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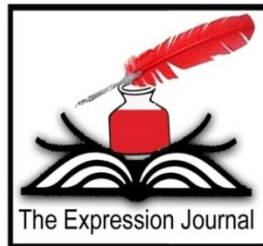
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CULTURAL MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN EASTERINE KIRE'S *A NAGA VILLAGE REMEMBERED*

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Abstract

Life and culture of the Angami Naga tribe of early twentieth-century in north-eastern India forms the backdrop of Easterine Kire's work entitled, *A Naga Village Remembered*. The plot revolves around the main character, Levi, who comes back to her village that has considerably changed during her absence and focuses on the idea of memory, tradition, and the elements of modernisation. The village is associated with culture and togetherness, the spear with power and sustained toughness, the forest with the unknown and hostility, the loincloth with the gender and culture of indigenous peoples, and precipitation as the rebirth of life. Issues of existential identity and roles are explored within the novel based on characters and their attempt to define their individual and social images in the course of culture shock. Thus, the conflict between the individual and society is reflected in Kevi, the given protagonist. In this ethnic identity is presented in a subjective way and being linked with social class, caste and nation to offer critique to colonized as well as post colonized world applying theories from Edward Said, Franz Fanon and Homi Bhabha. Imperial ethnographic model, Culture: Kire uses the idea of ethnography fiction to record the Naga's struggle against the British colonization in Indian, regain aboriginal data, and combat stereotype. The novel is deservedly devoted to the description of Khonoma village, its architecture, handicrafts and horticulture works, and the sights conveying the idea of unity and the desire to preserve the traditions of the village and make traditional activities. Based on modernisation and globalisation, the story explores the strain of a community in retaining its heritage form while inheriting progression; the Christianity and education influence on Naga people; and the colonisation of the Naga society. *A Naga Village Remembered* is a deep reflection on the thematic concerns of subjective existence and politics of culture that testifies to the resourcefulness of the Angami Naga culture in the face of the overt and the covert forms of historical and contemporary troubles. In addition to documenting both the cultural collectivity and the individual; the myths and the mentality of the Naga people, Kire's authorship of his poetry also performs a meta-discourse on colonialism and the indigeneity and concomitant preservation of cultural identity.

Keywords

Angami Naga Culture, Colonial and Post-Colonial Dynamics, Existential Identity, Ethnographic Fiction, Modernization and Globalization, Indigenous Resistance and Cultural Preservation.

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A Naga Village Remembered is a novel by Easterine Kire, one of the Indian authors who brings out the culture of northeast India in the early twentieth century. The main plot of the story revolves around Levi a lady who comes back to her village from a long time only to find that everything is not as she left it. It is necessary to note that the novel contains themes of memory, tradition, and modernity, and reveals the traditions of the Angami Nagas.

Symbolism in the novel is also quite versatile and helps convey complex motifs and ideas through characters and objects. Thus, the village can be viewed as the manifestation of the cultural identity, social unity, and the connection with the environment that is the product of generations. The spear represents incredible strength and also strong endurance of a man and the forest represents mystery, danger and all that is beyond known territories. The loincloth is semiotically significant as a representation of the main character's gender and utilitarian as a representation of the culture in which she is forced to live. Finally, precipitation acting as a washing away of the old and coming with the new is a symbol of progression, roles, and the everlasting cycle of life and the world that turns one after the other.

Thus, the problem of existential identity occurs to be one of the topics of focus in *A Naga Village Remembered*. Culture and society transformation is beautifully captured in the novel with issues to do with British colonization, faith, and education. The author also gives a flavour of Angami norms, traditions, sites of significance, rite, and rituals which are essential to give a picture of the Angami culture.

Therefore, it becomes evident that the novel does a good job in portraying how lack of acceptance of social and personal self-images affects the lives of several characters in the society. The protagonist, Kevi, is given universal advice: World is uncertain and as to what fate has in store tomorrow, so it is good to be thankful for being returned safe and sound. For now Kevi's name is rising; he is a warrior of Khonoma people and anyone that hears his name will think twice to cross him.

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Therefore, his life should be taken with a pinch of salt as pride and violation of taboo are deadly.

The novel also analyses the issue of the conflict of the individual against the society. The main character, Kevi, is trapped between her personal wants and the needs of her society. The woman gently wades through conventions of individualism and authoritative traditions of her people. Hence while analysing ethnic identity, one cannot isolate it from being in a constant social interaction with the class, caste or nation especially in a multi-ethnic state like India.

However, ethnicity and communalism are not the same things. Ethnicity gradually refers to the conjunction of similar consciousness, which is not always the notion of religion. Defining the Aryan race is racialism; ethnicity should be non-partisan though the two are interchangeable most of the time. In India's context particularly, the term community has assumed particularly a religiosity which in fact means identity construed purely on the basis of religion. *A Naga Village Remembered* is a novel that completely and correctly unfolds the history into the modern political scenario and vice versa in the north-eastern Indian region. The main character is a young woman from the Angami Naga tribe, and the film is about her attempts to decide who she is in the context of her culture's traditional values. It also touches on the issue surrounding the subject of gender, within a gendered society, the protagonist, a woman is always bound by various restraints base on her gender.

Thus, it is possible to identify the interrelation between power and cultural politics as discussed in the novel by employing the potential approaches to introduce cultural alterations. Similarly to sculpting the Naga culture, Easterine Kire performs various types of cultural epistemologies in her texts that serve on the same plane of cultural recovery and reinstatement of a gradually falling into oblivion culture and heroic history of the Naga struggle against the British invasion. Therefore, by means of employing the method of imagined ethnography, Kire writes back to the indigenous resistance of stereotype and colonialism, restores the indigenous forms of knowledge, and redraws the geo-spatial diversities of the Northeast India.

Khonoma is a village in the north-eastern part of India which has seen vigorous anti-British colonization initiatives. The background of the village is rich and vibrant cultural identity for the particular village which is famous for architectural style and design, handicraft, horticulture among others. The text also presents the elements of culture and gender division in the village including the segment of the "thehou," chaste or segregated ambiance of the village women's activities such as weaving or childbirth. The main concern shown in the village is solidarity and belonging inasmuch as men gather in a pack to talk about previous wars and to look for retaliation. A description must be noted:

Khonoma nestles amid mountains that are as high as 7,000 feet; a little village on a small hillock cradled by gaunt mountains that form a natural fortress. Hidden from human view by the mountainous barrier, Khonoma can be seen only from one direction in the northern Angami region between Meriema and Chieswema. Although her size of 500 houses in the 1800s was rather average among Angami villages, her fame spread far and wide as a warrior village. Her warriors of the Semo, Thevo and Merhü clans hardly numbered over a thousand at any given time in her history.

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However, Khonoma's protectorate extended in every direction, to the southern, northern, eastern and western Angami villages and some other Naga villages. (Kire, VII)

The pride of the village and the protection of its women cause conflict and revenge. It also talks about segregating the people depending on the ages, going through the rites of passage, and getting certain ornaments that are associated with the warfare as a means of symbolizing masculinity. This paper seeks to examine the social influences in the development and the general characteristics of the village based on the physical geography and the population. *A Naga Village Remembered* is a rich exploration of the theme of existential identity, the connection between power and cultural politics, and the challenges faced by individuals in navigating their desires, cultural expectations, and historical legacies.

With reference to modernization and globalization, the novel also raise issues about change and the swallowing up of the Nagas in the modern world where their culture is replaced by outside matters such as Christianity and education. They stress such aspects of the contemporary society as both the desire for its progress and the concern for the cultural legacy.

The Naga people's struggle against the colonization by Britain was an important segment of Nagaland, one of the northeast states of India. The Naga people possessed their own language, customs and traditions and hence, did not allow any penetration of colonial forces. This worth with special emphasis on the deeper aspects of cultural existence, defiance, and the outcomes of colonialism.

The so called 'orientalist discourse' developed by Edward Said provides a helpful theoretical perspective to take a critical look at the western construction of the orient, because it invariably involves the colonial perspective. Franz Fanon's discussion demonstrates the meaning of the detachment from the colonialist dispensation besides underlying the psychological implications inherent to it, therefore resulting in a weighty fight for the restoration of culture besides the ability to govern oneself. One cannot underestimate the value of Homi Bhabha's concept of dwelling hybridity and the third space with regard to the coalition between colonialism and modernity in the novel. *Sky Is My Father* open the history of the conflict between the Nagas and colonialism and the effects of their modern transformation. Culture is also portrayed as something that needs to be protected against the forces of colonialism that are represented in the novel.

The group called Subaltern Studies founded by historians like Ranajit Guha aims at studying and giving voices to the historical agents who were oppressed and excluded from the colonial as well as post-colonial historiography. The Naga resistance movement can be studied under the subalternity paradigm, as it explains how the Naga fights the dominant historiography and how the construction of the Naga as a threat also offers the 'subaltern' subject an opportunity to speak out. In her work Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak examines the complex relations that underlie the erasure of some people in the dominant knowledges, stress the necessity of constructing the 'freeing voices' environments where the procedures of the exclusion would have been discussed and challenged.

By referring to the concept of "weapons of the weak" as proposed by James C. Scott, such strategies and tactics pertain to the ordinary people's informal ability to resist and rebel against dominating hierarchal systems. These theorists and conceptual

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frameworks offer a comprehensive structure for comprehending the complex themes expounded upon in *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* and how both are related to broader discourses about colonialism, indigenous people's identity and their resistance, and the complex journey towards modernity. The novel explores how individuals struggle to reconcile their identities with their cultural and historical identities. Here are a few examples of how the theme of existential identity is explored in the novel. The advice is universal:

Life is strange, my son, we never know what tomorrow is going to bring. But you have been given back to us alive and we are grateful for that. And now, my son, yours is a name that is growing. You are a warrior of Khonoma. People will think twice when they hear your name. So step into your life carefully. Arrogance and pride kill. Be humble, heed the taboos and there is no reason why you should not have a full and long life. (Kire 53)

To clarify, there is information that Naga culture has always been closely connected to the struggle against the British colonialism in the territories of Nagaland. Naga National Council (NNC) which came into existence in 1946 was a political organization which sought to defend Naga tradition as well as obtain sovereignty for Nagaland. Several Naga leaders closely related to the NNC, bore strong convictions about the need to protect the Naga cultural being.

Levi, a central character in Easterine Kire's book *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* is powerful and influential in the Naga group, proving that Naga culture and tradition survive. Also he is an adult male, a master of hunt and cultivation, an expert in everything related to duality and wild nature and spouse, a priest involved into crucial activities within the framework of a community. Levi's character in the movie is just an example that Native Americans are trying to defend their culture and live according to their instincts which were altered by the colonialist's impact.

Keviselie who is focused as one of the central characters of the novel reflects the aspects of traditional human values, duties and practices of the village society. He has proper respect for tradition and the elder people, loves the rules and performs the actions which are necessary to become a new member of the tribe. In this case, Keviselie shows concerns and Christian gratitude for the bestowment of divine gifts and courteously invites the gods at the palatial Festal Board and Feast of Merit. Clear German made a difference because he was very thoughtful in creating his interventions, and his approach meant that he would change the tenour of the village and its people for the time he was there.

Kire's meritorious works of writing include novels and poems that paint a picture of the history and culture of Nagas. Being an ethnic group of the Indo-Burmese border region, the Naga people have contributed enormously in World War II especially in defending northeast of India from the Japanese invasion. A lot of the Naga soldiers had been struggling for independence of British domination, and for this objective shape the Naga National Council (NNC) for world's first sovereign Naga state.

Easterine Kire is a Naga writer and a poet who is a specialist in describing the history and background of the Naga people. This is the theme that her novel *When the River Sleeps* brings out in that its central character is a Naga shaman who seeks his personal identity. Naga particularly participated in the second world war by fighting the

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Japanese military invasion of India's northeast territory. Political consciousness was exhibited when many Naga soldiers engaging in fighting for independence from British regime also founding Naga National Council with the view of forming Naga independent state. The novel explores the tension between individual identity and community identity. The protagonist, Kevi, is torn between her desires and the expectations of her community. She struggles to balance her sense of self with her responsibility to uphold the traditions of her people. We can observe:

In a multi-ethnic state like India, ethnic identity cannot, thus, be studied as an isolated primordial category. It has to be viewed in the context of its constant interrelationship with class, caste or nation. Again, a distinction also needs to be made between ethnicity and communalism. The two terms have been used in various contexts, which are not always internally compatible. Ethnicity eventually connotes the conjunction of similar consciousness, which is not necessarily religious. Racialism is bad ethnicity; ethnicity is supposed to be neutral, though one often shades into the other, as Sikh ethnicity in the Punjab or Gorkha ethnicity in Darjeeling. On the other hand, although communalism in its original meaning or etymological sense referred to excesses of sentiment of any feeling - localist, provincialist, tribalist or casteist - the term community in India's context has assumed specific religious connotations, implying identity essentially based on religion. (Das 680)

The battle of the Naga people against Japanese was a primal fight against colonization as well as for India's freedom. On the issue of Japanese invasion, the Nagas were divided, some viewed this as liberation from colonial rule of British and some considered Japanese as another power intending to occupy the Naga people. But which this progression of war or continuation of occupation it was seen that the Japanese were not being interested to provide any sort of independence or autonomy to the Nagas instead they wanted to dominate over the people of Nagaland as well as the area's resources, the people included.

Speaking of orality, the motif is represented in *When the River Sleeps* through the Naga shaman who is a main character of the story - the man who goes in search of the plant which can cure the sickness threatening the community. She incorporates intelligence by using the elders' counsel, which has been acquired centrally through word of mouth. Kire's work of orality raises the question of the continued survival of indigenous people's culture and education systems and his experiences the disadvantage of indigenous people in the ever-changing world where their cultures and ways of life are under attack by modernity and globalization.

The plot mainly revolves around a village and how the people in the village stand together especially when one of them goes missing. The following tactics of the loud talking and hearing of light voices pertain to the climax of the movie and the important role that the village elders particularly the Maran (spiritual elder) and other senior citizens of the village have in the running of the affairs of the village. The villagers are afraid of supernatural beings and power which is why they do not break the tradition in case they meet such. Thus, there is an analysis of how the people of the village perceive the natural resources and the shift from childhood to adulthood through the use of stories heard from the elders. Use of emotions are marked by concern reflected by the

villagers, questions that the children ask, and the persistent tries made by the villagers to look for the missing persona.

The plot is based on a man who went missing just six days before the show and tells a rather grim story of being kidnapped by some dark beings. In this situation non-medical characters in the village go on with their normal activities after the warrior raids while the elders are more concerned with management of the aftermath. Warriors' deaths are often followed by disruptions in normal activities, which sometimes result in special funerals. In the given plot, the mother is named Piano who is also rather severe but still believes that her sons will one day be able to grasp the notion of death.

The plot therefore focuses on Kovi, a young man already preparing for a risky raid to be able to qualify as a warrior. He is a traditional man who respects culture and obey traditions, however, his mother is worried about him. This practice is referred to as fortune casting and entails the use of a sacrificed rooster- this is a collection of beliefs and half-baked superstitions. In the war reality, the warriors of the different villages combine their efforts to make a successful attack, which proves they are united against a common enemy. This releases bloodshed and violence, which prompts some form of response from the British administration to the warriors.

Kovi goes back to his village Khonoma and realises several changes. Ngonyi is a special day on which people must set; apart time for feasting and performing number of activities for 'fun'. Levi, who was set free from jail six years earlier, goes back to the village and estimates the size of the village as well as the development of the youths. By this the villagers are able to demonstrate the feelings they have towards culture through the rituals and traditions.

As for the concerns the novel presents, the issues related to the marriage rights and traditions of the Naga tribe are in the found of detailed procedures of couples' connection. This minority celebrates genna days and gets involved in a number of practices that would pull down the divide between the earthly and the divine. The social roles are defined by the delegated tasks, and women are related to providing food as weavers; men are engaged in performing activities with symbolic meanings. The blessings of the elders are illuminating and have the pattern similar to constellations in the sky, therefore, the blessings that has been given in the past determines the future.

The text shows that transmitting culture knowledge and also the evils also wants to pass and it also depicts there is a rift between traditional and change. The sacrifice of the chickens in the ritual is meaningful according to the beliefs of the people and concerns the relationship between the practical life and the spiritual world.

The novel documents the issues of struggle between the indigenous Konyak Naga tribes in India during the British colonization with focus to the Khonoma wards. What is special about this documentary is that it portrays the Angami tribe and the members' behaviour as a genuine and unaltered representation of their daily life. The last excursion was conducted in November 1879 when Brigadier General Nation led thousand men, and stressing the problem of the colonial power and the warrior culture of the society.

The novel occurs in Khonoma; the village is deployed to interact with hard events like battles and burnings. The main characters are Kovi, a brave warrior and the head of Merhü clan, Apfü, his wife and Lato and Roko, their sons. It asserts the

omnipresence of traditional methods and social relations by detailing Levi's angst for the new faith and the persecution of converts.

Sky is My Father is a novel written by Easterine Kire – a Nagas author – where she presents her people's oral history and myths coming from the Nagas, an indigenous people living in Northeast India. It is centred on a human protagonist, a Naga boy, Kovi raised within a basic tribal society setting. The novel presents and developed the aspects of identity, family structure and conflict and tradition and modernity, besides the stories of Nagas as an oral society.

The village of Khonoma in the Nagaland state of India has a troubled past of colonialism, military violence, indigenous peoples' sovereignty. The Nagas have fought against colonialism and trying to remain out of bounds from the external world, Rani Gaidinliu, a Naga freedom fighter for independent Naga from British regime. The warfare between Nagas and Japan in the 1940s greatly affected the Nagas by leading up to the Naga Insurgency. This conflict came to a halt in 2015 when the government of India and the Naga rebel groups inked a peace deal. The conflict with Japan during the 1940s has another role in Nagas' history that has influenced the present day fight for sovereignty and self-rule.

Sky is my Father is based on the oral histories of the Nagas with the themes of nature and a person's life and death. The Nagas are mythological creatures inherent to South Asia, and they have a complex mythology which tells the story of the creation of the world and relations of the beings. There are also several Naga fables and myths in the book: one of these is the one telling about Tikhir, a playful spirit of the jungle that tricks people into the forest, and after that, they cannot find their way out.

Themes of identity, family and illumination of the conflict between the modern society and outmoded culture is well depicted in the novel; *Sky is My Father* by Easterine Kire. It emphasizes the values of folk experience and verbal turnover in the context of the progressing world. It also expounds on issues of indignity and the awkward position that indigenous people find themselves in an ever transforming society. The protagonist is connected to her historical identity through her family's stories and traditions. She must navigate the complexities of the past to understand who she is and where she comes from:

The Northeast Indian region is located between two regions, Indic Asia and Mongoloid Asia. This geographical condition is one of the important factors of the crisis of identity here. While addressing the identity crisis, one has to bear in mind the cultural plurality of the northeast and difference in people assimilated into tribal and non-tribal people in particular. (Ghosh)

The social issue in the novel is focused on Khonoma village which is a community that still observes tradition and tradition alone despite intrusion of modernity and modernity's standards. The novel also focuses on the richness and relativity of the Naga culture and issues with the modernization of indigenous population. In *Don't Run, My Love* (2017) and *Sky is My Father: In A Naga Village Remembered* (2018), traditions and folklores are performed to reconstruct and renew the culture and economy of the Naga people. Historical events, linguistic features, and concept along with indigenous people's experiences linked to anti-colonial historiography are used in the novel.

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Enormous emphasis is placed on the stories that are shared in folklore since it becomes important to educate the new generation of children on the history and parts of the tribal regions of India. Specifically regarding the culture of the Naga people, revitalization is embodied in storytelling which enables the youth to gain cultural knowledge and promote continuity between generations. They perform rituals for spirits and are animistic believing that there is interaction between the spirits and Naga human beings.

Thus, Kire uses narratives to acknowledge the Naga tribes' cultural economy by putting their disregarded customs and ceremonies into perspective. This is outlined by the memory of the feast and the feast itself as the means of developing fraternity, such a collectivist community, and identity. Two major concepts examined in the text are identity and memory, both of which are reciprocal; Individual memories can progress and turn into collective memories.

Don't Run turns the tale into a chase-not-chase kind of love story and *Sky is My Father* depicts the colonial history of the Naga tribe amidst the anti-colonist fight. The aggression that penetrates everyone's life erodes the setting's innocuousness and represents violence more and more characteristic of the north-eastern states of India.

In the two postcolonial novels by Easterine Kire titled *Sky is My Father* and *Don't Run, My Love*, the author deals with issues of colonization, conversion, and assimilation that lead to the gradual elimination of the natives' culture. These work focuses on the historical past of Naga people and their culture and the experience of colonialism in literature. This pattern ensures that the young generation gains education on the history and knowledge of their tribe thus increasing the awareness of their cultural importance and bridging the generation gap.

Thus, analysing the novels of Easterine Kire, such as *A Naga Village Remembered* and *Bitter Wormwood*, one is introduced to main motifs of the Nagas' fight for freedom and colonizing effects on their society. Thus, these books improve awareness of the history and culture of the Naga people through the telling of their story and the descriptions of their customs.

Nagaland is an area in India and there are sixteen recognized tribes there, Angami, Ao, Chang, Chakhesang, DimasaKachari, Konyak, Khiamniungan, Kuki, Lotha, Pochury, Phom, Rengma, Sangtam, Sumi, Yimchunger, and Zeliang. Easterine Kire's *Walking The Roadless Road* also offers the best information about the tribal, social-cultural and political structure of Nagaland. Cadena calls this time period the Plantationocene as this is when capitalism came to the colonies with colonizers. Neo-colonialism is the reason behind the global dichotomy of the so-called developed world and the developing world. It was occupied by the British in the middle of the nineteenth century and this paved way in the development of primary schools and had its rudimentary form on medical assistance. Initially, the Angami people and particularly the Khonoma village people boycott and heavily persecuted Dr. Sidney Rivenburg, the first Angami man and the first Christian. However, the luminaries of the village were produced due to the advantages of education, some of the best doctors, scientists and musicians after 1930.

Christianity intervened the Naga Hills in a rather a complex and disputative manner and this involved the use of several tactics and endless discussions between the missionaries and the Naga community. In the case of political impact, the British

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colonization of the area influenced the Khonoma not only politically, but also ethnically. This led to Britain intervening to support the initiatives and missionary undertakings of the American Baptist Missionary to introduce the 'War-loving' Naga tribes to the light. The Naga gradually began linking Christianity with education in order to deal with new social and political conditions.

In the book, *A Naga Village Remembered*, Sato attempts to explain that there is a certain likeness between the Christianity and his own religion because Naga worshipper have been able to discover some aspects of their own culture in the Christian teaching though nativized. Such a twisted copy of Christianity ensures that Christianity cannot be made better as both the colonizers and the colonized subject are involved in the contradictions of colonial discourse.

Easterine Kire critically captures the essence of the Naga people, an Indian indigenous minority by depicting the struggle of a woman named Niki who was abandoned by her husband to find out that, Sky is her father, though this kind of stories is rare among the Naga people but Kire depicts hoe women are civilized through Niki, while making a point that the traditional way of life of the Naga people should not just be forgotten and It is possible to give out the following themes and issues of morality in the novel: community, identity, spirit and the role of culture.

Indigenous identity is a way of considering one's self as Indigenous that is anchored in the Indigenous tradition and culture. The Naga people's spirituality and its integration with the environment in which they live fully encompass their existence. Engaging and provoking its audience, the novel raises questions on the place of indigenous peoples' intelligence in the modern world.

The existence of 'genna days' when the Khonoma people do not undertake any kind of work in order not to chase away the animals that destroy crops is brought out in the novel. A character then proceeds to tell Levi that the taboos are in place so that the innocent shall not die and so that wickedness will be happy. Sins of people are pride and arrogance; if one loses these qualities and learns to consider other people's needs, he will be happy, and his life will be long. There is pressure to maintain the status of the people of Khonoma as protectors of their home through safety. Civility and manners are therefore the duty of a man towards his fellow man in the society.

The destruction that came after the war is described in the book *Sky is My Father: A Naga village remembered*. Quite naturally, it is suggested to learn about the sense of community, cultural identity and spirituality in one's own life, as well as ponder over the key values and principles by which one can live.

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