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# VOICES FROM THE MARGINS: POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY IN NORTHEAST INDIAN LITERATURE THE SELECT NARRATIVES OF EASTERINE KIRE AND MAMANG DAI

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***Abstract:***

*This research paper explores the postcolonial narratives from the Northeast Indian literature, focusing on the works of Easterine Kire and Mamang Dai. It delves into how these authors articulate the identity in a region marked by its unique cultural diversity and historical marginalisation. The select narratives of Easterine Kire's Bitter Wormwood (2011) and A Respectable Woman (2019) emphasise Naga identity; Kire's narratives portray the enduring struggle for self-determination and cultural preservation amidst colonial legacies and contemporary challenges. Mamang Dai's The Legends of Pensam (2006) and The Black Hill (2014), on the other hand, weave tales that traverse Arunachal Pradesh's rich tapestry, capturing the tradition and modernity. Dai's writings offer profound insights into the indigenous heritage of the region and the complexities of postcolonialism. This article highlights how Kire and Dai's shed light on the multifaceted facets of postcolonial identity and makes an indelible mark on the global literary landscape.*

***Keywords:*** *Adi, Culture, Identity, Naga, Post-colonialism.*

## Introduction

Writing from Northeast Indian literature is often researched because of its familiarity with political upheaval, beautiful scenery, and ethnic diversity. It is also written about topics like identity and ethnicity, as well as to question the violence that has ravaged their home state. The authors grew up in the shadow of the gun, and their desire to explore the indigenous people's response to the insurgency remains strong. The literature under consideration explores themes that appear to bring together individuals, highlighting the intricate nature of ethnic and geographical boundaries, which are often oversimplified. It suggests the possibility for the emergence of a fresh North Eastern identity, characterised by a greater international orientation and a willingness to embrace the contemporary framework of identity.

Post-colonialism is a phrase used to describe the current depiction of racial, cultural, ethnic, and human identities; particularly after several formerly colonised nations gained their independence. The expansionists' fabricated stereotypes, in which all the derogatory terms (savages, uncouth, apathetic, silly, uninformed, conniving, untrustworthy, unusual, and so on) originated with the pilgrim powers, served two primary purposes in the overarching colonisation project. First, they had to justify their invasion and subsequent misuse of the land they conquered. Second, they had to induce a sense of shame in the indigenous population so that they would actively participate in their own marginalisation and the resultant collective hardships. These are, without a doubt, some of the major plot points that Albert Memmi

dissects in *The Coloniser and the Colonised* (1991). Post-colonialism is a phrase used to describe the depiction of issues of race, ethnicity, human identity, and culture that emerged following the independence of several formerly colonised nations. From the colonial era forward, the term imperialism is derived from the Latin *imperium, which* means numerous things, includes --- power, authority, command, dominion, realm, and empire. (Habib 2005: 737). Postcolonial literature refers to works written and produced in countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Australia, and others following their independence from colonial rule. Edward Said's *Orientalism is* a significant book on how "postcolonial studies" frame Western depictions of Asian cultures. The most well-known essayists from the postcolonial era include Chinua Achebe, Frantz Fanon, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Eavan Boland, Homi K. Bhabha, Salman Rushdie, J. M. Coetzee, Isabelle Allende, Michael Ondaatje, Derek Walcott, V. S. Naipaul, Edward Said, Jamaica Kincaid, and many more.

**Voices from the Margins: Postcolonial Identity in Northeast Indian Literature**

The study looks at how Easterine Kire and Mamang Dai's select narratives depict the postcolonial identity and cultural philosophy of the tribal community under the lens of female leadership. It critiques Northeast Indian history, pointing out bias and prejudiceand questioning their trustworthiness and strength against the milieu of the political and epistemological crisis. Moreover, it has the impact of advocating for interdisciplinary approaches to reconstructing the history of the predominantly nonliterate societies of the Northeast.

Easterine Kire is a well-known author from Nagaland. She is a member of the Naga indigenous people and cleverly uses their history, mythology, and politics as backdrops in her paintings. These reflect the deep love, respect, and attachment she had for her house. She incorporates cultural themes into her works, such as the oral tradition of storytelling in her novels and depicting the post-colonial features of the Naga indigenous population.

Mamang Dai is a novelist, poet, and sometimes journalist. *The Legends of Pensam* is more like a book than a collection of stories because of the intricate web it weaves through many generations of one family. Hoxo, the narrator, his first buddy Rakut, and her friend Mona are just a few of the memorable characters that are steeped in local tribal beliefs and lead precarious lives that are susceptible to spirits, shamans, and the supernatural. Short stories tell of the Adi people's struggle to maintain their cultural traditions while adapting to new circumstances and environments under colonial rule in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Easterine Kire's *Bitter Wornwood* is set against the backdrop of the indigenous people of Nagaland's fight for liberation, and it bridges the gap between the everyday lives of these people and their political past. Through Mose's eyes, the author chronicles the entire struggle and anguish of Nagaland's indigenous people. The sound of the gunshot made Moses feel "the almost daily killings, the young men on the streets calloused by hate and shouting at everyone in sight, and the complete collapse of cultural life" (Kire, 2011: 9-10). Regardless, he learns more as a reconciled underground actor about the brutal annihilation of his relatives by the Indian military and the sluggish exploitation of Naga culture because of factional slaughter.

Essentially, Easterine Kire's *Bitter Wormwood* is an everyday man's account of the Naga liberation movement. The novel's protagonist, Mose, meets Neilhounuo while serving in the Naga National Council (NNC)'s underground cell, where they both seek to liberate Naga people from Indian rule. Vilau and Khrienuo have admitted to killing members of their own community. "The British had left India, and the radio was full of the news of the partition of India. After August 15, there were many reports of Muslims killed in India and Hindus killed in Pakistan... 'Naga Independence' was one of the phrases he had heard." (Kire, 2011: 41-42)

The author also addresses the pervasive problem of Central Indians biased and degrading treatment of those from the North and East, as well as the racism these people endured. The Naga people have also felt the influence of Christianity, which has its roots in post-colonialism. After receiving an education, Moses embraced Christianity and began worshipping the Christian God. "Khricnuo and Vilau were both non-Christians, but Mose had begun to recite the Christian prayers he learnt at school" (Kire, 2011:51).

The author conveys a more balanced tone in the original by telling a story about an Indian warrior named Himmat. Through his friendship with Neibuo, grandson of the Naga warrior (Mose), and Rakesh, grandson of the Indian officer (Himmat), and through the use of smart closures on an optimistic note inferred from the adjusting attitude of this new age, which offers a human answer for a political issue.

In addition, Kire's well-known work, *A Respectable Woman,* deals with such remembrance tales with the intention of instilling a sense of Naga's identity and collective awareness in the minds of younger generations. Specifically, the story revolves around the life of Atsa Bonuo, also known as Kevinuo. The Naga people's life identity was represented like, "The conflict between the Naga Underground and the government of India was still highly volatile and begging a solution. The ceasefire of 1964 had brought some peace, but both sides had accused each other of violating it" (Kire, 2019: 98).

Like other writers from India's Northeast, Naga writers record the stories of people whose lives are often forgotten in the shadowy pages of our country's long and complicated past. This comes from the colonial tradition of ethnographic representation and the search for unity among ethnic and cultural groups in postcolonial times. The Battle of Kohima, sometimes referred to as the Stalingrad of the East, occurred throughout the course of World War II and resulted in profound and lasting social and political disruptions for the Naga community.

It focuses on the history of how the culture and style of the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh changed because of colonial rule in the 19th century. The book primarily recounts the history of the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, focusing on how their culture evolved because of colonial control in the 19th century. The story is based mostly on her travels. The British are the subject of Travel of the Road. The old headman says, "They think we are a village of horror, but it is not true! The leaves of the orange trees glisten. The hills are radiant with the light of the sun. The laughing children tramp down the same steps of stony earth that the soldiers marched up. (Dai, 2006: 55)

But the local soothsayer, Mona, and her husband, Jules, reacted to the British soldier's revelation of the world's nature. The Legend of Adela and Kepi's Silence is a remarkable illustration of the faith that people have. "They are a powerful, successful couple by any estimate—he a famous development scientist and she the proprietor of a glossy magazine, *Diary of the World*, that carries unusual true-life stories." (Dai, 2006: 17-18).

The narrator returned to her previous residence in the town of Gurdum with her companion Mons. Mona consistently sought extraordinary factual narratives to include inside her publication, titled "Diary of the World." Jules, the husband of Mona, is a highly esteemed advanced scientist from France with ancestral roots tracing back to Arab-Greek heritage. Their nomadic lifestyle necessitated regular migration across several countries and continents. The individuals embarked on a collective journey from Gurdum to Duyang, a location that had significance as the birthplace of the maternal narrator. At the location of Duyong, the two sons of Haxo, together with their respective wives and a total of five offspring, convened with the storyteller and Mona. In light of Mona's forthcoming investigation into the regional folklore, Hoxo's grandmother provided her grandson with a comprehensive account of the tragic demise suffered by Kalen the Hunter.

Mamang, who is well-versed in the ancient traditions and myths that shape the lives of the Adis, serves as the primary narrator. The author demonstrates a sincere endeavour to not only depict a dismantled community's worldview as it existed in previous times but also to establish connections and correlations

between the traditions and transformations in the cultural narrative of a tribe as they transition across different historical periods, encompassing the era preceding colonisation by white settlers and extending into the postcolonial era. The book's beautiful nature descriptions are also worthy of praise, and it makes for excellent material for an eco-critical reading analysis.

The desire to go back to one's roots is the desire to rediscover one's true identity. Mamang Dai*'s The Legends of Pensam (2006) is presented as an artefact that serves as a nostalgic keepsake and retrospectively examines historical events to shed light on the current state of affairs.* It effectively illustrates the various alterations that the land has undergone throughout time. Nenem symbolises individuals who have struggled to acclimatise to these transformations, while Sirsiri and Kasup exemplify individuals who have successfully adjusted to the contemporary environment and acquired knowledge of its enigmatic aspects. Rakut states in this section that he engaged in an argument when the change was already well underway. 'Change is a wonderful thing! It is a simple matter of rearrangement, a moment of endless possibilities! Why should we be so afraid? We all want to be happy, but happiness eludes us as we keep thinking about it all the time." (Dai, 2006: 190)

The narrator shifts and rearranges her approach to recording the myths and stories of her country at this point. Because of the gravity of the situation, she decides to abandon her attempt to portray her family to the outside world in her "Diary of the World.". She reorganises herself to reactivate the images of her origin and preserve her native land by catching them on sticky tape, making her search for the root clear as she learns that the clanroot is oratory, the rhapsodists are gone, and the film is a gift of modernity.

In *The Black Hill,* Kajinsha refused his share of the white priest, but he accepted two small statuettes made of wheat and butter that were venerated as sacred objects. When Marpa caught up with him, he begged for him to stay and see his performance, which he knew would be a final ritual. Gimur is a key figure in the story of Kajinsha, a priest who is wandering alone in a village when he finds an unknown person. He is unaware of the boy's identity and is filled with fear and confusion, as he has seen the priest gulping down a bowl of watery rice and looks into his body, white like a fish and covered in flea bites. Moreover, the first report of the killing reached Father Louis Bernard in mid-December 1854, who was later believed to have been Chowsa. Rumours swirled about the crime's motive, with some suggesting it was a case of revenge and others suggesting it was a case of mistaken identity. They eventually linked the incident to the murder of two priests. Gimur and Awesa were sitting on a ridge when they heard a shout.

**Conclusion**

This study has explored the nuanced portrayal of postcolonial identity through the works of Easterine Kire and Mamang Dai from Northeast Indian Literature; their narratives examine the complexity of identity, culture, and history. Both writers are reflections of indigenous voices through their writings. They provide not only insight but also the unique struggles of society. The voice they represent shows how literature serves as a tool for self-expression and cultural reclamation. Ultimately, it contributes to a comprehension of the identities within the Northeastern region and its inhabitants.

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