by the dominant colonial writings has become a trend especially with postcolonial writers in contemporary times. In writing these said histories, folklore and oral traditions provide the much needed source for the previously non-script societies to literally write themselves to existence. This chapter is an attempt to study Easterine's interpretation of Naga history in the six selected novels written by her. Easterine's novels are an amalgamation of the past and the present. She blends the past and the present Naga history together in her writings. She interprets Naga past history by presenting them in the form of memory of the characters, by incorporating oral traditions and by writing fiction based on the old Naga life. In fact, her novel *When the River Sleeps* (2014) can be quoted as 'a modern Naga folklore' that tells the of old traditional life of the Naga people, while *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003) largely deals with the life of the Nagas before the advent of the British and their reaction to the consequent intrusion. The others selected for study in this thesis, *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), *Mari* (2010), *Life on Hold* (2011) and *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), though modern in settings and plots, there are tell-tale signs in the narratives which provide the past history of her people. On the other hand, she interprets Naga history (those covering the period from the beginning of colonization to present times) by basing her novels on factual historical events. For the purpose of better scrutiny of the aim of this chapter,

Naga history is categorized into three periods and studied in the following paragraphs. Moreover, as the purpose of the chapter is to study Easterine's interpretation of Naga history through her six selected novels, those periods outside the novels will not be studied here.

i) Pre-colonial Naga History

The Nagas did not have any script of their own until the American missionaries introduced a Romanised script to them in the late 1880s. This means that they did not have any written record of their past except for a few references about them in some writings like the chronicles of the Ahoms which mentioned that in 1228, the Tai-Ahoms migrated to the Brahmaputra valley from Burma through Naga territory, and a few others. Other than these, no detailed study of Nagas today of their pre-colonial life is ever recorded in writing. Before the advent of the British even the term "Naga" was not used to identify these people who are called Nagas today. The people were identified according to their individual tribe and village names.

J. H. Hutton in the preface to his monograph, *The Angami Nagas* (1921), mentioned S.E. Peal, who in his "Fading Histories," lamented the delay in the study of the Naga tribes, and the consequent loss of much material out of which their past histories might have been recovered. Hutton also wrote, "Old beliefs and customs are dying, the old traditions are being forgotten ... and the spirit of change is invading and pervading every aspect of village life." (vii) Principally, due to the absence of any written records of Naga pre-colonial history, their oral traditions and other folkloric items served as the main source of their past history. Of the practicability of folklore as historical science, Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones in *Folkloristics: An Introduction* (1995) write:

A concept of folklore and an interest in the expressive traditions from which the concept is derived existed long before the word *folklore* was coined.

From the beginnings of recorded history, writers called attention to what they considered to be fantastic stories and exotic customs.... (31)

Easterine's numerous incorporation of oral literature in her writings can be said to be her way of interpreting Naga identity at the same time presenting the history of the pre-literate Nagas, that is, pre-colonial Naga history. Easterine in fact is a postcolonial indigenous writer to whom may be applied what Elleke Boehmer asserts about postcolonial indigenous writers, "writing is an integral part of self-definition" with its "emphasis on historical reconstruction and the ethical imperative of reconciliation with the past" (qtd. in Elizabeth and Tsuren 42). Most writers writing on the history of the Nagas till today back-up their theories on oral traditions regarding their origin and migratory route to their present settlement. Charles Chasie in his *The Naga Imbroglia* (2005) writes, "Perhaps, the possible migratory routes of the Nagas, and legends, would shed more light..." (30). K.S. Zetsuvi in his book *The Angami Nagas under Colonial Rule* (2014) states, "As the Angamis do not have any written record of the past their history migration to their present settlement has been on the basis of their oral sources" (12).

The rich throve of oral tales and traditions of the Nagas indeed reflect their long history. They are proof of Nagas as a community or in modern parlance an ethnic group or tribe who were self-sufficient, independent, having a distinct culture and tradition; beliefs and values, distinct identity and history. In *Life on Hold*, Easterine creatively constructs a narrative wherein a grandmother tells her grandchildren an origin tale of a clan (a clan known to the children) as bed time story. The tale that the grandmother narrates is given below,

“Once upon a time, there was an old woman, a widow. I suppose she was as old as me, oh she must have been.” Grandmother nodded to herself and then she continued. “Well, the old woman didn’t have any family because her husband had died, and she had no children. She was very poor. Every day, she would go to the field and plant some vegetables or tend to the ones she had planted. Among the vegetables in her field was a big gourd plant. One morning, she found a gourd fruit which was so well formed and smooth-skinned, she had never seen such a fine fruit before. The old woman took her carrying basket and covered the fruit with it. Every morning, the old woman went to her field and she lifted the basket to check on it. Every morning, she found that the gourd had grown bigger and better. Then one morning, before she could lift the basket, she heard a soft murmur, like a child’s voice. Astonished, she opened the basket and found, not the gourd, but a baby boy inside. He was a smiling little boy, as smooth skinned as the gourd had been. She took him in her arms and carried him home. The boy grew up as the widow’s son. All her neighbours heard of his miraculous origin and he came to be called Mepfuo, after the name of the gourd.”

“You always stop there, Grandmother, what happened to him after that?”

Nime wanted to know.

“Well, the old woman lived a very happy life after she found the boy, and the boy grew up and became the founder of a great clan, which we still call the descendants of Mepfuo of Mepfuonuomia.”

“Hey, that is the same name that Setuo uses. At school he is called Setuo Mepfuo!” Nime was almost shouting in her excitement. (6&7)

Unrealistic and strange though it may sound but folklore has purposes and meanings of the people. They are artifacts and that different tales and myths prove “they have a history, having been generated in the past and continued in the present. (Georges and Owen 86). In the same novel, Easterine talks about the legend of *Tso-u and Terhuopudiu*, the Angami Romeo and Juliet. In the legend Tso-u and Terhuopudiu are not allowed to marry because their villages had been at war earlier and that it was taboo for the Angamis for two persons to get married if their villages were at war. “It was culturally impossible for them to marry because of the old feud between their villages” (*LoH* 45). This sad legend indicates the traditional social reality of the Nagas where inter-village war was known to be very common. Recognizing the kind of knowledge folklore can provide, J.F. Campbell explains what the stories he collected in Scotland in 1859 and 1860 “can teach us... about the people ..., their origin, their habits, past and present,” he also writes, “The states represent the actual every-day life of those who tell them, with great fidelity. They have done the same, in all likelihood, time out of time, and that which is not true of the present is, in all probability, true of the past; and therefore something may be learned of the forgotten ways of life” (qtd. in Georges and Owen 160 & 161).

Vladimir Propp in *Theory and History of Folklore* (1984) states, “The folktale, and especially the tale of everyday life, is an ancestor of written realistic literature” (20). The tales within the novels incorporated by Easterine are uncommon, yet they reflect everyday life of the people and hence true to the social dimension of the Naga past. With the intention of retrieving and recording the Naga oral tradition, Easterine uses the format of fiction and presents them in a new form to a new readership informed by literacy. One such important product of Easterine is *When the River Sleeps*. The novel is significant in interpreting Naga past history because as already mentioned it is a modern

folklore, the people's past retrieved and presented in written form in modern times. J.H. Hutton in *The Angami Nagas* wrote, "To enumerate the various superstitions of the Angamis would fill a book in itself,..." (251). One of such beliefs reflected in Easterine's work is the myth of the weretigers. In the novel, Easterine writes, "Vilie lay pondering ... It was this miracle of transformation that amazed him the most – that a man could choose to metamorphose his spirit into a tiger. He had no doubt it was true. He had heard enough stories and tonight, the way the tiger had left when he challenged his lack of courtesy, made him feel certain that there was some truth to the whole matter" (*WTRS* 28).

The pre-colonial Naga life is full of rituals and taboos one was expected to fulfil. In all the six novels selected for study in this thesis Easterine reflects the taboos, rituals, superstitions, and other cultural beliefs and practices of the Nagas then and now. However, this aspect of the social dimension of the Nagas at that point in their history will be studied in the following chapter, Chapter III: Interpreting Society.

A Naga Village Remembered showcases the pre-colonial village life of the Nagas although the period covers only a few years before the arrival of the British in Khonoma village. Clan affiliation is a major characteristic of traditional Naga community.

In the pre-British period, every Angami village was a social and political unit. Each village consisted of two or more major clans or *khels*. For instance, the village of Khonoma, was and is still divided into three sectors, viz, *Thevoma*, (ii) *Merhuma* and (iii) *Semoma*, each sector being occupied by a *khel*. (*Zetsuvi* 19)

Being a historical novel, *A Naga Village Remembered* is based on factual historical settings. The novel opens with a call for meeting of the male members of the Khonoma village at the upper *thehou*, a community house. In the meeting, after the crowd had assembled, Pelhu of the Merhu clan described the reason for the meeting that was to expedite an attack against the Garipheju village to whom they had fallen earlier. This expedition of a village to raid another village found in the novel is what is commonly known to be “Head-hunting”, closely associated with the Nagas even today. “After the first calamitous attack on Garipheju, Pelhu and his brother Thinochu had escaped beheading by fleeing through the forest tracks,” (ANVR, 3) but Thinochu stumbled and hit his forehead on a rock which caused his instantaneous death. Pelhu deeply mourned his brother and “Many other men of the Merhu clan shared with Pelhu the obligation to avenge the deaths of their kin” (4).

By tradition, social recognition was given to warriors for the number of enemy heads he had taken, which became in time the dominant features of much of the material culture of the Nagas. On this aspect of head-hunting J.H. Hutton says,

So much significance has been attached to the practice....

It is agreed by all Angamis, as well as by other Nagas, that head-hunting was essential to marriage in so far that a buck who had taken no head, and could not wear the warrior’s dress at festivals,... found it exceedingly difficult to get any girl.... (156 & 165)

Talking about marriage, in explaining the evolution of human institution, Jonathan Turner in his book, *Human Institutions: A Theory of Societal Evolution* (2003), made a comprehensive study from the hunting-gathering stage of human societies to the establishment of families and families with kin ties. His study reveals

that marriage led to formation institutions within a society. Therefore, to take a head was vital for a Naga for his survival within his community as well as for the survival of the community.

Again on the concept of head-hunting among the Nagas, Temsula Ao writes,

The basic assumption was that as a social practice, head-hunting was to be within the framework of social sanctions.

Head-hunting took place due to many and varied reasons: disputes arising out of land or water rights, as retaliation for the killing of a member of a village without provocation, long-standing feuds between villages and even as a means of establishing the supremacy of a particular village within a tribe. The notion of 'supremacy' was closely linked to the safety and survival of a particular village. It was presumed that if a village could prove its prowess in taking heads, it would have established a reputation as a 'fierce' village and would not be attacked by others easily. (19)

In *A Naga Village Remembered* and *When the River Sleeps*, Kire mentions two kinds of inter-village warfare. As mentioned earlier, the one found in *A Naga Village Remembered* is the result of a long standing feud between two villages as well as to establish supremacy over other villages. While in *When the River sleeps* it is as a retaliation for the killing of a member of a village without provocation. Vilie of Zuzie village, the protagonist of the novel happens to be a witness of a murder committed by one of his travelling companions hailing from Dichu village. He is hunted by Dichu villagers as they are falsely informed that Vilie was the murderer. In both the cases, it is not just bloodthirstiness that drives the men hunting for head(s) but they have an inherent social implication that is for the welfare of a village and to uphold its status.

Another concept worth mentioning here of the Nagas regarding “head-hunting” is related to their belief system. The Nagas believed that killing in certain cases avert the displeasure of an evil spirit. “There can be no doubt that all the tribes in this district consider that by killing a human being in certain cases they are doing the most effectual thing towards averting the displeasure of some peculiar evil spirit (*terhoma*)” (qtd. in Hutton 160). They were also known to be doing it for the sake of getting a good harvest. “There is a very general superstition among the Angamis and Semas that to kill a human being and place a small portion of the flesh in the murderer’s fields is specific to ensure a good crop ... prompted certain men of Purobami to murder two men, a woman, and a child near the Sijju River towards the end of 1895” (qtd. in Hutton, 111).

“Head-hunting” in fact deals with a practice which transcended the limits of mere criminal justice or political exigency. Data collected by scholars about the prevalence of this practice covers such widely scattered areas that they believed that the phenomenon is the result of cultural diffusion or due to independent invention and a parallel development. One of such is the observation of Robert Heine-Gelden:

In the Old World during the nineteenth century head-hunting was largely restricted to south-east Asia and Oceania and some tribes in Africa. Here was a case that clearly seemed to warrant the assumption of independent parallel development. The picture changes, however, when we consult the archaeological record, or ancient literature. We shall find that head-hunting was practised in vast regions of Europe from the Iberian peninsula to southern Russia. There are many indications of its having been practised by tribes in central Asia, and if we extend our research further back in time, we shall find traces of head-hunting in pre-dynastic Egypt and in the ancient Near East. Obviously, the two regions in which head-hunting was found in

modern times, even though thousands of miles apart, were remnants of an area stretching from the Atlantic Ocean eastward to the Pacific where head-hunting was practiced. (qtd. in Ao 14-15)

Concerning the practice of “head-hunting” by the Nagas, Verrier Elwin in his book *Nagaland* (1997) writes,

The practice of head hunting is found all over the world and has attracted great attention. So-called civilized countries, which can destroy whole populations with a single atom bomb, can hardly afford to look down on a method of ritual warfare which, at most, involve the loss of a few hundreds of lives every year. (11)

On the other hand, Mar Imsong maintains that Naga “Head Hunting” is “a misinterpreted identity” (90). Colonial writings of the Nagas had given so much attention to this practice of the Nagas that even today it is regarded as a distinctive feature of Naga identity. Tazenlo Thong, a Naga scholar argues that the term “headhunters,” like many others, is a colonial construct and had a political intent. He states:

Decapitation or the practice of beheading the enemy did exist, but to term it as “headhunting” is misleading ... today, if a person can bank on the number of his Medal of Honor awards to win a crucial national election, the act of taking heads, a culture signifying bravery and courage, may not be far too iniquitous and malevolent. (qtd. in Imsong 91)

In Easterine’s novels, the presence of the inter-village warfare is seen but never did she mention that the Nagas were driven solely by their savagery, instead she

creatively reflects the forces behind those fighting. At the same time, she also did not oppose that the Nagas are war-like people, “Many women were widowed early by the love of war among the men. The men called it battlesport and itched to be on a raid when they felt they had been home too long,” but the reason behind this is, “The reputation of the village grew as a result of their triumphs in these raids” (ANVR 15).

The concept of head-hunting and otherwise the many facets of historical reality in the form of folklore portrayed by Easterine in her novels define the pre-colonial history of the Nagas. In the eyes of the colonizers Nagas were “savages and head-hunters.” J.H. Hutton opines that the Nagas like “Most savages are somewhat economical of truth” (157). Unfortunately for the Nagas as well as all colonized subjects around the globe, it was the colonizers who had written their history before the subjects had the medium to do so. Not only did they write and define the subjects but their definitions become the dominant trend. Therefore, by interweaving folkloristic elements with factual historical settings, Easterine interprets Naga history of a period when her people were unable to define themselves through script, in her novels.

ii) Colonial History of the Nagas

Colonialism brought about profound transformations in the history of the Nagas as never before. Before the arrival of colonialism, the Nagas had hitherto lived in near-complete isolation from the influence of other cultures. They lived in a land, in the words of Ursula Graham Bower, “where the ancient candours and ancient moralities survived uncorrupted ... where men go armed with spear and dao instead of notebook and fountain pen; where the dog-eat-dog existence of modern economics has not swamped the primitive decencies, and where life is simple and pagan and brief and happy” (3). With colonialism Nagas were inevitably geared towards modernization and

globalization and all the changes and transformations it entailed. In this thesis, only those incidents and issues in the colonial history of the Nagas reflected in the selected novels for study with some inevitable historical accounts outside the novels will be analysed for better understanding of Easterine's interpretation.

The Nagas came in contact with the British in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26) was a landmark in the history of the British colonial rule in the whole of Northeast India. Burma was then a powerful nation and occupied Assam and Manipur plains. Their gradual advancement towards Cachar and Jaintia made the British alarmed for the safety of their territory in Bengal. In 1824, the British declared war against Burma. In the course of several encounters the Burmese were defeated and forced to retreat. The war was brought to an end by the peace treaty that came to be known as Treaty of Yandaboo on 24th February, 1826. Under the terms of the treaty, a Burmese king, the king of Ava renounced amongst others his claims over Assam and the neighbouring states of Cachar and Jaintia, and he also recognized Ghanbhir Singh as the Maharaja of Manipur. The Naga Hills locating between Manipur in the south and Assam in the north and the west was now sandwiched from two sides by territories either under direct or indirect administration of the British. It was under such conditions that the history of the Nagas under the British rule began.

By the time when the British arrived in their land J.H. Hutton wrote, "it is exceedingly difficult to pronounce a test by which a Naga tribe can be distinguished from other Assam and Burma tribes which are not Naga." (qtd. in Chasie, "Nagaland" 254). Due to the presence of different Naga tribes who in most cases have different nature of relationship or non-relationship with the British, this chapter will focus only on the history of the Angamis during colonial rule in the Naga area as the selected novels more or less deal with only the Angami Nagas.

The initial stage of the British-Naga relationship was a hostile one. The popular theory propounded by the British Administrators was as Sir Edward Gait asserts, “The hilly tract inhabited by the Nagas had never been subjugated by the *Ahoms*, and it was no part of the British policy to absorb it”, and Austra Ozols Gaige also observes “Had the Nagas abstained from disrupting the peace and the economic efforts of the tea gardens on the plains, most likely the British would have left them alone” (qtd. in Imsong 94). If this argument was true, then the British incursion into the Naga Hills was for the economic interest of safeguarding tea plantation in the foothills, which inevitably required them to construct motorable roads between Assam, Manipur and Burma that required going through the Naga Hills. Therefore, the strategic importance of the Naga Hills as a border to lands of greater commercial significance for the colonizers made it impossible for the British to exclude the hills under their control.

On the other hand, any kind of intrusion into their land has never been taken lightly by the Nagas. This is more or less because, “In the Naga understanding, land is sacred; indeed for the Naga, land includes Earth and all creation, in its spiritual and material modes of being. Their consciousness of the integrated dimensions of land as sacred place shaped the traditional Naga identity and ethos” (Imsong v). The first direct contact between the Angami Naga and the British occurred when on January 18, 1832, a British team led by Captain Francis Jenkins passed through the Angami territory in search of a direct route from Manipur to Assam. During this march, the Angamis put up a strong resistance. However, the British force with superior arms managed to penetrate the Angami hills. After the return of the British troops from the Angami territory, a series of raids were carried out by the Angamis on the British territory. In order to punish the offenders, the British authorities in Calcutta detailed Lieutenant Gordon in

1833. Lt. Gordon's expedition did not achieve any success as the Angamis did not stop from raiding their neighbouring territories.

"In 1838, the Court of Directors decided that the Naga affairs would come directly under the purview of the British government" (Changkiri, 50). As a result of this decision, Mr. Grange was chosen to conduct Angami expedition. While the first expedition of 1839 proved a failure in stopping the Angamis from their raids to the British territory, during the second expedition in 1840 Mr. Grange reached a truce-agreement with the Angamis who agreed to pay annual tribute to the British. A Foreign Political Proceedings (A) quotes, "There were no more raids upon Cachar in 1840 and it was considered as an effect on the harsh measures adopted by Grange towards the Angamis" (qtd. in Zetsuvi 42-43).

The said "agreement" did not last long. As "in April 1844, Grange's assistant went to collect the first year's tribute, the Nagas refused to pay any and instead indulged in committing a series of raids in the neighbouring plains" (qtd. in Changkiri 50). Not only did the effort of the British in trying to subjugate the Nagas prove futile but the Nagas took to open rebellion against the British. In 1844, a group of men from Khonoma village raided a British outpost at Lanka in North Cachar, killed three sepoy and took their guns. This incident is referred to in a meeting of Khonoma men at *theshou* in *A Naga Village Remembered*.

... We killed three of the soldiers and carried off their guns with us. Then the white man, Wood, came to our village to ask for the guns. We gave the guns back to him but no one named the men responsible for the raid. That angered the white man greatly and he and his soldiers burnt down the village. (6)

This reference in the novel is a historical fact, J. Butler in *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam, During a Residence of Fourteen Years* writes:

In consequence of the frequent audacious raids of these freebooters, Captain Eld, Principal Assistant, accompanied by Mr. Sub-Assistant Wood, and a detachment of fifty men of 2nd Assam Light Infantry, set out from Now-Gong on the 10th December, 1844, with the express object of capturing the murderers of Sipahees at Lunkye... Mr. Wood was accordingly directed to visit the village... their huts also were burned to the ground” (119).

This was the first burning of Khonoma village by the British. The second historical fact referred in the novel is the killing of Bogchand Daroga by Khonoma men. Bogchand was then in-charge of Samaguting outpost of the British. “In 1849, he visited Mezoma village in connection with a land dispute between two rival clan leaders, viz. Nilhulie and Zhavilie. Unfortunately, his intervention in the feud led to his murder” (Zetsuvi 44). In *A Naga Village Remembered*, this incident is also referred to in the meeting at the *thehou*:

“But we got our revenge on the white man at Piphe” recalled another speaker, “Do you remember it started with the feud between two clans of Mezeria? One clan came asking for our help and the other sought the white man’s help. I remember the Police officer who led the white man’s soldiers here. His name was Bogchand, an arrogant man. He marched into our village as though he owned it and, after arresting two men of the Mezo, he gave a quick order and his soldiers began burning the houses of the Merhu clan... We caught them by surprise, waylaying them and killing 22 of them.” (6-7)

The inherent value of a Naga man in connection with his responsibility in his society is asserted by the speaker of the above incident with regards to the killing of Bogchand:

“But it was a matter of honour. A man is not a man if you let another man kill your kin and torch your houses and you do nothing about it. We have a name for such men – *Thenumia!*” he spat out the word. “That is what drives a man to battle, the need to prove himself worthy of defending his village and his womenfolk, and to earn ornaments of war.” (ANVR 7)

This excerpt is an explanation of all the undertakings of the Nagas from time immemorial to present day as far as Easterine’s novels are concerned. She points out that matters related to battles or raids are of serious concern to the Nagas. They are no small-talk and are seldom mentioned in any place other than the *thehou*. “Talk at the *thehou* often centered round what was called man’s talk. No women were allowed to come to the *thehou*...” (ANVR 6) The Naga’s intention with regards to the intrusion of British colonizers in their land is, L. Atola Changkiri states, “The Nagas, ... could not be expected to accept the colonial intrusion without a showdown in the war path. Every attempt at expansion was faced with sturdy resistance” (54).

In fact, the nature of colonial intervention in the Naga Hills from 1840-80 is known to be of non-interference (Misra 3273). This was introduced after the third burning of Khonoma village in an expedition led by Captain J. Butler and his party. In this attack of Khonoma village Captain Vincent who had established an outpost at Khonoma asked for assistance and “Major Jenkins recommended a strong force to proceed” (Zetsuvi 45). Therefore, in December 1850, “A bloody battle ensued in which the British lost 34 sepoy and the Angamis about 200 warriors” (Tajenyuba Ao 39).

Regarding this capture of Khonoma fort, Captain Butler writes, “Thus fell one of the strongest forts ever seen in Assam after a siege of sixteen hours duration” (199).

The “non-interference” policy of the colonizers in the Naga Hills is needed a closer scrutiny here in order to better understand the nature of colonial intervention in the area. The policy was laid down in the minutes of the Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie on the 20th February, 1851. He opined that possession of the Naga Hills “would bring no profit ... and would be as costly as it would be unproductive” (qtd. in *Assam District Gazetteer* 16). To further understand his intention, here is another quotation from the minute:

Hereafter we should confine ourselves to our ground; protect as it can and must be protected; not meddle in feuds or fights of these savages, encourage trade with them as long as they are peaceful towards us; and rigidly exclude them from all communication either to sell what they have got or to buy what they want if they should become turbulent or troublesome. (qtd. in *Assam District Gazetteer* 16)

The absence of a direct annexationist strategy in the colonial policy towards the Naga Hills till then points to the lack of any economic benefit for the colonizers. The British policy in India had been shaped by their economic interest, and the Naga Hills had nothing much to offer economically. There are references to the relatively low availability of mineral deposits and the possible difficulties in the collection of revenue from a scattered and sparsely distributed population (Misra 3274). So, the Naga Hills and the people, as presented by Bayly as, “imperfectly civilised tribes ... savages and wild men” (qtd. in Misra 3276) were of no value to the British. The colonizers’ concept on the Nagas as stated by the secretary to the government of Bengal was “to restrain the

savage tribes which infest the frontier ... existing only as pests and nuisance to their neighbours, and to wean them gradually from their present habits of plunder and outrage against inhabitants of British territory” (qtd. in Misra 3274). Therefore, with regards to the policy of non-intervention in the Naga Hills, it was as Misra asserts:

... the relatively lower possibility of economic extraction from the Naga Hills prompted the British to follow policy which was marked by an absence of overt forms of territorial aggrandisement ... the strategic location of the Naga Hills had necessitated the implementation of an alternate policy by the colonial state. Such a policy was aimed at effectively legitimising colonial intrusion through the use of minimum coercive force and hence with a relatively low financial expenditure. (3274)

With the policy of “non-interference”, the colonizers tried to keep themselves aloof from the native people’s issues. For instance, in 1854, Manipuris raided and destroyed some Angami villages and the Angamis who sought the protection of the British were turned down on the ground of “non-interference.” Moreover, L. Jamir states, “the continued Angami raid on the plains put the British interest in jeopardy which forced them to intervene. Lord Dalhousie aimed at preventing the Angamis from aggression and ensuring the security of the British subjects by a system of frontier control” (106).

Among the “many raids” by the Nagas as seen in the colonial records, one is given reference in *A Naga Village Remembered*:

... All they knew was that they were going to avenge three of their men killed at *Shupfu*, also known as Muram in Manipur.... They marched till they come to a village at the foothills of *Japfu*....

The men of the village quickly made up their minds,... They were thus joined by warriors of the villages of Viswema, Phe sema, Kigwema, Mima, Kedima and Kikruma... The 150 men reached their destination and exacted their revenge by killing thirteen people and burning down the village of Muram on their departure.... (36)

According to the British, this raid and the many others were the “endless insults and defiance,” of bold outrages and cold-blooded murders executed by the Nagas (Butler “Notes” 1875). The *Foreign Political Proceedings* recorded that, “Despite all these measures, the Angamis raids continued from 1854-1855, there were at least 19 Angami raids in the plains in which 232 British subjects had been either killed, wounded or carried off” (qtd. in Zetsuvi 47) On the flip side, upon closer look of the said novel as a whole and the given excerpt in particular, one could ascertain that the Nagas were not executing these so called “cold-blooded murders” because they were “savages” and “primitive” but rather they were fulfilling tasks as Naga men in maintaining their honour.

Chapter Ten of *A Naga Village Remembered* focuses on “Battle of Khonoma,” the turning point in the history of the Nagas under colonial rule. By this time, the British Headquarters at Samaguting was shifted at Kohima with G.H. Damant as its Political Agent. In October, 1879, Mr. Damant undertook a tour to some Angami villages because “His informants gave him the news that the people of Khonoma were acquiring arms and ammunition in an alarming quantity” (ANVR 67). Damant and his escort halted for a night at Jotsoma where a Jotsoma interpreter repeatedly warned Damant that “the Khonoma people meant mischief and entreated him not to proceed” (Changkiri 55). Undeterred Damant proceed and was shot at Khonoma village gate.

From the moment when the British set their foot in the Naga Hills they were not welcomed by the Nagas, and even after suffering endless “punitive actions” from the British for their “daring raids,” they never considered giving themselves up. One noteworthy incident which reflects the Naga’s determination to maintain their sovereignty and triggered the famous Battle of Khonoma is mentioned here. As stated earlier, the people of Khonoma village craved to drive out the British from their land. Easterine writes, “The feelings of mistrust of the white man and his Government had continued to grow in the village ...so the tension grew between the two till some of the men of Khonoma were saying, “Let us stop this. We cannot continue like this, we’ll not be under the turbaned ones.”” (ANVR 67) At this particular time, in 1879, Pofuchasa Chase of Khonoma killed a tiger. The game killed was followed by an elaborate ritual including the ritual of firing off guns. When the shooting died down, one man shouted, “Shall we not throw off the yoke of the white man with these many guns?” His words stirred the men’s hearts and many echoed, “Shall we not?” (ANVR 68). From then on in Khonoma village preparation to drive out the white man began in the form of accumulating arms and ammunition and training the younger men the rituals of war. This incident is a historical fact and can be seen in K.S. Zetsuvi’s *The Angami Naga under Colonial Rule* wherein Sievizo Seyie of Khonoma states, “Thepfucasa of Khonoma killed a tiger which was followed by an elaborate ritual of war dance, involving all the village warriors who exhibited their weapons. Interestingly, they themselves were surprised that they had 95 muskets. The discovery of this fact boosted their courage to fight against the might of the British” (52).

It was under such circumstances that Damant came to Khonoma and met his end. Their victory over Damant and his escort made the Angamis braver towards the British and so, “the whole area thus raised the war cry and joined hands ... to offer the last but

gallant resistance to British imperialism” (Changkiri 56). In *A Naga Village Remembered* there was jubilation in Khonoma the night Damant was killed, and “majority of the men said, “We must strike again soon and crush the white man’s rule completely.” Strategists conferred together and gave a unanimous decision, “On to Kohima, if we can defeat him in his headquarters, we will be rid of him”” (71). So, the warriors of Khonoma together with warriors of Viswema, Chedema, Secuma, Jakhama, Zotshuma, Piphema, Tsiepama and Tsutuonuoma clan of Kohima “numbering at least 4000 men with 300 guns, and the rest carrying spears and *daos*” (ANVR 72) undertook a 12 day siege. The killing of Damant and the boldness of the Angamis in sieging Kohima garrison greatly angered the British. Therefore, in October 1879, a British army headed by Brigadier General Nation, Charge of Affairs, who commanded the forces brought from Assam, Manipur and Shillong, Major Evans with 200 rifles, Captain Williamson with his troops and together with all the troops stationed in the neighbouring villages of Zotshuma, Mezoma and Sechuma attacked Khonoma village. All the detailed accounts of the afore-mentioned Angami raid on Kohima garrison and the British retaliatory attack on Khonoma are reflected in *A Naga Village Remembered*.

The village of Khonoma held out against the British for months. An important incident took place during the fighting. While the British were wearing down their fighters, some warriors marched into Assam and killed the Manager of a tea plantation and 16 of his labourers. “The white man could not forget this insult added to injury ... Khonoma was razed to the ground, its inhabitants dispersed” (ANVR 85). But according to the Khonoma people “this raid on a British territory and its subjects was necessary because men of Khonoma were culturally bound to avenge their fallen men” (ANVR 85).

Colonial writings on this battle recorded that Khonoma surrendered but in *A Naga Village Remembered* Easterine writes that Khonoma and Brigadier-General Nation reached a treaty only after Pelhu of the Merhu clan agreed to make peace with the white man after much hesitation. The treaty was concluded between representatives of Khonoma and representatives of the British Government at Mezoma on the 27th March 1880. However, unlike most treaty found in history this treaty is not a written treaty with any terms. When Brigadier-General Nation asked Pelhu, ““Do you need a written treaty?” Pelhu shook his head and said firmly “No, if we have said there will be peace between us there will be peace. We do not need to write it down”” (ANVR 86).

True to their colonizing nature, the British, took punitive actions against Khonoma and other Angami villages who aided the former. “The people of Khonoma in particular received the severest punishment as its people were chased out from their village and forced to resettle in other villages. Its terrace fields were also confiscated” (qtd. in Zetsuvi 55). After sometime the people of Khonoma came back to rebuild their burnt village, but things were not the same as before. Stripped of their pride and all the equipment they had to fight against the white man confiscated, and more importantly due to their promise to make peace the Nagas had to live under the British for the years to come. So, in some ways one can say Khonoma fell after the Battle of Khonoma.

Meanwhile, the end of Angami resistance made the task of colonization of the Naga Hills easier for the British. “In February 1881, Naga Hills ceased to be an area under political control. It became a settled district under the Deputy Commissioner administered in accordance with well defined rules” (Changkiri 59). In the same year Kohima was declared as the permanent headquarters of the Naga Hills District.

With the annexation of the Naga Hills under colonial administration, the days of raids were gone but the cultural paradigm of the Nagas society was yet to undergo tumultuous transformation. But this aspect of social transformation will be studied in the next chapter of the thesis. The advent of Christian missionaries and the introduction of western education brought about profound changes in the society that the Nagas of the early colonization period were totally different from the Nagas who fought side by side with the British during the Second World War.

The Second World War, or in particular the Japanese invasion of Kohima is given much space in Easterine's novels. In the "Author's Note" to *Mari* she writes:

For Mari and the others of her generation, World War II and the Japanese invasion to our lands was the most momentous period of their lives....

What is so remarkable about World War II, which is still referred to as *The War* by the Nagas, is that people have very little memory of what they were doing before the war years. I was left with the impression that the war, for us, was equivalent to the big bang, the beginning of all life. (viii)

In fact, it was at Kohima that the Allied Force stopped the advancing Japanese from entering mainland India. Arthur Swinson in retelling the battle fought at Kohima between the British troops and the Japanese named the book *Kohima* with the sub-title *The Story of the Greatest Battle Ever Fought* (2016). Swinson's concluding line is, "The Naga Hills have seen enough bloodshed to last for many centuries" (321). Easterine's *Mari* produces the experiences of the Nagas of Kohima during this difficult period. Mari and her family left Kohima for their safety and underwent numerous hardships; hunger, sickness, homelessness, always fearing for their lives while taking refuge in the forest.

They returned home only to find “the terrible sight of the ravaged town.” She continues to write:

Kohima, dear, dear Kohima, had changed so much Hardly any houses were left standing. The debris of war, bombed-out houses and shelters and empty bomb shells littered the streets....

But we were not prepared for the dead bodies littering the streets. Dead Japanese soldiers lay where they had fallen, unattended and unburied....

We had never seen so many dead bodies before... We couldn't believe this was Kohima, this mess of human destruction. (93)

In *Bitter Wormwood* Mose and his family along with other people from their clan fled the Japanese invasion of their village. “Mose could hazily recollect this period of his life... they had trekked several jungle paths and camp in the woods. He had one vivid memory of seeing a war plane crash with a deafening sound...” (24) In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Delieno's mother recalled one ordeal she encountered with a German spy masquerading as a British officer during the Second World War. The German spy visited them while the sisters were alone at home and tried to rape Dalieno's mother, but did not succeed. Mother also recounts that “Terrified of the Japanese, the local people fled to the fields and field huts. When they stole back to their houses by night to salvage grain, they found that it was impossible because their house were occupied by the Japanese soldiers” (172).

An important incident happened to Mari in *Mari*. When the British government was leaving the Naga Hills and the procedure for Indian independence had begun, Mari, though not legally married, had a child with Dickie, a British soldier from London.

Dickie offered Mari to join him and leave for London. But, the administrator, Mr. C.R. Pawsey, the then Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills ordered that ‘he would not allow Dickie too stay behind in Kohima nor take his small family with him to England, and Dickie felt the pressure to do as he was told... Dickie promised to write as soon as he was back in England but he never did...’ (130).

The above incident is very telling in the sense that the Nagas were not given the same status quo by the British; they were the subject and the latter the ruler or in postcolonial terminology “the other”. The entire colonial discourse on the Nagas is that they had undoubtedly been identified as people about whom objective knowledge was possible and necessary. Edward Said in *Orientalism* writes, “Since the West’s knowledge of the east cannot be fully appreciated without identifying the political context within which the east become an object of that knowledge” (41). The use of the term ‘Naga’ to identify the diverse tribes settled in that region sufficed the colonial construction of the identity of the tribes and their attempt to locate the strange within the familiar framework. As colonial records show, there is no evidence of the use of the term ‘Naga’ by the Nagas themselves for self-identification. That the term was a colonial construct is reinforced by R. Woodthorpe “The name is quite foreign to and unrecognised by the Nagas themselves” (52) – this is, during the colonial period.

The persistent representation of the Nagas as physically and culturally isolated from the plains, thus the ‘hill-plain’ dichotomy, was further intensified by the introduction of the Inner Line Regulation in 1873, which while being defended by the administrators as “designed to protect the innocent tribals from being exploited by the people in the plains” (Zetsuvi 62) appears to sow the seed of ‘otherness’ in the Naga mentality which would bring more trouble than peace for the Nagas in the decades to come.

First-hand European account of the colonial period, such as Colonel Johnstone's fury in knowing Khonoma continued raids on British territory, reduced the Naga inherent cultural value to mere "raids." Easterine in her novels reveals that the British knowledge of the Nagas was mistaken. By writing about the incidents that happened during colonial rule in her fiction and appropriately incorporating the Nagas ethos and challenges in them she is giving an insider's point of view, and she shows the Naga history was destined to fall under the mighty British. Moreover, through her novels Easterine asserts that Naga colonial encounter led to the construction of collective selfhood which in post-Indian independence would surface in Naga Nationalism.

iii) Modern Naga History or Post-India Independence Naga History

The modern Naga History is marred with their struggle for sovereignty. A sense of nationhood amongst the Nagas that developed during colonization reached its full-fledged state when the imperialist left the continent and the Naga Hills became part of India and Burma. This merging and division of the Nagas without their consent was never accepted by them. The Nagas fought, and continue to fight for their freedom and unification to this day. However, this thesis will deal only with Nagas in India as they are chiefly the subjects of the selected novels.

As already quoted in the introductory chapter, in an interview when asked about what had inspired Easterine to write a particular novel she answered, "*Bitter Wormwood* was written as an act of catharsis. I had to write a novel that followed the Naga freedom movement chronologically in order to make younger generations understand how the conflict started and why" (Mallick "In Conversation"). Easterine is unpretentious in writing the history of her people. Nevertheless, she does not just put down historical facts to her writings but always considers the experiences, loss and

sufferings of her people because of those incidents. The historical domain of the Nagas in this portion of the thesis, therefore, is Easterine's interpretation of modern Naga History in her novels.

Concerning the Naga Nationalist movement, Abraham Lotha in *The Hornbill Spirit: Nagas Living their Nationalism* (2016) writes:

By and large, Naga armed nationalists (NNC, NSCN-IM, NSCN-K), civil society organizations (Naga Hoho, Naga Students' Federation, Naga Peoples' Movement for Human Rights, Naga Mothers' Association, United Naga Council), and many Naga writers have followed a well-trodden path of using shared narrative of particular events that trace the history of Naga nationalism. This commonly accepted narrative maintains that Nagas were always an independent people. They saw themselves as being only partially colonized by the British, and being colonized at all had not been by any choice of theirs. They were a people outside of the British Empire. Nagas never considered their identity and their indigenous history as a people to be part of India, though like other Indians groups, they had been placed under a wide umbrella of "British subjects."... (13 & 14)

The first political organization formed by the Nagas was the Naga Club in 1918. The Naga Club submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929 wherein they stated "If the British Government however, want to throw us away, we pray that we should not be thrust to the mercy of the people who could never have conquered us themselves and to whom we were never subjected; but leave us alone to determine for ourselves, as in ancient times" (Appendix II BW 249). In 1944, while the Japanese armies invaded India via the Naga Hills, Zapuphizo, a Naga leader, assisted Subash Chandra Bose of the Indian National Army who promised to help Nagas establish self-

rule. In 1945, C.R. Pawsey, the District Commissioner of the Naga Hills helped establish the Naga Hills District Tribal Council. The Council met at Wokha in 1946 and changed its name to the Naga National Council (NNC). Kaka D. Iralu writes, “The NNC was formed with the aim of uniting all the Naga tribes under one political umbrella... As to its membership, every Naga born of Naga blood was by virtue of birth right a member of the NNC” (48).

It can be seen from records that the NNC did what they could to the parting British to leave the Nagas sovereign and not thrust them to the mercy of India. In 1946, when a British Cabinet Mission came to India, the NNC submitted a memorandum stating that “the future of the Nagas would not be bound by any arbitrary decision of the departing British Government if such decisions were taken without the prior information and approval of the Naga people” (qtd. in Iralu 49). The NNC submitted another memorandum to Bordoloi’s Advisory sub-committee on Northeast Frontier Tribal Areas and Assam excluded and Partially excluded areas in March 1947 asking for ““Interim government” for a period of ten years and a referendum after that to decide their future. However the talks broke down” (*BW* Appendix I 245). In June 1947, Sir Akbar Hydari, Governor of Assam, made a Nine-Point agreement with the Nagas, known as the Hydari Commission. However there was a disagreement on the ninth clause and the Constituent Assembly would not ratify it. In July 1947, a delegation of NNC met Mahatma Gandhi. In the meeting Gandhi assured that “the Nagas have every right to be independent if they did not want to join the Indian Union” (qtd. in Iralu 55). On 14th August a day prior to Indian independence in 1947, the NNC declared Naga independence.

On 15th August 1947 India attained its independence. With it the Hydari Agreement was not accepted and the Naga areas were constituted as a district under

Assam in the new nation of India. Unfortunately for the Nagas, Mahatma Gandhi, who was in favour of Naga sovereignty was assassinated in 1950 and his successor Jawaharlal Nehru was against it. In 1950 Angami Zapuphizo was elected the president of the NNC, and in 1951 under the leadership of the newly elected president conducted plebiscite. Of this plebiscite Kaka D. Iralu writes:

From January to May 1951, the NNC leaders toured all the Naga inhabited areas explaining to the people, the purpose and implications of the national plebiscite. Finally, the inaugural function of the plebiscite was held in Kohima on May 16, 1951. About six thousand people attended.... All Naga adult males and females above the age of fifteen were included in this plebiscite. The Naga people were asked to give their thumb impressions on either one of the two columns in a paper indicating “for” and “against” joining the Indian Union.

After the inaugural function, the plebiscite papers were taken by NNC volunteers to all the villages, even to the remotest regions...

Thus, the over-all conduct of the Naga national plebiscite took over six months to complete. When all the thumb impressions were collected, the result was a resounding 99.9% verdict for Naga independence and refusal to join the Indian Union. (61)

Here one should be aware that until 1951 the Naga general population did not participate in their struggle for sovereignty but was done at a level where some intellectuals like the members of the NNC met the authorities or submitted memorandums. The Nagas learned of the happenings of their surroundings only through certain media like the radio. This is probably because of the relative distance of the

Naga Hills from mainland India as well as poor communication and transportation systems at that point in history. In *Bitter Wormwood*:

Mose asked, “Mother, can we buy a radio?”...

“Why? What do we need a radio for?”... Today, there was a man on the radio saying that the white man will soon leave and go back to England.”

“*Hou!* Then who will be the government if the white man goes away?” exclaimed his mother.

“We have never had a government without the white man. I don’t think any of our men know enough....” (31)

This excerpt shows the simplicity of the common Nagas with regards to politics. Living under the colonial masters for many decades the Nagas were completely hegemonized. They could not even think of running a government without the white man. Here they could not be blamed for their ignorance because the modern system of governments, be it democracy or otherwise, was so alien to the pre-eminent position of village centric form of governance and livelihood. Moreover, the British Administrators, with various tiers of administration recognised traditional leadership and sought not to disturb them as far as possible, and this in turn left the Nagas dependant on the British.

The parting British indeed left the Nagas with immense impediments. “A great deal had happened in the year that was about to end. The British had left India and the radio was full of the news of the partition of India... Men talked about it endlessly ... certain phrases. ‘Naga Independence’ was one of the phrases...” (*BW* 41-42). The turn of events at the dawn of India’s independence brought all the Nagas at the forefront of their struggle for independence. In 1950, Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, and Zapuphizo, who later took active leadership role in Naga freedom struggle, was elected

president of the NNC “One Sunday morning, the pastor announced at the end of the service: “We need to pray for our land. The Indian government has taken Zapuphizo prisoner for saying that the Nagas want independence. Hard times are ahead of us. Please continue to pray in your homes for peace in our land”” (BW 52). The mentality of the Nagas concerning their nationalism is captured quite clear by the following excerpt from *Bitter Wormwood*:

After church, everyone was discussing what the pastor had said. Some people had more information about it. They said that Phizo was in jail in central India for writing letters to the British Parliament.

Later that day when they were at home, Khrienuo asked, “Can it be such a bad thing to write to the white man’s government? What did Phizo write about?”

“They say he wrote asking that Nagas should not be made a part of India,” Mose tried to explain.

“Well, that is quite right. We have never been a part of India before. Why should we join them now?” Khrienuo asked.

Yes, why should we join them?” Mose echoed. (52 & 53)

By this time, the new Indian government started deploying its army in the Naga Hills. In *Bitter Wormwood*, Vilau explained the reason why she came home from the fields early, “I came back early because there were a lot of army trucks parked above us on the road. They were there for a long time”.... “They keep coming and coming,” said Khrienuo. “Early in the morning, I hear many trucks crawling up the road. One must be very cautious when there are so many soldiers about...” (55). The Nagas had

experienced harsh times with many soldiers about during the Second World War, so they could sense the situation was tense with the unfriendly soldiers around them.

During the plebiscite the Nagas readily participated: “Khrienuo and Vilau were very pleased they had participated in the plebiscite. Back home, they reluctantly washed the ink stains off.” The Nagas were confident that with so many people expressing their wishes India would grant their wishes. But things went from bad to worse. “Curfews became the order of the day” (*BW* 56). From this point, the Naga freedom struggle which earlier was done at the tables of some selected people now involved every Naga citizen. When the delegates of the NNC met Nehru and raised the issue of Naga independence and the verdict of the plebiscite, he exploded with anger: “He shook his fist and shouted, ‘Whether heaven falls or India goes to pieces and blood runs red in the country, I don’t care. Nagas will not be allowed to become independent’” (*BW* 62).

Of this incident Harish Chandola justifying Nehru’s behaviour writes:

On 19 December 1951, a nine-member Naga delegation headed by Mr. Zapuphizo went to Silghat in Assam to meet Mr. Nehru. It wanted to convey to Mr. Nehru the outcome of the opinion poll it had carried out in Naga Hills from May 1951....

Mr. Zapuphizo’s manner of talking was aggressive. He rained a barrage of questions on the person he was talking to, and did not give him or her the possibility of having a discussion. He showed Mr. Nehru the register which contained thousands of thumb impressions and signatures in favour of an independent Naga state. Nehru was dead set against another division of India.

“You agreed to accept that Hindus and Muslims, who had lived together for centuries, were different people and divided India on that basis. We Nagas have always been a separate people. Our food, way of life and thinking have always been different from yours. You don’t even drink the water touched by us. We are a separate people and want to live separately”, Mr. Zapuphizo argued.

He touched Nehru in the raw and hurt him where it hurt most.... He went red on the face.... (110-111)

However, the Nagas to whom the delegates brought back the news were never interested or even concerned with the manner in which the meeting was conducted but the outcome of the meeting hurt them badly. Their opinion of Nehru after the incident was thus: “One of the men had spoken harshly about the Prime Minister of India. “That man Nehru, “... How can we live under such a man? Can we live under such a government?”” (BW 62)

Following the plebiscite, the Nagas started non-cooperative movement, and the first Indian General Election in 1952 was boycotted by the Nagas. “No Naga participated in this event and as a result all the ballot boxes were returned to India empty” (Iralu 62). In retaliation, the government of India forced the Nagas to cast their vote at gun point: “... Suddenly there were policemen and soldiers all over the village. They pointed guns at people and assembled them all at the Village Council. The policeman forced us to put our thumbprints on little pieces of paper and put it in a box...” (BW 64).

On 18th October 1952, a peaceful procession was held by the Nagas across Kohima. In that procession Mr. Zasibito Nagi of Jotsoma village was shot dead by the

police. Kaka D. Iralu writes, “Zasibeito Nagi...,thus, became the first political martyr in the Naga independence struggle. However, it also must be noted that on August 27, 1948, three Mao Nagas ... were shot dead while protesting against Naga payment of house tax to the Manipur Maharajah...” (62). Meanwhile, the Indian Army moved to the interior areas of Naga Hills and started committing atrocities: “The Indian Army had now moved into the interior areas of Nagaland and killed a number of villagers. The Naga National Council sent several letters to the Prime Minister of India.” (BW 57).

Until then the struggle for independence by the Nagas was non-violent and carried out in a peaceful manner. On March 30, 1953, Nehru and the Prime Minister of Burma, U Nu visited Kohima. According to Kaka D. Iralu, “...The Naga leaders thought that where the appeal to a single Prime Minister had failed, an appeal to both Prime Ministers might succeed. The NNC therefore prepared a very warm reception for the two Prime Ministers” (64). Iralu has put on record that around fifteen thousand people gathered to welcome with an appeal in a memorandum to be submitted to them.

However, the Nagas were told by the Indian officials at the last minute of the starting of the meeting that they would not be allowed to address the Prime Ministers during the meeting. Greatly angered, the Nagas walked away and left a handful of government servants to welcome Nehru and U Nu. The Indian version of the incident is that: “Nehru had gone to address the Nagas along with U Nu, the Burmese premier, at a public meeting in Kohima. The Nagas embarrassed him by walking out of the meeting and even reportedly showing their bare bottoms!” (Nag 50) Soon after the incident arrest warrants were issued against the leaders of the NNC. Also, the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act of 1953 was launched in the Naga Hills which empowered a soldier to “shoot and kill, in case it is felt necessary to do so for maintaining public order” among other powers it gave to the police and army. Later on, Nehru clarified himself saying

“... so it is not true to say that I refused to receive an address... I did not know it at that time. I know it later...I was distressed. Not on my account but because the prime minister of Burma, an honoured guest of ours had been treated so discourteously” (qtd. in Nag 51).

After that incident, the Indian army was called in: “Very soon Assam Armed Police units and Assam Rifles battallions were moving into villages...” (Iralu 66). Satal Nag also writes:

... the NNC members were tracked down and arrested, which prompted a number of the Naga leaders to hide underground. The Nagas who went underground eventually took up arms, formed a Naga government in exile and began to attack the symbols of Indian presence in the Naga Hills. The army had to be called in to tackle this new challenge. Thus began the first insurgency and counter-insurgency of Independent India. (50)

In her novels, Easterine Kire has not reflected what prompted the Naga leaders to go underground and take up arms. But as she asserts in “Author’s Introduction” of *Bitter Wormwood* “This book is not about the leaders and heroes of the Naga struggle. It is about the ordinary people whose lives were completely overturned by the freedom struggle. Because the conflict is not more important than the people who are its victims” (6). Therefore, as can be seen in the novel, what Easterine wants to point out is why ordinary Naga people like Mose went underground and took up arms to fight against India. Mose was brought up by two loving women, his widowed mother, Vilau and his widowed grandmother, Khrienuo, both simple and illiterate but who worked very hard to support Mose. One unfortunate day, Khrienuo was killed by a single bullet of the army while she was in their field. Mose “didn’t have the heart to study for his final

exams” the year his grandmother was killed. Adding to that the army continued their atrocities towards common people. Kaka D. Iralu writes, “This then was the situation in Nagaland so that by the early part of the 1955 NNC records show that ten thousand Nagas had been beaten and tortured...One thousand eight hundred eleven men were maimed through torture...” (67) and the list goes on.

For innocent people who did not have any involvement with the underground, the harsh treatment meted out to them and to their people was unbearable. Therefore, many young angry Nagas joined the underground. “They left at night and their departure was spoken of in whispers amongst their fellow villagers... Young men were being recruited into the Underground” (*BW* 68). The recruited Underground cadres were given rigorous training. Meanwhile, the leaders were very cautious in handling the energetic youths who were ever ready to fight the Indian army after reports of the rapes, killings and village groupings. “But in spite of these serious provocation and inhuman treatment of the Naga public, the Naga leadership of the NNC were still desperately seeking for a political solution without an armed confrontation,” writes Kaka D. Iralu (78). In *Bitter Wormwood*, Easterine writes, “Mose and Neituo felt angry and helpless... because their officers were not ready to launch counter-attacks” (94).

In the third year since the Nagas took up arms, the first attack from them took place: “Counter attacks finally took place when Undergrounds captured a police outpost near Chiecha village” (*BW* 94). Of this incident Kaka D. Iralu writes, “Though very ill equipped, unable to tolerate the provocation any more, the newly formed Naga Safe Guards launched their first attack on an Indian Army outpost at Tsiedugei near Chiechama village on March 24, 1956. In NNC records, this attack was the first official offensive against the enemy after the formation of the Federal Government of Nagaland” (79). Henceforth, the Naga Hills once again became a battle field with the ill

equipped Nagas fighting on one side and the organized and well equipped Indian Army who were empowered by many acts and ordinances like the aforementioned Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act of 1953, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Regulations, 1958, the Armed Forces (Assam, Manipur) Special Powers Ordinance, 1958 and the Nagaland Security Regulation, 1962. Hence, the sufferings of the Naga people in this conflict were immense.

In 1963, amidst the Underground's determination to fight for independence, Nagaland became the 16th state of India. In *Bitter Wormwood* Easterine writes:

In 1963 the dismal news that Nagaland was being made into a state in India came as a shock to all in the Underground. It was not welcome news.

Something had gone terribly wrong...

"This is not what we have been fighting for. We don't want to be a state in India. We don't want anything to do with India," Neidelie, a senior officer was shouting.

"Who is behind this? Find them and execute them. They are traitors, all traitors should be eliminated!" shouted another officer....

The new government moved swiftly to use both threat and persuasion to disband the Underground. Money and land was offered for rehabilitation of those who surrendered and joined hands with the new government to build up the state. Very few jumped at that. The majority of the Underground members stayed on with the organisation, vowing to fight until Nagaland was free. (104)

Therefore, the attainment of statehood of Nagaland in 1963 divided the Nagas who earlier in solidarity fought for their independence, into two groups, those in favour to be with India and those who would continue to fight for freedom from India. In *The Periphery Strikes Back : Challenges to the Nation-State in Assam and Nagaland* (2000), Udayon Misra writes, “The Delhi Agreement... between a section of the Naga leaders and the Indian Government which led to the formation of the State of Nagaland was fiercely resisted by the Naga Federal Government and the hostilities continued unabated” (45). With the formation of statehood, the Nagas were governed by two governments simultaneously with conflicting ideologies. Monalisa Changkija writes, “Since statehood the history of the Nagas continued to be written in blood. Blood that was shed still continues to be shed, among brothers and all because of disagreement, dispute, dissent and divergence of views, opinions and perceptions on how to achieve shared aspirations, ideals, objectives and dreams” (4).

The active participation of the Nagas in the general election in 1964 marked a new era for the Nagas as part of the Indian Union. But the gradual marginalization of the NNC in Naga politics made them realize that “the cause they had been fighting for was losing much of its appeal” (Udayon Misra 46). With this, inter-tribe rivalry erupted within the NNC. Udayon Misra writes, “Such factionalism increased after Phizo left the Naga Hills in 1957 for self-exile in England and different power centres started emerging” (46).

Meanwhile, The Naga Baptist Church Council (NBCC) took initiative in setting up a Peace Mission to negotiate for peace in Nagaland. Finally in 1964 a cease-fire was secured between the Underground Army and the Indian Army. Easterine writes, “The cease-fire that had been talked of for a long time finally came... The Peace Mission, where the Rev. Michael Scott, Jayaprakash Narayan, a Gandhian, and B.P. Chaliha,

Chief Minister of Assam worked with the local people, had successfully brokered peace,” she continues, “For a few months, there were some respite from the fighting. But the army continued to raid villages and torture villagers in the interior. The raping of women continued unabated. The Peace Mission received complaints about these cease-fire violations” (BW 105). The political negotiation through the Peace Mission collapsed in 1966 and the cease-fire was also terminated in 1972 due to the incompatibility of the two rival claims to sovereignty only to be renewed in 1977 with the change of government in the centre. Therefore, the undertakings of some elite sections of the Nagas did help in bringing peace but momentarily and the fighting and sufferings of the common people continue unabated.

In 1975 Shillong Accord was signed between some Naga leaders and the Indian government. The Accord was not accepted by a section of Naga leadership led by Thuengaling Muivah and Isak Swu. They broke off from the NNC and formed the National Socialist Council of Nagalim in 1980 (Udayon Misra 53). To cut the long story short (mainly because the aim of this chapter is Easterine’s interpretation of Naga history and not the Naga history in general), differences between the Muivah-Issac Swu and Khaplang groups of the NSCN developed and it did not take long for the distrust between the two groups to break out into open clashes (Udayon Misra 53). So from 1988 the NSCN further divided into two factions; NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) with factional killings between the two groups. Amidst this critical political situation the common Nagas suffers immeasurable misery.

“Break away groups,” said Neituo in a half-whisper. ‘That’s what’s happening.’”

“Is that possible?” asked Mose. Mentally he began to calculate. Twenty-six years since the struggle had begun. They both knew about the rumblings in the Underground with new members coming in. But they could never have imagined the organisation becoming factionalised....

“But who kills a bunch of kids to do that?” said Mose with anger in his voice.

... Mose couldn't help feeling that things were going from bad to worse.

“... it is about power and how to seize it,” said Neituo....

“I am quite sure it's the end of our Naga cause,” Neituo responded, “When you begin to kill each other, you no longer have a cause left, do you? You have as good as destroyed your own cause.” (BW 119, 125, 148)

Mose and Neituo, who had sacrificed their family, youth and everything they had including their life for the Naga cause could no longer understand what their people were doing in the name of fighting for sovereignty. The people who had once fought in solidarity were split and fought against each other. This phenomenon of the lost cause of Naga struggle is also reflected in *Life on Hold*. Roko laments the futility of their struggle for independence: “I've been wrong. Setuo, I've been very wrong. The cause is dead. Most of us don't even remember what it was anymore. It has become a contest for power and money, you know. Such a waste...such a waste” (103). Roko, at a very early age realised the desperate situation for the unprivileged Naga youth in securing government jobs and so he joined the Underground Army when he was just sixteen years old. However, he soon discover that life inside the army was not what he thought, he said to Nime, “You haven't really grasped that I'm a condemned man now, have

you? They'll never stop looking for me. All my life, I'll be looking over my shoulder for an assassin" (39).

Again in *Mari*, one witnesses the different kinds of situations in Kohima in the name of fighting for independence. In the year 1956, "...there was political unrest in Nagaland. Letters from home were full of the tense situation and about the Indian army's killing of many Nagas who were fighting for independence from India. The situation became so serious that after a few months my family wrote to say that they were travelling to Assam to live with me till the worst was over" (143). In 1973, Mari's father wrote her another letter which said, "'Aviu, life in Kohima has changed so much in the last few years. The people are not the same as I knew them in my youth. There are such terrible things happening at home, I do not like living here anymore. We hear of things we never knew before. It makes me tired of life'" (157).

One important aspect of modern Naga history taken seriously by Easterine in her writings is the dichotomy between Indians and Nagas. In an interview when asked about Indo-Naga relation, Easterine replies:

I don't believe people from my generation or my children's generation will ever feel that they're Indian. We will always feel we're Nagas. There's a huge cultural difference. But we are able to embrace India, understand Indian culture...only if you're a Naga, you will understand. You have a sense of belonging to a smaller degree to India. Your identity is always as a Naga...you can have a sense of belonging to India. But you know that because of the history and culture, you'll never really be Indian. You'll always be fully Naga in your mentality...we should actually build up on that - the levels of belonging, the levels of Indian-ness. (Arora "Big Indian")

In another interview she is found asserting:

There is the big issue of cultural identity. A Naga does not have the same cultural identity as the Indian whether it is Hindu or Muslim. Our history is completely different as we do not belong to the Dravidian or Aryan races that populated India. Our religion was totally separate from Hinduism or Islam. Our food habits and language are separate from the rest of India and so on. This naturally makes it difficult for us to feel Indian and on top of that when Noetheasterners are treated badly and in a racist way in the cities of India, it is even more difficult for them to feel they are Indian. (Mallick “In Conversation”)

Sanjoy Hazarika, an Assamese writer also comments on the Indo-Northeast relationship, “the cultural chasm between the people of northeastern India and those of the mainland is deep” (20). Concerning the root cause of this dichotomy Easterine claims, “the NE (Northeast India) was not part of India and even India was not India as we know it after 1947. Historically speaking, the Naga hills were colonised by the British in the 1800s and on their departure, the British ignored Naga appeals to leave them out of the Indian union... So, there was no cultural connection between mainland India and the NE. There wasn’t even a historical connection...” (Zubaan “Web-chat”). This “non-belongingness” of people from Northeast India including the Nagas has greatly hampered their sense of nationhood as Indians. In *Bitter Wormwood* when Neibou was about to leave for Delhi for further studies, his grandparents were quite apprehensive though they did not show it outright to the boy. The boy had to explain to them that there were many Naga students and he would not be lonely. But true to their concerns, Neibou’s early days in Delhi were not sound. Apart from the uncomfortable ordeals he suffered at the hostel in the name of “ragging”, he was

called “*pahariya*, a hill-dweller” at college. In the capital he witnessed the reality of the situation faced by Northerners; “boys being picked on and intimidated and sometimes even beaten up” and girls being called “*Badchalan*. Easy women” (181-182).

Temsula Ao, a Naga writer writes, “Being a Naga has never been easy for us. The mystique and negative power of the ‘savage’ has always fascinated the western mind... But fortunately for us, though we were stripped of our external Naga-ness, the essential core of our being Nagas could not be obliterated and this consciousness has remained firmly rooted to the soil of our origin” (4). The white colonizer sowed the seed of ‘othering’ the Nagas from the rest of the world, and in postcolonial era, the seed got germinated and the Nagas remained the ‘other’ in the eyes of their ‘fellow Indians’, so the sense of alienation on the part of the Nagas comes naturally. Neibou’s experiences in the capital in *Bitter Wormwood* is a microcosm of the alienated life of Nagas in mainland India.

In interpreting the history of the Nagas, Easterine posits that they were once an independent, never wealthy but self-reliant people with definite identity, culture and tradition, but were stripped of their pride and forced into submission by the British, and subsequently living in their land with an unending fear and suffering and losing their selfhood in their fight for the lost sovereignty under India.

Historical accounts of Nagas by colonizers as well as other non-Naga writers overlooked and disregarded many cultural values inherent to the Nagas while documenting their history. In her novels, Easterine reveals that others’ knowledge of the Nagas were either mistaken or misrepresented. By reflecting incidents of the pre-colonial, colonial and modern times in her writings and appropriately incorporating the

Nagas ethos and challenges in them she is giving an insider's perspective. She shows how the Nagas were destined to fall under the mighty British and again under India. She shows how the Naga collective selfhood and nationalism was constructed and also how conflicting ideologies developed amongst the Nagas and the violent consequences thereof.

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CHAPTER THREE

INTERPRETING SOCIETY

The previous chapter dealt with Easterine's interpretation of Naga history from pre-colonial to modern times through her novels, covering a period of roughly two centuries. This chapter attempts to study, Easterine's interpretation of the societal paradigm of the Nagas during the aforementioned period. As seen in the previous chapter, the Nagas have gone through tremendous transformations; from near complete isolation to globalization, during the said period. The impact on the social set-up of the people by these historical transformations was manifold. In order to better understand the transition of the Naga society, this chapter is also divided into three parts with each part covering the same period as done in the previous chapter.

i) Pre-colonial Naga Society

Of the Nagas today Julian Jackobs writes:

... many young Naga people feel today about their cultural past: Everybody tells them not to lose their Naga culture, to connect to the past. But if they ask 'so what is our culture, how was our past?' they will be told a strongly Christianised story by their parents and grandparents. But the young people, especially the educated ones, know very well that this is not true. (xii)

What, then, is the cultural and societal past of the Nagas? Who were the Nagas and what were their traditions? These are some basic questions answered by Easterine in her novels. As the Nagas did not have written record of their past, and the earlier available accounts of their past culture were obtained principally by means of conjectures and speculations by British administrators, historians, and scholars based on personal interviews, a study of extant traditions and cultural practices that were still in

practice as witnessed by them, a detailed study of the pre-colonial Naga society is difficult. However, Easterine locates her characters in the traditional Naga society thereby showcasing the crux of the old society which is now gone. She writes her novels in simple prose and her technique reflects the type of fireside narrations in oral cultures. The folk and cultural elements in her narratives which are part of the oral tradition naturally form the basis of the novels and serve as important sources of the Naga past society. All aspects of the Naga society cannot be studied in detail here, so, only some aspects of Naga society witnessed in Easterine's novels will be given space in this study. Moreover, as Easterine focuses basically only on the Angami Nagas in her novels, the society studied in this chapter is the Angami society. Two of the selected novels; *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003) and *When the River Sleeps* (2014) encapsulate the pre-colonial Naga society, so they are analysed in this section of the chapter.

As already mentioned, *A Naga Village Remembered* published in 2003 is the first novel written in English by a Naga. Being a native postcolonial writer, the narrative of Easterine in the novel utilizes the grand narrative of history created by the colonizer as backdrop, by presenting perspective of the colonized. The novel, therefore, recreates a pre-colonial, pre-Christian world depicting the rich cultural life of the Nagas especially of the people of Khonoma village. The novel tells the story of Khonoma village through one of its three clans, viz., *Merhu*, *Thevo* and *Thepa* clan. People of the *Merhu* clan constitute most of the characters of the novel. It spans through three generations following the lives of Kovi, his nephew Levi and Levi's sons Roko and Sato. The characters lived their culture. They are representative of what the Nagas were before the influence of other culture(s) which entered their society.

On the other hand, *When the River Sleeps*, is set in modern times, seen in the functioning 'Forest Department' (4), the presence of 'a flask of whisky' (43), 'shop

cigarettes' (57), markets wherein traders sell "Women's dresses and shoes, sunglasses, and shiny, coloured plastic handbags ... Umbrellas, rain boots, carpentry tools.." (119) and many other items. Apart from these instances, in another excerpt the narrator writes, "A hundred years ago, the non-Christian customarily offered chicken sacrifices if anyone fell sick ... But no one did that now because the Christians taught that *Jisu* had been sacrificed for everyone's sickness so nobody needed to offer chicken sacrifices again" (54) clearly denoting the post-colonial setting of the novel. However, the way of life, the belief system and values practiced in the novel reveal a pre-Christian Naga worldview. The culture and tradition is deeply rooted in the past. This helps provide an analysis of old Naga society.

Some features of the pre-colonial Angami Naga society incorporated in the two novels are analysed in the following.

In the pre-colonial Naga society all activities - judicial, political, social, belief system and economic activities revolved within the village. In those days, a village was an independent unit in itself. In the novels, Easterine clearly denotes the names of villages whenever she integrated them in the texts, like Khonoma, Viswema, Phe sema and others in *A Naga Village Remembere*, and Zuzie and Dichu in *When the River Sleeps*. Each village possessed a well-defined area. An excerpt from *When the River Sleeps* states, "to get back to Zuzie, he would have to cross Dichu territory until he got to the bridge that divided their land from Zuzie" clearly reflects the system of village lands with clear demarcation among the Nagas. "Before the advent of the British," Charles Chasie wrote, "the world of the Naga revolved around his village: family, *khel* and village largely represented the extent of his concern and involvement" (253). There was no higher polity than the village state. They were primarily agrarian and economically independent.

Within a village, the community further divided into various clans, and it was obligatory for an Angami Naga to offer his loyalty and identify himself with his own clan. Unlike some other Naga tribes having chiefs such as the *Angh* of the Konyaks, the *Akekao* of the Semas, the *Ung* of the Aos and *Awunga* of the Tangkhuls, the Angamis had no chieftainship nor elected council of elders. Each Angami village was comprised of several clans and the elders of the different clans were their representatives in the village. About this clan affiliation among the Angamis, K.S. Zetsuvi writes, “This is natural in the light of the fact that he has descended from his clan and lived in the clan settlement with its well-marked boundaries. So he belongs to that particular society and political set-up of the clan. So distinct is this clan identity that a clan almost acts like a village within the village” (10).

In *A Naga Village Remembered* this clan affiliation of the characters is denoted when a notable character is introduced like “Pelhu of the Merhu clan,” (2) “elders from the *Thepa* clan and the *Thevo* clan” (16), “The seer of the *Thevo* clan” (28) and others. It is also seen from the novel that community life of the traditional Angami Nagas began at the clan level. “Something was brewing in the clan again” (34). Be it raid or any other social activities, it was first discussed by the clan.

This clan affiliation was so strong that a man was known by the clan to which he belonged, and the clan members took initiatives in matters concerning other clan member. Clan was in fact the main social identity of the Angamis. J. H. Hutton also mentioned this clan affiliation of the Angamis. He writes:

Although the village may be regarded as the unit of the political and religious sides of Angami life, the real unit of the social side is the clan. So distinct is the clan from the village that it forms almost a village in itself,

often fortified within the village inside in its own boundaries and not infrequently at variance almost amounting to war with other clans in the same village. (109)

At the same time, in Angami society family was the smallest unit in a village. According to their custom, “joint family system is not encouraged so that a son after getting married moves away from his parents’ home and shoulders his own share of responsibility” (Zetsuvi 20), while joint family system is a traditional practice found with their neighbouring Asamese community and other Hindu communities in most parts of India. This traditional practice of Nagas maintaining nuclear family is well-reflected in the novels. *In a Naga Village Remembered*, Piano has two sons and a few days after her elder son Levi married Peno they shifted to a new house. Again in *When the River Sleeps*, Vilie has a separate house in his ancestral village while his two unmarried aunts live in another house. There is no instance of people living in joint family system in the novels.

In the familial set-up, the husband was the head of the family and all major decisions were taken by him while the other members occupied secondary status. Therefore, the pre-colonial Angami society was patriarchal and patrilineal. A story of three generations (*A Naga Village Remembered*) tackled only through male lineage indicates the patrilineal Naga society. However, this aspect of the Naga society is studied in detail in Chapter-IV: “Locating Women in History and Society.”

Like most pre-moneyed, pre-literate society, the Naga society of the past was a community-centered one. Every individual was dependent on the community for his survival, and in the same way, the community was responsible for the individual members. R. R. Shimray in his book *Origin and Culture of the Nagas* (1985) writes:

One of the most colourful ingredients of the Naga village-states is its “Community Life.” Naga individuals know no other life except that of “community life.” They work in groups, eat in groups and sleep in groups. There is no individual cultivation nor harvest, no individual house-building, no ‘feast of merit’ by individuals alone and no wooing of girls individually. All things are done in groups and in the full presence of the entire community. The individual has no existence apart from the community.

(121)

Such a scenario may not necessarily exist today, but the ethos of the old days, of clan and village life remain the same.

The Angami community life without class hierarchy reflected the egalitarian society that prevailed at that point in their history. Charles Chasie writes, “Our village-society was egalitarian to the extent possible and the basic social premise seemed very sound” (125). A significant event incorporated in *A Naga Village Remembered* which showcases the community life of the Nagas is Keviselie performing feast of merit. Keviselie felt ready to take a title when he “had dreamt of the short-tailed gwi” (16) and before that he wanted to perform the *Phichupihie*. In fact *Phichupihie* is the third feast in a sequence of the seven stages in a feast of merit performed by a married Angami man. The first feast is given to his close relatives when a person is able to accumulate sufficient amount of wealth. The second feast is given to the relatives and neighbours (Zetsuvi 51). The third was giving feast to the clan elders, and the stage went on with each successive stage more extortionate than the previous, and each completed stage entitles the feast giver to show his status rise in the community. The feat of feast of merit is exclusive only to the few privileged men in the society and is beyond the performance of the general public. Therefore, even in the fierce and powerful Khonoma

village a feast of merit is a rare occurrence so after Kevisela feasted his village, “The village had not been feasted so well since Nikerhe’s title taking feast, some twenty years ago. But many were too young to remember that” (23).

Feasting culture was not a unique feature of the Angami Nagas, but a common practice of several pre-moneyed societies. However, the reason of this phenomenon may vary with different cultures, though. Margaret Ch. Zama writes, “The Naga tribes have long practiced it as one of their most conspicuous and important features of fertility rites, relating both symbolically and practically to life and prosperity. By giving feasts of merit, a feast giver’s status rises, ensuring he will be remembered after death” (12). She also states, “The feasts of merit of the Nagas are not an assertion against social competitors as is seen with some practitioners elsewhere, but a means of gaining certain recognized ranks in the society” (12).

Among the Angamis, feast of merit was performed with elaborate rituals. The initiation ceremony itself was thorough and laborious. It was a community activity; everybody young and old took part in it. It is “one of the common social practices ... for a rich man to share his wealth by feeding the clan, khel, or village ... wealth was seen in its true perspective – transient and temporary and meant to be a tool in the hands of man to serve a purpose” (Chasie 125-26).

Another important feature of the pre-colonial Naga society incorporated by Easterine is the institution of the dormitory system generally known as *Morung*. Among the Angamis, it is “two institutions combined into one, ... Thehu (meeting place) and Kichuki (“Kichu literally means ‘sleeping together’ and “Ki” is the building housing the dormitory)” (Chasie 123). The outermost part of the *Kichuki* formed the *Thehu* or *Thehou*. In *A Naga Village Remembered* Easterine writes:

“Are you going to sleep in the *Kichuki* tonight? Vipiano asked her son. “I would like to, Apfu” Levi answered. “Good. Do not spend all your time jesting but do listen to the stories that your parent has to tell.”...

As he walked up to the male dormitory of his age-group, he crossed another dormitory....

Levi walked on till he reached his dormitory... their parent was saying something in great earnest. “If you are at a community feast and take more than two pieces of meat, shame on you. Others will call you glutton.... This is the key to right living – avoiding excess in anything – be content with your share of land and fields.... Never be arrogant, respect yourself sufficiently so that you fulfil the responsibilities of manhood.... Obscenity of speech does not prove anything, keep that in mind.”

... Evenings at the dormitory were exciting events when they exchanged stories and were taught by their parent, the elder chosen to be parent for their age-group....

The members of Levi’s dormitory... were to be included in the raid this time as an initiation into warriorhood.... (24, 25 & 34)

As can be seen from the above excerpt, a well-functioning dormitory system in Naga society played a crucial role as a social institution. After a day of hard labour at the jhums, the young men having cleaned up and had their supper would proceed to the dormitory and spend the night there. It was here that young men were taught different skills in life. It was a power structure that literally controlled every aspect of village life. It was a place of learning and the repository of indigenous knowledge. Another important purpose of the dormitory was that it facilitated quick action from the young men with regard to security. It prepared young men for manhood. “After intensive

training and discipline in the *Morung*, they turned out to be good warriors, and to be a good warrior was the lifelong aspiration of every young man” (Changkiri 7). In the absence of modern education system, the Nagas had this well-established social institution of the dormitory system.

This dormitory system was also practiced by other tribal communities as well during pre-colonial times. In Mizoram, the Mizo forefathers practised the dormitory system for bachelors known as the *zawlbuk*, while in Manipur the Paite had *haam*. While there are certain differences in the functioning of the dormitories of different tribes the crucial role they played as the main social institutions for the communities cannot be neglected.

Similar to modern education which functions by clubbing students into classes and delegating teachers to teach them, in the *Morung*, young men were divided into age-groups and *Peyumia* (Angami term for veteran leaders) were assigned for them. At the same time, this age-group system among the Angamis was not confined within the *Morung*, but was employed in all social activities. “All children, regardless of sex, with age difference of say upto five years (sometimes even more) are organized into a group. This is one Age-Group. Each khel in the village had one such age-group although the various khel age-groups, formed in the same year would be treated, informally, as belonging to one. Everyone belongs to one such group... for life” (Chasie 124). Each age-group had a foster parent whose name henceforth was used to identify the group. K.S. Zetsuvi writes:

During the village festivals such as *Thekranyi*, the members of this age group get together for recreational activities. Such social occasions are times for fun, enjoyment, singing, laughing, drinking etc. while at work, they

work very hard as a unit... These peers remain close at all times and are loyal to each other, helping in times of need and in distress always and every time as an end in itself. (26)

This age-group system is reflected well by Easterine in *A Naga Village Remembered*. From the moment when the young characters in the novel started attending Morung, they are identified by their age-groups, instances like, “Levi and Penyu were on their way home when they heard the hubbub. Several elders were walking out of the village with the oldest age-groups” (27). “Three weeks to *Thekranyi* from today....Apfu, our age group has earned much this year” (32), and others.

K.S. Zetsuvi in his notes writes, “An interesting aspect of the age group is, when asking the age of an old man/woman, his/her answer is usually accompanied by listing the names of the surviving members of his/her peers...” (25) This identification with one’s age-group peers is found in *When the River Sleeps* when Vilie asked his aunt Selno how old she is, she replied, “How would I know how old I am?... But your mother was not the same age-group as us. She was in the age-group below ours. So how old does that make me?” The system of age-group was in fact an important identity marker for the Angamis. In the absence of modern system of counting years, the Angamis had the required system of calculating age.

In the pre-colonial Naga society, the system of land ownership practiced by the Angamis occupied a pivotal role in their society, because in the words of Mar Imsong, “Strictly speaking, it would almost be unfeasible for us to define exclusively terms such as society, culture, and religion since all of these revolve around the Naga Creation / Land-centered spirituality” (167).

Basically, the old Naga society was rural and agrarian in character and as such land was their main resource. Land system of the Angami Nagas could be broadly divided into three categories; firstly the village land which consisted of some forests. The village land was the common property of the whole community and every member had equal right over it. "Each family in a village keeps several breeds of cattle which graze on the village common. Moreover, for the construction of *thehou*, village-gates, bridges etc for the community, raw materials were collected from the village forests"(Zetsuvi 30). This system is reflected in *When the River Sleeps* wherein Vilie is entrusted with looking after gwi and tragopan in the forest own by his village.

Secondly, there was the clan land. Every clan owned certain forests. It was this area that the clan members distributed amongst themselves for cultivation. However, as they practiced jhum cultivation which was temporary, after some period the cultivated land reverted to the clan. This system of land distribution for cultivation to its village members was also practiced by Paite in Churachandpur district of Manipur. Though for them the land was the property of the chief. Each household who cultivated and hunted in the land paid some amount of paddy and certain portion of the game hunt to the chief as tribute. However, this kind of paying tribute was not paid to anybody by the Angami Nagas as the land was the common property of the clan members.

Thirdly, there was the individual land. "In all Angami villages, every family owns some private lands which are generally *jhum* lands and the terrace fields. For such properties, the land owner has the right to share the products of the land, to transfer holding, to alienate or to grant the right to use by others" (Zetsuvi 31). According to Angami traditional law, the owner could sell his land, yet under strict restriction. That was, his clansmen were given the first opportunity to buy and if there was no buyer among his clan members, he could sell to anyone within the village. Selling land to

someone outside the village was unheard of. This system of land ownership with its laws of restriction in distribution and selling helped the Angami Nagas in maintaining their detachment.

In fact, this land ownership system mentioned above is so much ingrained in the Naga consciousness that it shaped their identity and ethos. Their belongingness to their land is deeply rooted that any intrusion to it was regarded as threat to their very existence. “Head hunting”, the term often associated with the Nagas can be linked to their land system. Mar Imsong writes:

The territorial unit of the village organization is an elemental component for ethnic Naga identity. Every village has its own jurisdiction. No villager could trespass upon the territory of another without permission. The trespasser’s village usually invites war or conflict from the trespassed village. The so-called “headhunting,” the much talked about (by non-Nagas) traditional practice of the Nagas came to be known as a way of life for the Nagas. However, the hunt was for the lives of the enemies. (173)

Another aspect of the pre-colonial Angami society found in the works of Easterine is their indigenous belief system. The pre-colonial Angamis’ belief system was based on oral doctrine propitiating deities and spirits. They also believed in a Supreme Being called *Ukepenuopfu*, the creator. In *When the River Sleeps* whenever Vilie found himself fighting strong spirits he often invoked this creator deity; “Sky is my father, Earth is my mother, *Kepenuopfu* fights for me!...” (193) The traditional Angami belief also features a number of spirit and supernatural forces. This aspect of the Angami belief system is also seen in Vikhwelie’s spiriting in *A Naga Village Remembered*. Vikhwelie is spirited away during a fishing trip. When he goes missing for several days a seer is consulted his whereabouts. After six days Vikhwelie comes back and has a terrifying tale to tell. This

aspect of spirits and other unnatural beings within the Naga worldview is given a bigger context in *When the River Sleeps*. In the novel the boundary separating the natural and spirit world is hardly felt and both worlds coexist together.

A lone hunter, Vilie, sets out to find the river from where he would be able to wrest a stone that will give him untold power. During the course of the journey he needed to overcome unquiet spirits, vengeful sorceress, and demons of the forest. At the same time, as he fights with these supernatural beings he is helped by greater and mightier spirits. In some cases these spirits manifest their horrible and scary shapes like when Vilie has a fight with them in the forest on his way back from the river, “the spirits now revealed their horrible shapes to him. Some of them were red-eyed and bloodied with long claws...” (*WTRS* 195), while in most cases the spirits were every bit real as men and women. Vilie succeeds in wresting a heart stone from a river guarded by spirits but “the river itself is a spirit” (*WTRS* 108).

In *When the River Sleeps*, Easterine reflects the Naga world view with respect to their belief system. The existence of the powerful creator deity, natural and supernatural, real and surreal beings in the novel indicates the rich doctrine of the Naga past beliefs. In fact, the whole book presents the supernatural world that inhabits and coexists with the humans which in turn tells how the cycle of life revolves around the Nagas in the past. Unfortunately, these cultures and beliefs of the past are now in most cases regarded as mere fiction.

The Angamis’ doctrine of supernatural spirits had affected their everyday life extensively. They believed that fortune and misfortunes were caused by spirits. Therefore, they always strived to appease the spirits. This in turn left them with a

number of rituals they had to observe. In order to have better insight to this aspect of their belief system, *genna*, marriage and death rituals are studied here:

Genna: “The most important ritual of the Nagas is the *genna* which was observed by an individual, family or village” (Changkiri 13). During the observance of *genna* works were avoided. They believed that strict observance of *genna* was necessary for health and wealth of the individual and the community and that failing to do so would bring misfortune. So, every individual had to see to it that they did not break this ritual. “Piano knew how important it was to abide by all the rituals and especially the taboos forbidding work.” (ANVR 11) “So the *genna* was death to those who defied it but life to those who abide by it” (42). So strict were the *gennas* that some were forbidden to even talk to sojourners (66) *Gennas* could be declared when something extraordinary happened in a village (WTRS 109). *Genna* days were observed by the Nagas for religious reasons to appease spirits which they believed could harm them.

Marriage: Nagas were monogamous and exogamous. Marriages within the same clan were strictly forbidden. Socializing of both sexes was permitted. The ceremony involved both the boy’s and girl’s family. An intermediary, preferably a woman, a close relative of the boy would approach the girl’s family for their consent. “A few weeks before harvest, his aunt visited the girl’s family and they did not hesitate to accept Levi’s suit” (ANVR 48). From the onset traditional Naga marriage was performed through a series of rituals. J.H. Hutton writes:

A man who intends to get married employs or gets his father to employ an old woman as a go-between with the girl’s parents. She makes all the arrangements and there is no intercourse between the parties. First omens are taken by strangling a fowl and watching the position assumed by its legs

as it dies. If the right leg crosses over above the left the omen is good. Then both the man and the girl must note their dreams on the same night. (220)

This traditional marriage ritual is reflected in *A Naga Village Remembered*: “The next night, Levi’s mother invited her brother-in-law home. He took the chicken she kept aside and strangled it and held it fast till it was dead. In death, the chicken’s right leg crossed over the left and Viu pronounced it as good ritual” (48). The ceremony ended with feasting. All the rituals were done cautiously as any obstacle was unsolicited in the marriage ceremony.

Funeral rites: During pre-colonial period methods of disposal of dead bodies differ among different Naga tribes. “It was a custom among the Aos, Konyaks, Phoms and Changs to dispose the dead bodies by exposing them on a raised bamboo platform outside the house or place on a bier under a small roof in the village cemetery... They smoked the dead bodies for about two months, after which the dead bodies are kept in wooden coffin till the next sowing,” (Changkiri 14) and only after that they bury the dead body. With the Angamis, they buried the dead body after some days when they finished the needed rituals of washing the corpse, laying it on the bed, covering with his own clothes, digging the grave, making the coffin, and others. These formalities were performed with certain set rules and “all this time the family of the dead man maintain a doleful howling” (Hutton 226). Moreover, an Angami disposal of dead ritual was not complete without feasting. J.H. Hutton writes that when a man died his, “most intimate friend... brings flesh, rice, and rice beer to the dead man’s house... Next day the young men of the deceased’s kindred bring cattle, including those of the dead man” (225).

An important aspect in the disposal of the dead by the Angamis incorporated in the novels by Easterine is treatment of ‘apotia’ or unnatural deaths. Among the pre-

literate Nagas, women who died at childbirth, persons killed by wild animals, suicides and other accidental deaths are considered *apotia* death. J.H. Hutton explains the meaning of *apotia* with its Assamese equivalent ‘accidental’ or ‘causing misfortune’ (229). No mourning is allowed and no rituals are performed for such *apotia* death. The first notable event made mention in the novel is the death of Kovi’s wife at childbirth. Maternity death is treated differently by different pre-literate societies, for example, among the Jale of Papua province in Indonesia, if a woman dies at childbirth the husband is held responsible because “he impregnated her.” (Encyclopedia “Comparative”). With the Nagas it is quite different. Dying at childbirth called *lashu* death by the Nagas was considered to be the most abominable. Kovi’s sister Piano remembers her sister-in-law as a good, hardworking, pious person and someone who never breaks taboos, and is therefore unable to comprehend why she met such a tragic end. About Piano’s uncertainty in Kovi’s wife fate, Vizovono Elizabeth writes:

The uncertainty of life and death is a mystery that is left unexplained in her simple world view ... her confusion is indicative of the fact that in spite of religiously observing the traditional rituals and taboos there were mysteries that the indigenous religion could not provide answers to and certain things like matters of life and death remained unexplained. She experiences the situation but is unable to analyse the mystery behind death. (30-31)

This uncertainty, among others, could have been an important factor behind the Nagas conversion to Christianity as the old religion could not provide the answer for such twists of fate.

A word must be added here of the Angamis’ belief in the life after death. They had a whole doctrine of the soul going into the afterlife world. While it is not the intention of

the research to study the said doctrine, their belief that the soul of a dead man lingered on is noted here in order to illustrate the changes or otherwise in this aspect of the Nagas in the coming decades.

As was the case with most pre-moneyed societies, the old Nagas maintained a close relationship with nature. Mar Imsong writes, “In the Naga understanding, land is sacred; indeed, for the Naga, ‘land’ includes Earth and all creation, in its spiritual and material modes of being ...” (v). This interdependency between nature and the Nagas is deliberated upon by Easterine in *When the River Sleeps*.

The novel is set in the beautiful and scenic hills of Nagaland. Much of the novel takes place inside the forest as the readers travel along with Vilie when he undertakes the epic journey in search of the river of his dreams. As Vilie takes shelter in the villages the readers are also transported to take a glimpse of the lives of Naga people. Easterine has exalted the rural life which is untouched by modernity and unadulterated by technology. The relative interdependence of men and nature in the novel also assert the Nagas strong bonding with their land.

The inherent human isolation from other human beings makes it possible to explore the sublimity of his relationship with nature. Nature generously provides food, shelter and all amenities necessary for survival. Time and again Vilie asserts that the forest is his wife and so he makes his home in it away from his village. Though his relatives insisted for him to return to his ancestral village he decided to stand firm in his decision. In nature there is abundance, an equilibrium that is maintained, beauty, freedom, order and above all an undeniable wholeness. Vilie-nature relationship is a mutual one. Nature is Vilie’s protector and he is nature’s protector. The forest is home to Vilie and he in turn is the “guardian of the forest” (*WTRS* 72). The clan has assigned

the duty of guarding the gwi and the Forest department has declared him the “official protector of the rare tragopan” which nested in Vilie’s part of the forest (*WTRS* 4).

The healing power of nature is emphasized by Easterine in this novel as well. Nature provides an antidote and cure for all ailments and the people rely on it heavily for treatment of any kind. When Vilie was stung by nettle plants Idele (a woman Vilie met on the way who knows the art of weaving nettle cloths) “looked around for an antidote. She plucked the leaves off a small bitter wormwood plant and kneaded it to a pulp in her hand...Vilie kept rubbing the paste into his skin and that seemed to ease the smarting” (*WTRS* 37). She also gave him rock bee honey stating that it is a “cure-all” (*WTRS* 38). For injuries Vilie made “pastes of cien for open wounds. That worked for smaller injuries, but for bigger wounds he liked to use pungent *Japan nha* (crofton weed) and rock bee honey. He had tried these on himself, and the healing had been quick, with little scarring” (*WTRS* 41). In the village for people who caught a fever “the seer would give them a drink made of ginseng and tsohou (nutgall tree), the wild sour seed that grew on trees” (*WTRS* 54). At the end of the novel Vilie metamorphosed and become one with nature.

In *When the River Sleeps* Easterine brings folklore alive by interweaving the natural and supernatural together. In folklore nature is personified and is always a provider and also a threat. In this novel too, nature not only provides a backdrop but is like a character(s) who is involved in the novel. Nature helps Vilie to conquer fear. Nature helps him not just to conquer the fear of people but also the fear of spirits as well. As Vilie reaches the river of his dreams he realizes that the “river is a spirit” (*WTRS* 108). He stepped into the river to wrest the heart-stone, but the force of the gushing water almost strangles him and made him realize that his fight is against a spirit. He conquers the fear of this spirit by invoking nature as he said “Sky is my

father, Earth is my mother, stand aside death! Kepenuopfu (creator deity) fights for me, today is my day! I claim the wealth of the river because mine is the greater spirit. To him who has the greater spirit belongs the stone!" (WTRS 103). While absconding from the people who are misinformed about a murder where he happened to be witness, he enters Rarhuria (the unclean forest known to be infested by spirits and so shunned by villagers) where he witnesses the presence of spirits but escapes all because "The forest was his wife indeed: providing him with sanctuary when he most needed it; and food when his rations were inadequate. The forest also protected him from the evil in the heart of man. He felt truly wedded to her at this moment" (WTRS 51).

The selected novels reflect that Easterine is consciously aware of the need to preserve, remember and value the old traditions and culture of the Nagas in the fast changing world. They also demonstrate the writer's painstaking consciousness for the need to be rooted in one's own culture in order to be able to tell one's own stories. The intimate details of the everyday cultural life of the Naga people are meticulously delineated in the selected novels.

It can also be said that Easterine has attempted to record living folklore(s) for posterity by encapsulating them in her novels. In fact, culture and folklore are inseparable in a traditional / oral society. Culture performs a crucial educational role in passing down collective cultural identity, and folklore does its part in recreating the past history of the people as is aptly illustrated particularly in *A Naga Village Remembered* and *When the River Sleeps*. Easterine has drawn heavily from the memories of oral narrators and based many events from true incidents. About *A Naga Village Remembered*, Easterine says that the novel is "set in 1850s to about 1900s and goes as far back as the memory of my oral narrators could take us." (qtd. in Elizabeth and

Tsuren 27). In doing so, she presents an account of the Naga past society from the perspective of her people.

Incidentally, by presenting such stories wherein Nagas survive in their own land without assistance from outside cultures, Easterine in turn makes her political stand that her people were self-reliant and self-sufficient and need no one to govern them. Their rituals and beliefs, their reverence for the land, the close knit communities, the life lived in harmony with their natural surroundings reflect the survival of the Naga society on its own.

On another tangent, the colonial description of the condition of the Nagas is:

A word must be added on the general condition of the Angami village. It is not a subject on which it is pleasant to dwell. Sanitary arrangements are nil. The offices performed by the sewer farm of an English town are carried out for the Naga by his fowls, pigs, and dogs, destined themselves to be eventually eaten.... (J.H. Hutton 50)

In response to such observations made by the so called civilized people, Easterine gives a gist of the living condition of the village of Kirhupfumia, the village of the outcast women:

All the houses had gardens in the back with a few vegetables growing, chilli plants, garlic and ginger. The village had two water sources which were looked after very carefully. In the lower pool, rocks for washing clothes were lined up on the bank. Ate explained that the upper pool was only for cooking and no one was allowed to wash clothes there. (WTRS 144 & 145)

The above excerpts indicate two totally contrasting observations; that of the observers and the observed. For a people with zero modern medical and other facilities, it would be wrong to define them as having no sanitary arrangements. One must retrospect, observe the context, period and whole living condition of the people and then only come to a conclusion. Easterine using the outcast women's village is suggestive of the fact that if outcasts lived in such a hygienic and systemic condition it should be taken for granted that other normal villages with well-established system of administration would live in a much more organised manner.

In re-creating the bygone society of the Nagas in her creative writing, Easterine's works reflect a strong sense of nostalgia; of reminiscing the past. As far as Easterine is concerned, the Nagas lived a meaningful life. There was order within the society as well as with the natural surroundings. There was love, respect and faithfulness amongst the members of the society. There certainly were negative forces too, but there were many good and healthy aspects in the cultural and traditional practices of the Naga society which are now lost.

ii) Naga Society under Colonial Rule

“Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter.”

The above quotation is an African proverb popularized by J. Nozipo Maraire (born 1964), a contemporary postcolonial writer.

Within a century of occupying the Naga Hills, the western colonizers succeeded in hegemonizing the Naga population in every sphere of their life. The colonial hangover is so inherent that they glorify the white man's ideology and practices over their traditional values. Easterine in *A Naga Village Remembered, Bitter Wormwood*

(2011), *Mari* (2010) and *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007) showcases how colonialism ushered changes in the Naga society. She focuses on the everyday life of ordinary Nagas during colonialism and thereby presents an insider's story of the impact of colonialism on the society.

The impact of colonialism on the Naga societal paradigm can broadly be divided into two domains; the administrative / governance, and the religious / education aspect. As the British adopted the policy of least interference by trying to preserve the nobility of the Naga democratic villages and their tribal distinctiveness, most of their traditional cultures remained unchanged until the advanced stage of colonialism in Naga areas when eventually the Nagas were introduced to western education and Christianity. In fact, colonialism ushered manifold changes in the society that the proud and insular Naga people were transformed into, in the words of Temsula Ao "people without confident moorings and a proper identity" (5). These changes in the societal paradigm of the Nagas with regards to their culture and identity are well reflected in Easterine's writings. This portion of the chapter attempts to study the writer's view of the Naga society during colonialism and the transformations it underwent during that point in history.

Initially, the British occupation of the Naga Hills was aimed at keeping the turbulent Nagas under control. Since the historical domain of the annexation of the Naga Hills by the British was studied in the previous chapter, this portion focuses on the societal paradigm. At the same time, some important measures taken up by the British to govern the Nagas need mention here so as to understand their effect on the Naga society better. The British established its first headquarters in the Naga territory at Samaguting in 1866, mainly to check the Angami's raids in the plains of Assam. Meanwhile, the Lotha Nagas killed Captain Butler while he was on a survey tour. "This

incident made the British shift the district headquarters to Wokha in 1876” (Zetsuvi 59). Samaguting still remained as an administrative station. Again, in 1878 the headquarters was shifted to Kohima, reducing Wokha to a sub-division. Kohima was a large village in the centre of Angami area and close to powerful Angami villages like Khonoma, Vishwema and others.

The moment when the British began their occupation in the Naga area, communication was improved. The administrative headquarters and other military outposts need suitable communications for military operations. In due course, they succeeded in constructing a network of roads that joined Kohima, the district headquarters with all outposts and “one would notice a gradual improvement of pathways everywhere and even modern systems of roads were introduced in few places” (Zetsuvi 78). This extension of road transport within the Naga Hills, which were meant to serve the British interest in the first place, brought about great social changes in the traditional Angami culture. It opened opportunities for the Angamis, as was the case with the other Nagas, to be in contact with one another and life was never the same again. Concerning these changes in outlook of the Nagas, K.S. Zetsuvi writes:

Fighting became less frequent and they learned to live in peace with one another. In fact, one of the most noticeable changes, brought about by the British rule was the respect for law and order, though it took some time for the people to become used to it. They gradually accepted the new administration as it had brought peace and security... The different villages and clans who had been at loggerheads for years were now willing to bury hatchet and get back to a normal working relationship. The acceptance of the British rule thus generated a growing sense of unity among the people

which was a direct outcome of their common subordination to the British authority. (78)

This phenomenon of the people from different communities coexisting together peacefully is witnessed in *Mari*. The novel also reflects the close cultural encounter among different tribes with the Manipuris, Nepalis and other tribes living in town.

When we were done, we bought eggs from the Manipuri hawkers because Mother had told us to buy the eggs at the very end. The Manipuris were popular with the local people. They sold dried fish and small yeast-balls which the non-Christians bought to make rice beer.

On Saturdays, the Nepali women would come by, selling milk. ‘Ama!’ they would call out to Mother. Occasionally, they brought chicken or mustard leaves for sale. ‘Ama, we have brought chickens today,’ they would announce. Mother would invite them into the house and serve them tea. She said it wasn’t right to send them away empty-handed.

‘Ama, can we pluck some mint leaves?’ one of the women sometimes asked. She was an especially large woman with very red cheeks, her name was Maya.

‘Take what you want,’ Mother would reply. (10 & 13)

This is a cross-cultural phenomenon that never happened in the past with the Nagas. The traditional Angami society characterized by stagnation and lack of change was now subjected to transformations and changes in all spheres of their life.

On the other hand, the everyday life of the common Nagas did not change much under the British rule as it did not interfere much in the traditional culture and customs. For example, the practice of maintaining a separate house for married couple was still

prevalent as in *Bitter Wormwood*, Khreinuo was a widow but she did not live together with her only son's family; "Khrienuo was a widow. She had been widowed for ten years now. She lived in the house adjoining theirs..." (17) They continue to live in their traditional way, their daily living scenario continued to be more or less the same. In *A Naga Village Remembered*:

As Levi had predicted, it was a good harvest again. Some men of the village prepared to take titles again for they had been blest in grain and cattle exceedingly. On the day of the harvest festival, Levi's wife carried her new son and held Roko by the hand. In her carrying basket she had shares of meat and brew for her parents and her two brothers. "we have brought meat and brew of *Terhunyi*" they announced at the door of her ancestral house.

(64)

At the same time there were certain practices of the Nagas which were considered to be socially unacceptable by the British. Case in point, the British put an end to the practice of headhunting. The phasing out of headhunting had disrupted the fabric of traditional society, as in those days, all activities were interlinked. The art of weaving by women dwindled with the disappearance of headhunting as the need to weave a particular shawl designed for a specific class of warriors or head-hunters was no longer necessary after the abolishment of head hunting. The disappearance of headhunting also indirectly had an impact on the decline of the *morung* system. One of the main functions of the *morung* was it imparted the required lessons for fighting the enemy, so with the end of headhunting, the centrality of the *morung* institution in the Naga society was adversely effected.

Again, with numerous acts and rules imposed by the British colonizers including Inner Line Regulations 1873, Forest Acts of 1878, Government of India Act 1919, Government of India Act 1935 and many more, the Nagas were divided by geographical and political boundaries. With these changes in their land structure the societal set-up transformed. As Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) asserts, “The main battle in imperialism is over land” (xiii). Therefore, when the Nagas who had manifested a strong proprietary instinct over their territory and who had nurtured undisputed connection to their land no longer hold the rights over their lands as before, were now being shaken to their roots. The land which they hold as rightfully theirs was now under the colonizers’ control. When they had little control over the land and other natural surrounding with which the doctrine of their everyday livelihood was based, the very existence of the Naga was in jeopardy.

However, as can be seen in the novels, with the intrusion entered a way of life so alien and unfathomable to the Nagas that they could not perceive the phenomenon. As far as the selected novels for study here are concerned, there are only subtle instances which indicate the frustration of the Nagas with the colonizers, that is, the times when they directly interfered in the activities of the tribe. Other than these, the Nagas were not able to comprehend the situation in which they were in, nor where it led them to.

The advent of the English also brought a new religion and a new system of education whose main teachings worked against the Naga traditional practices and belief system. The American Baptist Mission initiated their work in 1836. Though the American Baptist Missionaries were invited to the Naga Hills by British officials such as Major Jenkins in the 1830s, the arrival of the Christian missionaries was not welcomed by the British administrators (Jackobs 152). There are various records which indicated the British concern for the Nagas converting to Christianity. The reason as to

why the British administrators were vehemently against the missionaries was that at one point the administrators sought to preserve the traditional cultures and practices of the Nagas, though they totally banned inter-village feuds, while on the other hand, missionaries discarded everything traditional but offered them education, modern aspiration and freedom from communal obligations. By the 1920s, although apparently unwilling, the administrators changed their attitude towards the missionaries but “to rule in favour of the traditionalists (Non-Christian Nagas) over the converted ones” (Jackobs 153). Therefore, the Nagas were caught between two conflicting options to decide for their future.

With the prospects of higher education which enabled the Nagas to secure government jobs, as by this time Nagas were already introduced to moneyed economy and the realization of the benefit of salaried jobs over their traditional cultivation of land, some Nagas began to embrace the new way of living that is the new religion, Christianity. In 1937, Mose in *Bitter Wormwood* was born to a simple agrarian family. He was born in the field shed without any assistance. After the birthing, the mother went home with her new born child which was an hour and a half away. “Their neighbours were not surprised when they saw Vilau walking past their fields with the baby. Women birthing while out in the fields was not an uncommon phenomenon in those days” (15). By the early 1940s, Mose attended school but his family continued to adhere to their traditional beliefs and customs. At the same time, with a school going child the family was gradually introduced to modernity in the form of purchasing a radio, and Mose feeding them with little news around the world which he learnt from others at school and from the radio. Apart from those fragmented news of the outside world, the village society continued to strive in its own traditional way of everyday life.

Moreover, the increase in urban population and change in economy deeply hampered their agricultural activities, and “a rational theological preference - a move ‘from uncertainty to certainty’, a response to the promise of salvation and the fear of hell-fire, a choice to desert the propitiation of capricious spirits in favour of the security of Christ’s benevolence” (Jackobs 154) ushered many Nagas, especially the young generation, to embrace the new Christian faith. However, this breaking away from centuries of beliefs and practices did not happen without struggle. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, Easterine writes of this conflicting situation of faith conversion in the Naga society:

Levi was growing impatient for him (Sato) to be initiated at the coming festival of Sekrenyi.

Sato did not like to think about his initiation. There were nights when he lay awake filled with dread at the thought of making a decision. If he chose to be initiated, he knew Chaha would disapprove. What could he do? That was the way of his people. No one had ever avoided initiation. On the other hand, they welcomed it and speak of it with great pride after the event....

Levi himself performed the ritual of pulling out the intestines from the dead chicken... So, Sato was initiated into manhood and into the clan which would now consider him a full member.

Sato hated not being able to refuse to be initiated. How he feared his warrior father. He feared him more than he feared hurting him. He had no doubt that his father would disown him if he learnt that he intended turning to the new religion some day.... (96 – 99)

Chaha is name given by the Nagas to Dr. Sydney Rivenburg, a missionary who ran the Mission School in Kohima while also tending to sick people with modern medical science. K.S. Zetsuvi in his book *The Angami Naga under Colonial Rule* gives a lengthy contribution of Dr. Sydney Rivenburg in converting the Nagas into Christian, he writes:

Rev and Mrs. Rivenburg were transferred from Molungyimsen to Kohima in January, 1887....

In 1891, Rev & Mrs. Rivenburg had to return home for health reasons and while on furlough he did a course in medicine at John Hopkins University. His specialization in medicine stood him in good stead when he returned to Kohima in October 1894. He started visiting the villages, preaching and helping the sick....

The Rivenburgs were joined by the Tanquists in 1912. By then the Angamis were relatively receptive to the gospel of Christ. (103-106)

In the novel Sato and his elder brother Roko attended the Mission School but Roko left the school before long. Between teaching his students with stringent disciplinary actions and tending his patients Dr. Sydney Rivenburg preached the gospel of Christ and “It was customary for Rivenburg, in the course of attending his patients, to pray for them and to tell them of heaven and salvation” (ANVR 95). Therefore, under Dr. Rivenburg, Sato was introduced to a totally new and different kind of life. However, this new faith that he was drawn towards was in conflict with the still prevalent belief system of his people, and so he was in a dilemma. He was torn between the old and the new religion. He strongly felt that he ought to choose the Christian faith as he found it more meaningful than his old religion but at the same

time he feared his father even more than the ostracism that his village people were capable of harshly meting out to new converts. At last, he converted and his father “roared like a wounded tiger. He couldn’t believe this was happening in his household. The shame of it, or the betrayal by his son – which hurt more, he couldn’t decide” (101). So, Sato was disowned by his father.

Levi is a warrior, self-made, well-respected member of his clan. His father was also a warrior before him and he wanted his sons to follow his footsteps. Therefore, Sato’s conversion was not acceptable to him. With Sato embracing Christianity, Levi becomes a changed man. “It pained Peno deeply to see Levi nowadays. He was gaunt and he rarely smiled. Easily irritated by the minutest of things... She feared this new Levi – cold and curt...” (ANVR 107) Through Levi, Easterine reveals the agony of her people over the condition at the transition of the Naga society and the consequent generation gap between fathers and sons. The new ideas and the new religion brought into the Naga society by the Christian missionaries caused conflict and dilemma for the Nagas. People like Levi are enraged by the readiness of young people to embrace the new culture instead of fighting against it. On the other hand, the missionaries and colonial government had gained grudging assent of the people by providing school and modern medicines with all the other ‘developments’ that modernization entailed.

Placed in an intolerable societal and political situation, Levi took to silence as he understood the futility of fighting unlike Ngazek in Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya’s *Love in the Time of Insurgency* (1960). Ngazek vehemently strived to uphold old traditions and encouraged others to do so even after his son Khating, embraced the new faith. Levi did not revolt against the invading alien culture outwardly but his inner being never accepted it. He eventually died, and because he is by nature a wise warrior, Levi took on the burden of his people’s tragedy as his own and tried hard to

rally the pride and spirit of his people. But when his sons failed him he died in spirit and his physical death followed soon after. He is in this sense a tragic and epic hero. His whole life can be seen as a portrayal of the old Naga life; proud and insular with definite identity who with all his might, protects whatever that opposes it, but was to be forgotten with the coming of alien force in the form of British colonizers and missionaries.

On the other hand, unlike the older generation, Sato could see “there is no quarrel between the old religion and the new religion” (ANVR 101) and he wished “that his father would come to see that the new religion was really a fulfilment 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” (ANVR 100). The number of converts eventually grew and after a few decades most Nagas became Christians.

The Naga’s conversion to Christianity did not happen smoothly without any hindrance. In Khonoma village when some people converted to Christianity:

There was great hostility in the village community against the small band. Visited by elders who declared in no uncertain terms, “You must not live with us. It will displease the spirits,” they shifted the house beyond the perimeter of the village. The Christians went to live across the river which was really a stream but conveniently acted as a natural boundary for the village. Taking what they could from their old homes, they erected shelters and began life much in the same way that a new village would be settled because their excommunication meant that they were cut off from all links with their old village. The women wept bitterly for they had to leave behind close relatives and the graves of their ancestors. But to stay on would be

impossible for they were outcasted from the village. Already, many of them were subjected to physical and verbal abuse by some of their village folks. The villagers were so angry with the new converts that they forced Krusietso to plough his field on a genna day at *Ngonyi*. Everyone knew the breaking of the taboo would be punished by the violator being bitten by snake. Miraculously, nothing happened to Krusietso. But the clansmen of those who converted were so angry, they beat them up and chased them from their ancestral homes so that the little settlement kept growing. (ANVR 103- 104)

By reflecting the strong resistance the Angamis meted out to Christianity in its early days in her novels Easterine asserts that her people were not easily susceptible, but were proud and independent. Her writing also reflects the writings of notable postcolonial writers like Chinwa Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiango who affirm that the Africans had a well-organized system of livelihood which was reduced to mere primeval system by the white man. As is seen from the above excerpt, the Angamis respond to Christianity was rather a turbulent one and taking a long period when compared with other Naga tribes. K.S. Zetsuvi writes:

The reaction of the Angamis to Christianity was not like that of the Aos or any other Naga tribes.... By nature they were conservative and so they were not very pliable to new changes. Samaguting, for instance, was the first Angami village to host C.D. King who was the first missionary in the Angami area, but it was the last village to receive Christianity... It was due to their democratic outlook that the decision-making was individualistic, whereas the fastest growth rate took place among the Semas and Konyaks where autocracy prevailed. The first Angami convert took baptism in 1885

whereas the first Semas was baptized in 1906. By the year 1936, Angami Christians reached 630 members, but the Semas had 6500 members. (107)

In the novel *Mari*, Mari and her family in Kohima town lived a different kind of life from that of Mose's family in *Bitter Wormwood*, although both the novels are contemporaries. Mari's father was an officer who worked directly under the then Deputy Commissioner, Charles Pawsey. Charles Pawsey (1894-1972) is a historical figure who served as the District Commissioner in the Naga Hills from 1942 to 1944. Moreover, Mari's sister-in-law was also an educated woman and all the siblings were attending school. While Mari's family were already Christians at the opening of the novel, some Nagas still followed their traditional practices.

Anyie lived in Kohima village. She and our other relatives would visit us all the time, bringing news of happenings in the village. 'It's genna day today.' She announced that day.

'Is it a fire genna day or a water genna day?' Mother asked her. The genna days were no-work days when it was taboo to work in the fields or woods. They were very important in the old religion.

'A fire genna,' Anyie replied.... Though we were Christian, we abided by these cultural practices in order to live in harmony with the non-Christians.

Anyie Kereikieu was not Christian. (5&6)

Here the narrator asserts that they abide by the old cultural practices in order to live in harmony with the non-Christians, and this, in the years to come, could be the reason as to why the Nagas incorporated many of their cultural practices into

Christianity. As the narration progresses, the old and new world view is reflected upon:

‘How old is Aviu now?’ she asked my mother,... I was cleaning rice in a winnowing mat, and hoped she wouldn’t notice that I hadn’t tied a scarf around my head like she always told us to do.

‘She turned sixteen last month,’ Mother replied.

Anyie looked at me again and said, ‘Hmm, at her age, I was already married and a mother of one.’

‘Times have changed, Akieu,’ said mother mildly. ‘The children want to be educated before they think of marriage.’

‘Yes,’ Anyie agreed, but I knew that deep down she thought that educating girls was a waste of time, as did most of the non-Christians. In the Naga culture, the woman’s role was to look after the house and children, and nothing beyond that. (6)

In *Mari*, the benefits of education and government jobs are greatly reflected upon. During World War II when the Japanese were to finally reach Kohima, Mari and her sisters could flee and stay with their father in Shillong while many could not afford such a move and so suffered the destructive war in their land. Also, when the novels *Bitter Wormwood* and *Mari*, wherein Easterine narrates stories of people from same community, are compared, the result is that the people lived remarkably different lives. In *Bitter Wormwood*, the characters are found toiling every day in their fields and children playing with mud pellets. On the other hand, in *Mari*, fathers are busy going

to offices, houses look beautiful with flowers blooming and children helping their mothers baking cake.

Western education eradicated many of the traditional Naga beliefs and practices. It is also one of the main reasons for the disappearance of the *Morung*. In fact, it was that section of the society who embraced Christianity and gave up their old belief system who received western education first. However, the new system of education was brought in such a way that they looked down on the traditional values. “The educated class abandoned their traditional hair cut, wore western dress and there was also a change in their food habit, mental outlook etc” (Zetsuvi 83). At this juncture, the Nagas had lost their identity to a great extent, unknowingly though. Easterine’s works suggests that with education and Christianity the Naga society was inevitably geared towards modernization, development and a wider outlook, but there were many elements among the old ways upheld by the traditional Naga society but which went against the dictates of their new faith, and so were abandoned. In the old Naga society, the social structure, their indigenous faith and their village community were closely interlinked and played a very important role in their lives and it can be said that their entire worldview was structured by these.

With Christianity and western education the Naga society got transformed into what Temsula Ao aptly puts:

Then came a new religion and a new system of knowledge whose main preaching worked directly against the essential core of our ‘being’. Being a Naga then in the way we thought of ourselves, was held out to be negative. Even those who embraced the new faith and followed the new education were condescended to, given a pat on the back and given stipends and

scholarships. Slowly but surely a new breed of Nagas was emerging, who rejected the old ways and who sought new identification apart from the tradition and culture of the fore-fathers. At this stage of our history, being a Naga became an apologetic acknowledgement of a seemingly inferior individual. (4)

The colonizers indeed succeeded in ending inter-village feuds and raids which was a common occurrence with the Nagas during pre-colonial era. However, the peace the colonialists provided the Nagas was short lived. They were introduced to a more fierce and destructive wars; the first and second World Wars. The historical events of World War I & II were directly experienced by the Nagas during this period. The latter, in particular, as it was fought in the Naga territory, had a great impact on the lives of the Nagas. As already mentioned in the previous chapter Easterine asserts that the Nagas have very little memory of what they were doing before the war years. It was such a momentous chapter in their life that even years after the war, its impact on the life of the people resurfaced in many forms. In *A Terrible Matriarchy* Lieno's mother baked cake in an ammunition box left behind by the British troops. Even when old people tell the young of their early life it begins with the white men. For instance:

Mother had many memories of the war. Of being evacuated from Kohima and travelling to Dimapur in an army convoy ... returning home in June only to find that their home was too ruined by the shelling to live in... They watched while the men buried decomposing Japanese soldiers before they could continue with their work of rebuilding the village and town" (170).

Slowly but surely, the lives of the Nagas had changed under the British. Their transformation took place to the extent wherein they had to reinvent themselves in order

to look like native Nagas again. This is found in *Mari*, when Mari and her siblings fled Kohima during the Second World War to Chieswema village “My brother and his-in-laws were being given Naga haircuts...Instead of trousers, he wore the black kilt... The rest of us had changed out of our dresses and we wore faded woven Angami waist-clothes” (58-59).

The impact of colonialism on the Naga society was so great that it became a defining chapter in their lives. The Nagas were no longer able to define themselves without those elements of colonial influences in their society. Therefore, the end of colonization marked the beginning of a total new era for the Naga society.

iii) Modern Naga Society

The authority of the village-state of bygone days now no longer exists in modern Naga society. In the pre-colonial times justice was meted in such a way that “care is taken so that even the guilty man/woman is allowed to get away without being totally humiliated before everyone. A lot of ‘punishment’ is allowed to hang on social stigma, castigation and ostracism” (Chasie 119). For example, in *A Naga Village Remembered* when Levi was accidentally killed by his friend Penyu in their hunting trip, “Penyu went away to the village of Bakiria, beginning the customary exile for seven years to atone for accidental killing” (112). Likewise, under the British rule “Criminal laws were very harsh... Thieves were sent to Tezpur to serve long sentences. Murderers were hanged” (*Mari* 9). Now in modern Naga society “The killers are too smart. In any case no one dares to catch them... Everyone is afraid of them... Everyone is sick of it, all these killings. But no one has the guts to do anything about it” (*BW* 9).

The modern Naga society covered in the selected novels by Easterine was a period of turmoil. In *Bitter Wormwood*, *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *Life on Hold*, Easterine

clearly reflects on the modern Naga society. The Naga society after India got her independence was greatly shaped by their struggle for independence from the Indian sub-continent. Although touched upon in the previous chapter, it is relevant to reiterate the history that initiated Naga nationalism which would affect all aspects of their social life.

Scholars opine that Naga nationalism was the direct outcome of British colonialism. As already discussed, Nagas are a patriotic lot. They fought whoever they deemed was a treat to their existence. They have not given up fighting those who try to dominate them. This, however, was done at village level in earlier days. Even though they had a very close-knit community feeling and solidarity, it was limited to the village level. Inter-village wars justify the absence of collective identity amongst the Nagas prior to the British incursion to their land. Mar Imsong writes, “The impact of colonialism in the formation of ethnic Naga identity is an important area... Colonialism or colonial experiences played a pivotal role in creating, recreating, and rejuvenating ethnic Naga identity” (55). He also writes, “It is true that the ethnic Naga identity as a nation, or Naga nationalism, was a seed unintentionally planted by the British administration because of its policy of Administration and Communication, but the Naga intellectuals further nurtured it in the 1940s” (109). The Nagas strongly nurtured this nationalism that within the approximately 50 years covered by Easterine in the selected works, the Naga society had greatly transformed on all fronts.

This national movement of the Nagas, a movement so big that it stirred the entire societal paradigm of the people is studied here. It is not the intention of this research to delineate on the politics that had shaped the Naga national movement, though. Still, some basic and conflicting ideologies of both India and Nagas are given space in the

following paragraphs in order to better understand Easterine's interpretations on the said issue.

Sanjib Baruah, in his article, "Confronting Constructionism: Ending India's Naga War" writes, "One of the world's oldest continuing armed conflicts is also one of the least known: the conflict between the government of India and the Nagas" (321). After more than half a century of unending conflict, one must retrospect on what had made just a minority people unable to submit to an adversary that was so much more powerful, and at the same time, what had made a nation so big fail to win over a territory so small? In order to answer this one must go back to the starting point of the conflict.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India, his ideologies and the measures taken up by him in trying to settle the Naga issue is taken here as the microcosm of India's view on the Nagas.

"Nehru first came to know of the Nagas, as one of the myriad tribes inhabiting the north eastern frontier, during his trip of Assam in 1937," writes Sajal Nag (48). He was also fast to recognise the distinctiveness of the tribal folks in the northeast, he writes, "I do not know what ideas most people in India have about tribal folk (of north-east India). My general impression has been largely derived from such people as the Bhils, Santhals and Gonds, etc... During my visit to north-east frontier I had change my conception of tribes" (qtd. in Nag 49). The first measure he proposed as the leader of India for the northeast people including Nagas was:

The problem in these areas is to make the people feel that they have perfect freedom to live their lives and to develop according to their wishes and genius. India to them signifies not only a protecting force but a liberating

one. Any conception that India is ruling them and that they are the ruled or that the custom and habits with which they are unfamiliar are going to be imposed on them, will alienate them and make our frontier problem more difficult. (qtd. in Nag 49)

When Nehru received a copy of the resolution of the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946 stating their wish to maintain autonomy, he replied:

It is obvious that the Naga territory in eastern Assam is much too small to stand by itself, politically or economically. It lies between two huge countries India and China and part of it consists of rather backward people who require considerable help.... It must form part of India and of Assam with which it has developed much close association. At the same time it is our policy that tribal areas should have as much freedom and autonomy as possible so that they can live their own lives according to their own customs and desires... I agree entirely with your decision that the Naga Hills should constitutionally be included in an autonomous Assam in a free India, with local autonomy and due safeguards for the interest of the Nagas.... They should have perfect freedom to continue their village *panchayats*, tribal courts, etc, according to their own wishes.... (qtd. in Nag 49)

Till then it was not known whether Nehru was aware of the intention of the Nagas which was complete sovereignty. In fact, from an Indian point of view Naga territory was too small to be a sovereign nation and the people too backward who “require considerable help.” On the contrary, “the Naga National Council (NNC), the political wing of the Federal Government of Nagaland, has consistently maintained that the Nagas constitute an independent nation. The NNC claims that, except for a century of

British rule, the Nagas had never been subjugated and ruled by any other people and had never been part of what today constitutes the Indian nation,” writes Udayon Misra (618).

It was under such a situation that a violent struggle broke out on the Indo-Naga issue. While Nehru remained adamant that Nagas could not have independence, the Nagas maintained that they would continue to fight until independence was attained. According to Nehru, independence demanded by the Nagas was an “absurd demand ... impossible to consider even for a moment” (qtd. in Nag 50).

Nehru might be right in calling Naga territory “much too small” when compared with other nations. At the same time, the people of this small territory were equally united and stood firm in their claim for independence, at least in the early phase of their struggle. In spite of the strong and bloody measures taken up by India to suppress the Nagas, they did not give up. In *Mari*:

It was around this time that there was political unrest in Nagaland. Letters from home were full of the tense situation and about the Indian army’s killing of many Nagas who were fighting for independence from India. The situation became so serious that after a few months my family wrote to say that they were travelling to Assam to live with me till the worst was over (143).

The excerpt refers to Mari living in Assam talking about the situation in Nagaland. The situation was so tense that many fled Nagaland to more peaceful places. The tense situation is also described by Easterine in *Bitter Wormwood*, “No one dared venture out on curfew nights. Even the drunks stayed home and drank in the safety of their houses. School was very unstable, closing frequently for days at a time. Sporadic shooting broke out...” (67).

Nagaland became a state in 1963 but did not really bring peace for the Nagas. In fact, it had complicated the struggle for independence to another level. With regard to the Naga struggle for independence the selected works show Easterine as a supporter of her people's struggle for independence. There is no instance in her work that maintains scepticism towards Nagas fighting for sovereignty, as the Nagas were self-reliant and independent in the pre-colonial era in spite of their relative smallness in territory when compared with other nations. However, it is the later developments within the Naga freedom struggle, different ideologies, factionalism, after the attainment of statehood which greatly effected Easterine in her view towards the Naga struggle.

The consequence of the birth of factions within the Naga army in the 1980s was that the Nagas were forced to keep everything in abeyance, except pain and suffering in the name of fighting for independence. Every household, even those not directly involved was affected by the infighting. The Nagas have been fighting against the Indian government for decades, but their situation deteriorated with the infighting. In *Life on Hold*: ““Very young,” said Bounuo’s husband in a low voice, “They are as young as 19 or 20. They never beg for food. They demand it. Oh, so different from the older groups that asked politely for a little rice or meat...” (20) In *Bitter Wormwood*, as the narration progressed Mose retired from the underground army and ran a shop to support his family. He became a passive spectator of the conflict with which he could not delink from. One afternoon, when Mose was alone in his shop, two young men attacked him and called out, “Traitors! You and your kind have sold out the cause. This is just the beginning. Next time it will be worse!” (139) It was indeed worse the next time. Mose, who had spent his youth for Naga freedom lost his life from the bullet of his own people.

This infighting amongst the Naga freedom fighters affected every aspect of Naga society. This is seen in *Life on Hold*. Nime's father is a businessman and they could manage well with her father's earning. However, with underground parties wanting their share in people's hard earned money, business was not profiting. It was not due to the lack of customers, but "the extortions were ruining the tradesmen" (11) Pusalie, Nime's father is deeply in debt from borrowing large sums of money. Yet he found himself too old to look for jobs, and business being the only livelihood he knew he tries his luck by traveling to different places as far as Assam to find business partners. Every step he takes failed because of the involvement of the underground extortionists. After several years of painstaking attempts Pusalie realises that it is the end for him. This realisation does not result in him changing his way of earning, but in mental breakdown. He suffers from delusional disorder due to which he is in need of constant care. Far from earning for the family Pusalie is now totally dependent on others. After suffering from this madness for some time he meets his death, not from his illness but at the hands of the underground army.

It is not just the economic life of families that is affected by the underground involvements in people's business, it also led to the breaking down of familial ties. Due to his heavy debts his brother-in-law Neiketouzo turns hard on Pusalie which results in halting the visits between the two families. Extortion continued even in the late 1990s, Nime's husband, Abeiu, a successful businessman based in Dimapur also becomes a target: "Lately, Abeiu had been troubled by some National workers who wanted him to pay "taxes" to their organisation. It was an exorbitant amount of two lakh rupees...." (*LOH* 83) Abeiu is fortunate to be able to negotiate to lower the amount and the time frame for him to pay. Others are not as lucky as him. His uncle reminds him of the man "whose truck was burnt as a lesson for refusing to pay tax" (*LOH* 85). Also,

There was a growing number of men like Pusalie. Middle-aged men who had earlier been successful at their business, now forced to borrow money to keep their business going. “Tax collections,” as the extortions were politely called, took away their profits, leaving them poorer than when they had started out. (LOH 31 & 32)

Today, extortion, bribing, nepotism, corruption and the likes are found in insurgency infested Nagaland and other parts of Northeast India. The underground army controls business and activities of the government including job recruitment to a very great extent, the government officials are no less corrupt, and the people must pay bribe to get their things done. It is therefore almost impossible for a common man who does not have any good connection and money to get on in life. In the novella Zeu tells Nime and his mother about the interview he attended:

There were 150 applicants for two vacancies. When the interviews were over, I overheard one of the experts laughing, “Two jobs and 150 applicants. I guess the Underground will get 148 new members tomorrow.’ I know he was only joking but there is a lot of truth in there. I know that Shekato and Neituo got appointed because they bribed the Minister with one lakh each. (LOH 36)

Another important aspect in the selected works is that Easterine’s interpretation of Naga conflict is a dialogic discourse. She acknowledges the virtue and vice of both India and Nagas in her writings. While admitting the atrocities meted out to the Nagas by the Indian army she also tells the Indian side of the story in *Bitter Wormwood* through the character of Himmat, an ex-army officer posted at Nagaland during the 1960s. Himmat narrates:

We left with very high morale, believing we were going off on a mission to save the country....

... War is a dreadful thing *beta*, it blinds you to the horror of what you are doing...

The feeling of deep vulnerability never left us in Nagaland... We felt alienated because we entered Nagaland with the understanding that the Nagas were fellow Indians but the truth was that the Nagas looked completely different and obviously hated our presence there.

Sadly, some of the soldiers posted there suffered serious psychological disorders... They were always under pressure from the constant tension caused by the atmosphere of alienation. It proved to be too traumatic for them. This is probably one reason for the great numbers of military atrocities committed by the army.... (BW 196 – 200)

Here Easterine acknowledges that the intention of India was to prevent secession of the Nagas from India as according to them they were part of the Indian Union. She is persistent in sensitizing the world about the real situation of the Nagas. Her interpretation of the whole modern Naga situation is well said by Monalisa Chankija:

It must also be said that Nagas have also failed on many counts. Sixty years down the road, there is much for Nagas to introspect and rethink, repent and reform, and most of all as Christians, forgive, especially vis-à-vis our ambivalence to our conflict situation. The next step should be towards efforts to integrate with the community of all nations, all peoples, because we can no longer live in the splendour of isolation as did our forefathers.

Freedom and sovereignty are humankind's highest ideals and they should always be prized and fought for. But 60 years down the road the gun has proved ineffective. It is time now to think of other methods. It is time now to think of the various kinds of freedom and sovereignty, the kinds that will ensure our survival, protect our identity and give a chance and scope to shape and determine our destiny. It is time to think not only with our hearts but with our heads too.

As for 60-year-old India, it is time to prove that the Nagas who have decided to share a common destiny with it, have not misplaced their trust and faith in it. It is also time for 60-year-old India to find ways to convince with maturity, sensitivity and commitment those Nagas' that do not wish to share a common destiny with it, that India has the best of the Nagas' interest at heart and make all efforts to prove it. As for those who will soon celebrate 44 years of statehood, it is time not only to demand what we have been promised, it is also time to give. And some of us are aware that to give means a lot more than simply speak. (9)

On the other hand, amidst the political unrest that greatly affected their everyday livelihood, by 1947, the Nagas lived a relatively advanced life with education and money economy and other facets of modernization. In *Bitter Wormwood*, "In 1947, Mose proudly went to the third grade having passed his exams... The school was moved to a new location, the former hospital in town... The thatch houses became a thing of the past" (28). On the other hand, the basic social life was still deeply traditional in a sense that majority of them were agrarian and lived in a very close knit society.

Widowhood was hard because the woman had to till the fields alone.

Certainly she received some help from her in-laws and male relatives but being a young widow, Vilau wanted to finish as much as she could on her own.

“Leave some for us, Vilau,” Belie called out, Luo-o’s cousin, as he walked past her field. (29)

In fact the historical circumstances around the world like the Second World War, and India’s independence of 1947, inevitably exposed the Nagas towards a wider outlook. Therefore, the old and the new way of life prevailed simultaneously.

Later, when the sun was setting, she heard the voices of her neighbours again as they got ready to go home.... When all of them converged at the field path.... They joked a bit. Belie said, “We should think of something less laborious to plant than rice.”

“Ah, yes, why don’t we all learn to eat roti and bread?” asked the neighbour.

“Indeed,” Belie responded, “it must be easier to grow wheat than rice. Why did we have to choose such a diet?”

All of them laughed at this. It was unthinkable that they would stop cultivating rice.

“In America, they use only tractors I’m told. None of the hard digging with hoes,” said the neighbour.

“We could all buy one together,” Belie stated.

They all laughed again at the idea of themselves getting a tractor to their hilly field. (30)

Change was nearer than what the people anticipated.

Some stringent laws that were once strictly abided by the Nagas no longer hold their grasp. *Genna* days were no longer observed, instead Sunday was regarded as no work day and worship services were held at churches. Christmas, New Year, Easter and other Christian festivals replaced old Naga festivals like *Kelipie*, *Sekrenyi* and others. Young men and women were now permitted to marry anybody of their choice even if he/she belonged to the same clan. In *Bitter Wormwood* “Neituo...had married a girl from his clan” (111).

Naga society at this point was already functioning with a strong Christianised world view. This change was witnessed in the manner in which funerals are conducted in *A Terrible Matriarchy*. When Petekhrietuo died the Pastor came and conducted Christian rites of burial for him. This is again seen when Grandmother died:

“Mother! Mother” They cried and beat on the floor with their body-cloths and some of the women stamped the floor a bit. The sound of weeping was deafening....

The Pastor made his way into the room. He spoke in an authoritative voice and all the mourners quietened down....

When the prayer was over, things settled down a bit... it was October and someone had brought a bouquet of white chrysanthemums.... Nisano and I sorted out body-cloths that she had expressly stated should be placed in her coffin....

“... So let us join in a hymn while we lower the coffin into its final resting place.”

It was an abrupt end to the long funeral service.... After the burial was over the mourners began to leave. But some of Grandmother’s clansmen remained with us.... When they had finished we bade them eat the evening meal with us. (259, 260 & 264)

A close scrutiny of the above excerpt reflects that Christianity is meticulously appropriated in Naga culture and tradition. Their cultural practices now are an amalgamation of elements of Christianity and traditional Naga customs. Mourning deaths is a practice followed by Nagas from traditional times except for *apotia* deaths. In the modern milieu, they continue the mourning; women wailing and crying, relatives coming together to observe the last rite of the deceased, but Christian hymns are sung and the Pastor conducts the funeral while consoling the bereaved family. This is the case with marriage ceremony too. Most of the formalities are carried out in a way traditionally followed by the Nagas, like, the young man’s family sending a female delegate to make an offer of marriage to the girl’s family, as in *A Terrible Matriarchy* “My Aunt Bino, accompanied Grandmother on her one visit to the girl’s family,” (207) and the ceremony completed by feast as in Vini’s wedding in the same novel, “Vini had a grand wedding, grand by our standards because they killed five cows and a *gwi*.” (207) However, the actual wedding is solemnized by a Pastor. In the traditional Angami society, marriage rituals were observed in all seriousness and it was a custom to bless the newly married couple for their prosperous future. Easterine writes that proclamation of blessings was one of the marriage customs from the old religion that they still observed “but the words of blessing were now treated lightly” (*ATM* 211). These

instances and others reflect that Nagas appropriated Christian culture into their tradition in modern times.

In the selected works Easterine showcases how Christianity had transformed Naga society from a traditional to a Christianized one. At the same time, throughout the narratives she asserts that the Naga conversion to Christianity and their incorporation of western ideologies into their society did not necessarily transform them into a new people. They still retained their basic cultural identity as Nagas. They might have replaced their belief systems and some traditional practices with new ones, but they also maintained certain basic systems which they still observed. Maintaining nuclear family is a case in point. All the three brothers of Lieno in *A Terrible Matriarchy* shifted to new houses once they married. Though this may be a logical thing to do, practiced already by many people, for the Nagas, this practice was one inherited through tradition.

Easterine's interpretation of her people's unchanged identity is also found in their belief that the soul of dead persons lingered on. In *A Terrible Matriarchy* when Grandmother died Bano, Delieno and others witnessed the presence of her ghost in her old house until they 'right the wrong' by bequeathing the house to Bano. Easterine does this with a comical touch that while reflecting other facets of social reality they add humour to the narration. This superstitious belief in fact reflects the old Naga beliefs of spirits. Concerning the Nagas superstition J. H. Hutton writes, "To enumerate the various superstitions of the Angamis would fill a book in itself" (251). So, if belief system is one of the main characteristics of people's collective identity, as posited earlier in the chapter, then the Nagas though greatly altered, remained the same. As Mar Imsong writes, "The Naga traditional spirituality persisted in many forms even after they became Christians" (139).

Again, in the modern Naga society the aspiration of the young Nagas for salaried jobs is another important factor. Nagas were, as already mentioned, principally agrarian. However, various political factors and their growth in population in urban areas change their economy. With regards to the Angami's economy Kekhrieseno Christina writes, "The most fundamental change is the decreasing importance of agriculture as the mainstay of the village economy... The commodification of land indicates a new pattern of land relations... There has been a transition from communal ownership to individual ownership. Further, the practice of tenancy has emerged" (216). With the changes in their land relations, moneyed economy became much more profitable for the Nagas than their traditional agricultural economy. Therefore, parents sent their children to school, as school education provided the needed qualification for salaried jobs. In the selected works, all the children within school going age are found attending schools. This education system in turn opened equal opportunities for both men and women to earn their living even though there was gender bias in this system, which is studied in the next chapter.

In *Bitter Wormwood, Life on Hold, A Terrible Matriarchy* and *Mari*, Easterine's interpretation of the modern Naga society denotes that life was joyous and happy only for young and innocent children but became miserable when they grow up. The lives of all grown-up characters are full of predicaments and hardships. Their political uncertainty and their insecure future engulfed every aspect of their society. For many of them life become an impasse. All these are because of the rampant factional killings and the inherent cultural loss of the Naga society. This has greatly angered Easterine. When asked what made her angry she answered, "People hurting people" (Aminah "The Longue").

In the selected works, Easterine acknowledges the circumstances evolving in the Naga society at that point in time. The inevitable influences of other cultures ushered developments in many fronts of the society as was done by western education. At the same time, she is concerned with the cultural loss. In all the selected works she incorporates the inherent social evil found in the Naga society like domestic violence, neighbourhood gossips, poor health and untimely death, poverty and others. Each family found in her works have had their share of problems; some go to the extent of fighting inside the house as in Lieno's family while some are cast out from the house as in Levi's family. At the same time, many of the characters portrayed in the novels are very unhealthy; Pete and his mother in *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Aneiu in *Mari*, among others. Also, death occurs in all of the selected work. Gossip mongers and superstitious beliefs in the society are not spared. Lastly, poverty can be said to be the main problem of most of the people found in her works.

Another social evil found in Naga society depicted by Easterine in her works is alcoholism. The abuse of alcohol is found to be present in the Naga society from pre-colonial period to modern times as far as Easterine's writings are concerned. Roko in *A Naga Village Remembered* is a heavy drinker. When he is drunk "he spoke with that tone in his voice, a quiet dangerous snarl" (96) and his antagonism towards his younger brother, Sato surfaced. This hampers the bond between the two brothers and their family ties. Another instance of alcohol abuse is found in the character of Vini in *A Terrible Matriarchy*. Vini's alcoholism greatly upset his family. His father's efforts to better him are in vain, his mother's health deteriorated because of his bad habits and his relationship with his siblings turns sour. His family thought that marriage would tame him, but it was not so, "Vini was dead drunk on the night his wife delivered a healthy eight pound baby boy" (215).

In interpreting the social reality of the Nagas from pre-colonial to modern times, Easterine indicates that the Nagas society has gone through a series of changes and is far from perfect; many aspects of the social evils are generated by the Nagas themselves. The various historical, political and economic changes ushered modernization into the society, but they also brought about certain unwanted elements such as the rejection of their old cultural values by the younger generation in particular. Easterine's writings of the past, and modern Naga society when compared shows a sense of nostalgia for the past. The pre-colonial society indicates a certain order while the modern society she portrays is chaotic. She has glorified the past society and posits that her people lost many of their good values with the onslaught of modernization.

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CHAPTER FOUR

LOCATING NAGA WOMEN IN HISTORY AND SOCIETY

A distinctive and concerted approach to feminist criticism began in the late 1960s is about “woman studies – the investigation of the status and roles of women in history and in diverse institutions and activities – and courses in women’s literature and feminist criticism; and ever-increasing place is given to writings by and about women in anthologies, periodicals, and conferences” (Abrams and Harphaam 129). This genre of literary criticism is the result of two centuries struggle for the recognition of women’s cultural roles and achievements and for women’s social and political rights, marked by seminal works such as Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) and a few others.

A notable pioneer of feminist criticism, Virginia Woolf (1882 – 1941), wrote fiction and numerous essays including *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) on women authors and on the cultural, economic, and educational disabilities within what she called a “patriarchal” society, dominated by men, that have hindered or prevented women from realizing their productive and creative possibilities. Subsequently, a much more radical critical mode, sometimes called “second-wave feminism,” was launched in France by Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), a wide ranging critique of the cultural identification of women as merely the negative object, or “Other,” to man as the dominating “Subject” who is assumed to represent humanity in general. These writings were followed by influential works like Mary Ellman’s *Thinking about Women* (1968), Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1968) and others.

After 1969, there was an explosion of feminist writings without parallel in previous critical innovations. Contemporary feminist criticism around the world is not a unitary theory or procedure. It manifests a great variety of critical vantage points and procedures, including adaptations of psychoanalytic, Marxist, and diverse poststructuralist theories. However, the various feminisms share certain assumptions and concepts; that Western civilization is pervasively patriarchal – it is male-centered and male-controlled and is conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal, and artistic, and that ‘gender’ is a largely social construct – generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of civilization.

“A major interest of feminist critics...has been to reconstitute the ways we deal with literature in order to do justice to female points of view, concerns, and values” (Abrams and Harpham 126). The initial emphasis of feminist critics is on woman as a reader of men’s works. Then came a number of feminists who have concentrated not on the women as reader but as the writer, termed ‘gynocriticism’ by Elaine Showalter in her work “Towards a Feminist Poetics” (1979). Today, women’s writing as a genre within feminism has gained momentum especially in academia. Writings by and about women is given ever-increasing place in anthologies, periodicals, seminars and conferences.

Coming to women’s writing in India, the genre has slowly but surely gained a momentum in the field of contemporary social sciences and humanities. There has indeed been a plethora of books, journals and articles with regards to the plight and problems of women and their status in the male dominated society. At the same time, the same cannot be said with regard to the women in the Northeast. Not only do their voices remain unheard but their plight, problems and exploitation in the society largely

remain unattended. In fact, literature of the Northeast in general has only begun to be recognised in recent years. Therefore, it is understandable and hardly surprising that critical analysis of women studies in the Northeast literature context is yet to be instituted. It is for this reason that the chapter will focus on the women characters, their position and status in culture and society as found in the selected novels of Easterine's, and the writer being a woman will also be taken into consideration.

As feminism is multicultural and diasporic, the need(s) of women living in different societies are dissimilar, and they are conditioned by several factors: familial, societal/racial, marital, economic, cultural and individual choices. In such a diverse context, it would be incorrect to associate Northeast or Naga women writings in particular with the western or Indian, and invoke western or Indian feminist critics on the challenges that Naga women confront. Therefore, it is not the aim of this chapter to study Naga women alongside mainstream feminist criticism but rather against the backdrop of the Naga culture and society. This, however, also does not mean that feminism per se would be ignored altogether. The intention is to examine Easterine's interpretation of the condition(s) of women in Naga history and society to which she belongs.

Easterine achieved the uncommon feat of being a woman writer who was the first to publish a novel in English in a patriarchal Naga society. At the same time, it is also understandable that she became a modern story teller in a society wherein women and especially grandmothers were known to be the storehouse of legends and tales. Within the ambit of feminist criticism, Helene Cixous posits the existence of 'feminine writing' or 'écriture feminine', which has its source in the stage of the mother-child before the child acquires the male-centered verbal languages. In Cixous's view "this prelinguistic and unconscious potentiality manifests itself in those written texts that, abolishing all

repressions, undermine and subvert the fixed signification, the logic, and the “closure” of our phallogentric language and open out into a joyous free play of meanings”

(Abrams and Harpham 128). Helene Cixous writes:

I shall speak about women’s writing: about *what it will do*. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement. (875)

As a woman writer and an insider who writes about her land and people, this chapter will examine if Easterine’s works fall into this discourse. Moreover, her interpretation and portrayal of the lives of Naga women is studied in this chapter to highlight their role in Naga society and history while at the same time examining the insignificant acknowledgement and recognition meted out to them.

i) In Domestic Life

Limatula Longkumer writes that Naga woman has but one resource – Home (102).

Naga society is patriarchal and the husband is the head of the family. “The house in which a woman lives with her husband and children is not hers but her husband’s” (Ao 97). The fact that Naga women are excluded from the power structure in the society has greatly determined the position they hold in their domestic life.

Easterine’s first novel, *A Naga Village Remembered* is set in 19th century Nagaland. The story is told in the third person through the voice of an omniscient narrator with the intention of maintaining objectivity in the story telling. From the very

beginning Easterine sets the tone by making it clear that this is a village where traditions are strictly adhered to and it is a patriarchal society with gender-specific roles assigned for both men and women.

Kovi habitually rose early. Even then, as he walked outside in the morning he saw the women returning in small groups with their carrying baskets stacked with firewood. His heart warmed at the sight, Ah, the old ways are good, he thought, our women do us proud when they show themselves so eager to keep the teaching of their fathers.

The women would set out before dawn to fetch firewood for the day. But if they already had firewood for their households, they could be seen fetching water in their water carrier. Smoke curling up from the houses hugging the slopes and the still dark houses in the valley signalled that the cooking of the morning meal was in progress. (*ANVR 1*)

What begins as a simple division of labour progressed into more telling differentiation between man and woman, leading to the assumption that the physically weaker woman is mentally inferior, too. Thus evolves the process through which certain areas in the Naga life are totally attributed to as woman's domain.

There are some female characters in the novel whose names do not appear but are identified as the wives of their husbands. This identification as wives of men is very telling about the subservient position women hold in Naga society. The first of them is Kovi's wife. When the novel begins, Kovi's wife is pregnant and is on the verge of delivery. "She moved awkwardly to pour the broth into his plate, her gait hampered by the growing child within her" (*ANVR 2*). This reveals the gender base division of labour within the family. There is no intention on the part of the husband to help his wife with

household chores nor any expectation from the wife even during pregnancy which is supposed to be a hard and tiresome period in the life of a women when she herself needed care and consideration most.

When Kovi's wife was ready for delivery Kotsu's wife (the second nameless female character) who "assisted in all the births" was sent for. "Kovi was undecided whether to go out to the *thehou* or stay at home and try to help. Birthing was women's business and he always felt a little helpless. If it were not for the ritual of claiming the new born he would not be found anywhere near the labour" (ANVR 4). Sadly, Kovi's wife died after suffering a long labour. She died a *lashu* death which was the most abominable of apotia deaths. No mourning and rituals were conducted over her, "she was wrapped in a mat and taken out of the house through the new opening in the wall, and not the doorway.... By late morning she was buried, hastily, tumbled into the pit and covered with soil" (ANVR 5).

During her lifetime, Kovi's wife:

...had been a good woman, not one to join the village gossips but keeping herself to her hearth and caring for her husband and children. If it was a day of community work, she would be seen at the most difficult portions....

...had not been a careless woman ... she was always circumspect in her conduct, careful with the jests of the young men of their age group, polite to all so that none would think she favoured one above the other." (ANVR 8, 9 & 12)

In spite of her honourable life, Kovi's wife met the most abominable of apotia deaths. Her life and conduct were upheld but she is just remembered as the good wife of Kovi, and no name of her own was attributed to her.

The other nameless female character mentioned in the novel is Keviselie's wife. Keviselie is the man who has given feast of merit in the novel. Among the Nagas, feast of merit consisted of elaborate rituals in successive stages and the wife of the feast giver has her share of responsibilities in them. In fact, a man without a wife could not give feast of merit even though he could afford it. In the novel, Keviselie's wife performs her duties well but all the credit goes to her husband. A woman's worth is counted on how good a wife she is to her husband but never in her productivity as an individual. This is captured well by Easterine in her female characters in the novel.

In spite of the dictate of the society, Easterine, as a women writer, takes the opportunity to depict the strength and power that a woman possesses for the survival of a society no matter how patriarchal. She deliberately shows that a woman is capable of fostering a family even without a man. This, she does through the character of Vipiano. It is important to note that the character of Vipiano, a widow, is utilized by the writer to showcase the true worth of women in the novel. Interestingly, none of the female characters mentioned in the novel are portrayed in a negative way, they are all hardworking and industrious women. But, the true worth of a woman can be shown only in the absence of her husband. While her husband is alive, she is just the helper, and a wife. However, at the eventuality of the death of a husband the wife has the ability and strength to take care of the household. Having lost her warrior husband, Vipiano still has the strength and wisdom to bring up her two sons singlehandedly. She knows the importance of abiding by the rituals and taboos which her society observed and most of the wise philosophical talks found in the novel come from her:

“Son, when our granaries are filled you may feel free to trap or shoot all the birds you want but remember, a household is not worthy of its name if its granaries are empty. The sun and rain are the Creator’s blessings. They rain and shine in turn for us to make our fields and get our harvests. War is part of a village’s life but if we have grain, we can withstand war. If we do not have grain, a few days of war will overcome us.”...

“A man who lets brew drink him instead of he drinking it is no man.... I have seen a few men, not many, a few of my clansmen, drunk and dragging their clan name in the dust. It is not manliness to be so overcome by drink, it goes by another name.” (ANVR 10 & 24)

When her elder son Levi tells her that he is joining a raid, she knew better not to stop him but to take all the precautions she could by performing rituals for his safe return. At the same time she does not hide that she is not happy with his decision, so she said to him “Death stalks a warrior, can any mother be happy knowing that? But leave this talk. We must cast your fortune tomorrow. Let us not forget any ritual that will ensure your protection. The spirits are not malevolent to one who has performed the rituals” (ANVR 35).

Vipiano strives hard to fulfil both the father’s and mother’s role for her sons. She provides them with food and clothes, and equipping them with the knowledge of life. She not only provides for her household but is always prepared to help people like her brother Kovi, a widower. “Piano was glad that her field-work was over and she could now be a little free to help her brother with his field” (ANVR 11).

From the character of Vipiano one can learn that a woman is capable of running a household as well as men, if not better. It is at this juncture that Easterine employs her

creativity in defining the position of Naga women at that point in their history. She avoids making direct comparison of men and women, at the same time there is no sense of protest in the narrative on the plight of women. It is possible that some may see the writer here as the victim of patriarchy herself, which blinds her towards the subordinate status of women over men in familial as well as societal set up. However, the crux of the matter is that what the novel showcases is the condition of women's lot which was an accepted norm, with men and women following the unwritten rules without question.

Life on Hold (2011), *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), and *Mari* (2010), clearly depict the pathetic conditions faced by Naga women in times of war and conflict. Unlike *A Naga Village Remembered* wherein Easterine focuses on the historical aspect of the Nagas, in the other three novels mentioned she focuses on the sufferings of the common people, especially women and children, in times of war and conflict.

Life on Hold is a novella capturing a few defining years for the characters involved. The main female protagonist of the novel Nime is a young school going girl when the story begins. The setting of the novel is in Kohima town and Nime, a girl child is seen mingling with boys and wrestling with them. From the beginning her mother is against her daughter spending time with boys ““You were with those two boys, weren't you? Oh Nime, when will you start behaving like a girl?”... Mother never liked her spending time with Roko and Setuo. It was no point trying to explain” (*LOH* 4). “Nime was otherwise an obedient daughter who dearly loved her parents, but she also loved being with Roko and Setuo. She felt so torn between them” (*LOH* 5). The labelling of an obedient daughter is marred by her spending time with boys, and nothing about this dichotomy is seen with the boys' manners. Mothers expect their daughters to be respectful, help in household works, mild in manners and not wrestle with boys. And mothers are expected to stay home, do the housework and look after their children

while fathers earn for the family. “Nime’s mother did not work. Like many women of her age, she stayed home and did the housework and looked after her children.” (*LOH* 11) Here Easterine reflects the notion of patriarchal society which does not consider housework as real ‘work.’ In patriarchal societies stay-at-home mothers are considered as unproductive as they do not produce any commodity for consumption. In Naga society household works and rearing children are regarded as women’s responsibility and those who fulfil these duties are taken for granted and their labour towards these services are not considered as their sacrifices.

As far as Nime’s mother is concerned she is contented with being a housewife and never thought of helping her husband in earning for the family. When her husband’s business fails and he falls sick she is unable to help her family financially. She depends totally on her children. There is no attempt on her part to earn money. She is a victim of patriarchy in its true sense of the term. Unlike Vipiano in *A Naga Village Remembered*, Nime’s mother neither has the wisdom nor the strength to run her family without her husband. This no doubt generates a society’s mentality that posits a woman to be the helper and not the earner. The patriarchal ideals are so inherent in her that right from the beginning she wants her daughter to behave in a certain way and not mingle with boys. She is limited by such a mentality that prevents her own holistic development as an individual.

In every patriarchal society the gender division is seen right from the birth of a baby. In the novella, the final gender division is pointed out when Nime delivered a baby boy named Zotuo. A few years earlier her daughter Vinuo had been born:

Abeiu was pleased that it was a son. He spent a lot more time in the hospital than he had done at Vinuo’s birth.

... His father doted on him. Nime worried that he might spoil the boy because he would never let him lie in his cot for long. If he cried, Abeiu would pick him up instantly.

... Intelligent and industrious, Vinuo was well liked by her teachers. She in turn loved school, for it was here that she found the attention that she missed at home. Her father barely glanced at her school work. However, if Zotuo showed him a drawing he had made, Abeiu would be very interested and praise the boy....

... She wished Abeiu would not exclude their daughter so obviously. The girl had grown up with a distant father.... Everyone else commented on what a sweet big sister Vinuo was to the baby, but her father never notice it.

... A shiver ran through her body.... A shudden thought of her life ahead with this man who neither cherished her nor their daughter made her feel desolate.... (LOH 86, 95, 96& 97)

This preference of boy child over girl child is also reflected in *Bitter Wormwood*: Luo-o, Mose's father is very pleased because "their first child was a boy. He happily took over the task of harvesting the field so his wife did not have to return to fieldwork in the next month," (17) after giving birth. So it is evident that gender division and preference in Naga society begins right from the birth of a child.

In *Bitter Wormwood* most of the female characters involved are relatively independent, self-reliant and outspoken compared to the submissive female characters found in *Life on Hold*. The social settings in both the novels are contemporary, they are stories of characters during the Naga struggle for independence, but *Bitter Wormwood*

covers a longer period of time than the other, though. It covers a period that spans from late 1930s to late 2000s.

The sufferings of female citizens when conflict breaks out between a people and a dominating nation are often shocking. The sufferings of women especially in the form of rape will always fill chapters in every nation's struggle. The Naga case is no different; rape and other form of tortures of women during their struggle and which unfortunately has not yet been resolved, cannot be ignored. In the Authors Note, Easterine gives clear mention of the atrocities of the Indian army "like beating a pregnant woman and forcing her to give birth in public, raping of the village women and killing of the menfolk" (*BW 2*). Unsettling as the reality of the background of the novel is, Easterine focuses more on the everyday struggle to survive of ordinary womenfolk during this political unrest of the times.

The first instance of the appearance of a woman in the novel is Mose's mother birthing him in their jhoom field:

His mother, Vilau, was in the fields, tying together the stalks of rice that would be harvested the following week. Suddenly she felt cramping pains low in her abdomen. She tried to continue working, but the pains came again and intensified. Their field was an hour and a half way from the village, so the young mother birthed her son in the field shed.

Vialu's mother-in-law, Khrienuo, helped her to wash the infant with a little water from the stream. Then she sent her daughter-in-law home with her infant son wrapped in a little bundle of cloth. No further ceremony to it. Khreinuo stayed on a bit to finish the rest of the work. Their neighbours were not surprised when they saw Vilau walking past their fields with the

baby. Women birthing while out in the fields was not an uncommon phenomenon in those days. (*BW* 15)

This instance is telling of the old Naga life – the agrarian society; absence of modern mode of transportation; total lack of modern medical facilities and others. Khreinuo is already a widow when the novel begins. The misery Mose’s mother undergoes by giving birth to her son in the field is unthinkable by today’s standard, however, it also reflects the harsh living condition of women, and also that of motherhood. Khreinuo and Vilau working in the field alone indicate that Naga women did not get much help from their men folk on the contrary to what is asserted by scholars like K.S. Zetsuvi. He writes, “As the husband was the head of the family...He was the bread winner and the responsibility of supporting the family rested on his head, whereas the wife only have to manage whatever her husband brought home” (21).

Interestingly, as K.S. Zetsuvi continues, he writes, “If we look at the division of work within the family, the mother had to manage the household chores as well as most of the field work while man played a secondary role.” (21) It is surprising to call man ‘bread winner’ when he plays a secondary role in field work. This irony is but the core of patriarchal ideology. As a woman is owned by her man all the fruits of her works becomes the husband’s products.

Back to the novel, unfortunately, Luo-o, Mose’s father died early and Vilau was widowed at a very young age. However, she has a strong bond with her mother-in-law, Khreinuo, like Nime who has a stronger bond with her mother-in-law Lhounuo, than the bond she has with her husband in *Life on Hold*. Vilau and Khreinuo do not share the same roof but live close to each other. “Khreinuo was very loving to her grandson. She saw the bitterness in her daughter-in-law and knew it would take a long time to heal.

She tried to compensate for it by giving young Mose more of her time, and cooking meals for them as often as she could..." (BW 22). Therefore, the understanding and strong bond between the two women makes it possible to raise a child even under very difficult circumstances.

Mari, as already mentioned, is an autobiographical novel narrated in the first person. Khrielievu dotingly called Mari by Victor, a Staff Sergeant of the British Army deployed in the Naga Hills during World War II, tells her exotic story during the turbulent war. Mari's family consists of herself, her father - a treasury officer, her mother - a housewife, a foster sister Marina, an elder brother and two younger sisters. With the father being a government officer at that point Mari's family do not really exhibit the typical agrarian Naga family. Relatively advanced in their standard of living and all members being educated compared to others, the family is grounded very much by Naga traditional values and customs. So, their's too was a patriarchal family where the womenfolk constitute second membership in the family.

Mari had two daughters from two different British army personnel. Since they were not born to Naga fathers they had to be adopted by the tribe so they have the right to settle in their mother's homeland. She said, "After my baby was born, we went to the village council, as was the custom, and registered the child. After this, both my children were acknowledged as the legal offspring of their fathers. This was how a foreigner was accepted by and adopted into a tribe. Now the children had the right to settle in the land of their birth and own property if they chose to" (*Mari* 129).

A Naga custom where male lineage is strictly followed is clarified in this case. Vic died and Dickie left, still, they are the legal fathers of Mari's children. The absent father cannot be replaced by someone. However, the fact that the two daughters of Mari

adopted by her tribe shows that the tribe has the tradition of giving children of Naga mothers from outside their tribe dignity and space within their mother's tribe regardless of the fact that they are females. Therefore, though the patriarchal element is strong in all aspects of their life, yet Naga women seem to be recognized as valued members too. They are not rejected or ignored. The patriarchal ideology in the Naga society appears to be that women possessed equal rights in terms of ownership but they are the 'weaker sex' and so subordinate to men.

Those casual instances in the novel where Mari's acquaintances, be it her friends or men with marriage proposal, seek her father's permission, showcase that father is the head of the family. Her father is the authoritarian figure, in Mari's words, "My father was a stern man and most of the younger people feared and respected him. He could be very caring too but people rarely saw this other side of him" (*Mari* 21).

On the other hand, the mother always occupied a large space in the life of Mari and the whole family throughout the novel. The mother is the positive figure that binds the family together even in the worst of times. She does not spare any love even for her foster daughter, "Marina can read the Bible and she had a beautiful singing voice. She is such a good cook, too. Any man who marries her will be fortunate" (*Mari* 5). Apparently, Mother is the one who upholds traditional values and customs while she also accepts and honours changes. More importantly, she is the family's strength when it is in dire state.

Mother weaves, and runs a blooming kitchen garden. She observes *genna* days or no work days even though they are Christians. "Though we were Christians, we abided by these cultural practices in order to live in harmony with the non-Christians" (*Mari* 5). She is kind to all. She treats everybody with care irrespective of their caste or tribe. She

would invite Nepali women selling milk and serve her tea, “She said it wasn’t right to send them away empty-handed” (*Mari* 13). She is the bearer of a culture that the men are fighting to defend.

When the war eventually reached Kohima Mother is the one to comfort her children and others in the absence of her husband, “... we all sat in the living room, huddled together, listening to the sounds of battle. My mother came after a while and spoke gently to us, ‘Don’t be afraid, God will not allow anyone to harm us. Just pray and ask for His protection’” (*Mari* 51). With the war getting more violent and when the family was forced to leave Kohima for safety, Mother refused to leave with them. “No amount of persuasion would make her change her mind” (*Mari* 53). She was determined to stay back to look after her aged parents when most people fled. Mother stayed and survived the great battle of Kohima. Her ordeals during those turbulent times are skipped in the narrative but she is among the few people saved and evacuated by the British. “When we found Mother we were so happy... She looked thin and frail but she smiled at us as we clung to her. Mother didn’t say much. She began to weep every time she tried to speak...” (*Mari* 90).

Mother had always been the guide, nurturer and caretaker of the family. She looked after her children according to their capabilities; she comforts and supports Mari when she becomes a single mother and helps taking care of the children. She sees that her youngest daughter is a weakling so she does not let her work as hard as the older ones. Even when she is ill “She insisted she was fine... she continued to busy herself around the house, pottering about in the garden” (*Mari* 155). It is only when Mother died that her true worth surfaces to her children. Mari narrates, “I saw clearly now that it was Mother and not Father who had been the strong one in our family. She had quietly

held us together, cared for our children when they were small and made sure we had hot food on the table at every meal” (*Mari* 156).

The mother character in the novel exhibits what many women in a patriarchal society do. The subtle but kind and comforting gestures they express towards their family and others are often taken for granted and their stubbornness in not complying to the demands of others like Mother refusing to leave home for safety are but a depiction of their belongingness to their roots, and their patriotism. Their suffering seldom reaches others, but their silent sacrifice is given so that others may continue to live.

Yet, another very crucial facet of the Naga women’s life in their family is well captured by Easterine in *A Terrible Matriarchy*. As the title suggests, the novel deliberately deals with the unfavourable conditions encountered by female members within the realm of the Naga female world. Here Easterine unmasks that to become a socially acceptable female in a Naga society has never been a smooth path. The novel is a girl’s coming of age story. The opening words of the novel are, “My Grandmother didn’t like me. I knew this when I was about four and a half” (*ATM* 1).

Paul Pimomo writes:

ATM is Dielieno’s story. Her Angami name, which translates into “little errand girl,” describes much of her life from age five to twenty-three. But the story is more than Lieno’s. It is about three generations of Naga women: Grandmother, Mother, and Lieno. It is a time of rapid social change. The women’s lives intertwine intimately and contrarily, defining them as individuals and their generational differences. (290)

As Lieno is the narrator, most of the characters and situations are laid down from her point of view. From the beginning, the tension between the grandmother and granddaughter is evident. Lieno is the youngest and only daughter of four siblings of her parents. At a very young age she is taken in by her grandmother who wanted to raise her to become an “ideal girl”. Grandmother is a terrible matriarch and a strict disciplinarian who is discriminatory towards Lieno while she pampers her grandsons with meat, sweets, money and other indulgences. Lieno grows up running errands for Grandmother who refuses to even call her by her name and always refers to her as “the girl.”

Feminism is predominantly not anti- men per se; rather Feminism seeks that women be treated as people too, having equal rights to men. Kamla Bhasin, a feminist activist and social scientist reasserts that feminism is more of an ideological belief system than anything else. She states, “I know enough women who are totally patriarchal, who are totally anti-women; who do nasty things to other women, and I have known men who have worked for women’s rights their whole life. Feminism is not biological: feminism is an ideology” (qtd. in Siambiakmawi and Sivasish Biswas 4).

The title of the novel, *A Terrible Matriarchy*, refers to matriarchal hegemony in a patriarchal society. The irony is that the matriarch in the novel manipulates and misapplies culture with all her effort to hold on to tradition which is staunchly patriarchal and so there is gender abuse within the same gender. Grandmother spends all her life trying to seize the love of her grandsons. She stubbornly champions the age old patriarchy system. She is against anything that could help bring up the status of girls from simple meat portions to education. She denies chicken leg to Lieno saying, “That portion is always for boys. Girls must eat the other portions” (*ATM* 1).

At the end, she ultimately is more a victim of patriarchy than all the women she discriminated against including her granddaughter.

Mother said to Lieno:

Your Grandmother was the eldest of three children.... When she was young she lived through a very hard age. In the village, widows without sons lost all their husband's property to other male relatives. Her mother did not have brothers and they lost all their lands and fields when her father died....

Grandmother saw her own mother suffer hardship and poverty and exclusion from many aspects of social life because she had no brothers. It hardened her and made her determined not to suffer as her mother did....

(*ATM* 250)

ii) Within the Societal Milieu

Each society functions with a set of certain rules or laws, written or unwritten called customary laws. The dictate of this law is reflective of the position of the members; men, women and children. According to customary law, the administration of the Nagas is democratic, yet, from traditional to present times it is also patriarchal in nature. The subordinate position of Naga women in society is candidly asserted by different Naga writers as well. Tamsula Ao writes, "The Nagas are a patriarchal society where women have always been subordinate to men" (46). Another prolific Naga writer, Monalisa Changkija also asserts, "Read any number of books on Naga traditional society, especially on social norms, you will notice the unequal status and position of women however politically correctly they have been written" (77). Another Naga female scholar Vizovona Elizabeth writes, "Naga society being a patriarchal and patrilineal

one, there is no space for women's verbal narrative at the societal level. The feminine voice is relegated within the domestic sphere" (115).

Due to the patriarchal and patrilineal nature of the Naga society, there is a gender division of labour, assignment of roles and status between men and women. The basic principle that governs the Naga society is that man is the 'provider' and woman the 'home-maker' in normal circumstances, and man is the 'protector' and woman is the 'protected' during war times. Instance of the latter is seen in *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003) when Khonoma raided Gariphe:

When runners came to announce: "Cho! Men of Khounoria are marching against us," some of their women said, "Ei, how they will assail our nostrils with their stench again" for many men of Khonoma had died at Gariphe in the first attack...

"There we were upon the village and many made their war cries and ran forward with spears outthrust. But the women of Gariphe sat at their looms weaving. They did not look up from their work, so confident were they that their men would repulse us and protect them...." (4)

Women acknowledge men as their protector and saviour and men give their lives protecting their womenfolk. On the flip side, this doctrine often left women alone with the burden of shouldering family responsibilities, as Easterine writes, "Many women were widowed early by the love of war among the men" (ANVR 15). While men were busy devoting all their time in warfare "the womenfolk were used to being left to finish field work on their own, leaving their men free to go on raids" (ANVR 9).

As Naga women are primarily home-makers, there is very less significant role for them outside the familial domain. Visielie Kehie writes:

... there is no doubt that she plays a role in some religious affair. In marriage, an old woman usually was made as a messenger for match making. To begin harvest the old woman in the village known as '*Liedepfii*' (first reaper) was normally selected to perform rituals and only after performing the rituals villagers can go for harvesting. Prior to the performing of this ritual by an old woman it was a taboo, failing which may bring famine and natural calamities to the village. Other than these there were hardly any activities where women can take part outside the society. (193)

The above example is especially true of the old traditional Naga society, wherein unlike today there were no formal women organizations where they could address their predicaments. Easterine in her depiction of the conditions of the lives of Naga women in her writings is realistic, and therefore, none of her female characters are portrayed as playing an important role in the society. In the absence of a male adult in the family, the women cannot take the place of the absent/deceased male members, who are therefore represented by a close male relative. In *Bitter Wormwood* when the widow Khrienuo died, she had only her widowed daughter-in-law and young Mose as family so their close male relative Beilie took all responsibilities.

Mose and his mother had no male relatives except Beilie. Their clansmen came and arranged Khreinuo's funeral...

The next morning the pastor came and conducted the funeral solemnly.

There were many women present. Beilie spoke at the funeral: "I am

speaking on behalf of the family today, not because I have contributed to looking after them, but I am speaking because I am the only male relative....

(71 & 72)

It is evident here that only male members have authority when any event involving the society as a whole occurred in a household. This is because of the norm of the society that dictates that a woman does not represent a household or clan. This clearly signifies that women are largely excluded from executing leading social duties.

This sub-ordinate position of Naga women in their society is also clearly reflected in the laws of inheritance practiced by them. Visielie Kehie writes:

In a patriarchal and patrilineal Angami family system, the major shares of the property goes to the sons rather than the daughters. The property of any deceased man without male child even if he had daughters, would be inherited by the father's first cousins. In case no relations being found, then the kindred inherits, and if no kindred, then the clan. It has been stated that a man cannot leave real property to his daughters. No woman can permanently inherit land of any sort... As per the Angami custom a man can leave as much land as he pleases to be enjoyed by a daughter during her lifetime to whom it is left, but the property would be reverted to the male heirs after the death of the daughter. (196)

In all the selected works, every female character exemplifies the non-status of women in their society. The aspect of inheritance is hardly addressed to, but is evident at the end of *A Terrible Matriarchy* when Grandmother died. Bano, who has spent all her life taking care of Grandmother is unceremoniously shunted out of the house. The narrator of the novel asserts:

Uncle Avi and Aunt Leno surprised everyone by suggesting very strongly that Bano should now move to Sizo's house so that the rest of the family could use Grandmother's house for some profitable purpose, perhaps rent it out and get some income...

Leto was astonished at the idea and the way Father's two brothers and their wives seemed to be in agreement on it. He was wandering if he should express his opinion on the matter considering that our people taught that it was rude for a young man to air his views strongly when his elders were around. The young men would sit on family conversations but most of the time, they were deferential. (*ATM* 276 & 277)

Only adult male members make decisions regarding properties and inheritance. Even Grandmother's will, while she was alive, was not considered anymore. No female inherits ancestral property nor do they have any decision in distributing it. In the patriarchal Naga society, Vizolenuo Sophie writes, "Nagas have customary laws and courts since time immemorial. However, there are areas in these customs and laws where women are left behind, never included or given the right to inheritance especially immovable properties. They are not allowed to take part in decision-making... Exclusion of women begins at the roots" (45). The scene in the novel mentioned above vividly clarifies women's subordinate position, at the same time, a close reading of it also subtly suggests that women can manipulate patriarchal system too. Leno only learns latter that it was actually her Aunts who plotted the plan to drive out Bano from the house:

After they had all left, I could join in the talk about it with Mother and Father and my brothers.

“Father, why didn’t you say that Grandmother had left the house to Salhou?” I asked Father.

“Lieno, we are not the ones to make that claim. If we did, my brothers would immediately suspect that I was trying to cheat them out of the house. Yet, I cannot let them throw Bano out so long as she wants to live there.”

Bulie thought that we should have been more open in our conversation and they might have understood that we were really interested in Bano’s welfare.

“Ah, it is easy for us to see that but they would misinterpret it. Men are not men when they have wives,” says Father mysteriously. I asked him to explain that but he refused. (*ATM* 278)

While reflecting plainly without any protest on the lowly status of Naga women, Easterine also asserts that some women are negative, that instead of promoting the life of other women they become agents for their down fall. Dielieno’s Grandmother is definitely an obvious example. There is an outright discrimination and gender bias in her treatment of her grandchildren right from a young age. The same is also seen in the same novel through “the two women by the water source.” They are sub-characters but played a noticeable role in the society, though theirs is a negative one and people could do well without them. In “A Note from the Author,” Easterine said that the two women “are real women I have met in my adult life” (*ATM* vii). The two women are gossip mongers who seem to know the dark secret of every family. They know exactly who Bano is and what kind of a person is grandmother to Lieno. “Don’t worry, Dielieno, we won’t do you any harm. You are to be pitied for being descended from that woman” (*ATM* 14). They speak the truth, but those unsettling truths of families are better left

unspoken. Easterine's honesty as a writer in incorporating malicious women in *A Terrible Matriarchy* reveals that it is not only the gender biased patriarchal ideology, but women themselves who contribute to the sufferings of other womenfolk in the society.

iii) In Political Scenario

No Naga female ever represented her clan from earlier days. In olden days the Council of Elders was the supreme legislative and judicial body. "Each clan sent a representative to the council. But no female could ever represent her clan. Thus according to customary law, women had no say in public affairs" (Christina 71). Women do not participate or interfere in the administration of the village. Kovi's wife knows that she is not to interfere on the subject when she learns of her husband's plan to visit the *thehou* (community house). When she enquires about the meeting, Kovi abruptly replies, "Its man-talk. Don't ask after the business of the clan." In fact, "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 that infrequently took place. But they knew that it was about grave matters" (ANVR 2).

Traditionally, the Naga society did not recognise the rights of women as primary decision makers. It seems that this ideology has not been altered either by the British colonialists as well as the Indian constitution. With the advent of the British there were certain changes with the administration, for instance, the office of Goanburas was established, but they were invariably males. In 1978, the Nagaland Village Council Act was enacted and the Village Council replaced the Council of Elders. With these changes, "... women's position remains the same as before. In some villages, women were included in the council only to help in cooking and serving when the men held their meetings" (Christina 72).

To strengthen this age old ideology, Nagaland is incidentally governed by Article 371 (A) of the Indian Constitution, which states “no Acts of the Parliament shall apply to the state in respect of religious and social practices of the Nagas; Naga customary laws and procedure and the administration of civil and criminal justice evolving discussion according to Naga customary law, unless the legislative Assembly rectify it by resolution” (qtd. in Khala 27). “Nagaland is embroiled in an open gender war over the implementation of 33% reservation for women in the Municipal as well as Town Council since 2010. While it is already the law in the state, elections was kept in abeyance claiming strong opposition from tribal councils and Naga Hohos, both traditional and modern bodies...” (Chhakchhuak 19). The Nagaland Government claimed the protection of Article 371 (A) and also asserted that “implementing the law of reservation “would have negative impact on Naga society, so as to disintegrate the same and weaken the strong administration of Naga way of life,” leading to law and order breakdown” (Chhakchhuak 19).

Due to the non-participation of women in decision and policy making in the Naga society, none of Easterine’s female characters in the selected works are portrayed as one. Even though the works are based on social and historical facts, most of them are primarily fictitious. Still, Easterine is not pretentious in portraying the reality of women’s situation in her society. Politically, therefore, women are that group of the society who are expected never to confront but to ever uphold whatever the dominant male members decide for them.

At the same time, the non-participation in active politics does not mean Naga women do nothing with regards to the political situation in their land. In *Bitter Wormwood* as the narrative progresses, the growing unrest becomes more severe with more and more Indian army pouring into the Naga territory. Each new day has news of

the atrocities committed by the army, and Khreinuo eventually died from a bullet of the Indian army. This incident urged Mose to join the underground Naga army. He did his part in fighting for freedom. With the formation of the Nagaland statehood and the brokering of ceasefire, Mose left the underground to look after his ailing mother. Due mainly to his mother's insistence Mose married Neilhounou, the "rifle girl" of the underground army. At first Vilau is a little worried if Neilhounuo would make a good wife for her son but she is proven wrong. Her 'unfeminine' character never hinders her to become a good daughter-in-law to her sick mother-in-law.

The above short summary of part of *Bitter Wormwood* is reflective of the involvement of women in conflict situation. In retrospection, one can wonder what sustains the Naga conflict for so long. There may be many answers to this question, but "brokering of peace" no matter how short they may be, is definitely one answer. A society or nation can last a century in peace, but cannot last for a prolonged period with constant killing and fighting. As seen in the novel, after a certain period of turbulent conflict, the Naga situation reached a stage where they negotiate "cease-fire." Easterine appears to deliberately exclude the initiative taken up by women in brokering of ceasefire in the novel. She writes, "The cease-fire that had been talked of for a long time finally came at the height of the fighting between the Indian army and the Naga Underground. The Peace Mission, where the Rev. Michael Scott, Jayaprakash Narayan, a Gandhian, and B.P.Chaliha, Chief Minister of Assam worked with the local people, had successfully brokered peace" (*BW* 104).

However, the active participation of women in brokering peace to Naga conflict needs mention here. Khatoli Khala writes:

In the midst of armed conflict and its adverse consequences as a backdrop, Naga women- seeking to safeguard their families and their society have made great strides in attempting to resolve differences and ending the conflict. The Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) and which women took the lead in peace building exercises, aiming to halt fighting as well as initiate a dialogue with the state government and underground elements towards ceasefire....

The NMA were instrumental in bringing about a ceasefire between the two warring fraction of the NSCN and have the distinction of being the first women's organization in South Asia to effect such change, their role is a pointer to the effective contribution of women in resolving armed conflicts. (78-79 & 82)

On the other hand, the suffering of Naga women because of the conflict is immense. The old Naga notion of men fighting and protecting their womenfolk is no longer applicable when home front is no longer the peaceful zone. Women are not spared the atrocities of war, in fact, they are the vulnerable lot who suffer tremendously. It is the patriarchal domination and political exclusion of Naga women in decision making which causes writers like Easterine to not portray female characters as leading members of society in her realistic fictions. It is as Anuradha Dutta contemplates:

When the dominant narrative of the Naga Peace process is written, will there be space for the gendered narrative of those behind the scenes – the Naga Mothers taking the lead in the puzzle of building peace, calling for a halt to all killings, initiating a dialogue with the state and the underground

for a cease fire, cross into hostile territory and appeal to the rival faction to stop internecine killings. (22)

By omitting the active participation of women in peace making process of the Naga conflict in her novels Easterine is subversively writing about the silencing of the Naga women's sacrifices for the Naga cause by the dominant narrative. In her article "From the Heart – The Philosophy of Easterine Kire's Writing" she writes:

We have experienced many periods in our history when our narratives were silenced, bombing and burning homes, and occupation of our hearts. All these periods silence our narratives. However, there has been an even more sinister silencing of our narratives by other agencies. Let us write the silences: the stories that others deem are worthless (Kire "From the Heart").

Moreover, as seen in *Bitter Wormwood*, Neilhounuo, a woman who took active part in fighting for the cause of her people is mockingly called "the rifle girl." In situations of militarization traditional gender ideals are often stressed. Man's 'masculinity' is called on to encourage them to take up arms in defence of their country, ethnic group, and in defence of their weaker sex - 'women.' And those "women who take more active roles are often de-sexed and no longer regarded as feminine women" (Handique 30). Indeed, the rifle girl "A good shot and a good soldier," (*BW* 106) is doubted if she would make a good wife. Her active participation in freedom struggle is taken as an alteration of her sexuality by others.

Neilhounuo's character is an important one for the fact that she embraces reality. She is more rational than her husband Mose. She joined the underground army when it was believed that fighting and taking up arms would bring Naga freedom. But as the struggle continued things took a turn, freedom fighters break into rival factions, amongst

themselves, killing each other, and the phenomenon becomes unfathomable for those ardently devoted to fighting for Naga freedom. Even at this point Mose remains an idealist, pained by what has become of his people, but on the other hand, Neilhounuo devoted herself to running her family and took to silence as she was well aware of the futility of her voicing her thoughts.

Neilhounuo did not join the men on the porch. It was a deliberate choice. She smiled wryly as she remembered her nickname in the Underground. “Rifle girl’ they called her,... She had been a better shot than the boys. But with marriage, she had chosen to put all that behind her. If only some lasting peace would return to their land so that they could raise their children in peace! The struggle had now gone beyond its twentieth year and there was still no end in sight. At 30, she felt a little disillusioned by it all. Too many had died.... (BW 113)

Easterine was concerned with the Naga situation. She says, “*Bitter Wormwood* was written as an act of catharsis. I had to write a novel that followed the Naga freedom movement chronologically in order to make younger generations understand how the conflict started and why” (Mallick “In Conversation”). In writing this she in turn voiced her opinion on the whole issue. One instance is:

Twenty-one years without any respite. Or any lasting solutions. It was a man’s war. If it had been left to the women, may be they would have talked it over and sorted it out long back. After all, it was they who bore the brunt of the deaths of husbands, lovers, brothers and sons. On both sides. But women did not settle wars. It was unheard of.

The women's lot was to mourn their dead. And the very next day try to find food for their families. The women themselves didn't think that was very much. It didn't compare with the heroic things that the men did. They never tried to take any credit for looking after their families in the absence of male members in the household. Certainly, not many women had done what she had done. Taken up a gun. But that didn't mean those who had stayed at home had not done brave things. Carrying messages hidden in the folds of their clothing past army check-points. Sharing their foods with the ones in hiding, tilling extra fields when they could, cutting fields for firewood, repairing houses and taking on the works of men. Not many remembered what the women had done to keep their families alive in those dark years. Because war was men's business, not women's.

If only people would actively work for peace as they worked for war. War was for the young, and only for short periods. It killed something in you if it was prolonged. This war was much bigger than an inter-village war, where another village could have intervened and made peace between the two warring villages. It was getting bigger than life, much, much bigger.

(*BW* 113 & 114)

Easterine pours out her opinion through Neilhounuo's persona, the rumination in the above excerpts clearly reflects her standpoint concerning the Naga issue. Being a woman, she is able to put forward the Naga women's predicament and perspective which is never acknowledged by the patriarchs. Here she is also reiterating what Cixous writes that a woman "must write her self." This makes one wonder what if Naga women are given space in politics? Would the course of their struggle be different? Would the Nagas still be in this unending conflict? Or would they acquire peace by now? Of the

involvement of women in policy making in conflict situation, Stella Tamang of the Tamang community in Nepal insists that:

If we put women at the negotiating table, they will change the equation of negotiation. They will introduce practical workable solutions to the conflict. I am not claiming to undermine the efforts of men; I am reminding you that what is important is that men alone and only men's interpretation and solutions will not resolve conflicts and bring peace. (qtd. in Dutta 21)

The exclusion of Naga women in politics which is clearly reflected in the absence of female members in the Legislative Assembly since its inception in 1964 is a matter of grave concern for Nagas to have all round development. It is at this juncture that Toshimenla Jamir insists, "Efforts toward improving the political status of women should be considered not merely as a step toward expanding the political landscape in the state but it would pave the way for a more equitable redistribution of resources in the society eventually resulting in a better and just social order" (64).

iv) Beyond the Confines of Naga Society

Most of the selected novels in this study are confined within Nagaland, so the experiences of women outside their society are not deliberated upon by the writer. However, a little, but significant coverage of certain events that happened to the Naga women outside their society cannot be omitted altogether. Not only do Naga women face subjugation inside the confines of their home or community, but they face double subjugation outside their community. This issue is voiced in *Bitter Wormwood* in the context of Northeastern girls in the capital. When Neibou, Mose's grandson arrives at Delhi for further studies, he is received with derogatory racial remarks. But the next

thing he realises is the double subjugation faced by the women from his part of the country:

... The targeting of girls from the Northeast had become a big problem in the city and he had read innumerable reports about these in the newspapers. It seemed that the girl students and working girls from Northeast were victims of carefully planned rapes and sexual attacks and the city was becoming increasingly unsafe for them. Protests from the students groups and human rights groups had not made much difference...

The spate of crimes and sexual assaults against girls from the Northeast had continued unabated.... (182 & 183)

Easterine clearly understands the cultural difference between the mainland Indians and Northeast tribes and also points out how impossible it is for the Nagas to define themselves as Indians. In pointing out the prevailing pathetic situation time and again encountered by the Northeast girls in places like Delhi, she in turn refers to the double oppression faced by them; first for being Northeasterners or “other”, and secondly for being “female”.

v) In Education

Limatula Longkumer writes:

Looking at today’s scenario in Nagaland, one can get the impression that Naga women have really achieved advancement in formal education, can compete with male counterpart in every aspect. There is no restriction but tremendous opportunity for women to pursue formal education equally with men. It is really true that education has brought tremendous changes upon

the lifestyle and status of Naga women. But on the other hand, if we examine critically the place of Naga women in education, in spite of better opportunities and facilities, problems and discrimination.... (97)

Formal education was introduced to the Nagas by Western missionaries in the later part of 19th century. Education improves the status and mobility of people and giving equal opportunity of schooling to both boys and girls is good, but disparity exists in the education process. The reason is that education is conditioned and bounded by the social, cultural and political ideology of the people. And a stringent patriarchal ideology dominates every aspect of the Naga society. The patriarchal bias existing in the education process is voiced by Easterine in *A Terrible Matriarchy*. Grandmother is against Lieno going to school. Her view on education is that it has nothing good for girl as it does not help her becoming a 'good Naga wife' and a 'mother':

In our day... girls did not go to school. We stayed at home and learned the housework. Then we went to the fields and learned all the fieldwork as well. That way one never has a problem with girl-children. They will always be busy at some work or other, too busy to get into trouble. It is okay if boys have a spot of trouble now and then, but with girls, it is different. You would never be able to get rid of her once she has gotten into trouble. I really do not approve of girls getting educated. It only makes them get fancy notions about themselves and they forget their place in the family. (22)

Concerning the early attitude of the Nagas on education, Temsula Ao writes:

For centuries Naga society existed on the strength of male superiority and male prerogatives. When book-learning became an option, it was the male child who got the first opportunity, and if, in a family, a female child was

allowed to go to school it was only to study up to the stage where she could read the Bible and the song sheet. That was considered 'enough' for female..., even if they happened to be better students. Merit was never the decider, being male was. (46 & 47)

Naga women are expected and told to be submissive and passive for centuries. So the vestiges of the long history of women occupying subservient position in society are not easily effaced overnight. Easterine's interpretation of the gender biased education opportunity in the Naga society is deeply rooted in their traditional ideology. In the selected novels, old people especially grandmothers who still uphold traditional values and systems are found to be against giving education to girls. Lieno's grandmother in *A Terrible Matriarchy* and Anyie Kereikieu in *Mari* are cases in point here because Anyie thought "that educating girls was a waste of time... In the Naga culture, the woman's role was to look after the house and children, and nothing beyond that" (6).

The defined model of 'ideal woman' – weak, dependent, caring, kind and feminine are so deeply rooted in the minds of the people that aggressive and outspoken women are not regarded as 'womanly'. A smart and outspoken woman is seen as 'uncultured' woman and the expression of being 'an ideal woman' is fully appreciated even among womenfolk themselves. In *A Terrible Martiarchy* her aunt turned down proposals for Lieno quoting that she is "too outspoken" even before consulting her. In another instance, Lieno narrates, "Aunt Bino once said that I was unfeminine and... as hot-headed as ever... I didn't think I was hot-headed but I did have strong opinions and had expressed them in the past. Now I was learning to keep my opinions to myself" (249). Also when the news of Leto planning to marry Vimenuo reaches Grandmother, she bursts out:

“What! The dead drunk’s daughter?!” Grandmother had roared when she was told the news.

“This is what happens when people get it into their heads to educate young girls. Folks forget their status and try to marry above their station... But it is all these modern ideas to blame. Educating girls indeed! Education can’t rid of you of bad blood I say! (193)

Education opens opportunities for women to work and earn. However, this idea seems to be overlooked in a patriarchal society like the Naga’s as seen in Easterine’s work. In *Life on Hold*, for Nime “... Marriage was far from her mind. How to get a job and earn some money and help, that was all she thought of.” (34) Being a girl, Nime is not considered of any help to her family as the men that is to earn money through education. Even those girl children who are given the opportunity of education are not envisaged by the family and society alike to be the bread earner because their rightful place is in the kitchen, educated and uneducated alike. Therefore, as far as Easterine is concerned, Naga women have been given prejudiced treatment in the realm of education which needs to be addressed. By incorporating some female character who are given access to limited education, Easterine depicts how Naga women face a strong barrier in education which prevents them from fulfilling their intellectual pursuits.

vi) Marriage

As a matter of fact, a woman’s position in a society can also be known best when studied vis-à-vis with men’s position in matters regarding marriage.

Monalisa Changkija writes:

Today the Naga marriage is an interesting study of a tribal society in transition into a form of modernism, the characters, the contents and contours of which is not quite clear at this point of time. The dynamics of marriage is generally a mirror of the dynamics of any society and the Naga marriage, which is a product of the patriarchal Naga society, definitely operates along patriarchal norms and reflects it. (77)

Among the Nagas, marriage is between a man and a woman which led to the union of two families or clans. The unequal status and position of husband and wife which was apparent in the traditional Naga society can still be seen in modern times, though it has witnessed changes in terms of inheritance, economic/financial dependence or independence on one gender to the other, productivity, and other fields within the domain of a family life. This hierarchy of husband dictating over the wife can be attributed to nothing else but a natural corollary of the patriarchal system and values upon which the Naga society is founded.

The selected works showcase that Naga women have little authority over their marriage. It is a practiced norm in the society that a young man's family approach and propose to the girl's family and not vice versa. This indicates that while a young man has the freedom to choose his bride, a girl does not. Moreover, the 'ideal wife' material is submissive, docile, passive and so on. Therefore, outspoken, independent, free-spirited and even educated girls are not considered to make a good wife. In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, when Lieno decided to continue her education Grandmother said, "... but a woman's role is to marry and bear children, remember that. That is her most important role. Men don't like to marry educated wives" (190). Years later, Lieno has an offer of marriage: "Mother and I found out that this was not the first offer I had had. There had been three others but the boy's families had gone to speak to my Aunt Bino as was our

custom. Each time, she had rebuffed them saying that I was probably too outspoken to be considered as good wife material” (287). In regards to marriage, women are thought of as ‘possession or object’ whose fortune could change overnight. In *Life on Hold*, Nime’s brother said to her:

“Be grateful you’re a girl, you can always marry some rich guy,” he said to his sister, in a half teasing, half serious tone.

“That’s horrid of you to even suggest,” she protested.

“What? I’m only being realistic,” he laughed, “It would save our whole family if you were to marry this really rich and generous man who would do anything for you. It would be a bit like a fairy tale.” (33)

The family indeed suffers a great deal with their father’s debt. So, Nime is looked upon by her family and relatives alike as their chance of overcoming their pathetic situation. She is not expected to help her family by working and earning, but by becoming the wife of a rich man who would in turn help them. In short, Nime is expected to sacrifice her life and dreams for the cause of her family. With her father sick, brother unable to get decent employment and the tremendous amount of debt her father incurred, Nime is forced to marry Abeiu, a rich business man from Dimapur who is much older than her even though she does not love him.

In the early days of their marriage, Abeiu in fact helped her family by letting her visit Kohima on weekends to see her ailing father. After a few months, however, he becomes resentful of her trips to Kohima.

“You know, it costs me 300 rupees to send you home to your family each time, that is quarter of a day’s labour. And then, I can’t, of course, send you

empty-handed. So, another 300 four your pocket money and there, half a day's labour is wasted. If your father is recovering, I don't see why you have to visit him so frequently. You have to remember that you have your own family now, and so should they." (LOH 64)

Nime is a wife to Abeiu, but the money she spent visiting her family is counted in terms of lost labour by her husband. Abeiu is right in a sense that Nime now has her own family to tend, but for Nime she is torn between two families, the one who believes that she would help if she marries a rich man and the one who are now her new owners. For Nime this predicament is just the beginning for more problems follow her.

As can be seen in the novel, a Naga woman does not have any stand in the decision-making process even when it concerns her personal life. Nime believes that she could help her family in overcoming their difficult situation by working, but she was forced to marry against her choice. Even after marriage she proposes to her husband that she should look for a job in order to support herself, but that too was harshly objected by her husband. Therefore, Nime has to live under the mercy of her husband and suppress all her dreams. She told her brother Zeu that Abeiu "is a hard man to live with but that is my lot in life: to bear his children and endure the harshness of the things he says. If he is too cruel, I block out his words in my head. I make myself stop hearing them," and she said "nothing, nothing at all" even when her husband rebuked her (81). Nime took to silence like some married women in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (1989). The life of Nime and Abeiu reflects that of Jaya and Mohan as a married couple, Jaya asserts:

I cannot distance myself from us and what happened to us, however much I would like to do so. A pair of bullocks yoked together... a clever phrase, but

can it substitute for the reality? A man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children... But the reality was only this. We were two persons. A man. A woman. (8)

Nime's despair is so great that it would not voice itself. Her life is "a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender" (Deshpande 36).

Indeed it is not just Nime who suffers in the family, but all of them. When their father met a tragic death, their mother is inconsolable and all the burdens go to Zeu. Nine months after their father died, their aunt Salienuo comes to Zeu with marriage prospect, however, he flatly denied her, saying:

Aunt, I am not going to marry ever...I have to devote my life to paying off the debts that Father incurred in his life. I will never have enough income left over to provide for a wife and children. If we get stuck in the same situation as our family did, what would happen? I never want any child of mine to go through what my sister and I did.... (LOH 76)

By not agreeing to get married, Zue's situation is no better than Nime's, at the same time, Zue's decision is respected while Nime is never given the chance to decide.

On her part, Nime often feels emptiness inside her especially after marriage, "What was she doing here? This was not how she had expected her life to turn out... Was this her life? Sometimes it felt as though she was living someone else's life... (LOH 94) This and other desperate thoughts, Nime has to suppress as she does not have any authority over her life choices. This is mainly because as Monalisa Changkija puts, "however educated, exposed and enlightened, Naga men and Naga society have not abandoned our patriarchal core" (80).

vii) Conclusion

The often repeated saying on the condition of Naga women by Haimendorf, “Many women in more civilised parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga hills their high status and their free and happy life; and if you measure the cultural level of a people by the social position and personal freedom of its women, you will think twice before looking down on the Nagas as ‘savage’” (101), is true to a large extent when compared with non-tribal cultures like the rigid hierarchical structure found in Hindu society, based on caste and class. This comparison of Naga women with their counterparts in other parts of the world urges scholars like U. A. Shimray to assert, “In the classless, casteless Naga society, women have traditionally enjoyed a high social position, with a pivotal role in both family and community affairs. In the ‘modern’ milieu, with the insidious influence of drugs and violence, Naga women’s organisations have taken the lead informing social movements for peace and revitalising customary laws” (375).

As already mentioned in the introductory part of this chapter that feminism is multicultural and diasporic, the need(s) of women living in different cultures are dissimilar, and they are conditioned by several factors: familial, societal / racial, marital, economic, cultural and individual choices. “To address the problem of gender bias in Naga society is in many ways a mind-game because there are no ‘tangible’ issues of ‘abuse’ of women like dowry-deaths, physical abuse or mandatory wearing of burquas...” (Ao 51). Naga women may enjoy a much higher position and are more free spirited in their family and society when compared to their female counterparts in other societies, but they are still the ‘second-sex’ when compared with their male counterpart. They occupy the ‘subaltern’ realm in the society.

In the ecriture feminine conundrum, if it is about recovering the lost voice of the archaic mother then surely Easterine's female characters exhibit biological existentialism (which means that the environment is non-stationary while the individual members are rigid and stationary). It is patriarchy in Naga society that framed women as the weaker, more fragile sex. Easterine does this in a subdued elusive way. Her interpretation of the position of Naga women in society is one that does not protest nor criticise. She writes of the realistic experiences of Naga women in Naga history and society, however there definitely is a strong undertone in the narration on the plight of Naga women. She is proud of the women when depicting their silent strength and dignity under any circumstance. At the same time, as a women writer, a close reading of her works suggest that a society's intention of approving or accepting policy based on one's gender now strongly required re-look.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This thesis has studied Easterine as an insider whose interpretation of Naga history and society is covered in the selected six novels namely; *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), *Mari* (2010), *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), *Life on Hold* (2011), and *When the River Sleeps* (2014) written by her. It has also studied Easterine's interpretation of the status of Naga women in their society. The thesis states that Nagas were once an insular people with a definite culture and tradition of their own living in a close-knit community with their womenfolk occupying a relatively high but subordinate position when compared to their male counterparts. It also argues that colonization and modern Indian democracy brought about tumultuous transformations in the history and society of the Nagas. These transformations usher manifold developments for the Nagas, but the developments they acquire are not always positive, in fact they are now left in an uncertain political situation. Again, these transformations in many ways uplift the condition of women in their society, but, as far as Easterine is concerned patriarchy still continues to be the basic principle in the Naga psyche and so therefore, women still hold secondary status.

Easterine is a Naga voice from Northeast India. The term Naga, as already stated in the introduction, is a collective designation given to a number of ethnic groups sharing common history and various traditional and cultural practices living in close geographical area. The collective consciousness of all Naga tribes was one of the many results of colonization (studied in chapter II). Before the advent of the British colonizers, each ethnic group lived in isolation though close to one another. This practice of ethnic group living together is still practiced today by them to a great extent and is shown in how Nagaland is divided into eleven districts for administrative

reasons, namely Kohima, Mokokchung, Tuensang, Phek, Zunheboto, Wokha, Mon, Peren, Longleng, Kiphire and Dimapur. Kohima district, the capital is the home of the Angamis, Rengma and some tribes. Mokokchung district is the home of the Aos, Tuensang is occupied by the Changs, the Sangtams and the Khamniungams, the Yinchunger, the Phoms and some minor groups. Phek district is the home of the Chakhesangs, the Pochurys, and a group of the Sangtams while Zunheboto is of the Semas. Wokha district is of the Lothas, Mon of the Konyaks, Peren of the Zeliangs, Longleng of the Phoms, and Kiphire the Sangtams. Dimapur being the commercial centre, is home of all Naga tribes.

If one is to study the distinctiveness of the different Naga tribes it would fill many books. However, it is beyond the subject of this thesis. And in spite of their differences in certain aspects the Nagas today assert their oneness as people. Easterine's (an Angami Naga) works, though they incorporate some other Naga tribes, are mainly confined to the Angami Nagas. All the main characters are Angami Nagas, and the customs, traditional practices and belief system found in the selected novels are that of the Angamis, and the novels are mostly located within the Angami area. According to the 2011 census the Angamis have the fourth largest population among the Naga major tribes numbering 94,408 (Zetsuvi 3) after the Aos, Semas and Konyaks. Time and time again Easterine asserts that she is writing the story of her people: "I started writing historical novels on my people's history because the insider's voice was silent in all the historical narratives on us. Writing historical novels gave me the opportunity to give a socio-cultural presentation of my community. I always include the spiritual elements as that is a big part of our reality as a people" (Kolachalam "Stories").

Emerging out of the colonial-ethnographic representation and seeking consolidation of ethnic and cultural identity in postcolonial times, Easterine describes

her culture, expresses her views and ideas, feelings and emotions and thereby signifying Angami cultural and ethnic particularity. At the same time, her concentration on the Angamis cannot be attributed to aggrandising her own tribe, but proves the accuracy of the themes in her writings. By doing this she is interpreting the little known history and society of all Nagas and also the history and society of Northeast India as well, as Kailash C. Baral writes:

Contemporary writings from Northeast either in English or vernaculars aspire towards a vision beyond the narrow ethnic groove and represent a shared history. In these writings, the cultural memory is reprocessed in that the intensity of feeling overflows the labour of technique and craft. The evolution of this literature as a domain has its freshness as well as rootedness in age old traditions

Although individualistic in approach and narrative style, the emerging writers also collectively represent what could be called the ethos of the region that underscores their shared history and political destiny. (3-5)

The concept that Northeast India is occupied by homogenous tribes is a misrepresentation; in fact each tribal group has its distinct history, language, culture and tradition. Literature from Northeast India is often called 'emerging' by scholars. Margaret Ch. Zama writes, "'emerging' does not necessarily denote only the new but also refers to the fact that though more new writings in English and the vernacular are indeed being generated from the region, so also is the emergence of previous and existing works in the form of translations, thereby making such works accessible for the first time to the rest of the world" (xi). She continues to write that Northeast literature:

[They] usher in a different brand of literary repertoire in ways that depict their various communities, their unique linguistic registers, and the worldview that they project in an endeavour to preserve their cultural and ethnic identities. This is not to be mistaken simply as blind nostalgia for a way of life long lost, but must be received as voices of individual authors from societies caught in the cross current of their political and historical inheritance, personal tragedies and cultural ambivalence, voices that are involved in developing and contributing to a much larger literary consciousness that needs to be recognized and interrogated. (xi-xii)

People of Northeast India have undergone historical and political traumas of untold suffering and marginalization under colonization and modern India. The writers of this region address these experiences in their writings which need to be heard in the context of India's multicultural mosaic. This process has not been a smooth one because "a self-recovery of the indigenous people through their representational agencies also involved a recovery of their cultural specificities not only in relation to the colonizers but also with reference to other indigenous cultures with which they were clubbed" (Bhattacharjee 107).

Easterine painstakingly undertook all these aspects into consideration in her writing. The settings of her novels selected for study are geographically accurate, and many historical figures mentioned in the novels are based on true life characters and events. Moreover, the plot, narrative and those numerous instances wherein the writer uses native terms are to showcase that they are indeed Naga stories and that, Easterine is engaged in giving an insider's interpretation in her writings.

Several interpretations on Nagas in English have been given by several writers. Detail accounts can be traced back to some colonial anthropologists, historians and administrators. There are also various Indian scholars in contemporary times who worked on the Nagas. Most of these works are on the history, politics, society, folkloristics and non-fiction. Moreover, today the number of Naga writers writing in English both fiction and non-fiction has multiplied. As already mentioned, Easterine is the first Naga who published both poetry and novel in English. With several of her works being translated into some foreign languages has helped earned wide readership. Therefore, she is definitely giving and sharing a new interpretation of Naga history and society to the rest of the world.

Easterine's stance in interpreting Naga history and society has been a contested one, and as an insider she has succeeded in projecting an identity for the Nagas other than the one constructed by colonial discourse. Interpretation on Nagas had started since colonialism. Even a cursory reading of the books on Nagas written by some colonialists shows that they witnessed quite a number of situations where the Nagas did better than other communities. On their health condition, John Owen writes:

The malignant fever which are so prevalent amongst the natives of the plains, to the Nagas are almost unknown. Whether this arises from their sturdy frames, habitual exercise in their agricultural pursuits, or the absence of exciting causes, such as the almost total disuse of opium until of late, is a matter of little moment.

No one single instance of either dropsy, elephantiasis or asthma have ever presented itself, to afford a belief of its existence, amongst them. Their

athletic exercise, continual ascents and descents, moreover forbid the assumption.

None are marked with small-pox, nor do they even know the disease. (4 & 6)

Again, with regards to Nagas' perception on marriage, John Owen writes, "No people perhaps in the world are more alive to the preservation of matrimonial honor than the Nagas, and any offers of insult to the wife or daughter of another, would meet with deadly satisfaction from either the battle-axe or spear" (10-11).

At the same time, true to their colonizing self, most of the good aspects of the Nagas are overlooked by the writers. "Cholera makes its appearance at times, but not in a fatal form. Immersion in water is strangely enough imagined by them to be a remedy; but subsequent cures by other more real treatment, such as an administration of opium and brandy, which, at once arresting the disease, has shewn them the fallacy of their former belief," writes John Owen (6). Here, opium and brandy are regarded by the writer to be "more real treatment" for cholera. While not disregarding the medicinal value of both, a re-reading of it makes an impression that the colonizers were the one who had introduced those dangerous substances to the Nagas which some now abuse and has become one of their most prominent social problems.

The numerous flora denoted in native language found in the selected novels like, *Ciena*, *Tierhutiepfu*, *Japan nha*, *Vilhuii nha*, *Tsomhou* and others (in *When the River Sleeps*) are of great medicinal value. Easterine appropriately makes use of these medicinal plants on occasions when her characters found themselves in situations where they needed cure. One is in *When the River Sleeps* when Vilie tries to cut nettle plant he was stung by a nettle:

Idele knew what had happened and quickly looked around for an antidote. She plucked the leaves off a small bitter wormwood plant and kneaded it to pulp in her hand. Then she handed it over to Vilie....

Vilie kept rubbing the paste into his skin, and that seemed to ease the smarting....

“Wait, I will give you something to put on it,”....

“Rock bee honey,” Idele replied, “It’s a cure-all. Let’s get some on your wound.” Without waiting for an answer she smeared honey generously over the swelling skin and covered it with a leaf....

... The honey counteracted against the sting by making his skin sore so that the bitter stinging was somewhat reduced. It felt much better. (37-38)

By incorporating those elements native to the Nagas and making them serving their purpose in her writings, Easterine is writing back to those who had belittled her people. In doing so, she pronounces that her people had their needed medicine which may not be “real treatment” to others and also showcasing how indigenous knowledge systems were what made them survive.

As most colonial interpretations do, books on Nagas by colonizers are full of derogatory imposition. The term ‘savages,’ ‘primitive,’ ‘barbaric,’ ‘rude tribe,’ ‘blood thirsty,’ ‘warlike’ and ‘head-hunters’ are repeatedly used by them to define the Nagas. A close scrutiny of Easterine’s works connote to a totally different interpretation of the people. Her narrative is plain and simple but she interprets that Nagas were not ‘savage’ or ‘barbaric’ or ‘rude’ or ‘bloodthirsty’ or ‘warlike’ or ‘head-hunters’ by nature, rather that they were a patriotic lot who would stand up to any threat that could thwart them.

The inherent value of Nagas in maintaining sovereignty dated long back even before the arrival of the British in their territory. Kaka D. Iralu reflects:

The Nagas attacked any people who entered their geographical lands. For example the migration route of the Ahoms from upper Burma and the Yunan province to Assam in the 13th century which came through the Patkai range of the Naga territory was met with ferocious attacks by the Nagas. There are also many records of Naga wars with the Kacharis, Manipuris and other peoples for the same reason. When the British entered Naga territory, the Nagas responded to this new threat as they had done to past threats. (30)

Moreover, through her novels Easterine conceptualizes and explores how the Naga colonial encounter led to the germination of collective selfhood which in time developed and became one of the strongest and most enduring political movement in modern India. As for the term ‘primitive,’ Easterine in her writing accepts that her people were backward when compared to ‘civilized’ societies, at the same time she reveals that in the absence of modern facilities the Nagas had a well established administrative and educational system as well as adequate wisdom and knowledge to utilize the natural surroundings for their benefit and survival. Therefore, her interpretation urges the so called more civilized people to think twice of the Nagas who were self-reliant and self-sufficient long before their occupation by the British.

In the absence of early written records of the Nagas, Easterine appropriately takes her materials from oral traditions. Temsula Ao writes that Naga oral tradition is “not a mere form of ‘story-telling’ as opposed to a written, recorded version,” but “in many ways the source of the people’s literature, social customs, religion and history” (174). Ao also writes that the history of the Nagas “lies within the ambit of the oral tradition”

(175). Moreover, concerning the adaptation of folklore in contemporary writings by writers from Northeast Tillotoma Misra writes, “Retelling folk narratives from a modern perspective or creative adaptation of folk forms by the emerging writers and dramatists from the region indicate a new maturity and confidence in people’s perception about themselves” (25).

By interweaving the folk elements and traditional systems of the Nagas in her creative writings, Easterine succeeds in interpreting the unwritten history and society of the pre-colonial period of the Nagas. By incorporating the ethos and challenges in the factual circumstances during the British colonization of the Nagas she provides an insider’s perception of the colonization period, thereby giving a self-representation of the Naga identity and re-writing the history of Naga colonization period.

Contemporary print media shows a number of interpretations of Nagas. However, most of them are concentrated on the conflict and political situation; their struggle for sovereignty and their infighting. Nagaland is severely plagued by conflicts and the prolonged unrest has indeed greatly paralyzed its socio-economic, political, cultural, administrative and strategic developments. The conflict in fact has overshadowed the whole literary paradigm of the Nagas. This has had an adverse effect on the views of other people. Indian writers like Samir Kumar Das call the Nagas ‘unruly’ and their social organization ‘rebellious.’ He writes, “The colonial and postcolonial policy of governing the region by settling ‘nomadic’ and ‘unruly’ tribes in clearly marked-out spaces they could claim as their ‘homeland’ has led to a history of bloodbath and homelessness in the region” (*Governing* 1). In another book he writes, “The rebel Naga National Council was the first to challenge the Indian state and declare independence in the Naga Hills” (*Conflict* 22).

With regards to Nagas struggle for independence, Indians' and Nagas' interpretations are quite contradictory. To cite a few examples, A.K Chakraborty observes, "We have no evidence to suggest that the NNC had any clear policy about the political future of the Naga Hills before the emergence of Phizo in 1947" (198). Udayon Misra also asserts that it was during Phizo leadership that the NNC turned "from an amorphous middle-class organization into a militant outfit wedded to the idea of a Sovereign Naga homeland" (34). On the other hand, Kaka D. Iralu, a Naga writer writes, "Prior to 1947, the Naga National Council had communicated its wishes both to India, Britain and the world that it would form a sovereign democratic republic called Nagaland. All these historical facts relating to these rights were communicated to the world in writing. When India refused to recognise these rights the Naga National Council declared Nagaland's independence on 14th August 1947" (27). Concerning the conversion of NNC from social organization to an armed outfit Kaka writes:

Following the March 30, 1953 visit of Jawaharlal Nehru and U Nu of Burma, all the leaders of the NNC had to go underground due to arrest warrant issued for their arrest. Due to massive Indian Army searches, the NNC leaders of the Southeastern parts had to slip into the Tuensang regions and seek refuge there. On September 8, 1954, these NNC leaders along with the active support of the people of these regions set up the first Naga Hongkin Government. Persecution of these Free Nagas by the India Government had begun as early as 1948 when two Nagas were shot to death by the Indian forces.... (68)

The bloodshed in Nagaland highlighted in newspapers greatly hampers the image of the Nagas to others. In other parts of India, they do not get the acceptance they deserve and this is well reflected by Easterine in *Bitter Wormwood*. In the novel

Easterine reveals the Naga's frustration in the kind of representation they get in national newspapers:

“Civilians support Insurgents in Nagaland,” he read out loudly from an article in *The Indian Express*....The journalist had reported that the Naga insurgents actively received help from the civilian population who donated money to their cause....

“Why don't people come here and see the situation for themselves instead of writing such crap?” he spat out.

... The Indian media is cleverly twisting the struggle into something else. No one is genuinely interested in ending it. Some people use it as a livelihood, toting a gun on that pretext and extorting money. Others such as this journalist here, use it to get a story in the papers. That's it, our great struggle for independence has been reduced to mere story....” (164 & 165)

Easterine has also said, “The more insidious writing that has been done on us is by national media. In a great disservice to the Nagas and the northeast region, national media has been creating a constructed identity of the Northeast for many decades. This constructed identity defines the area and its people as conflicted; prone to politically volcanic eruptions on a regular basis” (Kire “From the Heart”).

She also describes that this representation by national media greatly effected creative writers from Northeast region with regards to publication. She says:

This constructed identity was accepted unquestionably by many mainstream publishing houses who expected writers from the Northeast to write works of blood and gore and victim stories. The effect of this definition was to

create expectations upon the writers and, sadly, many reviewers of our books are greatly influenced by this definition” (Kire “From the Heart”).

She is irritated by this representation of mainstream media so when asked why Naga literature is so underrepresented in wider Indian writing, she replied, “Because of the politics of publishing – for many years, the media presented us as the region of conflict. The culture was underplayed. Ordinary life was not valued. We became defined by the conflict. It’s so irritating – infuriating actually!” (Arora “Big Indian”)

In the selected works for study in this thesis, Easterine admits that the conflict has greatly affected the life of her people and society, at the same time “there’s more behind the conflict. The people and their lives are interesting...there are people whose stories need to be heard.” (Arora “Big indian”) In the “Author’s Introduction” in *Bitter Wormwood* she writes:

The struggle for independence from India by the Naga, indigenous inhabitants of the Naga Hills, has been a story hidden for several decades. Cleverly concealed by censorship on newspaper reports....

The conflict which began as a peaceful resistance of Indian occupation escalated into a violent full-scale war after the death of Mahatma Gandhi....

Today, many young Nagas struggle with a confused identity....

This book is not meant to be read as a history textbook... This book is not about the leaders and heroes of the Naga struggle. It is about the ordinary people whose lives were completely overturned by the freedom struggle. Because the conflict is not more important than the people who are its victims. (1,3,4&6)

In the selected novels, Easterine discloses that the Nagas suffered a great deal because the dominant identities attributed to them are constructed by others – the colonizers and India, apparently, to whom they were and are but mere ‘subject.’ Therefore, historically, politically, economically, and even sociologically the Nagas continue to suffer in the hand of a nation that does not want to accept them as what they are.

While Easterine champions the struggle for independence she is deeply troubled by what had become of her people in her interpretation of the latter developments of their struggle. Her predicament in her writings is well reflected by Monalisa Changkija. She writes:

Nagaland, the 16th state of the Indian Union, suffered long labour pains and severe birth pangs, the sores and scars of which remain even after 44 years of its existence. However, if it were only a matter of the sores and scars of a painful birth, perhaps by now some of these sores might have healed and some of the scars become invisible. But the waters that have flown ever since have been deliberately mixed with blood and tears and to understand the consequences, we must attempt an analysis of the past so as to understand the present and thereby enable and empower us to build a future of hope. This analysis of the past would also enable us to understand the under-developed status of India’s 16th State, and the low level of its human security status, the consequences of which also create conflicts and conflict situations. (1)

Quoted elsewhere in the thesis about one of the selected novel, Easterine said that it was an act of catharsis that she had to write a novel that followed the Naga freedom

movement chronologically in order to make the younger generation understand how the conflict started and why. She also asserts, “The struggle for independence from India by the Naga people, indigenous inhabitants of the Naga Hills, has been a story hidden for several decades” (*BW* “Author’s Introduction, 1). Easterine acknowledges the Naga struggle and its violent consequences on the people in her writings, but by presenting a dialogue of the conflicting ideologies at play during the course of this struggle and by reflecting the circumstances of those who are at the fringes of the society in her novels she is disseminating the real situation of the Nagas amidst their struggle for independence which are ignored and excluded from the dominant narratives of the Naga society in modern times.

Easterine, through her novels constantly reiterated her position as a Naga woman. She argues that the inherent patriarchal ideology is the reason behind Naga women holding a secondary status in their society. Her interpretation of their position in her novels is not in the form of protest, though. She honestly reflects that Naga women occupy the subaltern realm in history and society. Besides, Easterine is a determined defender of the plights of Nagas. In the novels she sketches the power relations that tend to influence the lives of members of her Naga community. Most of her characters are taken from the common people who occupy the lower section of the society. Thus, they recount the lives of the innocent, naïve and resolute Nagas. While she deals with issues from various walks of life, the selected six novels also cover quite an extensive period from the precolonial to postcolonial era and thereby presenting a veracious account of the history and society of the Nagas.

By presenting these historical and sociological novels, we see that they encompass not just political matters reflected passively by culture, tradition, ethos and challenges; nor are they a mere collection of texts about the Nagas; nor are they

representative of some alien power dominating and breaking the Naga world. They are rather, to borrow the words of Said, a “*distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts” (12). Furthermore, the selected novels for study are an elaboration not only of the basic geopolitical, cultural and societal distinction of the Nagas, but also a whole series of interests which are at play on the Nagas past and present. Therefore, Easterine’s discourse on the Nagas, greatly contribute towards wider scholarship on the Nagas in particular and all the other tribes of Northeast India as a whole.

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ABSTRACT

**INTERPRETING ONE'S HISTORY AND SOCIETY: A STUDY OF
EASTERINE KIRE'S NOVELS**

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INTERPRETING ONE'S HISTORY AND SOCIETY: A STUDY OF
EASTERINE KIRE'S NOVELS

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INTERPRETING ONE'S HISTORY AND SOCIETY: A STUDY OF EASTERINE KIRE'S NOVELS

Nagaland as well as its sister states of the region are, more often than not, absent from any mainstream discourse on literature, though news of the instability of its political situation in national and international media is a frequent occurrence. Nagas in Nagaland and Nagas in newspaper pages and other medium of social media can be quite contradictory at times. This is mainly because the insiders seldom have the platform to narrate their story(s). This thesis attempts to give an interpretation of Naga history and society as interpreted through the novels, of a woman writer from Nagaland, Easterine Kire (henceforth referred to as Easterine) who was born in 1959.

Bordering the state of Assam to the west, Arunachal Pradesh to the north, Myanmar to the east and Manipur to the south and covering an area of 16,579 square kilometres, and lying between the parallels of 98 and 96 degrees east longitude and 26.6 and 27.4 degrees north longitude, Nagaland state came into being in 1963, when the then President of India Radhakrishnan inaugurated it to be the sixteenth state of the Indian Union. Ironically, when India was freed from the British yoke in 15th August 1947, Nagas were caught under India's yoke at that point in history. Prior to the nineteenth century when the colonizers extended their rule over their land, the Nagas had little or no contact with the outside world.

Nagaland along with Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim make up the geo-political 'Northeast' India which is often misrepresented by the outside world as a homogeneous region, inhabited by ethnically and culturally homogeneous people. In reality the region is home to different ethnic tribes with distinct history and unique cultural heritages, and speaking diverse languages. Moreover, the political scenario of each state is different from the others.

The struggle for independence from India by the Naga people is well known to the rest of the world. Amidst their struggle for independence, the Naga people suffered, and continue to suffer two levels of violence in their homeland, that is, the atrocities committed by both the Indian army and the different factions of underground fighters.

On the other hand, Nagas are quintessentially a hill people. Today, the Nagas are spread throughout the Indian states of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, and parts of Burma. The majority of them live in Nagaland, with approximately nineteen lakhs population, according to 2011 census, and it is with this Naga population that this thesis is mainly concerned with.

Easterine, a prolific Naga writer of the Angami Naga tribe of contemporary time has so far, authored more than 20 books in English to her credit consisting of poetry, fiction and non-fiction works as well as books for children. Six novels written by her are selected for study in this research. They are:

1. *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003)
2. *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007)
3. *Mari* (2010)
4. *Life on Hold* (2011)
5. *Bitter Wormwood* (2011) and
6. *When the River Sleeps* (2014)

The selected novels indeed deal with history of the Nagas and their society in one way or the other; for instance *A Naga Village Remembered* is an account of the last battle between the colonial forces of Britain and the little warrior village of Khonoma in the year 1879. *Life on Hold* and *Bitter Wormwood* are about Naga society during the troubled years of their freedom struggle, which covers the decades following Indian

independence in 1947. Again, *A Terrible Matriarchy* is a story of the patriarchal structure of Naga society which is underlined by a very strong matriarchy. The book contains flashbacks into the Naga past, a colonial history under British administration, the Second World War and the Japanese invasion as well as the struggle for freedom of the Nagas after Indian independence. *Mari* is the story of a young Naga girl in Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, caught in the midst of the terrible Second World War. Lastly, in *When the River Sleeps*, Easterine transports her reader to the remote mountains of Nagaland in northeastern India, a place alive with natural wonder and supernatural enchantment. The novel is unmistakably a Naga story in its sense of place, time, and oral traditions.

In the absence of early written records of the Nagas, Easterine appropriately takes her materials from oral traditions. Temsula Ao writes that Naga oral tradition is “not a mere form of ‘story-telling’ as opposed to a written, recorded version,” but “in many ways the source of the people’s literature, social customs, religion and history” (*The Ao Naga* 174). Ao also writes that the history of the Nagas “lies within the ambit of the oral tradition” (175). Moreover, concerning the adaptation of folklore in contemporary writings by writers from Northeast, Tillotoma Misra writes, “Retelling folk narratives from a modern perspective or creative adaptation of folk forms by the emerging writers and dramatists from the region indicate a new maturity and confidence in people’s perception about themselves” (25).

The vitality of referring to oral traditions of the then oral cultures in order to study their past cannot be over emphasized. In the context of Northeast tribes, G.P. Singh asserts, “It will not be incorrect to state that the folklore of the tribals of North-East India constitute the bedrock of the higher philosophy, higher literature, higher history and higher art” (qtd. in Elizabeth and Tsuren 19). Easterine incorporates

numerous folk/oral literatures in her writings, and in creatively fusing folkloristic elements and socio-historical facts and settings of her tribe, she in fact redefines its history and society.

The dominant narratives or colonial writings seek to establish a Eurocentric hegemony of knowledge and power to the cultures of a larger part of the world. This has been painstakingly critiqued by a new group of writers rightly called native writers who are at the 'periphery'. Through the lens of Postcolonialism, the politics of writing fiction by native writers whose history and society had been written previously by outsiders, have a perspective and intention that is totally different. This thesis is a study of a Naga writer's interpretation of a multi-layered conflict ridden society and intriguing history of her own people depicted through her novels.

Moreover, Easterine achieved the uncommon feat of being a woman writer who was the first to publish a novel in English in a patriarchal Naga society. At the same time, it is also understandable that she became a modern story teller in a society wherein women and especially grandmothers were known to be the storehouse of legends and tales. Easterine, through her novels constantly reiterates her position as a Naga woman. She argues that the inherent patriarchal ideology is the reason behind Naga women holding a secondary status in their society. Besides, Easterine is a determined defender of the plight of Nagas. In the novels she sketches the power relations that tend to influence the lives of members of the Naga community. Most of her characters are based on ordinary people who recount the lives of the innocent, naïve and resolute Nagas. While she deals with issues from various walks of life, the selected six novels also cover quite an extensive period from the pre-colonial to postcolonial era thereby presenting a veracious account of the history and society of the Nagas.

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter focuses on clarification of the key terms such as Naga and its history and society. It also includes a brief biography of Easterine Kire, focussing mainly on her literary outputs. The chapter also includes analysis of certain literary theories and their application in the thesis.

The term ‘interpreting’ (as used in the title of the thesis) or ‘interpretation’ in the theoretical sense generally means “a formulation of the principles and methods involved in getting at the meaning of all written texts, including legal, historical, and literary as well as biblical texts” (Abrams and Harpham 178). The theory of interpretation was first formulated by German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) in 1819. According to him the theory of general hermeneutics is the art of understanding texts of every kind. Schleiermacher’s views were further developed by some notable critics like Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), E.D. Hirsch (1928-), Jay F. Rosenberg (1942-2008) and Charles Travis (1943-) among others. Though they conceived diverse opinions on the subject, their main standpoint is that there is an intended meaning in a text determined by the author. A departure from this author-oriented view of a determinate intended meaning happens with Structural and Poststructural theories. These new theories reject control of interpretation by reference to the author. The phenomenon does not designate one critical theory but rather focuses on the process of reading a literary text called ‘reader-response criticism.’ Reader-response critics propound that the meanings of a text are the ‘production’ or ‘creation’ of the individual reader, hence there is no one correct meaning for all readers. Notable critics of this criticism are Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007), Jonathan Culler (1944-), Stanley Fish(1938-), and others.

Therefore, the term 'interpretation' as a literary term mainly signifies the derivation of the meaning(s) of a text (intended by the author or derived by the reader). However, in this thesis, the act of writing itself is considered as a process of interpretation. Accordingly, Easterine is interpreting Naga experiences down the ages through her creative works. The chapter concludes by highlighting the gist of the following chapters.

Chapter two: Interpreting History.

Easterine's novels are an amalgamation of the past and the present. She blends the past and the present Naga history together in her writings. She interprets Naga past history by presenting them in the form of memory of the characters, by incorporating oral traditions and by writing fiction based on the old Naga life. At the same time, she also based her novels on defining factual historical accounts of the Nagas. This chapter mainly analyses Easterine's interpretation of the Naga history through the lens of postcolonial theory. For the purpose of better scrutiny of the aim of this chapter, Naga history is categorized into three periods and studied in this chapter.

i) Pre-colonial Naga History

Since the Nagas had no script of their own prior to the arrival of the missionaries, this meant that they did not have any written record of their past except for a few references about them in some writings like the chronicles of the Ahoms, and a few others.

Easterine's numerous incorporation of oral literature in her writings can be said to be her way of interpreting Naga identity at the same time presenting the history of the pre-literate Nagas, that is, pre-colonial Naga history. Easterine in fact is a postcolonial indigenous writer to whom may be applied what Elleke Boehmer asserts about postcolonial indigenous writers, "writing is an integral part of self-definition" with its

“emphasis on historical reconstruction and the ethical imperative of reconciliation with the past” (qtd. in Elizabeth and Tsuren 42).

The many facets of historical reality in the form of folklore portrayed by Easterine in her novels define the pre-colonial history of the Nagas. In the eyes of the colonizers Nagas were “savages and head-hunters.” J.H. Hutton opines that the Nagas like “Most savages are somewhat economical of truth” (157). Unfortunately for the Nagas as well as all colonized subjects around the globe, it was the colonizers who had written their history before the subjects had the medium to do so. Not only did they write and define the subjects but their definitions become the dominant trend. Therefore, by interweaving folkloristic elements with factual historical settings, Easterine interprets Naga history of a period when her people were unable to define themselves through script, in her novels.

ii) Colonial History of the Nagas

Colonialism brought about profound transformations in the history of the Nagas as never before. Before the arrival of colonialism, the Nagas had hitherto lived in near-complete isolation from the influence of other cultures. With colonialism Nagas were inevitably geared towards modernization and all the changes and transformations it entailed. In this thesis, only those incidents and issues in the colonial history of the Nagas reflected in the selected novels for study with some inevitable historical accounts outside the novels are analysed for better understanding of Easterine’s interpretation.

From the moment when the British set their foot in the Naga Hills they were not welcomed by the Nagas, and even after suffering endless “punitive actions” from the British for their “daring raids,” they never considered giving themselves up. One noteworthy incident which reflects the Naga’s determination to maintain their

sovereignty and triggered the famous Battle of Khonoma is written in detail by Easterine in *A Naga Village Remembered*.

In the selected novels, Easterine reflects that the Nagas were not given the same status quo by the British; they were the subject and the latter the ruler or in postcolonial terminology “the other”. The entire colonial discourse on the Nagas is that they had undoubtedly been identified as people about whom objective knowledge was possible and necessary. Edward Said in *Orientalism* writes, “Since the West’s knowledge of the east cannot be fully appreciated without identifying the political context within which the east become an object of that knowledge” (41). The use of the term ‘Naga’ to identify the diverse tribes settled in that region sufficed the colonial construction of the identity of the tribes and their attempt to locate the strange within the familiar framework. As colonial records show, there is no evidence of the use of the term ‘Naga’ by the Nagas themselves for self-identification. That the term was a colonial construct is reinforced by R. Woodthorpe “The name is quite foreign to and unrecognised by the Nagas themselves” (52) – this is, during the colonial period.

The persistent representation of the Nagas as physically and culturally isolated from the plains, thus the ‘hill-plain’ dichotomy, was further intensified by the introduction of the Inner Line Regulation in 1873, which while being defended by the administrators as “designed to protect the innocent tribals from being exploited by the people in the plains” (Zetsuvi 62) appears to sow the seed of ‘otherness’ in the Naga mentality which would bring more trouble than peace for the Nagas in the decades to come. Such colonial construction of the Naga identity which would greatly affect them in the years to come are reflected well by Easterine in her novels.

iii) Modern Naga History

When asked about what had inspired Easterine to write a particular novel she answered, “*Bitter Wormwood* was written as an act of catharsis. I had to write a novel that followed the Naga freedom movement chronologically in order to make younger generations understand how the conflict started and why.” (Daftuare “For Easterine”) Easterine is unpretentious in writing the history of her people. Nevertheless, she does not just put down historical facts to her writings but always considers the experiences, loss and sufferings of her people because of those incidents.

One important aspect of modern Naga history taken seriously by Easterine in her writings is the dichotomy between Indians and Nagas. In an interview when asked about Indo-Naga relation, Easterine replies:

I don't believe people from my generation or my children's generation will ever feel that they're Indian. We will always feel we're Nagas. There's a huge cultural difference. But we are able to embrace India, understand Indian culture...only if you're a Naga, you will understand. You have a sense of belonging to a smaller degree to India. Your identity is always as a Naga...you can have a sense of belonging to India. But you know that because of the history and culture, you'll never really be Indian. You'll always be fully Naga in your mentality...we should actually build up on that - the levels of belonging, the levels of Indian-ness. (Arora “Big Indian”)

In interpreting the history of the Nagas, Easterine posits that they were once an independent, never wealthy but self-reliant people with definite identity, culture and tradition, but were stripped of their pride and forced into submission by the British,

and subsequently living in their land with an unending fear and suffering, losing their selfhood in their fight for the lost sovereignty under India.

Historical accounts of Nagas by colonizers as well as other non-Naga writers overlooked and disregarded many cultural values inherent to the Nagas while documenting their history. In her novels, Easterine reveals that others' knowledge of the Nagas were either mistaken or misrepresented. By reflecting incidents of the pre-colonial, colonial and modern times in her writings and appropriately incorporating the Nagas ethos and challenges in them she is giving an insider's perspective. She shows how the Nagas were destined to fall under the mighty British and again under India. She shows how the Naga collective selfhood and nationalism was constructed and also how conflicting ideologies developed amongst the Nagas and the violent consequences thereof.

Chapter Three: Interpreting Society

The impact on the social set-up of the people by the historical transformations was manifold. In order to better understand the transition of the Naga society, this chapter is also divided into three parts with each part covering the same period as done in the previous chapter.

i) Pre-colonial Naga Society.

Of the Nagas today Julian Jackobs writes:

... many young Naga people feel today about their cultural past:

Everybody tells them not to lose their Naga culture, to connect to the past.

But if they ask 'so what is our culture, how was our past?' they will be told a strongly Christianised story by their parents and grandparents. But the

young people, especially the educated ones, know very well that this is not true. (xii)

What, then, is the cultural and societal past of the Nagas? Who were the Nagas and what were their traditions? These are some basic questions answered by Easterine in her novels. As the Nagas did not have written record of their past, and the earlier available accounts of their past culture were obtained principally by means of conjectures and speculations by British administrators, historians, and scholars based on personal interviews, a study of extant traditions and cultural practices that were still in practice as witnessed by them, a detailed study of the pre-colonial Naga society is difficult. However, Easterine locates her characters in the traditional Naga society thereby showcasing the crux of the old society which is now gone. She writes her novels in simple prose and her technique reflects the type of fireside narrations in oral cultures. The folk and cultural elements in her narratives which are part of the oral tradition naturally form the basis of the novels and serve as important sources of the Naga past society. Moreover, as Easterine focuses basically only on the Angami Nagas in her novels, the society studied in this chapter is the Angami society. Two of the selected novels; *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003) and *When the River Sleeps* (2014) encapsulate the pre-colonial Naga society, so they are analysed in this section of the chapter.

Some features of the pre-colonial Angami society like, land ownership system, clan system, dormitory, feast-of-merit, genna, marriage and funeral rites as found in the selected novels are studied here.

In re-creating the bygone society of the Nagas in her creative writing, Easterine's works reflect a strong sense of reminiscing the past. As far as Easterine is concerned,

the Nagas lived a meaningful life. There was order within the society as well as with the natural surroundings. There was love, respect and faithfulness amongst the members of the society. There certainly were negative forces too, but there were many good and healthy aspects in the cultural and traditional practices of the Naga society which are now lost.

ii) Naga Society under Colonial Rule

Within a century of occupying the Naga Hills, the western colonizers succeeded in hegemonizing the Naga population in every sphere of their life. The colonial hangover is so inherent that they glorify the white man's ideology and practices over their traditional values. Easterine in *A Naga Village Remembered, A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), *Mari* (2010) and *Bitter Wormwood* (2011) showcases how colonialism ushered changes in the Naga society. She focuses on the everyday life of ordinary Nagas during colonialism and thereby presents an insider's story of the impact of colonialism on the society.

The impact of colonialism on the Naga societal paradigm can broadly be divided into two domains; the administrative / governance, and the religious / education aspect. As the British adopted the policy of least interference by trying to preserve the nobility of the Naga democratic villages and their tribal distinctiveness, most of their traditional cultures remained unchanged until the advanced stage of colonialism in Naga areas when eventually the Nagas were introduced to western education and Christianity. In fact, colonialism ushered manifold changes in the society that the proud and insular Naga people were transformed into, in the words of Temsula Ao "people without confident moorings and a proper identity." (*On Being* 5) These changes in the societal

paradigm of the Nagas with regards to their culture and identity are well reflected in Easterine's writings.

With the intrusion of the British colonizers, slowly but surely, the lives of the Nagas had undergone changes. Their transformation took place to the extent wherein they had to reinvent themselves in order to look like native Nagas again. This is found in *Mari*, when Mari and her siblings fled Kohima during the Second World War to Chieswema village "My brother and his-in-laws were being given Naga haircuts...Instead of trousers, he wore the black kilt... The rest of us had changed out of our dresses and we wore faded woven Angami waist-clothes" (58-59).

The impact of colonialism on the Naga society was so great that it became a defining chapter in their lives. The Nagas were no longer able to define themselves without those elements of colonial influences in their society. Therefore, the end of colonization marked the beginning of a total new era for the Naga society.

iii) Modern Naga Society

The authority of the village-state of bygone days now no longer exists in the modern Naga society. In the pre-colonial times justice was meted out in such a way that "care is taken so that even the guilty man/woman is allowed to get away without being totally humiliated before everyone. A lot of 'punishment' is allowed to hang on social stigma, castigation and ostracism" (Chasie 119). For example, in *A Naga Village Remembered* when Levi was accidentally killed by his friend Penyu in their hunting trip, "Penyu went away to the village of Bakiria, beginning the customary exile for seven years to atone for accidental killing" (112). Likewise, under the British rule "Criminal laws were very harsh... Thieves were sent to Tezpur to serve long sentences. Murderers were hanged" (*Mari* 9). Now in modern Naga society "The killers are too smart. In any case no one

dares to catch them... Everyone is afraid of them... Everyone is sick of it, all these killings. But no one has the guts to do anything about it" (*Bitter* 9).

The modern Naga society covered in the selected novels by Easterine was a period of turmoil. In *Bitter Wormwood*, *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *Life on Hold*, Easterine clearly reflects on the modern Naga society. The Naga society after India got her independence was greatly shaped by their struggle for independence from the Indian sub-continent. An important aspect in the selected works is that Easterine's interpretation of Naga conflict is a dialogic discourse. She acknowledges the virtue and vice of both India and Nagas in her writings through discussions amongst her fictional characters. Easterine acknowledges that the intention of India was to prevent secession of the Nagas from India as according to them they were part of the Indian Union. She is persistent in sensitizing the world about the real situation of the Nagas.

In the selected works Easterine showcases how Christianity had transformed Naga society from a traditional to a Christianized one. At the same time, throughout the narratives she asserts that the Naga conversion to Christianity and their incorporation of western ideologies into their society did not necessary transform them into a new people. They still retained their basic cultural identity as Nagas. They might have replaced their belief systems and some traditional practices with new ones, but they also maintained certain basic traditions which they still observed such as the continuance of nuclear family, funerary and celebratory practices and so on.

In interpreting the social reality of the Nagas from pre-colonial to modern times, Easterine indicates that the Naga society has gone through a series of changes and is far from perfect; many aspects of the social evils are generated by the Nagas themselves. The various historical, political and economic changes ushered modernization into the

society, but they also brought about certain unwanted elements such as the rejection of their old cultural values by the younger generation in particular. Easterine's writings of the past, and modern Naga society when compared, reveals a sense of nostalgia for the past. The pre-colonial society indicates a certain order while the modern society she portrays is chaotic. She has glorified the past society and posits that her people lost many of their good values with the onslaught of modernization.

Chapter Four: Locating Naga Women in History and Society

This chapter focusses on the feminist aspect of selected works of Easterine Kire. "A major interest of feminist critics...has been to reconstitute the ways we deal with literature in order to do justice to female points of view, concerns, and values" (Abrams and Harpham 126). The initial emphasis of feminist critics is on woman as a reader of men's works. Then came a number of feminists who have concentrated not on the women as reader but as the writer, termed 'gynocriticism' by Elaine Showalter in her work "Towards a Feminist Poetics" (1979). Today, women's writing as a genre within feminism has gained momentum especially in academia. Writings by and about women is given ever-increasing place in anthologies, periodicals, seminars and conferences.

In India women's writing has slowly but surely gained a momentum in the field of contemporary social sciences and humanities. There has indeed been a plethora of books, journals and articles with regards to the plight and problems of women and their status in the male dominated society. At the same time, the same cannot be said with regard to the women in the Northeast. Not only do their voices remain unheard, but their plight, problems and exploitation in the society largely remain unattended. In fact, literature of the Northeast in general has only begun to be recognised in recent years. Therefore, it is understandable and hardly surprising that critical analysis of women

studies in the Northeast literature context is yet to be instituted. It is for this reason that the chapter focuses on the women characters, their position and status in culture and society as found in the selected novels of Easterine, the writer being a woman will also be taken into consideration.

As feminism is multicultural and diasporic, the need(s) of women living in different societies are dissimilar, and they are conditioned by several factors: familial, societal / racial, marital, economic, cultural and individual choices. In such a diverse context, it would be incorrect to associate Northeast or Naga women writings in particular with the western or Indian, and invoke western or Indian feminist critics on the challenges that Naga women confront. Therefore, it is not the aim of this chapter to study Naga women alongside mainstream feminist criticism but rather against the backdrop of the Naga culture and society. This, however, also does not mean that feminism per se would be ignored altogether. The intention is to examine Easterine's interpretation of the condition(s) of women in Naga history and society to which she belongs.

Within the ambit of feminist criticism, Helene Cixous posits the existence of 'feminine writing' or 'écriture féminine', which has its source in the stage of the mother-child before the child acquires the male-centered verbal languages. In Cixous's view "this prelinguistic and unconscious potentiality manifests itself in those written texts that, abolishing all repressions, undermine and subvert the fixed signification, the logic, and the "closure" of our phallogentric language and open out into a joyous free play of meanings" (Abrams and Harpham 128). Helene Cixous writes:

I shall speak about women's writing: about *what it will do*. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from

which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement. (875)

As a woman writer and an insider who writes about her land and people, this chapter examines if Easterine's works fall into this discourse. Moreover, her interpretation and portrayal of the lives of Naga women is studied in this chapter to highlight their role in Naga society and history while at the same time examining the insignificant acknowledgement and recognition meted out to them. For better analysis of the aim of this chapter the position of Easterine's female characters found in the selected novels in different spheres of life will be studied as follows; i) in domestic life, ii) within the societal milieu, iii) in the political scenario, iv) beyond the confines of Naga society, v) education and, vi) marriage.

It is found that the often repeated saying on the condition of Naga women by Haimendorf, "Many women in more civilised parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga hills their high status and their free and happy life; and if you measure the cultural level of a people by the social position and personal freedom of its women, you will think twice before looking down on the Nagas as 'savage'" (101), is true to a large extent when compared with non-tribal cultures like the rigid hierarchical structure found in Hindu society, based on caste and class. This comparison of Naga women with their counterparts in other parts of the world urges scholars like U A Shimray to assert, "In the classless, casteless Naga society, women have traditionally enjoyed a high social position, with a pivotal role in both family and community affairs. In the 'modern' milieu, with the insidious influence of drugs and violence, Naga women's organisations

have taken the lead informing social movements for peace and revitalising customary laws” (375).

Naga women may enjoy a much higher position and are more free spirited in their family and society when compared to their female counterparts in other societies, but they are still the ‘second-sex’ when compared with their male counterpart. They occupy the ‘subaltern’ realm in the society. It is as Temsula Ao writes, “To address the problem of gender bias in Naga society is in many ways a mind-game because there are no ‘tangible’ issues of ‘abuse’ of women like dowry-deaths, physical abuse or mandatory wearing of burquas...” (*On Being* 51).

In the ecriture feminine conundrum, if it is about recovering the lost voice of the archaic mother then surely Easterine’s female characters exhibit biological existentialism (which means that the environment is non-stationary while the individual members are rigid and stationary). It is patriarchy in Naga society that framed women as the weaker, more fragile sex. Easterine does this in a subdued elusive way. Her interpretation of the position of Naga women in society is one that does not protest nor criticise. She writes of the realistic experiences of Naga women in Naga history and society, but there definitely is a strong undertone in the narration on the plight of the women. She is proud of the women when depicting their silent strength and dignity under any circumstance. At the same time, as a women writer, a close reading of her works suggest that a society’s intention of approving or accepting policy based on one’s gender now strongly requires a re-look.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Easterine’s stance in interpreting Naga history and society has been a contested one, and as an insider she has succeeded in projecting an identity for the Nagas other than

the one constructed by colonial discourse. People of Northeast India have undergone historical and political traumas of untold suffering and marginalization under colonization and modern India. The writers of this region address these experiences in their writings which need to be heard in the context of India's multicultural mosaic. This process has not been a smooth one because "a self-recovery of the indigenous people through their representational agencies also involved a recovery of their cultural specificities not only in relation to the colonizers but also with reference to other indigenous cultures with which they were clubbed" (Bhattacharjee 107).

Easterine painstakingly undertook all these aspects into consideration in her writings. The settings of her novels selected for study are geographically accurate, and many historical figures mentioned in the novels are based on true life characters and events. Moreover, the plot, narrative and those numerous instances wherein the writer uses native terms are to showcase that they are indeed Naga stories, and that Easterine is engaged in giving an insider's interpretation to her writings.

By presenting these historical and sociological novels, we see that they encompass not just political matters reflected passively by culture, tradition, ethos and challenges; nor are they a mere collection of texts about the Nagas; nor are they representative of some alien power dominating and breaking the Naga world. They are rather, to borrow the words of Said, a "*distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts" (12). Furthermore, the selected novels for study are an elaboration not only of the basic geopolitical, cultural and societal distinction of the Nagas, but also a whole series of interests which are at play on the Nagas past and present. Therefore, Easterine's discourse on the Nagas greatly contributes towards wider scholarship on the Nagas in particular, and all the other tribes of Northeast India in general.

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