



Echoes of Self: Navigating Memory and Identity in Easterine Kire's 'Don't Run, My Love'

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Easterine Kire, a highly productive writer originating from the Angami Naga tribe in contemporary times, has amassed a considerable body of literary works. Her extensive repertoire encompasses over 20 books written in English across various genres, such as poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and children's literature, showcasing her wide-ranging and diverse literary prowess. Within her extensive collection, Kire embarks on a profound quest to establish a profound connection with her Naga heritage and encapsulate the essence of life in the hills. Her literary endeavors delve into deeply ingrained taboos, customs, revered traditions, and region-specific laws. Notably, Kire's groundbreaking contributions include the preservation of Nagaland's oral history, a legacy that endures through the remaining storytellers in the country. This research paper undertakes a comprehensive analysis of Easterine Kire's "Don't Run, My Love," with a particular focus on its depiction of Nagaland's historical backdrop. The narrative intricately weaves myths, customs, and the rural environment into the lives of the two main characters, Visenuo and Atuonuo. Furthermore, this study investigates how the text situates itself in a pre-Christian era prior to the British arrival and subsequent evangelical missions. The objective is to comprehend the significant role of memory in perpetuating and constructing the identity of a generation haunted by a turbulent history.

Keywords: Memory, history, custom, tradition, identity.

Born in 1959 in Kohima, Nagaland, Easterine Kire is a well-known and insightful writer from Northeast India. Her artistic endeavours display a deep depth, as seen by her diversified proficiency in translation and poetry. It is clear that Kire is deeply connected to the struggles her tribe faces, as evidenced by her dedication to depicting the lives, culture, and customs of the Angami Nagas. Her efforts are centred around her commitment to the preservation and enhancement of Tenyidie, her mother tongue. Her 200 oral poetry in the language, which are a monument to her perseverance, foresight, and creative endeavour, serve as an example of this dedication. Her anthology of 200 oral poems in the language, which attests to her perseverance, foresight, and creative endeavour, serves as an example of her dedication.

Kire's literary objectives extend beyond personal aspirations, as she earnestly seeks to convey to the world the essence of who her people are, how they exist, and where they belong. Through her writings, she offers a profound

exploration of cultural memory—one characterized by integrity and identity. Her commitment to reporting the cultural identity of the Angami Naga people, along with their way of life and origins, underscores the gravity of her purpose. In this pursuit, Kire's writings serve as a significant conduit for understanding cultural memory, intricately woven with threads of integrity, identity, and shared experiences.

The allure of Kire's writings lies in their amalgamation of oral traditions and historical narratives from Nagaland, captivating outsiders who are drawn to the rich tapestry of its cultural heritage. Delving deep into life experiences entrenched in cultural ethos, Kire employs artistic imagination to reflect existential realities. Her narratives convey the essence of tradition through storytelling, dance, myths, and legends, illustrating the deeply rooted beliefs, cultures, and symbiotic relationship with nature that define this cultural milieu. In essence, Kire's work serves as an academic exploration of the vitality and dynamism inherent in the cultural environment she vividly portrays.

Easterine Kire skilfully incorporates the lived experiences of the Angami Naga tribe in her narratives emphasising their strong relationship to cultural and social identity. Her narrative method gracefully intertwines oral traditions embracing animism, ethnicity, race, mythology, and tales. Kire creates a multi-dimensional investigation of cultural memory, historical memory, and personal memory within the context of her community, presenting a nuanced picture of their collective heritage and identity. The writings of Easterine Kire reflect a deep reverence for tradition and a passionate commitment to preserving the voices and stories of the Angami Naga tribe in order to ensure their continued vitality and success.

Objectives:

The objectives the study are as follows:

- Examine how Nagaland's history is depicted in Easterine Kire's "Don't Run, My Love," with attention to myths, traditions, and rural life.
- Explore how the novel positions itself in a pre-Christian era, prior to British colonization and evangelical missions, and consider the implications for the representation of Nagaland's history and culture.
- Investigate how memory contributes to the identity formation and preservation of a generation profoundly affected by a violent past.

Methodology:

The methodology of this research shall be entirely descriptive in nature, using primary and secondary sources as basis of textual-interpretations. The primary data will be collected from the text written by Easterine Kire. The secondary data will be collected from the edited books, journals, scholarly articles and e-resources.

Discussion:

Easterine Kire's outstanding work "Don't Run, My Love," published in 2017, unfolds against the historical backdrop of Kija, an ancient village belonging to the Angami Naga tribe. It depicts a lifestyle marked by strenuous agricultural labour, including activities like hoeing, planting, and harvesting, regulated by the changing seasons. Amidst this toil, the village stands as a harmonious community, guided by sagacious elders and characterized by

caring, albeit occasionally overbearing, neighbours and relatives- 'their lives are hard – regulated by the seasons and by the ceaseless annual labours of hoeing, digging, planting and harvesting. But is also a life of peace, lived in a well-knit community of wise elders and caring – though sometimes overbearing – neighbours and relatives.' (Kire, 2017)

The literary work provides readers with a comprehensive and enlightening examination of the customary lifestyle prevailing in a remote Naga village. Through this literary piece, readers are able to engage with and comprehend the intricate aspects of the cultural, social, and economic environment of this specific locality. By immersing themselves in the narrative, readers are afforded the opportunity to delve into the intricacies of daily existence, deeply ingrained conventions, and time-honored practices that govern the inhabitants' way of life.

Atuonuo's mother assumes possession of the agricultural fields, however, her ability to cultivate the land is dependent on the aid of her daughter as a result of her widowhood. Their means of living are closely interconnected with the soil, which they depend on for nourishment. At the commencement of each year, laborers prepare the soil for planting subsequent to the early precipitation that softens it. This period is dedicated to the growing of legumes, pumpkins, and vegetables from the gourd family. The commencement of meaningful agricultural labor coincides with the onset of the monsoon rains, enabling farmers to inundate their fields for the cultivation of rice. The harvest season serves as validation for their toil, characterized by commitment and minimal absenteeism.

In the rural Naga context, the lifestyle of the people is deeply ingrained in their connection to the land. The primary occupation for the inhabitants of these countryside areas is agriculture. This signifies that the means of living, customs, and cultural practices of the Naga people revolve around cultivating and caring for the earth. Furthermore, the narrative emphasizes the importance of a pivotal institution within Naga society, referred to as the kichuki, morung, or male dormitory. This establishment lacks any cultural or communal value, and has no significance in serving as a central point for any social or educational activities, nor does it have any space for the transmission of traditional knowledge and values. It is within these dormitories that young men often receive guidance, participate in communal rituals, and contribute to the wider social fabric of their community.

In the context of the Angami community, the communal structure designated for their use, commonly referred to as the morung, is locally known as the kichuki. In her work "Walking the Roadless Road," Easterine Kire references theologian Mark Pongener, who provides detailed insights into the significance and purpose of the morung within Naga villages. Pongener argues that the morung serves as a prominent communal edifice, exerting a physical presence within the village surroundings. Typically positioned conspicuously, it is distinguished by its elaborate decorations, which include intricately carved depictions of hornbills, tigers, human faces, and occasionally, projecting barge boards that bear resemblance to wings or horns.

The morung, a fundamental social institution, possesses a significant spatial capacity that is adequate to accommodate all of the adolescent males residing within the village. "Naga oral traditions were kept alive in the morung and passed on from one generation to the next in the form of folk songs, dances and folk tales." (Kire 32) The organizational framework of the morung is based on age differentiation, whereby individuals are classified

into distinct cohorts: Sungpur, Tenapang, Tekumchet, Yhanga, and Juzen, arranged in ascending order of seniority. Furthermore, the morung assumes the crucial role of instilling its members with a distinct and intricate ethical system known as 'sobaliba'. Historically, the morung served as a focal point for providing instruction in military strategies, equipping its members with vital skills not only for combat but also for their daily pursuits. Additionally, the morung functioned as an educational center, imparting expertise in a wide range of crafts, including the construction of dwellings. Importantly, it undertook the responsibility of perpetuating the fundamental principles and cultural heritage of the tribe, ensuring their transmission to subsequent generations.

In her novel, Kire explores the domain of myth and mythology to intricately interlace the fabric of traditional existence among the Angami Naga tribes. Within this narrative framework, specific emphasis is placed on the conviction in ethereal beings, notably the tiger spirits referred to as 'tekhu mevi' in the local vernacular. These metaphysical components are assimilated as pivotal aspects of the cultural and spiritual legacy, providing readers with a profound understanding of the interdependent connection between mythological beliefs and the actual encounters of the Angami Naga communities.

The coexistence of spirits and humans is frequently denoted as animism or the belief in animism. This framework of belief postulates that spirits or supernatural entities dwell within the same sphere as humans and exert their influence upon diverse facets of existence and the natural world. Animism is widespread within numerous indigenous societies and is distinguished by a profound veneration for the natural realm and its spiritual occupants.

The Nagas maintain a belief in the simultaneous existence of the natural and spiritual realms, thereby asserting the cohabitation of spirits and humans. They collectively uphold a shared conviction in the continuation of life beyond death. A notable Naga legend depicts mankind, spirits, and the tiger as brethren who resolve their conflicts through a race. Assisted by a spirit, mankind emerges triumphant, compelling the tiger to withdraw to the wilderness. This tiger myth is embraced by the Angamis, Chakhesang, Lotha, Sumi, and Rengma Naga tribes, while it remains unacknowledged by the North and North-western Naga tribes.

The concept of therianthropy, commonly known as lycanthropy within specific cultural frameworks, entails the belief that certain individuals possess a dual nature, one human and the other animal, and have the ability to undergo transformation, often into predatory creatures like wolves or tigers. This belief, deeply ingrained in various mythologies around the world, manifests itself in different ways across cultures. Among the diverse Naga tribes, a prevalent form of therianthropy revolves around the conviction that certain individuals embody both human and animal traits, particularly as tigers or leopards. This belief system is supported by the high regard given to Tekhu-rho, a legendary figure revered as the protector of tigers. According to this belief, individuals with a connection to tigers are thought to experience the physical ordeals and suffering endured by the animals themselves. Notably, the Nagas abstain from hunting tigers for recreational purposes, unless villagers perceive the presence of a 'familiar' spirit haunting their community, thereby highlighting the interplay between mythological beliefs and cultural practices within this indigenous context. The introduction of Christianity to Naga individuals who embody tiger-like qualities has significantly reduced instances of lycanthropic behaviours in Naga society.

The introduction of Christianity within the Naga community, whose members exhibit characteristics similar to those of tigers, plays a crucial role in the transformation of their cultural convictions and customs. “The conversion to Christianity of Naga tiger -men and tiger-women has brought down the rate of lycanthropic activities.” (Kire153) The novel exemplifies how the arrival of Christianity instigates a change in the Naga society's spiritual and belief systems, particularly as it relates to lycanthropy. The Christian faith, with its emphasis on the worship of a single deity and rejection of animistic beliefs in spirits and animal metamorphosis, stands in stark contrast to traditional Naga convictions. Consequently, individuals within the Naga community, previously associated with lycanthropic tendencies, find themselves navigating a new religious framework that advocates an alternative comprehension of spirituality and existence. Consequently, the novel posits that the influence of Christianity has resulted in a decrease in the prevalence of lycanthropy within Naga society, thereby underscoring the profound impact of religious conversion on cultural convictions and practices.

The novella presents a multitude of examples wherein individuals undergo a metamorphosis into Tekhu-rho, denoting a profound traversal of boundaries that confers upon them a certain level of entry into the spiritual domain. Pfenuo, a denizen of the Village of Seers, provides an all-encompassing explication of the procedure by which individuals undergo a metamorphosis into Tekhu-rho, representing a momentous metaphysical transition that facilitates entry into the ethereal realm. In their pursuit to embrace the identity of were-tigers, these individuals consciously detach themselves from their human existence, embodying the essence of the tiger, thus acquiring the designation of "tekhumevimia." This transition into the spiritual dimension bestows upon them distinctive abilities, such as the prescience to anticipate the outcomes of conflicts and related matters. Additionally, they possess the expertise to discern the precise spiritual causes of ailments afflicting individuals and suggest appropriate remedial measures, which substantiates their deep connection with the spiritual domain.

The Village of Seers exhibits a unique geographic position, marked by a distinct peculiarity in terms of accessibility. “The geographical area of Nagaland is shared by the following sixteen tribes: Angami, Ao, Chang, Chakhesang, (made up of the Chokri and Kuzhami), Dimasa Kachari, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Kuki, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sumi, Yimchunger, and Zeliang.” (Kire12) The proximity to this village is not solely determined by physical distance, but rather intricately linked to the urgency and intensity of one's purpose or necessity. This nuanced approach to reaching the village implies a dynamic interaction between the geographic terrain and the subjective importance attributed to the journey, emphasizing the village's exceptional position within the wider regional context. Upon discovering Kevi's were-tiger nature, Atunuo's mother made the decision to seek assistance from the formidable seers of her husband's village. It is intriguing to note that the Village of Seers has always been surrounded by a mysterious geographical aura, which has perpetuated discussions and conflicts among the villagers regarding its precise location. These passionate debates often lead to heated arguments, with individuals fervently defending their own interpretations of where the Village of Seers should be situated. The village's elusive whereabouts have remained an enduring puzzle, as its reputation as the ultimate solution provider for the various challenges faced by humanity is emphasized by its unique ability to

shift its location at will. This characteristic bestows upon the village an almost mystical essence, making its physical coordinates an elusive and constantly changing enigma.

In "Don't Run, My Love" Kire presents a vibrant glimpse of life as lived in the villages. By employing its evocative prose, the novel masterfully depicts the patterns and rituals of the villagers, capturing instances of toil in the fields, collective assemblies at the dahou, and the customary exchange of greetings. The depiction of the well-worn stone seats and the men adorned with their distinct drinking horns imparts a palpable perception of the village's communal areas. This immersive representation effectively engages readers in the mundane encounters of the protagonists, thus establishing a vivid and all-encompassing backdrop for the unfurling storyline.

The text makes a reference to the prevailing beverage, known as zu or suzen, which is a strong and fragrant rice beer. This beverage holds great cultural significance among the Nagas and is produced through the process of rice fermentation. In the traditional context, the consumption of this beverage is a privilege exclusively granted to men, who partake in it from Mithun horns, while women commonly employ bamboo mugs for the same purpose. This custom highlights the distinct cultural roles and traditions associated with the consumption of this traditional Naga brew.

In her work, Kire delves into the intricacies of memory within the socio-cultural milieu of the Angami Naga tribe, offering a profound exploration of how collective remembrance shapes their cultural identity and heritage. Naga villages universally exhibit a prominent presence of monoliths, often erected to commemorate communal feats of merit organized by affluent individuals in bygone eras. From the modest talismans stored within granaries to enhance familial prosperity, to charms employed for attracting wealth, companionship, or martial prowess, and to the massive monoliths necessitating collective clan efforts for transportation and installation, these stone memorials serve as enduring symbols of Naga culture's perpetuation and preservation of its heritage. Through such strategy, she unsettles the dichotomous cultural narratives and "rewrite cultural narratives... [where she] use[s] alternative signifying practices and bold refigurations to undo cultural iconographies and unsettle the status quo of habitual cultural codes." (Schwab, 2012, p.02)

Visenuo remembers her husband's family, especially her wealthy grandfather-in-law, who sponsored four feasts in the past. The feasts were commemorated with monoliths along the route to the fields, used by villagers as resting spots and to pass on the legacy of Kezharuokuo. This perpetuates the memory of the influential figure in the community.

The observance of celebrations in villages has cultural significance for indigenous communities. Easterine Kire describes the Vatenyi ceremony as marking the end of the agricultural calendar. This ritual involves bringing the harvested crops into the village. On the first day of the festival, the matriarch of the household eats lentils and sweet potatoes instead of rice, which is believed to protect the harvest. The narrative also mentions customs related to the harvest festival, such as children catching frogs to begin the celebrations.

The narrative combines spirits and humans, creating a detailed picture of Naga rural life. It integrates traditions, customs, village life, food, and festivals to show the Naga landscape. The narrative aims to revive and preserve Naga life and customs, despite a difficult history and modern influences. The story focuses on Visenuo, Atenuo, and Kevi, offering insight into Naga rural life. It reveals details about Naga houses, the importance of agriculture, and culinary traditions. The narrative explores the spirit world and unique beliefs in this area. The book depicts a time when Nagas lived in harmony with nature and followed cultural values. It also describes agrarian festivals and traditional beliefs in lycanthropy and tiger spirits, reflecting Naga religion and worldview.

Conclusion:

Nagaland has many stories that are important for sharing and preserving the cultural heritage of the Naga people. These narratives connect the past, present, and future and help to foster unity in the Naga society. Storytelling in Nagaland has academic significance in understanding Naga culture and history. In addition, it showcases the resoluteness of the Naga people in the face of change.

"Don't Run My Love" serves as a significant narrative, reconstructing the spiritual realm and customs of the Naga people. It offers insight into the rural past before Christianity. The novel is a repository of heritage and guides the present generation. It rectifies the obliteration of an unrecorded history and resurrects the identity of a marginalized Naga populace. It is a historical document rectifying a violent history and political tumult.

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