



## REVIVING THE INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE OF THE TENYIMIA NAGAS IN EASTERINE KIRE'S *WHEN THE RIVER SLEEPS*

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of the research is to acquaint the readers with the ideological episteme of the Naga theological dialectic which has always been suppressed by the dominant pedagogy of mainstream India. The study also aims to offer lessons in the management of complex land resources and livelihood through the consciously preserved and transmitted, cumulative, multigenerational Indigenous knowledge of the Naga community.

**Methodology:** The methodology is text-based interpretation, supported by the associated theoretical premise. A detailed critical analysis of Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps* based on the theories of folk study and Indigeneity has been undertaken in the article.

**Findings:** The study brings to limelight the Indigenous knowledge base of the Tenimiyas and unveils the inviolability and regard these native people harbor towards their knowledge system. The paper provides a local answer to the global conundrum of perennial subjugation of traditional Indigenous knowledge. It also tries to legitimize the novelist's tenability behind showcasing the necessity and relevance of Indigenous knowledge as a means to ensure the durability of the human race.

**Implications:** The new ethos propagated through my research will give primacy to the revival of the marginalized cultural ideology. Besides, a detailed study of Kire's novel will enable critics and theoreticians of Indigenous studies to endorse the re-emergence of local knowledge of the aboriginal communities of Nagaland, since traditional Indigenous knowledge has always been perceived as inferior and naive by scientific developmental theories.

**The novelty of the study:** The readers get an opportunity to accustom themselves with a promising literary work from North-east India which evinces an inherent cultural resilience to preserve the body of knowledge that has been considered credulous, primitive and uncritical since ages. The paper also offers glimpses of the immensely rich and powerful folklores explicitly reflected in the narratives written by Indigenous Naga writers that form an intrinsic part of their collective archetype.

**Keywords:** *Folklore, Indigeneity, Nagaland, Storytelling, Tenimiyas, Traditional Knowledge.*

### INTRODUCTION

The colonial definitions of 'Indigeneity' demarcate the ethnic population of any region as primitive, savage, animistic, lacking in development (Xaxa, 1999) and particularly susceptible to the exploitation and marginalization engendered by ethnic groups that are socio-politically prevailing. As a consequence, the traditional knowledge of the Indigenous communities has always been perceived as inferior and naive by scientific developmental theories. Even though the Indigenous peoples are considered to be the earliest dwellers of a given territory, unlike the settlers or the migrants who have occupied the expanse in successive stages over the years, the urban commercial perspective of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has particularly demonstrated a lack of awareness about the necessity of preserving the Indigenous identity. However, the new millennium ethos has started giving primacy to the revival of this peripheral cultural ideology. The Indigenous communities have now come to be defined as people who have certain rights depending on their prior connection with a specific province, and their cultural individuality from other politically dominant populations. While there are homogenous worldviews about a common native identity, every Indigenous society has a diverse and exclusive history, culture, milieu, and ingenious fortitude. The following lines from the poem "Barcelona Dreamtime" lend a collective voice to the distinctiveness of the Indigenous communities worldwide: "Every man is a story./ Every story has something in common/ With the stories of the rest of humanity./ And yet, each story is different from the others./ In every story that we tell, we validate lives,/ When we share the stories of our people,/ We add meaning to their action,/ The choices they make and the values they live by/ The need to tell one's story is a common need" (Kire, 2007).

Literary theoreticians and critics of Indigenous studies can now be seen claiming and endorsing the re-emergence of local knowledge of the aboriginal communities. The traditional knowledge of the Indigenous communities about agriculture, medicinal plants, biodiversity, etc. has been a part of oral tradition, having been passed on through generations in the form of myths, legends, archetype, and stories:

Indigenous peoples made significant contributions to global knowledge, for instance in medicine and veterinary medicine with their intimate understanding of their environments. Indigenous Knowledge is developed and adapted continuously to gradually changing environments, passed down from generation to generation and closely interwoven with people's cultural values. IK is also the social capital of poor, their main asset to invest in their struggle for survival, to produce food, provide shelter or achieve control of their own lives. (Rao, 2006, p. 226)

The revival of the Indigenous knowledge is no longer restricted to the domain of theory; the intellectual and political dedication to the native people can now be traced through major works of literature as well. Instead of being perceived from the ideology of confined awareness, it is now being studied as an autonomous genre, on a wide-ranging and global forum. However, if a non-Indigenous author undertakes an attempt to retell Indigenous narratives, there can be a considerable amount of contention regarding authenticity as well as sharing of benefits with the repositories of such knowledge. Moreover, the question of free, prior and informed consent comes into consideration. That is why many critics and theorists are of opinion that when Indigenous writers share their own community knowledge through their cultural narratives, they are able to produce it inadequate collaboration with the communities from which the native knowledge base has actually originated. The enormous disparity of control between the native and mainstream population invariably hints that any form of cultural exchange is practically implausible because of the prevalent inequality and the vulnerable position of the aboriginals whose knowledge base has been repeatedly sabotaged by Western intellectual property laws:

Indigenous cultural knowledge has always been an open treasure box for the unfettered appropriation of items of value to Western civilization. While we assiduously protect rights to valuable knowledge among ourselves, Indigenous people have never been accorded similar rights over their cultural knowledge. Existing Western intellectual property laws support, promote, and excuse the wholesale, uninvited appropriation of whatever Indigenous item strikes our fancy or promises profit, with no obligation or expectation to allow the originators of the knowledge a say or a share in the proceeds. (Greaves, 1996, pp. 25-26)

In India, the idea of Indigeneity has always been a matter of substantial disputation; still, the native communities constitute a significant portion of the socio-cultural scenario of the country. As per the Census 2001, the total population of Scheduled Tribes in different parts of the Indian sub-continent is 84,326,240 which accounts for 8.2% of the total population of the country. The commitment that these communities demonstrate towards their traditions and customs and the efficiency with which they administer their ways of life, as well as their cosmological insights, are considered invaluable treasures for every community living in India. Far from the contemporary trend and economic development, the Indigenous tribes of India own their personal identity as *Adivasi* having their distinct language, religion, festivals, cuisine, dance, and music. Taking into account the cultural, historical, religious and linguistic heterogeneity of Indian tribes, the north-eastern part of the Indian subcontinent is considered to be one of the most significant hotspots of these varied ethnolinguistic groups. Thus the literary works from this part of the country evince an inherent cultural resilience to preserve the body of knowledge that has been considered credulous, primitive and uncritical for ages. The immensely rich and powerful folklores embedded in the collective archetype of these communities serve as an ancillary thematic prop in the narratives written by the writers from this region to showcase their native knowledge base.

In popular usage, the term *folklore* is sometimes restricted to oral literature tradition. However, in modern usage, folklore is an academic discipline, the subject matter of which (also called folklore) comprises the sum-total of traditionally derived or orally or imitatively transmitted literature, material culture and custom of subcultures within predominantly literate and technologically advanced societies. (Deka, 2011, p. 173)

## UNDERSTANDING THE NAGA CULTURAL HERITAGE

Nagaland, a vibrant hill state located at the far end of the North-Eastern region of India, surrounded by Myanmar, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur from various sides, is renowned worldwide for its rare ethnic civilization, natural magnificence and enriching culture. Rich in flora and fauna, the region is an amalgamation of various Indigenous cultures represented by sixteen tribal communities, of which one of the most major groups is the Angami. Nagaland has remained less explored for a very long time and perhaps due to this reason, it does not have a much-written account of its history. It should be noted that the scribal tradition is a recent one amongst the Nagas and before the development of a script for the Naga languages through the efforts of the American Baptist missionaries, literature was confined only to the oral form (Misra, 2011). In other words, Naga literature is still in its infancy and is primarily a conversion of oral history into print. The Naga writers during the initial period mostly translated Gospels and wrote literature with a moralistic note. However, with the passage of time, due to the outbreak of the war between the Naga underground army and the Indian government forces, the cultural ethos of Nagaland underwent a complete transformation. It brought significant changes in the traditional Naga way of life. Temsula Ao (2006), in her book *These Hills, Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, pertinently commented, “The sudden displacement of the young from a placid existence in rural habitats to a world of conflict and confusion in urban settlements is also a fallout of recent Naga history and one that has left them disabled in more ways than one.” (p. 10)

Quite inevitably, there was a definite effect of this transition on the literature that was produced during this era. There were tales of the troubled political climate, violence, underdevelopment, poverty and the ever-present image of the gun. According to Kailash C. Baral (2005), “Northeast is a land of paradoxes. In the congeries of its complexities, Northeast does not only designate a territory of diverse cultures and people but also represents an idea constantly in its making. If the past has a rootedness of harmony and cohesiveness among communities and cultures, the present is a reality of profound disaffection” (p. 10). However, with authors like Temsula Ao, Easterine Kire, Monalisa Changkija, the Naga literary trend has undergone a paradigmatic shift and started bringing back to the limelight the varied rich Indigenous

cultures intricately inscribed in the Naga socio-cultural history. Although acutely aware of the scars left behind in the society from years of violence, these writers choose to write about Naga culture by attempting to study its people for who they are and not what they have become in their interaction with the outside world. As it has been very rightly put forth by critic [K.S.Ahmed \(2016\)](#), “The writing of these authors emanates from a land of turmoil and they depict the anxiety of ‘otherness, the necessity of the separatist tendency, the subsequent evasion of the Naga nationalism and the emergence of a ‘new literature’” (p. 20). This ‘new literature’, as defined by critic Tilottoma Misra, talks about a different aspect of the Naga life. In her discussion, she refers to Kire’s remark on experiencing her childhood days in Nagaland and comments that, ‘Curfews and continued periods of gun-fire were all part of growing up in Nagaland’. Yet the new literature that is emerging from Nagaland is not all soaked in blood. The old storytelling tradition which is common to all oral cultures of Indigenous people has been creatively integrated into modern literary genres to give a distinct identity to the literature of this region. ([Misra, 2011](#), pp. xxiii-xxiv)

Further, in an interview, Kire has acknowledged that she has been “very inspired by the novels of African writers and felt that I could also write a novel about my culture and society the way they did” ([Imsong, 2018](#), p.171). As a custodian of culture, we see many attempts by these new-age writers to re-invent ways of preserving old practices. The method of using traditional folklore to make a commentary on how they are not merely playing into stereotypes but once again reminding people of the reason this culture needs to be preserved by displaying its incredible wealth is indeed laudable. They deliberately bring the sole focus back to the Naga community and not to the ravages experienced by it in its contact with alien cultures in order to strengthen the case for cultural greatness. The great subtlety employed by these authors in making references to the pain of a threatened culture is illustrative of high skill and maturity.

## OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

Traditional Indigenous knowledge is a form of subjugated knowledge that has always been disqualified as inadequate by the mainstream cultural expressions. The dominant discourses routinely locate traditional knowledge low down in the hierarchy and consider it beneath the required level of cognition. The reason behind this is that local knowledge is thought to be subjective and prejudiced as opposed to the rationalist approach of scientific knowledge. In India, there are several Indigenous communities that have nurtured and refined knowledge systems of their own. But it has been observed that the globalization process, the accompanying alienation of the youth from their traditional roots, even the national policies are collectively posing threats and dangers to these fragile knowledge systems. There is evidently a huge gap in terms of adequate research on this form of knowledge. In fact, very little of this niche ideology has been propagated and recorded to date because of which Indigenous knowledge has not yet gained momentum in the mainstream educational pedagogy. A sense of urgency in this situation demands us to take drastic measures. In-Depth research has to be undertaken to bring to the fore the rich heritage of this knowledge that cannot be invalidated altogether.

Moreover, the Indigenous communities from the Northeast of India stand for a population that has historically been underrepresented at multiple levels. They are marginalized based on their geographical location, gender and most importantly, their Indigenous identity. However, these communities have started demonstrating commendable courage in raising their voice beyond all the obstacles. As a result, their expertise in Indigenous knowledge has started gaining rapid primacy in the twenty-first century. Hence this ever-evolving community deserves the attention of research communities worldwide for promoting traditional knowledge as a mitigant of the ill effects of what conservationists call “urban arrogance” ([Chiang, 2007](#)).

Keeping in mind these gaps in the existing research, the primary objective of this paper is to establish the significance of traditional Indigenous knowledge, specifically the native wisdom of the Tenyimia Nagas, in a global context since it has the potential to become one of the most visibly dynamic scholarships giving new dimensions and currency to literary and cultural studies. Moreover, the paper also aims to analyze the role of folklore as a tool for preserving Indigenous knowledge.

The research work undertaken in this paper is going to be an interpretative one, based on the associated theoretical premise. The critical analysis will be absolutely text-based. The methodology for the research will be an analytical study of Easterine Kire’s novel *When the River Sleeps* based on the theories of folk study and Indigeneity. The approach of the author towards her own Indigenous tribe, the Tenyimias, as well as her treatment of the traditional native wisdom that the community possesses will be studied to determine the abovementioned objective. An exploratory literature review of primary, secondary and tertiary sources has been conducted to explore and merge the possible gaps seen in North-East Indian Indigenous Literature in the contemporary context and determine the significance of traditional Indigenous knowledge in the present socio-geopolitical scenario. The research aims to see its application as a discourse, modeled in the form of literary text which sheds light on the global impact of Indigenous knowledge on the challenges of marginalization.

## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Easterine Kire’s *When the River Sleeps* (2014), unique for its mythopoeic imagination and “... full of witchcraft, heart stones, seers and forest spirits” ([Balantrapu, 2015](#)), is an attempt to exemplify the rich history of a particular Indigenous

Naga community- the Tenyimias. Kire brings to the fore the inviolability and regards these native people harbor towards this knowledge system. The narrative showcases the traditional Indigenous knowledge that this particular community possesses and reflects the cultural heritage of communities for whom their local knowledge is synonymous with something divine. While talking of the inception of *When the River Sleeps* in an interview, Kire says:

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 for a long time and surfaced when it was time for it to be written as a book. (Daftuar, 2015, para. 2)

The novel is set in the beautiful and scenic hills of Nagaland. Much of the story takes place inside the forest. The readers travel along with the protagonist, Vilie, who undertakes an epic journey in search of the river of his dreams. As Ville takes shelter in the villages, the readers get a glimpse into the lives of the Naga people. Through his journey, the novelist deftly exalts the unadulterated Indigenous knowledge base of the Naga people. ‘Ethnicity’, which refers to the fact of belonging to a particular race or community and therefore abiding by its socio-cultural norms, has been observed as an important concern in *When the River Sleeps*. Nagaland, according to Kire, is a huge reservoir of wisdom recorded in its songs, folklore, customary laws, festivals, rituals, dances, etc. that form a unique intrinsic cultural library. But it is unfortunate that these living books of Naga’s life have not been read properly. That is why Kire’s novel makes a genuine attempt to inspire readers throughout the world as well as her own people to understand what they actually are, and to discover themselves in their own history and shape their future. Her novel basically illustrates her concern about the preservation and conservation of Naga culture. As William Rueckert(1996) opines.

The problem...is to find ways of keeping the human community from destroying the natural community and with it the human community. This is what ecologists like to call the self-destructive or suicidal motive that is inherent in our prevailing and paradoxical attitude towards nature. The conceptual and practical problem is to find the grounds upon which the two communities- the human, the natural- can coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere. (p. 107)

Because of the changing thought processes of the contemporary generation, the role of folklores in the conservation of Indigenous knowledge has considerably diminished. However, the preservation of the traditional knowledge system still has its own relevance. This has been made evident by Kire throughout her novel where she has quite meticulously provided numerous examples of the Tenyimia folk-culture which have a direct influence on the preservation of the native culture. Ville is a perfect representative of the life of hunter-gatherers. He has spent twenty-five years of his life in the forest and has been made the guardian of the *gwi*, the great *mithuns* found in the hills west of Kohima by his clan and also the official protector of the rare *tragopan* by the forest department. Vilie’s knowledge about the ways of his surroundings, the awareness of “the herbs one could use for food, the animals and birds one could trap and the bitter herbs to counteract the sting of a poisonous snake” (Kire, 2014, p. 15), is unparalleled. He has the expertise of using the medicinal shrub *Tierhutiepfuas* a curative herb, *Japan nha* as an antiseptic leaf to relieve ache and wounds, rock bee honey to heal damaged tissues or native tobacco as sedative and insecticide which is unique to the Tenyimias. They are endowed with the mastery of obtaining nourishment from the tree fern *Ketsaga* or the edible nettle *Jotho* or the Tahitian apple locally known as *Mezasi*. The novelist here tries to focus on the considerable impact that religious belief system has on the survival of the ethnic tribes. Vilie’s refrain- “the forest is my wife” (Kire, 2014, p.7) attributes an emotional as well as a physical presence to an inanimate object, so much so that the protagonist is even ready to abandon the company of his community for its sake. He firmly believes that “leaving the forest would be the same as abandoning his wife”, that “he was being an unfaithful spouse” (Kire, 2014, p.9). Vilie’s friend Krishna voices the ethos of the hunter-gatherer community when he articulates the worth of establishing a culture based on reverence towards the root. When asked about the future of his son, Krishna reflects on the utility and value of the traditional knowledge system in the face of globalization: “I am not a rich man. I don’t have the means to send him to school. I will teach him my trade and he will grow up and earn an honest living. School is not for the like of us” (Kire, 2014, p.15). The folk-traditions of this aboriginal community are safeguarded since ages by the ‘age-group house’- the village educational institute where knowledge about the tribal ways of life is imparted to children of the same age-group by an elder. The cognizance of the high economic and ecological efficiencies that are secretly deposited in the cultural landscape of the Naga hills are known only to the native inhabitants and can only be disseminated to the subsequent generations through these living repositories. The custom of observing a no-work day, “a day of thanksgiving for delivered lives” (Kire, 2014, p.109), is an exclusive cultural belief of the Tenyimias who strictly consider it to be a taboo to work on *genna days* so much so that those who violate the practice have to inevitably meet with injuries or accidents that might even lead to death. This is because, for the Naga Angamis, the “awareness of evil is all-pervasive” (Sekhose, 2012, p. 129). Thus the consciously preserved and transmitted, cumulative, multigenerational Indigenous knowledge of the Naga community has the potential to offer modern society many lessons in the management of complex forest, mountain, and land resources.

Significant Indigenous wisdom that is visible in the pages of the novel is the concept of “eco-spiritualism”, the practice of attributing divine power to the world of nature. According to Abrams and Harpham(2009), “The common view in such traditions... envisions the natural world as a living, sacred thing, in which each individual feels intimately bonded to a particular physical ‘place’, and where human beings live in interdependence and reciprocity with other living things” (p. 99). The intercommunion of the divine, human beings and non-human creations on earth is an elemental belief that

inspires the Tenyimias to preserve the landscape in which they inhabit. A spiritual facet is fundamental to the Indigenous knowledge system of the aboriginals which is perpetuated through a continual act of prayer and benediction. For instance, the creator deity worshipped in the old religion of the Tenyi people, *Ukepenuopfii*, has to be acknowledged whenever anyone takes firewood or gathers herbs from the forest or finds an animal in his traps- “*Terhuomiapeziem*. Thanks be to the spirits” (Kire, 2014, p.80). This is basically a way of pronouncing a prayer of thanksgiving and gratefulness to the provider for its hospitality. When Vilie attempts to catch the river while it is asleep, and is shocked by the treacherous undercurrent of it, he at once concentrates on the spiritual words that he has been taught to use in order to strike balance with the world of nature: “Sky is my father; Earth is my mother, stand aside death! *Kepenuopf* 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!” (Kire, 2014, p.103) Kire’s novel charts Valerie Lincoln’s (2000) idea of ‘ecospirituality’ which evokes the “manifestation of the spiritual interconnection between human beings and the environment... Ecospirituality engages a relational view of the person to the planet, soul to the soil, and the inner to the outer landscape” (p. 228).

The traditional knowledge base of the north-east considers the supernatural as a manifest part of the natural world. The reader can observe the various references to the mystical that the novel incorporates. For the Tenyimias in Kire’s novel, supernaturalism is a part of their canon because linking existential concerns with the extramundane are their way of saving the world from destruction. Hence it is quite significant to investigate the role of the occult in maintaining a viable and symbiotic relationship between the cultural and the human world. The Naga theology rationalizes the existence of the mystery behind each and every natural event. Even the forest in which Vilie takes shelter during the course of his journey is infested with spirits against which Vilie has to fight- “Mine is the greater spirit. I will never submit to you!” (Kire, 2014, p.83) The description of *Rarhuria* figures distinctly in the course of Vilie’s journey. The word “*Rarhuria*” literally means the unclean place that remains untouched in certain parts of the forest area. The tribal people of the Angami community believe that people, who fail to avoid the rainforest, suffer from fever and headaches afterward. The Tenyimias have a firm belief in the existence of “beautiful long-haired girls playing and singing to each other in the forest ... to enchant humans and draw them to the unclean forest so they would die and come to live with them there” (Kire, 2014, p.76). The encounter of the protagonist with the *Tekhumiavi*, “the folk practice of certain men transforming their spirits into tigers” (Kire, 2014, p.25), is another vivid illustration of the combination of the natural and supernatural exercised by the native Nagas. Jano L. Sekhose (2012) posits that “Ancestral Nagas living in the elemental world of nature were Animists and believed that all things of nature have a soul” (p. 128). Although initially when attacked by the huge animal at night, Vilie makes an attempt to scare it by his gunshot, he very soon realizes the numinous power of the were-tiger and applies the knowledge that he has gained in the age-group house to protect himself: “*Kuovi! Menuolhoulie! Wetsho!* Is this the way to treat your clansman? I am Vilie, son of Kedo, your clansman. I am not here to do you harm. Why are you treating me as a stranger? I come in peace. You owe me your hospitality. I am your guest!” (Kire, 2014, p.26)

The transformation into spirits is a “closely guarded art” (Kire, 2014, p.25) among the Angamis in which “it is not only the tiger that men transform themselves into. There are men in the other tribes who have been known to turn their spirits into giant snakes, and their women’s spirits have become monkeys” (Kire, 2014, p.28). The social educational institution of the Tenyimias has been imparting this knowledge to Vilie and his clansmen since ages to enable them to “go out into the world with knowledge of both, and not disrespectful of either world as some people are” (Kire, 2014, p.28). Even towards the end of the novel, while returning to his village with the river-stone, Vilie’s companion Ate is attacked by a tiger-spirit and is saved only when Vilie shouts the command- “*Kepenuopf* *Zanutsielatalie!*” (Kire, 2014, p.189) Vilie has by then attained the wisdom that “sometimes the struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual powers which you would be quite foolish to defy with gunpowder” (Kire, 2014, p.189).

The river too is endowed with a living spirit, the real worth of which is elucidated by the border-village headman Kani, who points out to Vilie that, “those who try to grasp the spirit of the river for wealth, are going to lose something that wealth cannot buy for you. You will lose knowledge of the spiritual. And you will lose the power it offers you ... over both the world of the senses and the world of the spirit” (Kire, 2014, p.96). This is the moment when Vilie realizes that above everything else, “he wanted the spiritual knowledge that the sleeping river would give him if they found it” (Kire, 2014, p.96). The novelist infuses deep symbolic significance to the sleeping river:

The river is the human mind (constantly restive and distracted by the objective world). When it sleeps (attains the meditative ‘zen’ state of equanimity) it becomes possible for a seeker to gain access to a heart-stone (profound knowledge from one’s core). As soon as the heart-stone is within grasp, the river puts up an almighty fight (that is possibly the person wrestling with the doubts and tectonics of the paradigm shift in awareness being churned by his newfound knowledge). If the seeker is able to withstand the onslaught and assert his supremacy over the river, he becomes the owner of the heart-stone. (Balantrapu, 2015, para. 9)

Further, the idea of the spirits of the widow-women as guardians of the sleeping-river is another example of the Indigenous Naga faith on the paranormal. The black-clad figures carry baskets on their backs and have something very forbidding about them. They can be interpreted as the obstacles in the way of attaining tranquillity necessary for achieving the ultimate knowledge. When Vilie succeeds in wrestling the stone from the bed of the river, these widow-spirits run “downhill, waving thin spears and shouting curses on the two men” (Kire, 2014, p.104). But according to the

native belief, only the name of the creator-deity has the supreme power to make the spirits retreat- "*Kepenuopfu Zanutsie la mhatalie!*" (Kire, 2014, p.105). This typifies the amalgamation of the natural, supernatural and the divine in the folklores of the Indigenous Nagas whose tale is accurately told by one of their representatives, Easterine Kire. Moreover, the description of the village of the *Kirhupfumia* serves as the most significant reference to the practice of occult rooted in the Naga folk-tradition. The Tenyimias culture believes in the existence of certain women who are considered to be "the most feared persons in the mountains" (Kire, 2014, p.131) as they possess a toxic power of maiming, blinding or even killing people simply by pointing fingers at the- "Evil, which is seen to have its origin in supernatural beings from the unknown world is so ingrained, without a doubt, and forms a part of the Angami psyche as well as their beliefs" (Sekhose, 2012, p. 130).

In the course of his eventful journey, Vilie takes shelter in one such village where he has to deal with the wrath of these outcasts for the priceless possession that he conceals. However, since Vilie had a strong and pure spirit, he manages to escape and also rescues Ate, an outcast, who has been mistakenly assumed to possess 'death' at her fingertips. Thus the cultural belief of infusing life into a natural object and intertwining it with supernatural mechanisms is a very significant doctrine of Indian Indigenous theology which acknowledges the presence of the inexplicable in the natural world, and Kire quite deftly handles this native belief in her novel. The introduction of the supernatural into such narratives serves to create a natural consciousness in the psyche of the urban non-Indigenous individual.

Examining the Indigenous folklore and archetypes of the Tenyimias, a very important binary seems to be instrumental in Kire's narrative- the conflict between partnership culture and dominator culture. It is implanted in the minds of these aborigines that the existence of their community relies on peaceful co-existence with the native knowledge base as opposed to the profit-driven practices of the urban world. It is evident from the fact that their religious observations are more of appeasing their deities, and not professing love or adoration. Dominator culture, unlike partnership culture that strives to be closer to the native cultural identity, speaks of such kind of a society where rationalism, hierarchy and aggressive competition prevail. The Indigenous Nagas deeply preserve innate care for their traditional wisdom since their sustenance depends only on maintaining harmony with it. Their perception of the supernatural world is also riddled with mysteries. Their idea of nature and Indigenous knowledge may not be very visible but they are as tangible as the surrounding hills, rivers, forests and animals and supernatural beliefs that make up their community.

The ending of *When the River Sleeps* very effectively justifies the existence of a society that embraces tranquillity, equality, and community in a mostly materialistic and hierarchy-based world. It challenges the sense of ethnic and "cultural othering" that these places are subjected to. "Cultural Othering" refers to the tendency of assuming that one's social group is superior to the rest and thereby negatively measuring and evaluating the cultural nuances of other ethnicities as inferior (Weiguo, 2013). Easterine Kire successfully through her book expels all doubts, uncertainties, anxieties, contradictions, and irrationalities that Nagaland has been facing as a subaltern culture and state. Even though the greed for the conjuration that the river-stone owns, leads to Vilie's brutal murder, his daughter, Ate, and her husband, Asakho, do not nurture an iota of doubt while discussing the future of their son, Vibou, as a hunter who might as well go in search for the heart-stone from the sleeping-river. Such is the way of life of the Indigenous Tenyimias that the violence and relative chaos of the dominator culture does not have the power to alienate them from the divine supremacy of the apparently subjugated Indigenous insight, thereby establishing social structures and beliefs based on the coalition. Through her novel, Kire essentially substantiates the understanding of Riane Eisler regarding the binary between these two fundamental paradigms. According to Eisler (1988), the struggle of mankind to establish a harmonious future largely depends on the conflict between those who adhere to the structure of suppression and those who strive towards a world of unbiased cooperation, and in Kire's realm, the latter undeniably obtains ascendancy. Kire, in her book and through her character Vilie, brings the fact to the fore that "when human beings as agents could see themselves as an extension of nature outside, they further evolved a linguistically mediated rational order that established a unity between 'nature' and 'culture'" (Biswas and Thomas, 2012, p. xix).

## CONCLUSION

Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps* showcases the necessity and relevance of Indigenous knowledge as a means to ensure the durability of the human race. Through this novel, Kire provides her readers with a written testament of the identity of her own Indigenous community, the Tenyimias. Basically, she fights against the age-old marginalization of her community which has always been deprived of proper representation. The deep magic and mysticism embedded in the collective unconscious of the Tenyimias are mostly built upon the Indigenous wisdom that has not yet been disrupted by the 'mainstream' and their effort to liberate the populace from their 'primitive' practices. Kire, in her speech at the International Congress of PEN in Norway, clearly states that the telling of a story is a spiritual exercise that is an integral part of the healing of a people's psychological wounds ... Naga literature is facing a dismissive neo-colonial attitude. Their (publishing houses) expectations from the region are very low indeed. It is a stereotyped expectation that Naga writers are capable only of producing politically charged writing or exotic folk literature in the mediocre language. (Kire, 2004, para. 2)

In this context, Kire has also acknowledged the importance of a written form of literature: "I felt we needed to create written Naga literature. We have so many oral narratives but with oral dying out, it's all going to be lost" (Mandal &

[Singh, 2019](#), p. 1377). Thus a novel like *When the River Sleeps* undoubtedly gains significance in the contemporary world as it shows ways of Indigenous knowledge preservation to be collectively ingrained in the Naga identity through their folktales that are passed on from one generation to another through words of mouth. Critic [Richard Dorson \(1963\)](#) very rightly defines folklore as “an echo of the past, but at the same time, it is also the vigorous voice of the present” (p. 98). He believes that folklore has the potential to take its place “alongside literature, music, and the arts as a controlled expression of a proletarian idea” (p. 98). Kire seconds this idea by commenting-

There is a lot of wisdom in the folk... the global environment movement can learn from our native ways of preserving the earth, and the sense of respect our culture displays towards the natural world... the practice of saving endangered flora and fauna, forests and forest animals- these are all good practices that we have which others can learn from and we try to reflect in our literature. ([Imsong, 2018](#), p.176)

Kire’s penetrating vision into the intricacies of Naga’s life and phenomenal observations stir the mind of the readers in such a way that they indulge in automatic introspection. The subtlety of her diction and pragmatism endows a remarkable force to the fictional account. It is due to this reason that Kire’s novel serves as a crusade to bring about a radical transformation in the perception of the mainstream society towards Naga Indigeneity. It can be inferred that the lives of the Tenymias and their microcosmic natural universe have the potential to engage in an Indigenous dialogue on a macrocosmic level.

Historically speaking, the ethics of traditional knowledge preservation in India are entrenched in the collective ideology of autochthonous peoples. It is their politics of self-preservation, following its own notion of legitimacy. In fact, the symbiotic relationship with their Indigenous knowledge base has become a source of inspiration for resource management locally and globally: “While the workings of self-consciousness help to distinguish man from other forms of life, the channel of ageless instinctive awareness helps to re-unite him, not only with his own immediate past but with the whole world of nature. Here at the roots of his being is believed to lie the accumulated ancestral inheritance since his beginnings” ([Kennedy, 1965](#), p. 82). This has been projected through an eco-critical and mythopoetic representation of the proverbial tussle between nature and culture, between man and its surroundings, between tradition and modernity, between an eroding age-old tradition of beliefs and rituals and rapid and commercial urbanization. The issues dealt with in the book are macroscopic but the form is microscopic. *When the River Sleeps* can possibly be read as a local answer to this global conundrum of the perennial subjugation of traditional knowledge.

#### LIMITATION OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE SCOPE

The research work that has been undertaken in this article is conducted on fiction by an Indigenous woman novelist from Nagaland. However, there are many such prominent novelists from Nagaland in particular and North East India in general who has taken the initiative to give voice to their respective native communities and bring forth the rich cultural heritage each of those tribes possesses. Moreover, further research can be carried out on the Indigenous male writers of this region and their approach to the theme of cultural celebration. A comparative study can be accomplished based on such a gendered perspective.

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