

CHAPTER – IV

Comparative Study of Easterine Kire and Thomas King as Native Writers

4.1. Approaches in Comparative Literature

Comparative study of literature is essentially a study of similarities and in many parts of the world, the discipline of comparative literature is now defined as cultural studies indicating the broadening of its scope. It deals with the study of literature and cultural expression across linguistic, cultural and national boundaries. Susan Bassnett in her book, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* confirms emphatically that, “Comparative literature involves the study of texts across cultures, that is interdisciplinary and that is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space” (1). Furthermore, the characteristically intercultural and transnational field of comparative literature concerns itself with the relation between literature, and other spheres of human activity, including history, politics, science and philosophy.

Comparative literature transcends the borders of single languages and national literatures. It calls for “a voice of finitude, for the spell between orality and writing, for a dialogue while maintaining the individuality of cultures, for differences to keep the dialogue going and hopes what is human in one culture will be transmitted to the other” (Jones 464). Hence, it is significant to have this source of comparative approach because the present chapter, *Comparative Study of Easterine Kire and Thomas King as Native Writers* gives focal attention to comparative literature highlighting Native voices in the works of Easterine Kire and Thomas King. The objective of comparative study in Kire and King is to portray the similarities in both writers, how they use written orality to retain native language through the

use of native idioms and phrases and, how they exhibit social, historical, political and cultural backgrounds to provide authentic voices of native society. The study intends to describe the constant interplay of similarity and difference that gives meaning to lived experience, and a lived experience that is shaped by multiple historical, traditional and contemporary frameworks which is being explored in myriad ways in native writings. Based on the given findings in the separate two chapters on Easterine Kire and Thomas King, a comparative analysis will now be made under the following captions:

4.2. Orality and the Significance of Storytelling

Orality is a carefully crafted oral presentation. It continues to play its part and is neither old nor obsolete. Oral tales belong to the modern society, figuratively presenting societal values. It deals with known and shared myths and is learnt, inherited and renewed by each generation of performers and each individual performer. Natives make use of this oral mode liberally as a significant literary device to establish discourses that are more authentic and more appropriate to the cultural backgrounds. Native critics and writers are of the view that writing could not exist without orality because of the undeniable movement from oral to written speech. According to the expertist linguist, Walter J Ong, “our understanding of the differences between orality and literacy developed only in the electronic age”, and adds that the relations of orality and literacy and the implications of the relations is not a matter of instant psychohistory or instant phenomenology (2). It calls for a wide, even vast learning, painstaking thought and careful statement. Not only are the issues deep and complex, but they also “engage our biases” (ibidem). Native subject writers, Easterine Kire and Thomas King, are partakers of this oral genre. Both authors, by and large, composed simple language narratives and short sentence structure which imitate ordinary conversations and are

frequently repetitive in their fictional oral tales. For instance, Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered* is a collective narration of a cultural village, Khonoma, an Angami village of warriors who fought the British from the moment of their entry till 1880. King's *Medicine River* is a simple homecoming novel with a flat narrative line depicting ordinary Blackfoot community rather than individuals and it focuses on activities of everyday life instead of a heroic story. King defines this form of narrative by the term 'interfusional literature', a kind of text that demonstrates "the relationship between oral and written literature" (*All My Relations* xii). Another newly developed term by Thomas King is 'associational literature', which refers to the body of literature created by contemporary native writers who share certain features, i.e., the depiction of "the relationship between native people and the idea of community" (ibidem).

Orality is accepted as storytelling and in native literatures, most writers employ features that combine written and oral art. This means native writers like Kire and King consciously manipulate, both, oral and written traditions to frame the literary space, challenging the reader to proceed beyond the confines of the printed page. Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered* has multiple oral approaches in narrating her tale. She goes on with a typical Native voice of an intriguing storyteller:

I could write my story in three different ways.

Like this:

This is the story of our village. Before the white man came, there were wars, my daughter, but these were wars fought with spears and daos. Our men were brave and fearless and they did not like to sit at home, crouched over like old women, but they hungered to prove that they were men...

Or like this:

When I was younger, I heard them tell this tale of a man who climbed up a tree but left his spirit behind him. So then he came home but his spirit did not follow him home And he ailed. So the village people went to the forest...

But I suppose the heart must yield to the head and so.

“Tonight’s the meeting,” hissed the messenger to Kovi as he stood in his compound close by the gate. “The upper thehou after supper” added the man in a conspiratorial whisper before he went off on his errand of informing the rest of his clansmen about the meeting... (xvi -1).

In doing so, Kire encourages the readers to reconsider the traditional conflict of orality and literacy as mutually exclusive terms of both textual and cultural signification. In King’s *Green Grass Running Water*, the shift starts with a mythical figure ‘Coyote’, one which is based on oral indigenous storytelling. It has multi-layered narrations but the primal story belongs to the traditional trickster figure. Coyote was present at the creation time, but was sleeping, and he had a dream. When Coyote dreams, anything can happen, his dream mixed up the whole thing. The narrative “I can tell you that” draws the audience mindset into an orally based thought process (1). Coyote calls his dream to be a ‘dog’ but his ‘Dog Dreams’ wants to be a ‘big god’:

Where did all that water come from? Shouts that GOD.

“Take it easy,” says Coyote. “Sit down. Relax. Watch some television.”

But there is water everywhere, says that GOD.

“Hmmm,” says Coyote. “So there is.”

“That’s true,” I says. “And here’s how it happened.” (ibidem 3)

King’s narration do not only emulate orality but has also initiated the involvement of the audience and make them part of the mythical story. It can be understood that the application

of oral structure enables King to perform a postcolonial act of working against stereotypical assumptions and, instead, to establish a form of discourse that is more authentic and more relevant to their own cultural tradition. As Helen Gilbert in her article, *Describing Orality: Performance and Recuperation of Voice* argues, “orality is practice and a knowledge, a strategic device potentially present in recuperating indigenous voices, potentially effective in describing empire” (101). Kire and King’s narrative largely contains oral dialogues, which facilitate storytellers and readers to take part in oral storytelling performances. In Kire, the emphasis is highlighted in Keviselie’s title taking ceremony. The priests walked out of the first room, paused at the door, and fixed his eyes on Viselie’s house. In a low voice he called, “Keviselie” Viselie was ready and he responded “we-e” in a low voice, the priest called again “Keviselie” in a louder voice getting the same response from the head of the house, “We-e” (ANVR 21). In King, the performances and demonstrations are created through an oral syntax which encourages readers to read the stories aloud or to have an aural reading, as the following quote in *Medicine River* and *Green Grass Running Water* illustrates:

“Johnnnnnnnnnnieeeeeee!”

“Geooooooooooooorggeeeee!”

“Frrrrrrrrrrrrred!” (MR 200).

“oh, oh,”... “hey, hey,” says Coyote. “That’s not what I thought was going to happen. Hey, hey, hey. What are those two doing?”

“Swimming,” I says.

“Oh . . .” says Coyote (GGRW 248-249).

“Look, Look,” says Coyote. “It’s Old Coyote.”

“HMMMM,” I says. “So it is.”

“HMMMM,” says Coyote. “I don’t like the sound of that” (ibidem 300).

Such immediacy in Kire and King’s oral retelling exemplify that Native literature suggests performative storytelling, the “oral lightly assumed in the written” (Lee 462).

Orality is fully natural, in the sense, that every human being in every culture who is not physiologically or psychologically impaired, learns to talk. An African novelist, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, rightly claims that: “Language carries culture and culture carries particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world” (16). Hence, native literature is “blending together the individual and the communal, the commonplace and the spiritual” which reflects a circular rather than a linear way of thinking (Eigenbrod 98). The statement validates Kire and King’s narrative. Their Plots as well as the character developments of the protagonists are cyclic rather than linear. Kire’s novels *A Naga Village Remembered*, *A Terrible Matriarchy*, *Bitter Wormwood*, and *When the River Sleeps* are typical examples of such narratives as the central focus lies on community activities. The individual character though present in Kire, act and are active only as a participant within the sway of the traditional community. The first novel, *A Naga Village Remembered* voices the indefeasible spirits of a pre-Christian world of rituals, taboos and festivals and the cultural life that sustained the village in spite of European Christian intrusion in later years. *A Terrible Matriarchy* echoes the socio-cultural fabric of community and the concentrated matriarchal domination in traditional society. *Bitter Wormwood* is a collective voice of native communal fight for autonomy, sovereignty and survival. *When the River Sleeps* has abundant supernatural and figurative elements. Kire has adapted cultural analogies, symbols and metaphors from native oral literatures to fit into the cyclic story and so, the narrative in *When the River Sleeps* starts with a mystical dream of the

protagonist, Vilie. Ever since he had first heard the story of the sleeping river, he had the same dream every month for the past two years. Ate explains:

Vilie kept dreaming repeatedly that he was at the sleeping river plucking the stone from the river water. He felt sure he was designed to get the stone, and that is why he went on the journey and he did find the river and the heart stone. The wisdom of the stone is more spiritual than physical. It helps us discover the spiritual identity that is within us, so we can use it to combat the dark forces that are always trying to control and suppress us (238).

Kire's orality is understood more broadly as a form of knowledge production encompassing community practices and process of meaning making. It insists on a close link between the corporeal aspects of life and survival. Comparatively, the novel of King's *Green Grass Running Water* is structured heavily on some important tribal features, orality and is cyclical. The story has a dualism that is present throughout, starting with Coyote and Dog. In *Green Grass Running Water*, Coyote is the trickster of Native American tradition, whereas Dog thinks that he is "God" but is merely a dream of Coyote's (2). King's use of a broken and discontinuous narrative creates a sense of movement and the effects of oral storytelling. The rapid interpolation of different storyline does succeed in keeping the reader's attention. *Green Grass Running Water* has four different strands. Each story being only obliquely related, as told by four timeless American Indian women or gods. In each of these retellings, the four originally starts with a mythical figure from Native American oral tradition. They then encounter Dog posing as 'God' and take names after Biblical characters: First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman and Old Woman. They also come across a Western literary figure and each takes new names: Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, and Hawkeye respectively. Interestingly, all these characters and storylines converge in two climatic events at the end of the story, a Sun Dance Ceremony and the bursting of Grand Baleen Dam, giving unity to the matrix of native oral discourse.

Storytelling is particularly significant among native community because it contains history usually of a communal event and it illustrates the sense of collectivity and shared property. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, Kire does not only insert stories from everyday life, but mainly of stories which have been passed on from generation to generation and, hence, carry cultural specific meaning. For instance, the elder tells a story about Khriesenu and his ladylove by way of warning to those who dare to disregard a genna. Khriesenu took her to the forest on a genna day. She accidentally broke her leg and died. This story is clearly an example of the use of stories for didactic purposes. In another novel, *When the River Sleeps*, Kire introduces stories from her tribal background. However, she changes them to make them fit into modern society. For example, she includes the story about the sleeping river, a lone hunter, Vilie, who sets out to find the river and wrest from its sleeping waters a stone that will give him whatever it is empowered to grant. It could be cattle, women, prowess in war, or success in the hunt, “the retrieved stone is a powerful charm called a heart-stone” (3). Likewise, Lionel, a character in King’s *Medicine River* transforms a story about Coyote to fit a contemporary context. He recounts how Coyote went over to the west coast to get some fire because he was cold. Coyote ran along until his feet hurts, and pretty soon he was in the trees and the prairies were behind when he felt sleepy and decided to lie down for a while. Raven saw Coyote, she flew down, and sat on a limb near where Coyote was trying to go to sleep, and she said, “You can’t sleep here unless you got a credit card” (165). King also inserts episodes of the protagonist Will’s childhood experience, recounted by his mother when she would get in a storytelling mood. Most of the stories were about when he was a little child. Each time she tells her stories: “they got larger and better” (ibidem 124). King, here, uses stories to reflect on the past and, at the same time, to compare it with events happening in the present which constitute a comment on the relatedness of story and history. By inclusion of such stories, the fictionists point out that there is “no distinction

between past and present, history and story” (Eigenbrod 93). According to a native belief system, history is only a story. It is often stated that a native perceives tradition to be flexible and adaptable. Nevertheless, traditions are modified according to the changing circumstances in society, which is essential for survival as a cultural group. According to Gail Valaskakis, reviving cultural traditions is “not a case of retrieving recollections; it is a process of transforming memory” (245). This interest in “relearning and rediscovering” is a necessary step in the struggle to regain the historical consciousness that is vital for establishing ethnic identity (Karrer and Lutz 34). In King’s *Medicine River*, Harlen Bigbear’s storytelling and relentless gossiping have the role of taking care of the members of the community. Right from the introduction of Harlen’s character, King has attributed him as having a “strong sense of survival, not just for himself but for other people as well” (2). Like the spider, he repairs the web of community wherever it is damaged because of his constant awareness that, “People are fragile” (ibidem 29). He takes great care with how he talks to people, and he move towards truth with careful consideration. He always circles slowly around his point because he is “temperate in his insistence on the whole truth all at once” (ibidem 168). Harlen explains that, “the truth’s like a green-broke horse,” and developing the simile, advises caution because the truth can harm and hurt others, “you never know which way it’s going to run or who it’s going to kick” (ibidem). While he is cautious about how he says things, Harlen is also open. Will finds him to be, “more concerned with the free flow of information than with something as greedy as personal privacy” (ibidem 173). Harlen’s storytelling involves multi-layered meanings. He establishes with his listeners, including Will, the kind of interaction that the orally influenced narrative establishes with the reader. Reminiscent of the character of Harlen Bigbear in King’s *Medicine River*, Kire in *A Naga Village Remembered*, has also cast her character Levi in a colossal mould. He is a strong member of the village community, a householder with children after his name and has communal responsibility. He

symbolizes the courage with which a man could meet the arrows of misfortune and still contribute to the life of the village. As the membership of Christian converts grew in numbers and the little band continued to be the subject of sharp ridicule and persecution by the mother village. Kovi was one man who pondered deeply over the teachings of the new religion. He saw there was goodness in it. However, considering the influential cultural weightage of his community, he did not feel it was appropriate for a man like him, an elder and a titled member of the village to embrace the new religion. But he often watched the ostracism of the converts and wondered how things could have so changed in his lifetime. Kire and King's short stories are, once more, comparable in their cultural retelling. In Kire's *Once in a Faraway Dorg*, the dorgels led a happy life, singing and making new songs to sing. They ate the round fruits on the trees with blue and red flowers. They could also eat round eggs laid by white birds that came to the planet once every week for the sole purpose of laying egg food for the dorgels. Things were going very well and King Dorgot reminiscent of origin stories, spent his time thinking of new animals to create that would give joy to people. King's *Coyote New Suit* is another entertaining story set at the beginning of time when animals and human beings are still said to converse with each other. Thomas King has drawn ideas on native own cultural tradition that is popularly based on oral storytelling regarding their myths, legends and tales. Inspired by the rich folklore of native cultures, King's myth is a wise fable and entertaining look at the consequences of wanting more than needed. Coyote who becomes obsessive in stealing other suits because Raven had told him that his, "tan isn't a very exciting color" (3). The story began in the form of cultural oral narratives:

A long time ago when animals and human beings still talked to each other, Coyote had a wonderful suit that he wore everywhere he went.

Each morning Coyote would walk down to the pond. "Look at my suit," Coyote told everyone he saw, stopping only to hug himself and blow kisses at

his reflection in the water. “Isn’t it the finest suit you’ve ever seen? I must be the best-dressed creature in the entire world”.

One day when Coyote got to the pond, he found Raven sitting on a branch.

“Good morning,” he said. “What are you doing here?”

“Oh, I thought I’d come by to see if anyone needed my help,” said Raven.

“As a matter of fact,” said Coyote, “you could be very helpful. What do you think of my suit? Isn’t it the most excellent suit you’ve ever seen?”

Raven flapped her wings and stretched her neck. It’s okay, I guess,” she said.

“Okay?” said Coyote. “It is certainly more than okay.”

“Actually,” said Raven, “it’s pretty ordinary. And tan isn’t a very exciting color” (ibidem 1-2).

The cultural story thus continues with Coyote noticing suits wherever he looks, Bear’s is certainly impressive, Porcupine’s is sporty, Raccoon’s is positively chic and Skunk’s is perfect for formal occasions. Then Coyote had an idea. It was not a good idea but then most of the Coyote’s ideas were not, “Perhaps,” thought Coyote, “I should borrow this suit for a while” (ibidem 4). Soon, the forest is in an uproar. When the situation threatens to get completely out of hand, only Raven is made to set things right giving its pride to cultural attachment. Stories deeply capture attention and help to reflect back upon one’s reactions and actions. As a form, it is no wonder that narrative is the primary means for passing knowledge within tribal traditions, for it suits the fluidity and interpretative nature of ancestral ways of knowing. The addition of storytelling such as these is, seen as a trait of native literature because native writers have a broader and more inclusive conception of literature, which stems from a long-lasting oral heritage. They aim at an inclusion of the readers, who need to listen and respond to the texts in order to contribute to a communal storytelling experience, or to respond to an orality that understands native voice and its wider cultural worldview.

4.3. Evocative Writers of Cultural Tradition, Community and Land

Cultural tradition is the inherited or learned portion of human behavior. In other words, culture is a concept that lies at the core of all human understanding, inherited and nurtured. Cultural formations are determined as much as by socio-economic factors, political systems, as they are by the inherited tradition of creativity in each society. Frantz Fanon observes that: “National culture can discover the people’s true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself its existence” (69). Kire and King are both evocative writers of this cultural tradition and their fictional works carry an interesting voices on the cultural life of the native folks. Comparably, Kire perceptively writes about place and people that she knows well and brings to the cultural storytelling a lyrical beauty that inhabits the hills and valleys of Nagaland. Kire’s popular novels *A Naga Village Remembered*, *Mari*, *Bitter Wormwood*, and *When the River Sleeps*, all have rural settings and each has an account that depicts the everyday life of common natives. *A Naga Village Remembered* is a typical example. It takes us into the interior of the house of the protagonist, Kovi, enjoying his morning meal in a wide wooden plate with “separate spaces carved for meat and tathu. Its wooden legs were convenient, one could carry hot food about and not burn one’s fingers by using this facility” (2). And within this focus, the cultural tradition of the village community is unveiled. There is the ritual of child birth, and claiming the newborn before the spirits, the ritual of death, reminiscent of hunts, battles and ornaments of war, the rituals of initiation and learning the basic necessity of life. There are various activities like fieldwork, firewood dragging or cutting logs for new houses, and basket weaving that give a peep into the cultural life as well. The whole idea of this form of existence can be amassed through the careful dictates of Piano to her sons:

There'll be enough time later for bird shooting after the field is done. Son, when our granaries are filled you may feel free to trap or shoot all the birds you want but remember, a household is not worthy of its name if its granaries are empty. The sun and the rain are the Creator's blessings. They rain and shine in turn for us to make our fields and get our harvests. War is a part of village's life but if we have grain, we can withstand war. If we do not have grain, a few days of war will overcome us (ibidem 10).

The need to trace the life pattern of the ancestors becomes necessary to understand fully the traditional culture of the natives and it is amazing that Kire as an attentive writer has given encompassing presentation to this intricacy of cultural output. Likewise in King's novels, *Medicine River* and *Green Grass Running Water*, the cultural traditions of native community are exhibited in the forefront. For example, *Medicine River* begins with a description of the landscape or cultural town of Medicine River: "Medicine River sat on the broad back of the prairies. It was an unpretentious community of buildings banked low against the weather that slid off the eastern face of the Rockies" (1). Such an emphasis is, directed to communicate a strong cultural attachment of natives to nature and to their natural environment. The story offers an understanding of one's individuality in relationship to the ecology of the place and the community. Native concept of nature is that of a holistic one, being close to nature give natives the feeling that they are at home. *Medicine River* encourages sensitivity towards cultural make-up. The presence of Native American cultural hero or trickster figure, 'either good or bad', confirms King's tryst in the understanding of cultural worldviews of the natives. He has introduced Harlen Bigbear, a modern figure, to display the typical cultural ambivalence of a trickster. It is said of him that, "nothing happened on the reserve or in town that Harlen didn't know about" (ibidem 26). Harlen highlights the importance of getting back to the roots, and family. His dictum, "Nothing more important than the family", serves as a didactic feature in defining the nature of native cultural structuring, tribal history and cultural existence (ibidem). There is the presence of non-native characters in King's writing, unlike

Kire, who has only native persons as her main characters. But what is similar with both writers, is of how culture is basically shared through family lineage and relationships that extends even to all animate and inanimate forms. King's introduction to *All My Relations* elucidates this point:

'All my relations' is at first a reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and relatives. It also reminds us of the extended relationship we share with all human beings. But the relationship that Native people see go further, the web of kinship extending to the animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined. More than that, 'all my relations' is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have within this universal family by living our lives in harmonious and moral manners (a common admonishment is to say of someone that they act as if they have no relations) (ix-xvi).

Such declaration by King generates an idea that natives are, by nature, a cooperative communal society. Community is a central factor that moves cultural tradition forward. Among natives, the relationship between community and land is closely and synonymously tied to each other. The reference to one invokes the reference to the other as well. Land is an inextricable part of native identity, deeply rooted in moral and spiritual values. Hence, in King's *Medicine River*, the native community and the land influence the protagonist, Will Horse Capture, in a way that he can finally accept his identity. He gets a better picture of the community through fragmented photographs of his childhood and the accounts of his native friends. He eventually feels closer to people around him. Will realizes that there is nothing more important than the family. Here, the family may not mean the sharing of direct blood ties but it rationally means the ties within community. Will is, accordingly, portrayed as "always helping someone, takes pictures of all the weddings" (159). Harlen is one, "who sees the good in everyone and is always trying to help" (ibidem 25). Lionel James as one storyteller who travels all over and "knows everyone" (ibidem 161). The centrality of the

story lies on community rather than individual welfare. *Medicine River* describes a close-knit community in which people are familiar with each other's intimate family lineage:

Big John Yellow Rabbit was Evelyn Firstrunner's blood nephew. Her father had married Rachel Weaselhead, which made Harley Weaselhead, Big John's great grandfather on his grandmother's side, which meant that Eddie Weaswlhead, whose grandfather was Rachel's brother, was blood kin to Big John (ibidem 50).

There is, again, the Native Friendship Centre Warriors and its basketball team, which builds up the intimacy of the native community. The native Friendship Centre is a communal meeting place where all activities like dances, bingo games, weddings and funerals take place. Harlen, the driving force of this community web talks about the significance of the basketball team and, indirectly, about the native community as follows: "The team gives the boys something to belong to, something they can be proud of (ibidem 22). By supporting the team and by taking part in several competitions, Will becomes a member of a group in which he plays a vital role as a father figure for some of the boys.

As pointed out earlier, the strong attachment of the people to the native land is exemplified by their connection to the Chief Mountain of how when they can see the mountain, they know they are home. Will lived in Toronto for the major phase of his adult life, but the place does not bond him as *Medicine River* does. The identification of Will within the cultural community comes symbolically at Christmas time, when Will has established a close relationship with Louise and his friends. There is a mood of happiness as Will walks outdoor and enjoys nature: "the day had started out overcast, but standing at the kitchen window, I could see that the winter sun was out now and lying low on *Medicine River*. Later that afternoon, I went for a long walk in the snow" (ibidem 249). These lines represent the new connection Will has established with his friends, family and with natural

world around him, anchoring himself as an individual within the cultural community and the natural land giving him a feeling of comfort and belongingness. As Mackie writes, “Will eventually finds his vocation in life and in the process finds the sustenance and enrichment that he needs in the community of Medicine River, in the shadow of Ninastiko” (65-71).

In Kire’s *A Naga Village Remembered*, Levi strongly identifies himself with the community and the land. He is a pillar of community, a titled member who had earned a name and ornaments of war at the battle of Khonoma. Kire attributes him with a power that is muscular and ranked him as one of the bravest warriors of the Merhu clan who fought the mighty British colonial power. Kire explains the significance of village land through the perceptive emotions of Levi. When, finally, Levi returns after six long years from Jail, he felt good to be back in the village, to be among his people. He saw his village with new eyes, a bonding so deep that he muse the ancestral land to be his ‘mistress’. What is noteworthy is the fact that for natives, land does not only mean possessions but also connotes a spiritual and cultural site. Levi reflects: “That was what this village did to her men; she bonded them to her so strongly that they were always striving to prove themselves men enough for her. Perhaps, that was the explanation for the thirst that drove them out onto the battlefield soul-thirsty for the danger, and the thrill of coming so close to death” (40). Levi was touched by the way imprisonment had affected the village. He could not get over the transformation of his carefree young companions into households getting ready for the next phase of their lives, shouldering the burdens of the clan as ‘tsudamia’. He took in everything that he saw and heard willingly, if this process was to be part of life, then, he was more than happy to absorb it and start all over again.

Reverence for land is so deeply ingrained that natives regard nature with utmost respect. The native community maintains ‘Land’ as ‘Mother’ and calls it “Mother Earth”, and trace their origin back to it and claim harmonic belongingness with the land (Imsong 199). In

King's *Medicine River*, Harlen also says; "You are standing on Mother Earth" (15). As such in *When the River Sleeps*, as earlier shown Kire gives more symbolic attribute to the 'village' as a place where one buries a mother. The term 'Village' and 'land' has same connotation. It is thus, applied interchangeably in Kire's fiction. Land is not only the source of sustenance for them, but also at the heart of their existential consciousness. Therefore, the puritan sensation of one's attachment to the village is drawn once more through the explanations of Subale:

She explained that more and more of the young people were moving away to the towns like Dimapur or Peren. They found it too difficult to live as their parents did walking back and forth. The village had approached the government to construct a road, but the politicians told them the government did not have the money to make a road to the village.

"This is our home, do you understand? We cannot abandon and try to live in another place. Our umbilical cords are buried here, and we would always be restless if we tried to settle elsewhere" (87-88).

Kire's protagonist, Vilie, is a seasoned forest dweller who had made forest as his home for twenty-five years as though wedded to it. The portrayal of Vilie as guardian of the gwi and official protector of the rare Tragopan is a stirring insight that captures a native's close association with nature. The forest is seen as a protective haven that provided Vilie with almost all necessities and often content, he utters, "The forest is my wife", and he felt truly wedded to her (ibidem 9).

Kire is very conscious in her tribal understanding of land as sacred. She attributes the same awareness in Vilie as he deliberates on a child's prospect of education: "What could school possibly teach him that his parents could not improve upon? They were rich in their knowledge of the ways of the forest, 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" (ibidem 15).

In the novel, Kire portrays the close relation of the land and the people to show the communion between the two. Native communities view traditional land as the “heartland of their culture”, supporting a distinct way of life, traditions and people (Ross and Smith 2). They wish to gain and exercise control over forest in such a way that the growth of the forest resources conforms to their own values and knowledge systems and is not economically but also ecologically and culturally sustainable. In Kire’s hand, the very glimpse of Nettle forest that grew very high, some as tall as trees in the heart of the forest, or the unclean Rainforest dark and dank attracts our attention with a touch of realism. The Rainforest is mysterious and people diligently shun coming near the forest. Those who accidentally wandered into the ‘*Rarhuria*’ get unexpected fever and label the Rainforest as ‘unclean area’ in village terminology. However, for Vilie this scary ‘*Rarhuria*’ becomes his guardian as he runs for safety when chased by assassin. For Vilie this forest was a boon, it provided him with the safest sanctuary when he most needed it and offered him food when his rations were inadequate. The forest also protected him from the evil in the heart of man. Vilie felt the forest was “his wife indeed” (WRS 51). One has to be careful of the ways of the forest, as a character, Krishna, tells Vilie: “Saab, the forest is dangerous to those who do not know it, but it can be kind to those who befriend it” (ibidem 20). This communication also acts like a kind of counsel to a non-native or an outsider who is unaware of native traditional culture because native people affirmed their cultural, social, political, and religious voice based on their concept of land. Consequently, their labour is not one of plunder and exploitation, forcing the land to be productive, but to work with care and partake of what she provides. The traditional people’s abstention from work itself is a symbolic sign of their cooperation with the creative activity of land. The observations of *genna* (no work days) in the traditional culture of the native community as reflected in Kire’s novels, show the intensity of the natives attachment to the land. ‘*Genna*’ is a respectful ritual observed to propitiate *Kepenuopfu* (Creator) first

and, then, the spirits who could cause ill to come upon man, animals, grains, if this propitiation is not offered. In *Bitter Wormwood*, Khrienuo and Vilau, carried cooked food and went late to the field on a fire-genna day. Though both are convert Christians, they still obey the dictate of genna days of the non-Christians. The modern native societies continue to be Christians without totally shaking off their rich cultural heritage inherited from their non-Christian ancestors.

King's *Green Grass Running Water* represents 'Land' as the base of all unity. It tells a creation story, the beginning of time, when all creatures, humankind and animals, are symbiotically connected. For example, Coyote, the trickster God, and the Four Mythical Indians in King's novel freely interact with the real characters. The mythical figures' repeated mention of "fixing up the world" and participation in the affairs of the Blackfoot citizens in Alberta is a kind of cultural contest that explains the native and non-native people's attitude towards land (428). Land treaties regarding, "as long as the grass is green and the water runs" is a sort of agreement that would only be considered legal for a limited period and then jettisoned (ibidem 296). In other words, treaties were signed when it was in the interest of the colonial powers, and once those interests were met, there was no incentive to meet the conditions of the treaties. But whatever the matter, King says: "as long as there are Indians, there will be a plethora of 'Indian things' 'Indian land' 'Indian rights' 'Indian resources' and 'Indian claims'" (*The Truth about Stories* 129-130). Hence, the struggles by native communities for obtaining their land rights goes down in history as one of the systematically fought battles for native land rights. This struggle stems from the fact that native people consider that their land ownership comes from "having lived upon and used the land when the world was new" (Indira 70-71). King's technique of using humorous derision in his novels is also a kind of remedy to correct exoticisation and stereotyping of Indians or First Nations of Canada. The western figures cannot accept native autonomy and seek to reclassify

the Old Indians according to their own ideologies. For instance, in Hawkeye stories, when Old Woman encounters Young Man walking on Water, he tries to cast her as a witness to one of his miracles. He fails to perform the miracle and she has to do it for him. In another story, Thought Woman meets A.A Gabriel, Heavenly Host, whose business card sings a parodic version of the national anthem: “Hosanna da, our home on Natives land” (*GGRW* 299). Gabriel asks Thought Woman, whom he addresses as Mary, to sign a ‘Virgin Verification Form’. Gabriel’s insistence that she sign the paper points to the inextricable interconnection in the history of land. In *Green Grass Running Water*, Eli Stands Alone begins to understand the possibilities of resistance to racist stereotyping and injustices against native. He returns to the reservation land, moves into his family home, and obtains an injunction to prevent it from being demolished to allow a newly built dam to go into operation, which, in turn, would allow lakefront developments on native land. He opposes the building of modern dam on native land because this natural course of waterway is important to Blackfoot tradition. Eventually, the water is restored to its natural course due to the involvement of Coyote. Clifford Sifton dam bursts, because an earthquake throws three cars into it. The cars are controlled by Coyote, who also causes the earthquake which destroys them, thus enacting a seizure of power from the colonists. Coyote’s power and that of the native goddesses, viz, First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman and Old Woman, far outstrips that of the Christian God, who features in the interspersed creation story but has no influence outside them. ‘Coyote’ is a comic liberator in a narrative. It is the spirit of the trickster creator that keeps Indians alive and vital. In *King*, it is used to find a balance between cultural traditions by exposing the truth and falsity in all of them. The multiple story of *Green Grass Running Water* is, accordingly, aimed to engage readers in mutual decolonization and “seeks to challenge their potentially stereotyped and undifferentiated understandings of native cultural tradition” (Hammill 56).

4.4. Political and Socio-Religious Concerns

The idea that literature is an expression of society in large measure, is undeniably true of native literature because a native author writes with an aim to represent a particular social reality. Easterine Kire and Thomas King are two examples of such native writers who expediently bring out the social documents of natives for the rest of the world to see. For Kire, it would mean honest depiction of social truth. Not her “version of the truth but an objective truth” even if it paints an “unattractive picture of the conflict and of the people who became its prisoners” (“Kire in Network News.” www.icorn.org). As such, with King it implies the honest portrayal of day-to-day life of native society in a predominantly white culture. His works act as a normalizing corrective to the image of native society.

To understand the expanse of native society, it is also important to include their religion because religion captures and dominates the structure of society. Knowledge of a society can be obtained through its religion as it controls both conscious and unconscious activities of man. In traditional society, religion necessarily has a social dimension and it contains prescriptions for man’s social behavior. For instance, Kire’s native person belongs to agricultural society, and they believed that the sun and rain are the creator’s blessings for good harvests because He is pleased. The chief livelihood of the native in Kire’s society is farming and thus they always try to please *Ukepenuopfu* (the creator deity) for abundant harvest. Besides sacrifices and prayers, one must have good conduct towards his fellow human beings, creatures, objects and things in nature to please the creator deity. Such teaching of native Elders in Kire’s *A Naga Village Remembered* has this ethical value attached to it when one hears the admonishing voice that the key to right living is to avoid excess in anything. To be content with one’s share of land and fields and that to move boundary stones bring tragic consequences, never to be arrogant but respect oneself

sufficiently and fulfill the responsibilities of manhood. The natives also believe in the existence of a super power in nature, hence they appease many localized spirits both benevolent and malevolent. For instance, on the decline of the full moon, *Terhase*, a ritual of making peace with the spirits is held. The genna days consist of seven days against the field's failure to bear grain and failure to ripen. Elders make a kind of petition or of obtaining a pact with the spirit for goodwill. Instances, have been pointed out where elder offers chicken sacrifice to appease the spirits, like when Siezo suffers a spirit-induced sickness. As the native customs and cultures are directly or indirectly connected with agriculture, it is the centre of all their social activities. In another sense, all social activities are rooted in religion and vice-versa.

The religious dimension in Kire's society can also be traced through various festivals, and ceremonies like, *Ngonyi* which is a festival of rest from fieldwork, festival of community hunting and fishing, feast of merit for titled family, initiation ceremony of young age groups etc. In Thomas King's works, the religious element has also been observed in the native rituals and festivals. It slightly differs from the native rituals of Kire's society because of King's intermixture presence of white society. During Sun Dance rituals, native societies congregate, their freedom interrupted only by the ceremonies. King's protagonist, Eli, in *Green Grass Running Water* vividly remembers how his mother would close the cabin every July and move the family to the Sun Dance. He gives an elaborate interpretation of the Native Sun Dance through his active participation. Eli helps other men set up the tepee, and rides horses with some kids in the camp, but of all, he liked the men's dancing. In another novel *Truth and Bright Water*, King mentions the native festival of Indian Days, a festival of giving and socialization. Tecumseh talks about it of how tourists who show up for Indian Days would get almost anything they want from beaded belt buckles to acrylic paintings of the

mountains, drawings of old-time Indians on horseback, deer-horn knives, bone chokers etc. Its authenticity in a modern setting is established thus:

And all of it, according to the signs that everyone puts up, is 'authentic' and 'Traditional.' Fenton Bull Runner and his wife Maureen make dream catchers out of willow shoots and fishing line. Edna Baton runs a fry bread stand. Lucille Rain and her sister Teresa do bead work. Jimmy Hunt and his family sell cassettes of old-time powwow songs....

Other artist come in from places like Red Deer, Medicine River, Hobbema, or from across the line, Browning, Missoula, Flathead Lake. Some of them rent the booths that the bands puts up just below the big tent, and some of them sell off the back of their pickup trucks. A few just spread their blankets on the grass and wait for the tourists to wander over (209).

Another premise in which native society can be explained is through the communal structure. Firstly, the basic social unit among native is the family. It has been taken up how Kire shows that family is an important cementing factor. Her stories give many examples of it. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, we see how a brother's widow and the sons are always provided with large meat shares at all festivals, and care taken to fulfill a missing father's role. In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, the family cares for the old members. The extended family rallies around the elderly when they need assistance. Sizo is said to have provided for Bano so that she will get some money from his pension all her life. Family members and close relatives support each other when there is a marriage, or death and funeral rituals are to carry out. Everything is a family affair. In *Mari*, the protagonist Mari's baby is taken care by her family who also advice the new mother down to the last details of nursing an infant. In *Bitter Wormwood*, Vilau received help from her in-laws and male relatives when she is a young widow found it difficult at times to till the fields alone. *Life on Hold* cautiously depicts patriarchal tradition where the eldest son in the family prepares himself to take on the responsibility after the death of his father. Traditional wisdom on collective welfare which

entails personal sacrifice is seen in the way Zeu sacrifices his own happiness for the bliss of his family in *Life on Hold*, when he finds the weight of his father's debts to be always all-absorbing, and decides that in no way would he have children and "let them grow up with the same burden" (77). In King's story, too, we find native characters repeatedly saying, "Nothing more important than the family" and that being related was more important than some small differences of opinion (MR 26). In *Green Grass Running Water*, Lionel, the protagonist, is identified to be someone more than a friend, "he's family" (44). Likewise, in *Truth and Bright Water* King shares the attachment of two cousins, Tecumseh and Lum, striving to live up to the expectations of their dreams. Lum who is preparing for a race to be held during Indian Days festival is also a kind of symbolic unification that protected all native family together.

The second social unit is the community. Here the role of elders as storytellers to guide and educate the younger members in the society is paramount. They imbibe knowledge on communal living and act as keeper of people's memories and performers of rituals. In Kire and King's narrative, elders play an active role and closely observe the growth and development of individuals within the social settings. Elders in Kire's narrative are decision makers and initiator of all rituals. They have duties to instruct and train younger man on the paths of life. For example, In *A Naga Village Remembered*, elders had instructed Vilau during the ritual that lasted for five days. They have assisted him to complete his first tiger kill rituals. Again, the clan elders of Thevo and Thepa had initiated the ritual ceremony of Keviselie's feast of merit. It is the elders who had negotiated the treaty after the war with the British. Pelhu, a respected elder of Khonoma offered a male tragopan. The British General took from Pelhu his bird, 'a token of peace'. Then they sat and talked, "the treaty was concluded between village representatives of Khonoma and representatives of the British Government at Mezoma on the 27th March 1880" (86). In *Bitter Wormwood* Khrienuo's

decision to allow her grandson inherit her house, is the empowered voice of an elder who is required to settle family property, ancestors lands or fields. Elders also act as custodian of the customary laws of the land or village administrations. Kire's *Mari* offers a concise manner of such elders' law settlement. Mari, goes to the to the village council, as was the custom, and registered her two children, following which, they were legally accepted by and adopted into a tribe. In King's narrative, the elders act as harbingers of native stories. They tell stories of the native past and present, and try to rectify the misconceptions about natives. In *Medicine River*, Lionel is considered to be a good storyteller, who tells stories about how Indians used to be. He is happy that Indian stories are getting its due recognition in the outside world. King's narrative, too, reveals that in a native community it is the elders who guide a wayward native person back to his social roots. So also, Floyd's grandmother replaces her dead son by adopting Will as her son. She invites Will to join the family photograph, paving the way for Will's acceptance and recognition within the native society.

Kire and King also emphasized the political issues concerning the native society. In Kire, it is the ideological differences that existed between the native Nagas and the British colonizer, and in later years with the Indian government. There is, yet again, the ideological difference that surfaced within the Naga society and vied for political sovereignty. Kire's, *A Naga Village Remembered* chronicles the advent of British colonization into Nagaland and their disruption of the social and cultural life of the Nagas. The introduction of formal education and Christian religion by the colonial ruler and white missionaries weakened the traditional pattern of Naga society. Kire has given the paradigm of it, in *A Naga Village Remembered*, there is the conversion of natives and ostracism meted out to the new converts of Christianity. Sato is the vivid example of a native warrior's son who has attended the Mission school run by the white man and is influenced by their religion, the tenets of Christianity. Being a warrior's son, Sato's decision to follow the new religion is not accepted.

His father, who sees it as a betrayal by a son, disowns him. Religion being the nucleus of all human activities, the slow conversion of native people to Christianity (a new religion) has altered the pattern of native living. The colonial contact has set off the self-governance and self-rule policy because the natives of Nagaland have existed independently, free from any outside interference before the arrival of the British into their village territories. At first, the natives tried to fight the domination of the foreign rule but the white proved too powerful for resistance, this resulted in the white man's entrenchment until the period 1947 when India got its independence from British Rule. The political issue of Naga independence commenced again with the taking over of power by the Indian government. The British left without settling the political claim of the Nagas and so its political ideal of self-government resumed with greater force. The Nagas identified as ethnic people see Indian society as completely different from them. They were strangers in matters of culture, food, habits, language, religious beliefs etc. Failure to accept each other is clearly voiced out by Kire in *Bitter Wormwood*, in the words of Neibou:

I know that, I am Indian on paper because when I fill up a form and they ask for my nationality, I have to write Indian. But many of my Northeastern friends believe that they are ethnically Indians, and when they meet this kind of treatment, they are so traumatized by it. It's deep rooted racism and its very ugly. The name-calling, the stereotyping of our girls and the way the police refuse to protect the victim, it just makes me feel very hopeless about the rights we have been promised by the Indian constitution. Becoming a state in India did not really change anything much. Now we keep encountering maltreatment from the civilian population in place of what we faced earlier at the hands of the army. I doubt things will ever change. In Mumbai, a man attacked and killed a Naga girl. In Pune, five Naga boys were beaten badly by a mob. Yet the government still insists we are all Indians and tries to ignore the racism (208).

It voices the intolerable militarism who kills innocent civilians and create a reign of terror, first by the Indian army and, later, the infighting of factionalist groups in Nagaland. There is a running mockery of one feeling frustrated at the way things are. Neilhounuo utters sadly: “I mean, we have had the war with India hanging over our heads all our lives. But to have our own men killing each other, and terrorizing us is unbearable” (ibidem 164). The conversation between Mose and Neituo reflects the dilemma of the people on all fronts:

First, we were fighting Indian occupation from 1947 and doing a good job of it until factionalism entered in 1975. Then we were plagued by infighting that made everyone think we were quite mad because the factionalism made Naga kill their fellow Nagas. Then the Indian government used the lure of money to destroy our integrity and impose Indian citizenship on us. Now we have all sorts of complications. Naga children are being taught they are Indians but when they go to the Indian cities they are completely alienated by the Indian populations. Another problem is home grown state terrorism. We have seen the growth of the Indian Reserve Battalions and their fearfully abusive conduct, and now we have almost come full circle because people today fear the Indian army less than they fear their own men! As for the Indian army, they don't have it so good either.... some of the Indian soldiers of yesterday are victims of extreme angst, traumatized by what they had experienced in the Naga Hills (ibidem 212).

In spite of all these unresolved conflicts and worries, Kire's native society are found to have tough spirits and they try to cope up with the political turmoil that still haunts them. Neibou, a character, in *Bitter Wormwood* declares: “We have to find human solutions to all these problems that have been engendered by political conflicts. After all, it is people who matter and not some stupid political theory” (ibidem 209).

In King's writings the political concerns of the native society springs out from varied issues of representation and misrepresentation. There are the border issues, land rights and the stereotypical portrayal in western literary canon. Border plays an ambiguous role in the

lives of contemporary native society. King's story tends to focus on the problematic legacy of border. His short-story *Borders* is about a native woman who refuses to align herself with either Canada or the United States. Similarly, *Truth and Bright Water* is set on the boundary between two towns, one in the United States and the other in Canada and engages a variety of significant refiguring of this national divide. We live in a world obsessed with national pride and rampant with boundary wars, with nationalism on the banner of countless parties, no matter how conflicting their place or destination. Homi K. Bhabha in introduction of *Narrating the Nation* says; "Nations like narratives lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eyes" (44). That image of the nation or narration might seem impossibly idealistic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea, an idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force. According to Arnold E. Davidson et al, King shows the 49th parallel to be "a figment of someone else's imagination", and thereby explores the relationship of national borders to identify politics (13). The storyline of *Truth and Bright Water* gives the symbolical idea of what living in a border could really mean, and in the process, King's texts "implicate both Canada and the United States in the destruction of the Native North American Population" (ibidem 156).

The one about Coyote and the Ducks in *The Truth about Stories* is a burlesque on the treaties for land. That the ducks gave up their lovely feathers to Coyote, who claims to be a protector who protect them from human beings, is an allegorical reference to the making of treaty between the natives and white government. With native people, land base was drastically reduced in the early years of treaty making. Treaties were a poor deal for the native lands. The title *Green Grass Running Water*, refers to such a poor deal and is a sarcastic reminder on the white government's policy on land rights. Historically, the Indian

Act was evolved to protect the small share of Canada's land base which remained as aboriginal domain, but this agreement was repeatedly broken, often in return for nominal consideration or no consideration at all. The Indian Act was an official treaty made with natives of Reserved land, and the promise was supposed to last "as long as the grass was green and the waters run" (234). Treaties were hardly sacred documents. It failed to deliver justice to natives who were legalized out of existence. Lionel exemplifies how the white man tends to regard everything in writing as if carved in stone. The earliest experience happens when he is accidentally swapped with another boy who has a heart condition in hospital. It seems impossible for him to correct the numerous mistakes because he remains identified by the system as a heart patient, despite the fact that he is physically fit. The same thing happens when he gets arrested and is imprisoned in a chanced encounter with a group of native activists. Lionel is trapped with repetitive mishaps without being able to correct them which are symbolic of the real situation of native society. The white man's attempt to understand a native religion in relation to Christianity in *Green Grass Running Water* is a kind of direct confrontation by King to those subversive ideas on native religion. Latisha tried to think of ways to explain exactly what the 'Sun Dance' was, how the people felt about it, why it was important. Ann only stood there smiling while Latisha searched for words and does not listen to Latisha's answer, instead details Catholic practice to her. The novel also delineates the fact that native figures are wrongly romanticized in Hollywood movies and western books as artifact. The character of Portland is a mimic image created by King to contradict Western literary symbols that fantasize natives as exotic beings for entertainment. Portland is an Indian movie actor in Hollywood but regardless of his Indian status, he is compelled to wear a false nose to have a lead role in westerns. His normal nose was not the right shape and he does not look 'Indian enough' to act for Indian roles as chiefs and the occasional renegade. When Portland auditioned for the Indian lead in the movie, the director, a slight man with a

sparse blond mustache that made his upper lip look as if it caked with snot, told Portland that he could have the part but that he would have to wear a rubber nose. Portland's role to don a fake nose and entertain western audience is an intentional exposition by King to correct white man's Eurocentric misrepresentation, appropriation and prejudice of native figures.

4.5. Historical Basis of the Chronicle of Native Voices

Easterine Kire and Thomas King employ real history of the native people to tell their stories. History of a people reflects the worldview of those who keep and transmit it. Kire and King are writers who utilize actual historical records to imaginatively narrativize people's voice and experience. For Kire, the method of using real history is a necessity because without it, there would be no authentic documenting of Naga society. About the existence of true historical records in her novels, Kire has positively responded: "I have always used the real history of my people when I write historical fiction" (Kire. E-Mail Interview. 2 March 2014). In Kire's debut novel, *A Naga Village Remembered* there are political accounts of the first expedition and the commencement of British rule in the Naga Hills. It recounts the historical chronicles of the Battle of Khonoma in 1879-1880. The fight to overthrow British intrusion gets fierce and bloody that the day's battle was considered to be the fiercest battle of the Naga Hills. Historical evidence states that in April 1879, the people of Khonoma had been planning to fight the white man but they were also aware of the strength of the British. At this decisive hour, Pfuchasa Chase of Khonoma Village killed a tiger. A tiger kill calls for elaborate cultural rituals involving all the village warriors in a war dance, displaying their weapons including guns. Fascinatingly, to their own surprise, they found out that the village was in possession of many guns. The discovery of this fact and the realization of their strength gave them much courage. It was soon after that the people of Khonoma decided to

send back the white man to his own country. They were determined to defend their land. Kire reflects this event as she voices out the native peoples resentment towards British invasion on Naga territorial land. There is, again, the substantial record of religious conversion from the indigenous religion to Christianity and the activities of the American Baptist mission and the first converts. It is true that the early converts faced great ostracism in the villages and the fictionist has given accurate details of the somber beginning of a phenomenon that was to win the entire native community in its grip within the next few decades. In Kire's *Mari*, there are factual records of British and Japanese forces, the imperial powers of the mid-twentieth century that fought the Second World War in Naga soil. From the perspective of Second World War: "the battle of Kohima and Imphal was the largest single defeat of the Japanese on land" (Dept. of Art & Culture 8). In 2013, the battle of Kohima-Imphal during the World War-II was voted as the greatest battle in the poll conducted by UK National Army Museum on Britain's greatest battle in the last four hundred years. The war memorial has an epigram, 'When you go home tell them of us and say for your tomorrow we gave our today'. Kire quotes this famous line from an inscription on the war memorial of the 2 division at the Kohima War Cemetery. Her intention is possibly to integrate personal stories into public stories that impel an idea of sacrifices of human life. For the Nagas, the battle had dramatically affected their lives. Apart from the devastation and casualties of the battle, "villages were razed down and villagers temporarily abandoned their homes to take refuge in the fields and jungles" (ibidem 10). The history of the Battle of Kohima 1944 underlines the harsh realities of what war can do to the peaceful and charming little village and its people. Ordinary people with very little knowledge of war were mercilessly forced to suffer, and Kire's protagonist, Mari, acts as envoy by explaining the psychological turmoil and displacement that war has wrought on people's mind:

We all felt terribly lonely and the beautiful golden sunset made me even more miserable. The whining of plane engines overhead, the incessant sound of shelling, these were the sounds that had become a part of our lives now. If there was a lull in the firing, we will all stop working and strain our ears, waiting anxiously for it to begin again. The shelling felt normal to us, the silence abnormal (73).

The bleakness of life during war is exposed when Mari further discloses: “I felt nauseated at the sight of fresh blood on wounded men, their bandages soaked through. We had seen much in such little time” (ibidem 81).

Kire's *Bitter Wormwood* and *Life on Hold* unfolds the candid history of the political struggle for independence and the internal strife of the factionalist groups in Nagaland. *Bitter Wormwood* furnishes the historical documents, like, Simon Commission 1929, the declaration of Naga Independence on 14 August 1947. It also has the plebiscite movement of 1951. The Nagas naturally voted for complete independence and separation from India. Kire is watchful as she enables Mose to delve into minute details. Mose is aware of the unusual presence of soldiers and the narrative builds up the uneasiness in Mose's psyche as he felt fearful of the future. He reflects on how the village assembled on an appointed day where a man carefully explained that they were collecting signatures and thumbprints of those who wanted a free Nagaland. The people were very pleased to have participated in the plebiscite. They reluctantly washed the ink stains off and were informed that their signatures had been collected by men in every village of Nagaland and were taken to the Prime Minister of India. The political histories has facts that A.Z. Phizo, a leader of Naga National Council extremists, had sent copies of the plebiscite result to the president of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, and the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and other dignitaries. But the Government of India refused to acknowledge the Naga plebiscite and it came to nothing. There are other historical

materials regarding the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) 1953; the declaration of Statehood in 1963; Naga Freedom Movement etc.

In *Life on Hold*, the game of wrestling played by childhood friends, Nime and Roko, serves as a symbolic imagery that describes the contestation of power by the factionalist groups in Nagaland. Kire delineates the sad fate of Pusalie, who is a struggling businessman. He attributes his failure to the feuding factions between the NSCN (K) and NSCN (IM) as they disturb the business flow due to their unreasonable taxation. Pusalie complained of how the taxes had doubled when both the underground parties wanted their share of what they called commercial tax. Kire's narrative pensively releases the intimidating reality that native people experience in the hands of their own Naga freedom fighters. The underground groups liked to consider themselves as the rightful government of Nagaland. Shopkeepers and businesspersons paid as high as twenty five percent to the groups. To refuse to pay was unheard of, for fear that they would be killed if they fail to abide by their dictates. The extortions were running the tradesmen, and Pusalie becomes a typical victim ruined by nationalist workers. Men who had earlier been successful at their business were forced to borrow money to keep their business going. 'Tax collections' as the extortions were politely called took away their profits leaving them poorer than when they had started out. The real presence of troubling historical, political, and social truths broadens the ideas of Kire's stories.

With Thomas King, the actual history of the native people is employed to explain the position of natives in white society. Throughout the history of Indian-White relations in North America, there has always been extermination and assimilation. In his critical and meditative book, *The Inconvenient Indian*, he tells a richly packed native history. There is the history of Indian-White relations in North America since their initial contact, and in which he based the identity of Indian as Indians. He emphasized that Indians were, "sometimes

Mohawks or Cherokees or Crees or Blackfoot or Tlingits or Seminoles. But mostly they were Indians” (xii). The term ‘Indian’ is a misnomer derived from Christopher Columbus’s mistaken belief that he had reached India. King has allegorized Columbus’ mistakes in his novel, *Green Grass Running Water*. He gives a picture of such a repeated metaphor in the story. There is the episode of Lionel and his aunt Norma who does not want to make a mistake with carpet. She says, “You make a mistake with carpet, and you got to live with it a long time” (*GGRW* 8). King has pushed the narrative into the present in order to consider the lives of contemporary people and events. The reply of Lionel that, “everybody makes mistake” is an open commentary to make matters right (*ibidem*). Again, there is the incident where the mythical figure, Lone Ranger, repeatedly gets confused and chooses wrong beginnings of the biblical Genesis. He is asked to get it right for it is “best not to make them (mistakes) with stories” (*ibidem* 11). King’s intention is to incorporate the fact that natives are not static and their cultures are dynamic, adaptive, and flexible. It draws attention to the genuine historical fact that the term ‘Indians’ for native people of Canada starts from a mistake. Columbus was mistaken, but as time went on, various folks and institutions reframed the name and Indians became Amerindians, Aboriginal, Indigenous people and American Indians. Lately, Indians have become ‘First Nations’ in Canada and ‘Native Americans’ in the United States. Thus, King has used the three official aboriginal groups; Indians (First Nations), Inuit and Métis to reaffirm his people’s stories.

Native people had been confined, reduced and relegated to reserves and reservations. King uses this realistic affair in his novel, *Truth and Bright Water*, principally to express the details of the poignant life of native society living in a reserve and in crossing boundaries. The fictional town, Truth and Bright Water, is separated only by a small river, the railroad town on the American side and the reserve in Canada, which figuratively draws one to the idea of what border crossing actually means. It is a geographical divide that separates people

from one's nation, locality, or of mental divide. The novel is attentive in its presentation of Indian roles into two categories. One is the historical Indians, which is collected by Monroe, a famous Indian painter, who retrieves Indians back from the Europeans museums from all over the world. Back at home in native land, Monroe gives a ceremonial burial with red ribbons tied around the yellow skulls, which, in a way, emblematically explains that Indians are back in its original place. Of how a native person does not, in any way, lose their land and that native land remains in native ownership. The other category is the contemporary Indians, living, breathing individuals that King wants to preserve through the life of the protagonist, Tecumseh, in the story. An everyman's character, who is sensitive and is at times prone to failure, tragedy, reconciliations and love. It develops the message that even after all the tribes had been moved out of that metaphorical house and into that metaphorical shed, Indians were still in the way. Worst, they were still Indians. While many natives speak English, while many converted to Christianity, and while many were small business entrepreneurs, native culture remained alive and well in North America. Removal and relocation had been effective in displacing and disrupting the lives of native people and their lands taken. These policies and practices had not been the answer to the Indian problem. Here is the reality, native people have never been resistant to education and by the beginning of the nineteenth century, natives and whites have been living together. The European mind worked in such a manner that it permits natives to set aside the missteps of history and offers a covenant with the future. The fact is that natives live modern lives, informed by traditional values and contemporary realities, and they wish to live those lives in their own terms. For instance, in *Truth and Bright Water*, Tecumseh's father preserves a Coyote as a good luck figure and he still believes that a medicine bag is never complete without Coyote in it. Monroe Swimmer believes that there is a lot more to do in the world, and his grand gifts especially a piano to Tecumseh is an indication of inner peace.

King has authenticated historical facts to discuss the serious issues of 'status' confronting native society. His book, *The Inconvenient Indian*, argues that Indians come in all sorts of social and historical configurations. North American popular culture is littered with savage nobles and dying Indians. While in real life there is, "Dead Indians, Live Indians and Legal Indians" (53). According to Thomas King, "Dead Indians are the stereotypes and clichés that North America has conjured up out of their own experience and out of its collective imaginings and fears. Live Indians are all native people living in North America. Legal Indians are those Indians who are recognized as being Indians by the Canadian and U.S. Governments. In Canada, Legal Indians are officially known as Status Indians, Indians who are registered with the federal government as Indians under the terms of the Indian Act" (ibidem 68). Legal Indians are entitled to certain rights and privileges called treaty rights. In Canada, the Indian Act 1876 does more than just define Legal Indians. It has been the main mechanism for controlling the lives and destinies of Legal Indians in Canada, and throughout the life of the act, amendments have been made to the original document to fine-tune this control. In Canada, loss of status has been an individual matter and this issue of who is and who is not a status Indians finds its trace in King's novel *Medicine River* and *Green Grass Running Water*. He explains Bill C-31, through the occurrence of intermarriages between natives and whites. *Medicine River* is a non-stereotypical novel rephrased from the viewpoint of native characters. In it, King questions the irrelevant and inapplicability of natives need for attending legal status and registration to prove their identity. The protagonist Will's family had to leave the reserve and relocate somewhere else because the law says that they are 'non-status' and are not Indians anymore. Will Horse Capture, is a replicate victim of such erroneous Act. In novel, *Green Grass Running Water*, the focus shows the marriage between a Native Indian Eli Stands Alone to a White woman Karen. Eli went to Toronto, taught in University. He had married a white woman, and brought her out to the Sun Dance one year.

King has narrated these incidents to bring a realistic emphasis on the destabilizing political Acts of the Government. King's concentration in both stories is to point out the actual historical breaches. Prior to 1985 and Bill C-31, when native men with status married non-status native or non-native, the women and any children gained status. However, when native women with status married non-status men, or non-native, they and their children lost status. In this regard, the Indian Act was clearly discriminatory and "blatantly sexist" (ibidem 167). In 1985 Bill C-31 was passed, native women who had lost status because of marriage were able to apply to have status reinstated. The bill also closed the loophole of non-native women gaining status through marriage by legislating that no one could gain or lose status through marriage. *Medicine River* reflectively elucidated all sides of this act with the frequent quest for identity by Will. His migration to Toronto and back to the reserve of Medicine River, a town for the Indians is decent imagery for native status relocation. Will, a mixed Blackfoot search for recognition within his own society is identical of native experience of alienation as well as the stereotypes projected on and at times perpetuated by outsiders. His shifting position directs readers in understanding the laws that hinders non-status to have an ingenious life. Early as a child, his own mother's family treats Will as an outcast. When he desires to return back to the reserve he is admonished by his cousin Maxwell against it because of the law. He is denied a governmental loan for setting up his photography studio because the law does not permit such facilities for mixed breeds. His endless search for an identity within the community is, at last, successful when Flyod's grandmother invites Will to join the family photograph as a replacement of her deceased son. This incident, too, serves a purpose that diplomatically explains the amending of the Indian Act to allow for more local autonomy.

In King's *Green Grass Running Water*, he utilizes the real historical event of the American Indian Movement (AIM) founded in the late 1968 by Dennis Bank, George Mitchell and Clyde Bellecourt. Talking about the movement of AIM in his critical essay, *The*

Inconvenient Indian, King states that there is no precise way to describe AIM and that the original organization was formed to “deal with police brutality against native people” (145). This is a political radical movement and it lobbies for native sovereignty, treaty rights, and to call attention to the problems of poverty on reserves and reservations. Initially, its aim was purely to ease the transition from reserve to urban life, but through this work they became aware of the depths of the social problems their people faced. The organization turned militant, and its spokesmen called for the restoration of tribal lands, for better social welfare programs and for more vigilance in the protection of the civil rights of Indian people. AIM and its groups were involved in political demonstrations, such as, the Broken Treaties Caravan in 1972, and the occupation of the village of Wounded Knee in 1973. Canadian native organization, while seldom militant, could not help but be influenced by the struggle of Indian people and the same is described in King’s *Green Grass Running Water*, through the unexpected participation of Lionel in one of the AIM assembly. The police just outside Green River seized him, when he mistakenly hooked a wing tip through the sling of one of the rifles and pitched forward into the policeman. Though it might be a funny mistake, it causes injury and unnecessary harassment to Lionel. He is forced to verify his identity and is wrongly accused as a leader of AIM when he does not know a thing about AIM. Hence, King’s depiction of AIM movements in the story is mainly to orient native concern because AIM was the only native organization that got most of the media attention and it was this organization, who took the brunt of law enforcement.

The real history of ‘land treaties’ between Indian and White people are also discussed elaborately by King. Indian-White relations were originally constructed around the concerns of commerce and military alliances. In these matters, native people understood themselves to be sovereign, independent nations, and in early land and treaty negotiations, they were treated as such. But by the late 1700s as European military forces gained the upper hand, Whites

began to reimagine the place of Indian nations in North America. The real problems start off, when the Federal Government gave itself the exclusive right to regulate the trade and manage all affairs of the Indians. King has noted in his book, *The Inconvenient Indian*, the three visible decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court beginning in 1823: “-*Johnson v. McIntosh*, *Cherokee v. Georgia*, *Worcester v. Georgia*- that would confirm the powers, U.S. government had unilaterally taken upon itself and spell out the legal arrangement that tribes were to be allowed” (81). A treaty is bargained in which natives were forced to give up lands and would be moved elsewhere to a location called reserves. White treaties were never long-standing agreements. King’s title, ‘Green Grass Running Water’ is a borrowed phrase from the historical documentation of land treaty discourse. Where the term ‘as long as the grass is green and the water run’ was commonly used by government officials to lend a sense of honesty to their promises to native leaders. In fact, native lands were exploited and utilized for white man’s expansion and purpose. The episode of constructing a Grand Baleen Dam to create electricity on Indian land and hiring a native Blackfoot lawyer, Charlie, to repel the protestations coming from among native society in King’s *Green Grass Running Water*, is a relevant examination on the insensitive conduct of white society towards native land rights.

4.6. Effects of Colonial Impact and Negative Native Stereotypes

The ‘Native’ society of Easterine Kire and Thomas King are people who have come under colonial influence in multifarious ways. Nowhere has native life been entirely unaffected by the advent of the European settlers and the domination of territory that was once the exclusive domain of native people. From an early period, the uneasy interaction between natives and the colonizing society has taken many forms, specifically the interest in land. The cultural attachment of natives toward land being primal, the new comers’

intervention into native lands for natural resources and other strategic developments created serious challenges to the traditional ways of native life.

In Easterine Kire, colonial contact and its resistance commenced from nineteenth century onwards. The British desire to have political control over every part of Indian subcontinent to project their colonial power led to the occupation of Naga Hills. *A Naga Village Remembered* retells the battle of Khonoma (1879-1880) and recorded the conflict, resistance and the impact of the colonial ruler. The Nagas hated the British ruler for having occupied their lands, cut down their forest, taxed them and forced them into labour, which pricked them to battle the white man and his government. Kire's story offers an adept study on the feeling of mistrust that natives have on this intruding ruler and soldiers: "Let us stop this. We cannot continue like this, we'll not be under the turbaned ones"; "We are not going to be coolies anymore for the white man" (67, 69). It was not only territory and political control, but the colonial rulers have also dominated the vast social, religious and cultural life of the Nagas, as it was historically impossible for them to resist the British colonization, which had, by then, enveloped the whole of Asia. In Kire's works, these developments are traced through the natives' involvement in the changing process that overwhelmed them. For example, the social life among natives before the advent of colonization is village state, but the British has succeeded in forming urban units. In religious sphere, the religion of the Nagas before colonization is labeled as 'animism' and they believed in numerous localized spirits, but with British advent into the Naga Hills, 'Christianity' was ushered in and transformed the animistic tradition to a more modern society. The culture of the natives was oral, and storytelling kept their memory alive, the Christian missionaries gave them the writing system with the introduction of formal education. Colonization has also brought in many developmental works that influenced the social standings of the people. *Mari* gives a precise reading through the various wartime construction activities. *Bitter Wormwood* gives

the highlight on the coming of communication technology when Mose talks about the 'Radio' that could transmit news, and they could learn about other countries and happenings around the world. *A Terrible Matriarchy* gives information on the installation of electricity and the utilization of colonial leftovers. An example of colonial leftover is the ammunition box Lieno refers to: "Mother baked a cake in one of the ammunition boxes that had been left behind by British troops after the war. Almost every house had one of these" (53).

The impact of colonization in Kire's society cannot be denied when one examines her novels intently. There is the growing dependence on Government, the impact on religion which means the loss of native religion, which also go to imply the loss of culture because religion is all pervasive in native societies like those of Kire's. Again, there is the growth of economic class, and the distinction between the rich and the poor. For example, in *A Terrible Matriarchy* Dielieno's family is poor and her grandmother is rich because she gets the pension of her dead husband. Dielieno's aunt is rich because she married an officer, and Leto gets a government job at the D.C office, through his influential aunt whose husband is a bureaucrat in government office. In novel *Life on Hold*, Pusalie ventured into business for its rich prospect, but this chase drives him to insanity due to surmounting loans and debts. Nime marries Abeiu because he is rich and is economically independent. In Zeu's story, readers are made to be aware of the fact that rich people's children could easily get a job because they bribe the minister: "Shekato and Neituo got appointed because they bribed the Minister with one lakh each" (36). Zeu was quite matter of fact about it, but Nime was horrified. He further tells Nime not to be shocked of how it is now, the rich get richer and the poor gets poorer. For Nime, life cannot go on with this blunder and bribery and that has to be changed. To which Zeu sadly replies, "Oh, you're so innocent still", and he finished with a cold laugh (ibidem). Another ugly change that can be witnessed is that, the life of a human being is treated like a game. It held to be decadently true that the death of a civil man in factionalist clash could

easily be compensated by government with money. When Pusalie was premeditatedly murdered, the government gave Pusalie's family one lakh rupees as compensation and the "bank stopped the interest on the loans due to them from Pusalie" (ibidem 70). Hence, Kire's works address all these unpleasant realities of life and the complexities around the daunting atrocities and discriminations. Native people, no doubt, suffered the pangs of political and social unrest, but underneath all these painful struggles, there is a spark of hope. The fictionist has framed her native society in a resilient manner to define the view that there is much more than just another political conflict. There is the challenge that describes how ordinary people cope with violence, how they negotiate force and power, how they seek and find safe places so as to achieve the dream of an independent native nation. The native characters in Kire's novels exhibit strong spirits and they are undeterred by the surrounding conflicts. They evoke a comparable reminder to American author Ernest Hemingway's character 'Santiago' the novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. There is the honor in struggle, defeat and death. Hemingway's character 'Santiago' struggles against defeat and has gone eight-four days without catching a fish. But the old man refuses defeat at every turn, and he resolves to sail out beyond the other fisherman to where the biggest fish promises to be. He lands the 18 feet 'Marlin' fish and then endures a long and grueling struggle with the Marlin only to see his big catch destroyed by Sharks. Yet, the destruction enables Santiago to undergo a remarkable transformation, and he wrest triumph and renewed life from seeming defeat. Akin to 'Santiago', Kire's native characters like Mari, Nime and Mose refuse defeat. In Kire's *Mari*, the protagonist, Mari, has to make a decision of choosing life and death after she is confronted with a situation where her lover, Vic, is killed in war and she is pregnant with his child. She confesses:

At one point, I had wanted to die with Vic... But when I saw the grave and his name. I had to accept that Vic would never come back...

And then I felt my baby move inside me, in tiny quivering movement, even when it was the slightest, was like the tugging of life. I decided then to live, not pine away (102).

The central crux lies in Mari choosing to live for her child and discovering a way to prolong her life, which, though harsh is at times peaceful. In *Life on Hold*, Nime's blissful life is snatched away by violent insurgency struggle when her childhood friend and lover, Roko, chooses to join the Naga Army and shatters her entire. He said coldly that there is no room for a woman in his life. Roko made up his mind and asked Nime to forget him. Nevertheless, in spite of every other harsh thing that she endures in her life, she wanted to accept life for her children's sake and exclaims: "Girls cry, mothers cannot afford to. Not over every puny – loser wrestler!" (104). In *Bitter Wormwood*, Mose's entire life is shadowed by war. He joins the Naga Freedom Movement as a soldier to protect his homeland, but is eventually killed by the same Movement while trying to save a Bihari boy. Yet, Mose's death and defeat leads to a more significant spiritual triumph. Mose achieves a miraculous feat and the readers are assured that Mose's teachings will persist through his grandson Neibou, who utters:

I put my trust in my grandfather's teachings. I realized if I did anything violent, my action would actually hurt Grandfather, instead of honoring him. It hasn't been easy. But now I have peace in the decision. How would it help if we had killed his killers? It wouldn't bring Grandfather back to life, and there would only be more dead to avenge (237).

Such a statement convinces that Neibou will make use of Mose's valuable teachings. That every man is born with a willpower to survive and Santiago's philosophical line: "But man is not made for defeat... man can be destroyed but not defeated", can be symbolic in explaining the undefeatable spirit of Kire's native society, a people who will continue to live a determined life as peaceful and optimistic as possible (Hemingway 29).

In Thomas King's reading, the impact of colonization is more exposed. Under colonialism, "Native/First Nation cultures were and continued to be devalued, and symbols of culture, e.g. sacred sites are destroyed and usurped for the purpose of the majority society. In the past, religious, health, and legal system have been denigrated and criminalized by the colonial powers, and the cultural productions of First Nations, such as art, music, and spiritual ceremonies, have been exploited for private profit" (Frideres *First Nations* 22). King is an advocate for First Nation cause and most often writes about Canada's First Nation. He voices against the negative native stereotype that were imposed by white people and against the suppression of their cultural rights. The social, cultural position of native Canada today is unquestionably a direct result of the colonization process and, therefore, King's short stories and novels are an endeavor that provides non-stereotypical readings of native characters. It gives a platform for addressing the marginalization of natives and attempts to abolish frequent stereotypes. According to Herb Wylie, "King's work reclaims images of native people from stereotyping by the dominant culture and while doing so reasserts and privileges a native perspective" (106). Wylie further notes, "King's work quite clearly reflects a consciousness of and a resistance to a long history of Eurocentric misrepresentation" (118). His first novel *Medicine River*, is a positive reading of a native community's struggle for equality and respectable existence in a place where they find it difficult to survive due to perpetrations and atrocities by the white people or the irresponsibility of the government. It describes the difficulties faced by the native people and underscores their solidarity in creating a habitable world of their own. The story is fashioned on a simple homecoming theme popular among native writers, who locate native ancestry through their characters. Percy Walton categorize King's works, as "metadiscursive" in that, "rather than trying to refer to a reality outside of language it refers to a discourse constructed about the native. It is a discourse about discourse" (78). Will and Harlen, in King's *Medicine River* are two good

examples of King's new way of constructing the literary native. Walton points out the attack King makes on cliché Indian images in mainstream media discourse, when Harlen imitates a television Indian by making funny noises:

Hey-uh. Saw Will Sampson on television. It was a movie about him being a sheriff. That's what he said all the time. *Hey-uh.* He's a real Indian, too. What do you think?

I couldn't help it. I started to laugh. Harlen, I said, "it sounds dumb as hell."
The two of us sat there laughing (10).

Here, the native standpoint represented by Will and Harlen divulges the outsiders' patronizing cliché. As Walton points out, "Metadiscursively, King's representations of native, laugh at the representations of natives in the media, and the text draws a distinction between the two. The constructed native of the past shares little in common with King's representations of the native of the present" (81). Will and Harlen differ from the media image of natives, but they are confronted with the Indian cliché. For instance, at the hospital Will is mistaken for the father of Louise Heavyman's newborn daughter. Will is asked for a name for the child and he answers with a joke about the girl being born in South Wing of the hospital and maybe they would call her that. The non-native nurse answers, "Is that a traditional name?" and writes it down on the official form (*MR* 40). Another incident is the one about the funeral of Jake Pretty Weasel, a former teammate of Will and Harlen from the Medicine River Friendship centre basketball team. Harlen, being the team coach delivers the funeral eulogy. Will describes the service as short. The priest refused to come on the report of Jack's suicide. So a substitute is called from Mormon Church and Harlen used a metaphor from mainstream sports culture in order to honour Jack. Leslie Monkman, in his study *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English Canadian Literature*, affirms that, "Native religious traditions are not recognized and acknowledged by non-native writers" (21). This

unawareness of native religious traditions is being mocked. King has assigned Harlen to create an alternative to Euro-Canadian funeral rites, profane as it may be. The speech given by Harlen, the coach of the 'Medicine River Friendship Centre Warriors' has nothing to do with Blackfoot religious tradition, but it is still much more personal than the short service held by a nameless "fellow from Mormon Church" (*MR* 45). As such, the character of Portland Looking Bear in *Green Grass Running Water*, is an indirect attack on Eurocentric caricature. Portland assuming a pseudonym "Iron Eyes Screeching Eagle" to get a lead role, is King's way of censoring non-native way of identifying native as being authentic or non-authentic (165). Portland's duration as actor in Hollywood is significant in several ways. The fact that he gets only minor roles until he changes his name to something more 'authentically Indian' is a good illustration of the unofficial rules that govern Hollywood. So also, the names of the chiefs that Portland portrays are absurd. King ridicules the screenplays of Hollywood westerns, most of which are written by authors of European descent. The native stereotyped produced by Hollywood culture is self referential and as described by Goldie, is a "see through construct" (67). For example, Charlie sees the dressed up strip dancers for what they are, and Lilian, laughs at the fake nose Portland has to wear in order to look more Indian for the camera. Even Portland who loves Hollywood, has to admit that his background dancing is a "dumb routine" (*GGRW* 239).

Another reconstructive native character of King is Eli Stands Alone. He is a native man, but is modern and educated. He has left the reservation to get a degree and a job in Toronto. Initially, Eli has problems accepting his origin and his Blackfoot tradition, and he does not keep in touch with his family once he arrives in Toronto, until his return to Alberta to live in the cabin of his dead mother. Eli's life history does, indeed, fulfill the stereotypes of the assimilated Native. Eli, being a well-educated man, notices this:

The Indian who couldn't go home.

It was a common enough theme in novels and movies. Indian leaves the traditional world of reserve, goes to the city and is destroyed. Indian leaves the traditional world of the reserve, is exposed to white culture, and becomes trapped between the two worlds. Indian leaves the traditional world of the reserve, gets an education, and is shunned by his own tribe (ibidem 317).

However, by coming back to Alberta, and by fighting for his mother's land, Eli resists the stereotype in what Arnold E. Davidson et al, calls "an act that subverts the generic white authored narratives about Natives who leave the reserve never to return again" (139). Eli's introspection of his own situation seems humble as he looked about the house and at what he had become:

Ph.D. in literature. Professor emeritus from the University of Toronto. A book on William Shakespeare. Another on Francis Bacon. Teacher of the year. Twice. Indian. In the end, he had become what he had always been. An Indian. Not a particularly successful one at that. (*GGRW* 289).

But behind Eli's understatement lies a great success, he has had a career which can be ranked equally with mainland Canadian standards. He was named teacher of the year and has published two books on important minds in European intellectual history, his English is better than that of Anglo-Canadian Clifford Shifton, but he still manages to remain 'Indian'. Furthermore, Eli uses the knowledge he gained in the white world to strengthen his position as the anti-stereotyped. When Shifton says, "My dam is part of the twentieth century. Your house is part of the nineteenth," Eli simply answers, "Maybe I should look into putting it on the historical register" (ibidem 155). It shows that Eli is capable of tackling Shifton, if Shifton does not accept native traditions. Eli considers the option of making his house part of non-native written history. Eli, is King's unperturbed character that stands for the connection between the traditional and modern. He can defend his modern lifestyle and intellectual career with his offensively traditional sister Norma. On the other, Eli stands up for his native

roots whenever he talks to Clifford Sifton. He argues that being native does not prevent anyone from getting education, and a well-merited profession. Otherwise, a progressive character, Eli also endures the Indian cliché with his marriage to a white woman Karen. Their relationship developed with Karen bringing books for Eli to read. She says, “these are about Indians... you should read them” (ibidem 179). The fact that Eli is an Indian always draws Karen’s interest. Karen opinion on, Eli, as her ‘Mystic Warrior’, and their relationship is noted by Arnold E. Davidson et al, as a strategic alliance of some sort: “Eli’s desire to pass as white is facilitated by a partnership that validates his choice. Concomitantly, Eli offers Karen access to the culture of the indigenous other, whose ties to the land precede the claims of colonial settlers; through this association, she can play at being Indian” (138). Karen’s query “you know what you are?” creates space for the assumption that Eli does not know what or who he is (*GGRW* 182). The Eurocentric perspective of Karen becomes more real when Eli takes her with him to the native ‘Sun Dance’ of Albertan community. Karen’s first impression on Sun Dance was one of ignorance. The scene is, ‘like right out of a movie’, and she does not recognize contemporary native life. For her, the participation in Sun Dance is a trip “back in time” (ibidem 228). After their return to Toronto, Karen remembers only superficial features of the Sun Dance: “You know what I remember the most?” “All those tepees. That’s what I remember” (ibidem 287). While Eli remembers his relatives, friends and people, he had not seen in years. Karen’s efforts to understand Eli and his native roots are definitely vain. Her imaginations results from books about native people written by non-native authors, “Karen reads the ceremony through her previous knowledge of westerns and commercialized representations of Indian traditions” (Davidson et al. 138). Although she married a Native man, she only sees the stereotyped ‘Mystic Warrior’, and romanticizes Eli’s Indianess.

A very noteworthy aspect of King's novels, *Medicine River* and *Green Grass Running Water*, is his clear refusal to depict native as victims. Negativity being a prominent feature of Canadian literary constructions, when he writes about natives, King does not intend to do the same and tries to move away from those portrayals of natives as victims or disadvantaged in his fictional works. His narratives are, seen as harbingers of new native image in the light of victorious positions. For example, the experience of Will and Harlen's visit to the Custer National Monument in *Medicine River*. While Harlen proposes for a visit to the National Monument, Will's answer is cynical: "You think they let Indians in?" "Why would they keep us out?" (102). The tour however does not happen because Harlen and Will lose their way, and when they finally make it to the monument, the guard is about to lock the gate:

Harlen came back to the car. "It's closed for the night, Will."

"What?"

"Young fellow, friendly enough. Told us to come back tomorrow."

"We won't be here tomorrow."

"I told him that."

"Did you tell him we drove all this way just to see the monument?"

"I told him that."...

"He said he was sorry."

"Did you tell him," ... we're Indians!"

"I told him that, too, Will. He said he was sorry."

I got out and stood by the car and imagined I could see that kid hiding in the dark, hunkered down behind the fender of the Bronco, his hands shaking around his rifle, waiting for us to come screaming and whooping and crashing through the gate (ibidem 107-108).

On a surface level reading of the above lines, Harlen and Will, the two native men, might be seen as, being barred of visit, a way that the dominant culture deprived native from visiting a historical site that is important for them. But, credibly, in King's storyline, this missed event is simply about bad timing and the real reason for the guard to lock up early, is neither racism nor denial, but game seven in hockey finals. Harlen confirms, "Said he'd let us in but the hockey playoffs are on tonight. Series is tied at three games all" (ibidem 109). Will blurbs in correctly: "The Blackfoot didn't fight Custer" (ibidem 102). Will and Harlen are therefore the dominant culture here, and the young non-native guard is the victim. The ironic mood of the passage is echoed in the guard's answer, "I'm sorry", to Harlen's statement, "But we're Indians" (ibidem 108). According to Wylie, King's characters, "do foreground the struggles and hardships of being native in a racist society, they do so in a way that resists depicting Native people as victims and resist defining them exclusively in relation to the dominant culture according to its expectations" (118). In *Green Grass Running Water*, the idea of King's recreated native figure is more detailed. The character, Latisha Red Dog, resists the typical native victim position. Early in the novel, the reader gets the fact that Latisha is married to a non-native ,George Morningstar, who is 'no-good' and "used to beat hell out of her" (59). While in the beginning, Latisha is the victim of George's violent assault that suggests a historic dimension to the incidents of domestic violence and stands as a metaphor for non-native racist attitude and violence against native people. Subsequently, she emancipates herself and gets a divorce. George leaves his family before the birth of their third child. The most evident sign of Latisha's successful emancipation starts from the moment she stops reading George's letters altogether. She became the emancipated native. Towards the end of the novel, George is forced to leave the site of the Sun Dance after he tries to take press photographs of the native sacred ceremony. This triggers the final step in Latisha's emancipation process. Supported by her family, she commits a successful act of resistance

against attempts by the mainstream media to exploit Native cultures. Latisha's character is perceptive. Her problems, though true to life, are not necessarily and exclusively native problems. Although a single mother of three children, she is independent, successful, hardworking and confidently runs her own business and organizes her family. This undercuts the hoard image of the dependent or economically poor native woman. The type of business she manages is yet another strike on the victim cliché. She owns the 'Dead Dog Café' where non-native tourists are led to believe that they are served dog meat. The conventional model of a native as weak and powerless is reversibly changed in King and the tourists becomes a susceptible victim. Latisha knows her metadiscourse that there is nothing wrong when one serves traditional foods. She explains to her customers that it was a treaty right, by referring to non-native written law or history, she gives them the proof they wanted. One might accuse Latisha of sham exhibitions of native cultures but certainly, here, it is the native woman, Latisha, who sets the rules and values of the competition. King's fictional works has been active in breaking up dominant stereotypes of the 'Indian' in history. He has managed to modernize the image of the native and in the process sets off the de-victimization of his characters. Popular native characters, Will, Latisha and Eli Stands Alone, are not marginalized victims but rather strong members who contribute to modern communities. King has done it by normalizing the relationship between his native characters and their non-native surroundings. Most of King's characters, as far as their social positions are concerned, do not differ from their native counterparts. Will, Eli, and Latisha resist being victims, they are modern Canadian citizens who work in modern normal professions which make them a part of strong communities. This clearly differentiates natives from Eurocentric literary interpretations of the past centuries. King, by reconstructing stereotypes attached to native people, changes the role from marginalized, exotic, dependent figures to characters with productive agency, without neglecting their ethnic native features. His native characters differ

from non-natives in their distinct awareness of their history. This consciousness however does not prevent them from adapting modern lives as shown in the conversation between Eli and Clifford Sifton:

Besides, you guys aren't real Indians anyway. I mean, you drive cars, watch television, go to hockey games. Look at you. You're a university professor.

That's my profession. Being Indian isn't a profession

And you speak as good English as me

Better, said Eli. And I speak Blackfoot too. My sisters speak Blackfoot. So do my niece and nephew

That's what I mean. Latisha runs a restaurant and Lionel sells television. Not exactly traditionalist, are they?

It's not exactly the nineteenth century, either (ibidem 155).

Eli's absorption of non-native lifestyles with enviable professions as censured by Sifton's is a contestation that approves the competence of natives. Furthermore, by mixing and pairing up his native characters with non-native characters, Eli/Karen and Latisha/George into marriage, King shows that balancing out traditional or modern lifestyles and the hybridism or assimilations of cultures is only a problem for non-native, not for native people. For instance, the overbearing expectations of non-native characters on native culture represented by Latisha's dog meat service, Sifton's outdated view of natives as traditionalist Indian, Portland's endeavor as Hollywood lead actor or the distorted media discourse on native appearances in movies. None of these have reliable facts and, thus, readers are compelled by King to watch out and revise their views of the native and their real culture. His purpose in all of these narratives is to correct non-native misperceptions relating to native ethnicity.

Thus, effects of colonial impact, the stereotyping of natives by non-natives and the need to deconstruct and reassess natives on their own terms, as they are, have been creatively represented by both Easterine Kire and Thomas King.

4.7. Ethnicity and the Native Identity

The long spell of colonial rule has effected and altered the native ways of spiritual, political, economic and social context that contributes to the formulation of self. This raises the issue of the identity of the native people. Definitions of ‘who they are’ seem to affect all natives because their ‘nativeness’ had often been defined by others to such an extent that at times their knowledge and consciousness of themselves had been vitiated, if not obliterated. They had repeatedly been subjected to the control and authority of the white man and outsiders through the assimilationist tactics of the dominant government. Notwithstanding the bleak scenario, literatures have been inspired to take up the issue of native identity to ensure them voice and representation and at the same time, create space for their own questioning critical voice. Easterine Kire and Thomas King are two such native writers, who avidly write about their ethnic communities and the question of their identity. The term ‘identity’ being a complex issue when confronted from all aspects, the topic will be examined under the following sub headings:

Quest for Native Identity

The quest for identity is ‘a fate’ natives share with all post-colonial or new nations. Easterine Kire and Thomas King’s ethnic societies are not an exception in their search for ethnic identity. Native literatures all over the world bring in a certain measure of reaction to

colonization. It is through efforts of native writers that struggle for recognition finds a voice when images of the natives are presented through their own eyes. They articulate the political and social issues affecting the natives and unmask the role played by dominant literature in diminishing the value of the native culture. A native writer not only record tales of the past but also write history of the people to train the focus on the authentic identity of who they actually are, apart from the dominant stereotypes. Kire's novel, *Bitter Wormwood* explores the native quest for political Naga identity. It draws attention to the political turmoil that has trapped the native community and their struggle to find a place of their own identity. The societal aspiration to have political identity of their own is reflected through the struggle of the fictional characters, Mose and Neituo, in the Naga Freedom movement. They learned that Naga leaders had organized the Naga National Council and were fighting for freedom from India. Mose and Neituo joined the movement in protest against the killings and tortures meted out to the innocent villagers. "We are not animals that they can shoot us when they will" is a direct resentment felt by the natives when their precious lives are put at stake mindlessly (59). Mose's task to hoist the Naga Flag at Kohima stadium under the reeling darkness of the night is a patriotic effort that nurtures one's hope to unite all natives together under one identity. Such a hope finds echo in the words of the Naga army officer, when he trains the young recruits:

"This is not an ordinary war,"... this is a test of who has the stronger heart. The Indians may have more men and more guns, but this is our ancestral land to which we are bonded. The Indian soldier does not feel for the land as we do. Sooner or later we will defeat them. One day, they will have to retreat and admit that we were right (ibidem 95).

For natives, the loss of land is the loss of existence. Landlessness is non-existence and creates an identity crisis. For an ethnic society, land is always linked to one's identity and the outsider's intrusion to native land is, therefore, an unacceptable offence. *Bitter Wormwood*

also offers an unreserved depiction of the problem of identity for the ethnic Nagas. The novelist shows how ethnic natives are discriminated and segregated in urban cities because their identity and physical features are completely different from those exhibited by dominant social groups. Through the experience of Neibou, an eighteen year old boy, who leaves home for higher studies in Delhi, Kire exposes the unequal treatment of natives rampant in Indian mainland. Neibou spells out:

What disgusts me is that we are always alienated and picked on. Today it's rape, another day it is a stabbing, how are we expected to believe that we are Indians when all this racism goes on? We are served last in a restaurant and cheated by taxis and autos and even rickshaw pullers. Why do they treat us different from other Indians? (ibidem 208).

The question 'why do they treat us different' may be a deep rooted racism based on ethnic identity but within that disparity what more can be said is open-ended because identity being fundamental it entails plurality of composition as Neibou's liberal friend Rakesh says:

"You are right about all that." But we can't give in to them, do you see? If we allow ourselves to be depressed by the racists, we will lose the impulse to fight them. If we give up, they will be proved right and they are far from right. We have to help others understand that racism is evil. And if we don't make an effort, the consequences would be reverse racism like what you told me about Indian-hating in Naga circles. That is just as bad. I'm sorry to bring up this comparison but if we are to be honest, giving in to hatred is just as evil and it sets off an ugly cycle (ibidem 208-9).

Identity being not something solely acquired at birth. Which is then, shaped and reshaped differently, that as well varies with situational and political factors, Neibou, a character with a highly sensitive identity, thus has to submit to his ethnic acceptance by saying: "They have no ability to accept that we are human beings like any of them... but not everyone in the

society is like that. We have to appeal to the good sense of the ones who are more broad-minded and compassionate” (ibidem 209).

In *Medicine River* and *Green Grass Running Water*, King discusses the natives’ search for identity in a white dominated world. With colonization, the self-sufficiency of the native inhabitants of Canada, gradually weaken in economic, social, political, demographic, religious and cultural spheres. Their positions deteriorated from being collaborators and partners to dependents. Their rank changed from being at the centre of Canada, “they were pushed to margins... relegated to the back seat periphery in economic, political and cultural spheres, through complex historical and cultural processes. The extensive contact between the Indians of Canada and the whites also fostered the appearance of a mixed Indian-White ancestry” (Kanwar 11). King gives representation of this native circumstance in *Medicine River* through the character of a mixed breed, Will Horse Capture, who struggles in his search for identity. His native mother, Rose Horse Capture, married a non-native from Edmonton and the day she married the non-native Bob, her family abandoned her as an outcast. Her children were never accepted in totality for it is the white verdict that prevents them from being an identified Indian member. As pointed out earlier, the discussion carried out between Will, James and their cousin Maxwell shows the denied status and its threatening position of being born a mixed breed in law. While, Will optimistically tends to the prospect of ‘going back to the reserve’, he is limited by Maxwell hint that they are not Indians anymore and have to live in town. Further, Maxwell words “But you can’t stay. It’s the law” shows the irrationality of white man in indentifying native people based on law rather than on human grounds (9). It also shows the discriminating attitude of white towards the natives basing on their categorical ethnic identity.

The endeavor to find a name to identify the native people and, indeed, a name to describe non-native people as well is not just a question of semantics but reflects the attempt

to redress the marginalization of natives, abolish common stereotypes, eliminate racism and offer positive new identities for native individuals and communities. King's writings reflect this effort to redress, rename and recreate native identities. In *Green Grass Running Water*, King has reviewed the appropriation of native's identity in media and Hollywood movies. Before Portland can act in the movies, he must go through an initiation into Hollywood culture by dancing in a strip show. He dances an almost pornographic dance with Pocahontas, during which a cowboy dancer comes on stage and defeats him, the Indian. In the end, however, Portland has a moment of triumph, he is transformed into a 'chief' who leads the Indians into victory over the cowboys in the revised Western film. Summarily, King's story is about natives' transcending the narrow confines of deficiencies.

Communal or Social Identity

Communal or social identities are "representations of/or are otherwise connected to social structure", and form a basis of life that retells affection, relationship, memory, kinship, place, community, emotional fulfillment, intellectual enjoyment and a sense of intimate meaning (Dasan 14). Easterine Kire and Thomas King, writes to strengthen their own ethnic identity. They unravel the depth of Native ethnicity, knowledge, trauma, wisdom, their tradition and point of view. Generally, native writings exhort the young natives to be united and be identified so that they can rightfully stand for themselves. James S. Frideres astutely points out: "Natives today are rediscovering their past and are attempting to sort out their identity. They are trying to develop a positive self-concept and a group identity that can provide a reference point for them" (276). It is true that the native people have always showed a strong tendency to follow the traditions of their communities. Thus, native writers make use of myths, legends and all other oral knowledge of their ancestral people to show the

traditional bond as well as to revive and assert their ethnic social identity. Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* and King's *Medicine River* give a universal touch by questioning the very basic social problems of human life such as male dominance, patriarchal identity and gender issues. The opening line of Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* states emphatically:

My grandmother did not like me. I knew this when I was about four and a half. I was sitting in her kitchen with my brother Bulie, older to me by two years, when she served us food. Hot rice and chicken broth.

“What meat do you want”... I quickly piped up, “I want the leg, Grandmother, give me the leg.”

“I wasn't asking you, silly girl,” she said as she swiftly put the chicken leg into my brother's plate, “that portion is always for boys. Girls must eat the other portions” I didn't understand why and I didn't care to ask why not (1).

The utterance in the passage, ‘I didn't understand why and I didn't care to ask why not’ shows the silent position of a female social identity. The grandmother, here, uses the patriarchal construct of society to show preference to her grandson and by the same rule, abuses the females in her household. Kire decisively has asserted that women have their controlling methods and draws awareness to “a particular form of matriarchal control in her society that perpetrates gender inequality” (Sebastian 148). The story runs smoothly to underline the patriarchal system of Naga society, how a male child is always favored and counted, with ancestral inheritance following him. He inherits property and is given a social identity as soon as he is born but the female child's role is undermined. The position is fairly explained by the fictionist in the character portrayal of Zekuo. He got three daughters but was angry his wife had given birth only to daughters. He wanted a boy to carry on his name because “girl-children are never considered real members of the family... they would always be known as somebody's wife or somebody's mother and never somebody's daughter. That way they could not carry on their father's name” (*ATM* 24-25). This patriarchal arrangement

perpetrated by society, has led to gender inequality. Dielieno, the female protagonist finds out that girls are denied many things in life. The literal meaning of her name Dielieno is “errand girl” (ibidem 4). She is without individual identity and her grandmother always referred her as ‘The girl’ implying her to be a non-status among her four brothers. Feminist sees the mechanism of patriarchy as a “cultural mind-set in men and women, which perpetrated gender inequality” (Barry 122). Sexist oppression is wrong, and so Dielieno, in her search for identity seeks to overthrow this patriarchal position. She finds a way out to change her situation, no matter what the social system is. She becomes a survivor, educating herself and finally finding for herself a job, a modern girl in that sense giving identity to her own person, within her own family and community as well. Kire, in this way, show the changing trends that native society is going through because woman has fought hard to find her identity and a place in the society. Similarly, *Medicine River* exposes the towering presence of male dominance through the episode of Jake and January’s relationships. That Jake beats up January is no secret for January was regularly, admitted in the hospital emergency ward, but her failure to file domestic violence charges against Jack’s abuses gives a peep into the social intricacies of gender bias.

In *Truth and Bright Water*, King narrates the experience of natives living in border crossings, and within it, he frames the story of two cousins, Tecumseh and Lum, and their search for an identity. Many of King’s character portrayal gives a theme of social identification. Lum’s struggle and his tragedy reflects the unreachable efforts of human in attaining every self-need, but his tragic death in the unfinished bridge and in the river, is a symbolical explanation given by King for cultural regeneration as water signifies revival in Native social identities. King classifies the insights of social identity by characterizing Monroe Swimmer, who refers to himself as ‘Famous Indian artist.’ Monroe has not only restored nineteenth-century landscape paintings when he worked for museums around the

world, but has also painted Indians back into the paintings. In the route of his works, Monroe steals 'Indian children' that he claims he has, "found them in drawers and boxes and stuck away on dusty shelves", who are probably native relics collected for the museums of Toronto, New York, Paris, London, Berlin (250). His intention is to retrieve the Indians back to their original place. Monroe tying the skull up ceremoniously with a red ribbon before putting the bones in the Indian River is a symbolic act of restoring native social identity from colonial obliteration.

Personal Identity

Personal identity usually have a reference to that which a person feels attachment for or ownership of. It provides people with meaningful life experience. Easterine Kire and Thomas King's writings portray personal identity as a defining quality that makes up the society. In Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, the little girl, Dielieno's personal search for identity guides readers to the understanding of the traditional fabric of the Naga society. Her grandmother, as one who lived through a "very hard age" of exclusion from many aspects of social life, provides Dielieno a base to reflect over the social existence that made up her grandmother's identity of being a terrible matriarch (250). It also made her to understand her own position and, eventually, her own identity. She says, "I felt a new sense of worth. I was not unfortunate to have been born a girl... I was proud of my domestic skills" (ibidem 253). In King's *Medicine River*, Will Horse Capture's search for a personal identity, provides a reference point for native and non-native social identity. His personal relationship with Harlen Bigbear established him to a man with social identity. Harlen's wish to settle Will in Medicine River for something intimate like a picture proves a secure homecoming as he says, "I looked around Toronto for a few months, took the occasional free-lance job, but nothing

seemed to settle... So that's the way it happened (93). In both novels of Kire and King, photography or snapshots contribute as an arch element towards a better understanding of the self and others. It is the photograph that allows their characters to identify their relations, and be an entity. Dielieno in *A Terrible Matriarchy* talks of having family photos that is a treasured possession in each house. She mentions about one photo of her dead grandfather who was squinting in the sunlight and grandmother looking solemnly into the camera. It is through the photograph that Dielieno, again, shares a personal story of her unmarried grandmother, Neikuo, who was engaged to be married to a student of theology. Of how the man died before they could marry so that she never married and still keeps a photograph of the young theologian in her bedroom. In King's *Medicine River*, photographs kept by his mother enabled Will to learn about his family relations. On an earlier occasion, granny Pete showed his grandfather's photo to him. Later, the reason for Will to set up 'Medicine River Photography' is to take family pictures. Will also finds an identification through Flyod's grandmother who invites him to join in the family photograph. Lionel talks of this symbolic picture: "Granny... says maybe she should adopt you" (202). Again, in another incident, Will and Harlen's desire to visit the Custer National monument is to get a picture of it, Harlen points out: "I want to get a picture of us standing over Custer's grave. Maybe send it to the *Kainai News*. Put a big caption under it says, 'Custer Died for Your Sins'" (ibidem 106). The reason for Harlen's need to have a picture of the monument is that it has historical identity related to the natives. Hence, in Kire and King's, the purpose of photograph serves as private identity and historical evidence to unveil human relationships.

A comparative study of the art and cultural experience of Easterine Kire and Thomas King, as this chapter bears out reveals a connection of similar features that grow out of a written orality, in a field that is intercultural and transnational.

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