

Revisiting "Myth" in Easterine Kire's novel *When the River Sleeps*

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Abstract

Histories show that every culture and civilization in the World has specific Myths and stories to be told, narrated, and remembered. In the words of Mircea Eliade, myth is always an account of a 'creation.' According to C.G. Jung, Myth is formed around a god-like figure of a man and is repeated throughout man's history. 'Myth' has always been an integral part of human civilization and rests on an idea or an archetype. It has symbolic and multiple meanings. Myth functions a vital role in molding the morality, social life, and culture of a people or community. Many Indian writers used myth in their writing. Their inclusion of legend and tales from the non-canonical stream widens the sphere of Indian writing, thus reflecting the diverse, multicultural society of our country. Easterine Kire is a well-known English poet and author from North-East India. Her works deal with the rich heritage of history, cultures, traditions, rituals, and beliefs of her Naga people. Her novel *When the River Sleeps* is a beautifully woven story with a mix of adventure, quest, supernaturalism, folktale, and magic in the tribal World of Nagas. The paper will try to analyze Kire's style of historical reconstruction of myth-making as well as the concept of folk narrative and folk epic in her writing.

Keywords: Myth, Folk-Narrative, identity, violence and Epic

Introduction:

Easterine Kire is a poet, writer, and novelist from Nagaland. She is one of the region's finest storytellers and has written several books in English. Her first novel, *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), was the first-ever Naga novel to be published. Her works reflect the realities of life in Nagaland and the complexities around the colonial atrocities and discrimination, and the in-house rivalry and ideological differences among the Naga brethren fighting for freedom. From oral histories, myths, folktales, and histories to that of war and conflicts, Kire captures the true essence of Naga life and its society. Most of her works deal with the living realities of her Naga people. As a Naga women writer, she writes about the Naga people, their trauma, their problem of insurgencies, and the condition of women in her society. The paper attempts to analyze Easterine Kire's style of using myth in the novel. The paper will also look into Kire attempt to reconstruct the history of her people through her writing.

Myth, according to the definition given by Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, is *a story from ancient times, especially one that was told to explain natural events or to describe the early history of a people*. The concept of mythology or myth is an exciting word. 'Myth' as “a concept is found in many areas of contemporary thought like Psychological, Sociological, Religion, Anthropology, and even science” (Frye 587). In Literature, Myth has always been an essential element and constant and remarkable since ancient times. Myth gives the human an outline of a verbal universe, which literature later occupies. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, speaks of 'Mythos' as plot, a sequence of gross events, which he says “is the life and soul of a tragedy” (588). All the mythology around the World merges into literature. In fact, in most works of fiction, mythos or sequences of events are being held and shaped into unities. The continuity of myth in literature has been constant. It has been used in literary works by writers of all times and ages. A Myth is a cultural folktale; a legendary story passed orally for many generations.

Northeast India has preserved their unique spirit of harmony between Nature and Culture, art and life, and maintenance of biodiversity and cultural diversity. They have articulated this spirit of balance in many different ways: in music, art, and architecture, their belief and knowledge systems, and their life-sustaining rites and rituals in response to the rhythm of work, seasons, and nature. The region has rich cultural histories, folk, and legends. Every tribe in the Northeast has its own story of origin, superstition, and story of creation and migration.

Myth and mythology have an intense connection with culture and its people. The centrality of myths in traditional societies cannot be denied. Myths help us to understand the patterns of society, and it helps us to understand the more profound implications of human life and its meaning. They have a deep grain in every daily life, belief, and practice and are a sacred story through which people connect with their ancestor's World. It forms the base root of every society. Many North-East writers have attempted to use the elements of these myths, folklore, and folktales in their writings. Some writers like Temsula Ao and Mamang Dai tried to retell the lost World and lost histories in their writings.

Easterine Kire in her novel *When the River Sleeps* (2014) tried to retrieve the loss Naga identity through the mythical structure. The Nagaland that Kire has presented in her novel is not at all tag along with the stereotypical image of the region, and it is longer a state in conflict and crisis. In the novel, she has presented a Nagaland where people live near other humans and nature. The novel talks about the journey of the fictional Naga world, where the human World and the spiritual World came in constant touch with each other. The novel unravels the Angami Naga's spiritual World and man's place in it. It also deals with the rich culture, beliefs, practices, supernatural, folklore, and myth surrounding Naga tribal society. The novel central theme on quest for identity and a quest for self. It revolves around the story of an Angami man named-Vilie and his adventure to find the heart of the stone of the mysterious sleeping river.

Quest as a genre has been used in much ancient literature. Such quest is based on a journey, in which a hero hears a call and leaves his home: alone or in the company of others to

search out a treasure. Arthurian legend is very famous for its theme of quest, valor, chivalry and bravery. In this type of genre, the hero undergoes trials, receives aid, fights enemies and may even die. Kire's novel begins with Ville's strange dream of the sleeping river calling forth him to make this journey. The myth of sleeping river, we find that it is not just the desire to get the heart stone; instead, it is a novel quest: a quest to acquaint with his true spiritual self.

Nagas have been embroiled in violence and insurgency for many decades. Violence made Nagas forget their essence and root. Kira has tried to re-create Naga's tribal identity with the help of its myths and cultural knowledge. Through the Myth of Quest, Kire is trying to re-establish her people's strained connection with true Naga self and identity. In the novel, the stone has much power and grants the owner whatever it desires. Vile's fight is actually against the spiritual powers. Those who get the heart stone are also required to use it for spiritual purpose rather than material. The heart stone provides the spiritual knowledge that enables a man to lead a moral life.

Ville set out on his journey to find out the magical stone from the heart of the sleeping river. During the journey, he came across many mythical creatures like were tigers, widow spirits and the deceiving forest spirits. They were part of Naga oral tradition. Vile's journey seems physical, but in the end, it brings him closer to the knowledge of Naga spirituality.

Through the myth of the sleeping river, Kire portrayed, nature is a living entity, not to be exploited but to be preserved. The stone gives spiritual knowledge to the person who seeks and gets it, and the wisdom of the stone is more spiritual than physical. Selfishness is also not encouraged in the novel.

Mythical archetype of good and evil is found in the novel. Ville could possess the heart stone because his purpose was free from corruption or the evil desire of greed and power; rather, his seeking the stone was a kind of spirituality that would purge his soul and purify his heart. The two sisters: Zote and Ate. Zote was driven by her obsession to take revenge on the villagers who discriminate them, while Ate was compassionate. Zote's obsession for revenge and her malicious use of the stone led her to her destruction.

The journey of Vilie is the most crucial aspect of the novel. It takes the reader to the primitive way of the Nagas, unintruded by modernity. The life that free from all the chaos and problem of the modern World. The novel advocates return to nature, and to renew the harmonious relationship between man and nature. Kire narrative takes us to the lives and hearts of the Naga people.

The novel is powerful and captures the minute detail life of ordinary village people. Nagas live in a society where ecological balance is maintained. For instance, hunting has been an integral part of the Naga people. Despite being a hunter, Vilie does not hunt frequently and even prevents fellow hunters from hunting animals. He protects nature, and in return, nature provides him shelter and a sufficient amount of food. Ville considered 'the forest to be his wife and felt a moral obligation towards it, "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" (Kire 51).

Kira successfully portrays the myths, beliefs, community rituals, and folk traditions of the tribal. It is an effort by the author to re-live that mythical past, the longings of Naga people, to revive their original roots. She has presented a world where people are living in their mythical patterns. The mythical structure in the novel is so much apparent and is in Naga's sense of identity. Naga's myths give identity to the Nagas.

Myths give meaning to the World around them. The novel is an amalgamation of the natural and the supernatural. Rarhuria, "the Unclean Forest"(Kire 51) , is feared by every villager and was studiously avoided coming near the forest. Because of this belief, fear, and Superstitious, the unclean forest is forbidden from human intervention and unexploited.

Tribal people have their mythological way of preserving the forest and maintaining balance. The novel shows how a particular set of moral behavior is prescribed in social, moral values through myths. A myth is different to fable and fairy tale. The most fundamental difference is that myth is that it is almost always grounded in facts. Even the most supernatural mythology in the World must have some fundamental reality. Myths are the individual stories

that are unique to a particular set of people and give that particular person its unique identity. Myths are always related to the cultural past. Kire is trying to present that identity centers around nature. Naga people have high respect for human, animal, and plant. Their belief is even extended to the spirit world. Naga believes there is a spirit every including not only the living but also non- natural thing like forest, river and sky. There are good and evil spirits.

Conclusion:

North-East India has always been on the periphery. Naga as a State has always been Known for its unpleasant past stories: for war or history of insurgency. Through the novel, Kire tried to revive the real Naga world, beliefs, and practices to the outside World through her writing. Linda Degh, in her Paper on *Folk narrative* talks about Magic tales, where the themes center on Man's fascination with a supernatural element. The magic tale is an adventure story with a single hero. Vile encounters the supernatural World and is endowed with the qualities to perform supernatural acts. His story of being the hunter in quest of stone heat was relegated to village mythology and was told and retold by his mate in the novel . There is the use of magic, supernatural elements, and creatures from other worlds. Kire uses her traditional style of folk narrative. She employed the third-person narrative style.

The novel shows the Naga landscape as a living organism. Each place, river, forest has a particular spirit that dwells and looks after them. Each spirit has its own space and respect and never crosses one. Naga tribal believes in two worlds: the human World and the Spiritual World, with a blurred boundary between them. There were men whose spirits had transformed and metamorphosed into tigers, called Weretiger, some turned into giant snakes, and women spirits became monkeys and spirits manifest themselves into man and women.

Kire uses Myth and folklore of Angami Naga to create new Naga perspectives in her writing. She tried to re-interpret Naga tribal life, its society, and their deep relationship with nature. Re-presentation of Myth, orality and folklore for a discussion of contemporary reality

help us for a deeper understanding of the World-order, human relationships and the inter-relationship of human wit nature and the universe.

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