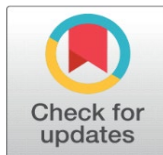


NAGAS AS OTHERS: EXHUMING THE DESPOTIC COUNTERINSURGENCY OF THE INDIAN ARMY AND EXPLICATING ITS PROVOCATIONS THROUGH EASTERINE KIRE'S BITTER WORMWOOD

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DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.4439](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.4439)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Tribal literature is a phenomenal literary branch in the abode of literature as it represents the lives of the original inhabitants of a particular soil, which are predominantly enswathed with catastrophic predicaments as they are discriminated and subjugated in their own lands. The writers of Tribal literature strive to unveil the true state of tribal life, which is hidden behind the numerous screens of misinterpretation throughout history, and to prop up the tribal stand by unearthing reality. They depict the salient ethnic history, culture, and tradition of all the tribal communities, along with the threats to all these prominent components. They articulate their voices through their paramount skill of writing for the unheard, underrepresented, and misrepresented voices of the tribal people. Easterine Kire is one such admirable writer from Nagaland who constantly unravels the misapprehended lives of Nagas by having them as the marrow of her literary contributions. Bitter Wormwood is her most influential novel, in which she composites the history of Naga insurgency and counterinsurgency with some fictional incidents to publicise how the Naga tribes as well as the Indian army endured that cataclysmic movement. Through scrutinising this novel, the researcher diagnoses why the Indian army whose obligation is to protect Indians, besieges and excruciates the Nagas, and why this despotic counterinsurgency is not divulged. Subsequently, the present article intends to demonstrate the hypothesis that Nagas are treated as 'others' rather than Indians throughout the counterinsurgency of the Indian army.

Keywords: Brutality of Indian Army, Counterinsurgency of Indian Army, Naga Freedom Movement, Naga Insurgency, Media Representation, Misinterpretations, and Nagaland

1. INTRODUCTION

Insurgency is described as a violent revolt that the citizens execute against the government of a particular country to overthrow the government's constitutions for certain reasons. Counterinsurgency is defined as a military and political action that is undertaken to restrain insurgencies and revolutions. In India, the oldest or longest insurgency is the Naga insurgency, which the Naga tribes of Nagaland have been carrying out since India got independence to obtain sovereignty from the Indian government. It was commenced as a single-grouped movement with a non-violent approach for their sole cause but polluted with unexpected circumstances; thereupon, it has been transformed into an armed uprising and factionalized into several groups for different causes, which yielded desperate commotions that swallowed the lives of many warriors and innocents as well. To constrain this deadly upheaval, the Indian government has been enforcing

several actions with the assistance of military force; hence, the perturbed social milieu of Nagaland is aggravated as the army force misemploys their power over the insurgents and guiltless villagers. This hazardous condition instigates conflicts and hassles between these insurgents and counterinsurgents. However, these importunate occurrences are not promulgated but concealed from the notice of commoners. If it is exposed, it will normally take the stand of the Indian government; this provides no space for questioning the misdemeanours of authorities, and that, no one could have control over their deeds.

In the present article, the researcher untangles the conglomerates of the Naga freedom fight by evaluating the novel *Bitter Wormwood*, which is an authentic representation of a Naga tribal writer Easterine Kire. Easterine Kire, who is a prominent woman writer and the first Naga novelist in the English language, is remarkable for her indigenous voice that she employs to disseminate the affairs of Nagas to the non-Naga world, which has miscomprehended this tribal world. Her novel *Bitter Wormwood* depicts the Naga independence movement, in which Nagas fight against the Indian army to attain freedom from the Indian government. It can be distinguished as an outstanding novel of Kire as it is portrayed from the perspective of both Nagas and Indian soldiers. Examining this phenomenal novel, this article aims to illustrate that there are disastrous damages for both sides, and to disclose the rudiments that exacerbated the devastation. This study procures replications for the research question that why the Indian armed force misuses its power and authority in the counterinsurgency process instead of wielding productive implements to control the insurgents. Consequently, it aspires to publicise the elements of provocation that stimulated the misbehaviours of the military force. Further, it reasons out why the Naga insurgency and counterinsurgency are there as folded tapestries. Along with these, it proves the hypothesis that Nagas are labelled as insurgents, which means that they are the citizens of India, but they are manoeuvred as 'others' by the Indian government and military.

The storyline of the novel spins around the major Naga characters Mose and his family members, who live in Nagaland during the Naga liberation movement. At the end of British colonisation, Nagas anticipate sovereignty with the determination to rule their own land, but they come to know about the establishment of their new government that is erected by the Indian constitutions; therefore, they begin to protest for their freedom with the weapon of non-violence through the organisation Naga National Council as they do not feel as Indians. When the Indian government decides to terminate their freedom fight by employing the power of the Indian military and armed police force, the Nagas start to indulge in violence to defend themselves from the brutal abuses of the armed forces.

The Indian government announces curfews for the places of Nagas to bridle the activities of the Undergrounders. Being a schoolboy, Mose gets scared of police and army men as they beat and torture whoever comes as an easy pick for them, apart from the revolutionists. They shoot the non-violent participants of a march to collapse it, persecute his villagers if they suspect them as the helping hands of undergrounds, burn the villages, and rape the Naga women to wound their psyches. In order to impose the Indian identity, Mose's mother and grandmother along with all other Nagas are threatened and forced to vote for the Indian election. Because of this truculent army and policemen, the innocent villagers are also not able to work in their fields peacefully but just lament, "[W]ho is there to protect us from all these evils?" (Kire 69). These counterinsurgency actions are taken to make the Nagas embrace the Indian identity, but they are treated as others, not as Indians.

Mose rages out as his naïve grandmother is shot dead when she was doing her fieldwork, and joins in underground to avenge the people who torment his folk mercilessly. However, there is no favourable action taken to alleviate their pain by the government, which expects Nagas to accept the Indian identity and abide by its constitutions. It implements the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act, Disturbed Area Act, and peace treaty that immune the army and police force further, and thereupon they treat the Nagas as animals that "they can shoot . . . when they will" (Kire 59).

After the horrendous struggle of Nagas, the Indian government declares Nagaland a separate state. Receiving the statehood, Mose and some of his fellow members get out of the NNC to lead a peaceful life as it is instructed by the government, where the problem arises in the name of breakaway groups whom have factionalized from the NNC due to differences of opinions; they initiate their atrocities by terrorising and killing their own community, which defile the cause of Naga warfare. As a result of this new trouble, the government employs the Central Reserve Police Force and implements the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which amplify the agonising atrocities of the Indian army and police. So, Mose and his community encounter disastrous turbulence, which horrifies the state of Nagas to the extreme.

Treatment of the Indian army and police force validates that Nagas are not considered as Indians but as 'others', which convictions have triggered the army men to torture the Naga insurgents as well as the faultless villagers in order

to inhibit their insurgency. The concept 'other' is widely associated with Simone de Beauvoir, the French feminist and existentialist who discusses this concept influentially in her book *The Second Sex* to demonstrate how the female gender is configured in the male-dominated society. Beauvoir elucidates that "she is nothing other than what man decides. . . . She is determined and differentiated in relation to man. . . . He is the subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other" (22). Here, the dominating force takes the place of 'self' or 'significant' and sets the opposite force in the subordinating place as 'other' or 'insignificant' to have power over that opposite force, and to segregate them as minorities in order that the dominating force can exploit the inferior. In the case of the Naga insurgency, Nagas, the inferior community repudiates the Indian identity and demands a separate nation for them in a revolutionary manner that is restrained by the Indian military, the dominant force to make the Nagas accept the Indian identity; in this process, the army men turn out as extremists to cease the rebellious deeds of the insurgents as they consider the Nagas as 'others' not as Indians.

The Indian army and police force who serve as the protectors or saviours of Indians become despots in the counterinsurgency that they undertake to constrain the Naga freedom fights. It is all because of their flustered circumstances that generate negative emotions which function as the impetus to make them involve in brutal or unlawful activities in order to relieve their strain. Robert Agnew, an American criminologist expounds on this kind of behaviours in his General Strain Theory. In GST, "a criminal or delinquent response to strain is viewed as an attempt by the individual to cope with the negative emotional state and, specifically, as an attempt to obtain immediate relief from emotional distress" (Brezina 5). Here, the strains are posited as the "events and conditions that are disliked . . . by most people . . . or . . . by the person experiencing it" (Decamp et al. 306). Kire projects the catastrophic milieus of Indian soldiers and police officers, who are used as "pawns in a bigger game" by the Indian government, through the non-Naga character Himmat, who has worked as a policeman in Nagaland to constrain the patriotic Naga freedom fighters (201). Himmat explicates that due to the physical and mental pressures in the alienated land, soldiers have exploited their power over the Nagas and they are trained to do so to save the integrity of the nation according to the norms of government:

I have known many soldiers who have been driven mad by seeing their mates killed beside them. They did terrible things to innocent civilians in turn. . . . We felt alienated because we entered Nagaland with the understanding that the Nagas were fellow Indians but the truth was that the Nagas looked completely different . . . some of the soldiers . . . suffered serious psychological disorders. . . . They were always under pressure. . . . It proved to be traumatic for them. That is probably one reason for the great number of military atrocities committed by the army . . . They just let go of their humanity. (Kire 199 – 200)

It is apparent that the Indian army and police force have undergone obnoxious circumstances that kindled negative emotions, in order that they turned out as despots and anguished the victims as these outpourings worked as antidotes for their disturbed psyches. However, he does not justify the brutality of the Indian army and police force.

As an indigenous writer, Kire unfolds how her people have endured the traumatising Naga independence movement, but the astonishing thing is that she enumerates the hard situation of the Indian army and police force exclusively, without prioritising the crises of her ethnic people alone. However, this history of Naga insurgency and counterinsurgency is not exposed through the media that has the power to promulgate the issues in order that way outs will be generated. Kire bursts out at the underrepresentation of the Naga liberation movement by the media in the 'Introduction' of *Bitter Wormwood*:

The struggle for independence from India by the Naga people . . . has been a story hidden for several decades. Cleverly concealed by censorship on newspaper reports, there was only one western journalist, a British war correspondent named Gavin Young . . . who managed to . . . report what he saw of the genocide and rape and torture of the Nagas by the Indian Army. (1)

She demonstrates that news about the Naga world have been shrewdly hidden under the wraps of censorship by the power of the Indian Government; and she states that only the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Naga Chronicles, and the Naga Federal Government have pioneered in reporting the Naga affairs genuinely.

Media serves as a phenomenal component and an inevitable fraction of every society. It functions as a medium of communication for the people of diverse sectors; according to the ethics of media, it is the obligation of a journalist to capture the facts of all social milieu of various societies or communities, and deliver them as content with dynamic perspectives in order to publicize the realities with transparency; it is essential for the reasons that by utilizing this constructive medium, one gets to know about the affairs of all over the world, grasps any information to be aware of any significant social occurrence and upgrades his or her knowledge about each socio-political, socio-economic as well as socio-cultural circumstance. Therefore, it should be the authentic articulations on which one can rely upon with trust;

and it has to be detached of favouritisms to contribute fine exposition of the actual events which is the prime devoir of genuine media.

An English writer James Arnold Watson elucidates the influence and prowess of media in his book *Media Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Process*:

Essentially the media operate in what is defined as public space or the public

sphere. In fact, in modern times, they arguably embody that space by being 'the voice of the people. . . . The pictures in our heads are the pictures for the most part put there by the media; and our attitudes towards those pictures, our definition of their meaning – our recognition of their reality – owes much to what the media have selected, omitted, shaped and interpreted. (4)

It is factual that media has occupied the public domain by taking the stand of people's articulation which has been controlled by its demonstrations where an individual acts and reacts according to the constructs of its representation. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the media to spread positive influence by promoting constructive and authentic information about real scenarios.

There are a number of ethical norms, even laws and ordinances implemented for the media to uphold its quality and potency which are mandatory to generate the trust of people which is the core constituent of every established band of media to run in the competitive market. The question is how far the media establishments incorporate the ethical rules and regulations to bring out their produce. A slight inclination towards favouritism degrades the integrity of the media source which ought to be objective at any cost. Publishing adulterated information is not at all a legitimized act of any media as it misleads the people by collapsing their ideology, and it shatters the trust of people in the course of time. Not all media companies indulge in morphing the original occurrences while converting them as data to deliver it to its audience, but some execute such counterfeit journalism for hidden remunerations where a human being strains to comprehend the truth that is furled under layers of misinterpretation and encounters trust issues over media representation.

The popular media sources mindlessly choose labels such as insurgents, militants, hostiles, secessionists, and extortionists to describe these Naga warriors whose horrible turmoil was not publicised by the media reports. It is the worst interpretation of Naga history in which the realities have been hidden behind the walls of censorship. Most of the journalists are not ready to disseminate the harsh treatment of the Indian Army which torrented not only over the warriors who strived for independence but also over the innocent villagers, though it consumed the lives of many Nagas. These media establishments lean towards favouritism and are not prepared to create any stain over the moves of the Indian Government or Indian Army when they address the issues of Nagas but they are very much keen in the case of Naga misdeeds; it is also a kind of misinterpretation which a genuine media should avoid and must stay away from it. Further, it is much better to handle underrepresented chaos than the misrepresented versions, the condition of which is truly pathetic where one's story is reshaped without his or her awareness and permission by the supremacy of media. Kire unlike journalists discloses the concealed history of Naga insurgency and counterinsurgency indisputably in the novel *Bitter Wormwood*. This should have been made by the voice of journalists, but they still misinterpret the events and allow the commons to miscomprehend the story. Therefore, one should not blindly believe or support the stand of any social phenomenon without recognizing the truth.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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