

Of Being and Belonging: Contextualising 'Cosubjectivity' in Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps*

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'Cosubjectivity' is the definitive hallmark of Naga consciousness and worldview. It forms an integral part of the structuring of the community, which, as I argue, offers a critique of the idea of subjectivity based on the supremacy of the power and agency embedded only in the 'human' subject. The absence of such valorisation defines the Naga consciousness as witnessed in *When the River Sleeps*, a representative text which establishes the fact that the Naga community is actually progressive as the Nagas were far ahead of the definitive and conclusive frameworks of western colonial enterprises based on the binary between 'self' and 'other'.

In this paper, I address the complexity implicit in the production and sustenance of knowledge as the Nagas do not just dissolve the modalities of the binaries of 'self' and 'non-self' into a simplistic equation of power relations. The idea of 'cosubjectivity' forms the governing rationale of Naga historiography existing prior to the colonial enterprise. The community foregrounds a different epistemological tradition which is basically a reflection of the lived reality of the indigenous tradition existing prior to the hegemony of the western and colonial practices valorising rationality and individuality. The fictional representation of territoriality and community in her works also challenges and critiques the conventional humanist and anthropocentric narratives valorising the essential superiority of humans as the supreme agency.

The art of inhabiting, as Easterine Kire narrativises, is a community experience as she foregrounds a collective sense of being as the space of the Naga community is inclusive of humans as well as non-humans. The fluidity of the boundary between the real and the fantastical, 'self' and 'non-self' is the focus of her conceptualisation of the universe as widely inclusive and symbolic, eschews codeveloped and cohabited worlds of existence and experience.

The question of indigeneity is an inherent component of the representation of the Nagas as a community, and Easterine Kire does conceptualise the community in terms of the modalities of indigenous practices and the affiliative markers of 'being' and 'belonging'. The space of community emerges as a cusp of shifting paradigms in terms of acknowledging the manifold ways of 'being' in the context of 'belonging' – national, social, cultural, epistemological, and most importantly, spatial. This can be only understood if we sacrificed our routinised, mundane ways of seeing and traversed beyond the common atavistic qualities of perception, as brilliantly summarised by Easterine Kire in her interview:

For Naga people of my generation, we have no problem in accepting the coexistence of the spirit world with the natural world. In fact, it is arrogant to presume that there is only one reality-the natural world of the senses. Some people say there is a very thin veil dividing the two worlds. I believe that is true. I have no problem in embracing both realities and I feel richer by it. And in turn, I try to give my reader that experience. (Interview of 20 Oct, 2020)

As evident, the law of coexistence and cosubjectivity rules supreme in the cultural consciousness of the Naga community. The Naga philosophy is accommodative. It teaches us to respect the varied forms of life and the functional interdependence between 'self' and 'non-self', 'truth' and 'falsehood'. Kire's poetics of representation contests the definitive conclusions about boundary formation and boundary spanning, thereby representing a fluid space of cultural encounter between humans and non-humans, a binary valorised by the western paradigm.

The aim is to attempt an analysis of the process of constitution of indigenous historiography based on the complex modalities of the ideas of ruptures, absences, and fluidity inherent in the process of formation of an indigenous archive as indigenous communities often encounter 'epistemic violence' and are believed to offer only a critique of and resistance to the onslaught of western epistemological traditions. Similarly, the constitution of an archive of indigenous knowledge, mostly oral in nature, can posit the Naga community on a decolonial interface as the Nagas also structure their world around indigenous practices and contest the hegemonic practices of formation of knowledge in terms of offering alternative epistemology and methodology as Michel Foucault's argues, "in short, the history of thought, of knowledge, of philosophy, of literature seems to be seeking, and discovering, more and more discontinuities" (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 6). But, it will be a simplistic generalisation to assume the Naga community staging only a 'resistance' to the existing practices and frameworks of community and knowledge formation as the projection of a more harmonious and balanced worldview comprising of more sustainable points of view has been a part of Naga cultural imaginary since ages. Naga consciousness has always been inclusive and accommodative in nature; hence, the idea of reading Kire only in the context of resistance poetics runs the risk of reductionism, although her methodological approach is deeply aligned with the practice of decolonisation of knowledge.

Acknowledging epistemic diversity in terms of the existence of alternate epistemologies, in *Walking the Roadless Road: Exploring the Tribes of Nagaland*, she narrativises the existence of a parallel universe, "the Angami is deeply aware of the spiritual world around him and accepts its parallel existence with the natural world. The spiritual world is peopled with malevolent spirits that could harm humans or could damage crops, so the penie is diligently observed to propitiate the malevolent spirits" (Kire 63). Her deep engagement with the world of spirits and non-humans and her constant effort to widen and broaden the conceptualisation of 'community' to highlight the practices of collective identity in an inclusive space where mutual solidarity is constantly mediated is embedded in the inclusivity of Naga consciousness as the community is defined as a human collective that must include a dynamic interaction with the non-human.

Through the experience of a lone hunter, the guardian of the forest, Vilie, who literally and symbolically lives on the threshold, *When the River Sleeps* represents the spaces where the binary between the human and the spirit world is constantly mediated and dissolved. Vilie truly inhabits the transient and transitional spaces of 'being' and 'belonging' and exemplifies 'cosubjectivity' in the true sense of the term. He represents the art of solitude in his enforced isolation and alienation, and through Vilie's multiple encounters with the world of non-humans, Kire has evidenced the space of the community as a cusp or a point of transition between multiple orders of being, otherwise a potential source of conflict. Vilie occupies the focal point on the brink of two worlds; his constant negotiations with the world of non-humans foreground the unifying integrity existing between the two, the hallmark of Kire's conceptualisation of community living. The sociality valorised by the community is often mediated by encounters with non-humans in various forms, and Vilie occupies "the threshold between one form and another" (Robyn).

Such inclusive consciousness is embedded in the practices of everyday life cohabited, codeveloped, and closely aligned with the formation as well as sustenance of an indigenous archive. The rhythms of everyday practices of the community and neighbourhood in terms of spatial tactics, strategies involved in the tradition of hospitality and distribution of food and other materials, and shared belief system establish the village as a total entity representative of the harmonious coexistence of all creatures and upheld the rhetoric of an inclusive totality. The idea of 'home' is extended to other territories as "the forest was home to Vilie" (Kire, *When the River Sleeps* 3), and continuous efforts are made to harness a sense of mutual bonding. The tradition of hospitality forms the crux of the community feeling. The courteous exchange of food items like brew, rice, meat, and fish helps to establish a sense of community bonding, the practice of not allowing a traveller to use up his resources,

and the custom of keeping essential items for the travellers who frequent the sheds in the forest entails a sense of homeliness and comfort as Vilie finds all the amenities (a bed made of straw, pots, and pans and a ready hearth) in the sheds.

The representation of everyday practices performed in the space of community is crucial to the formation of the indigenous archive, which upholds alternate spatial cultural ethics, liminal to the core. Attempting a 'rhythmanalysis' of the indigenous practices of living is a transformative as well as a collaborative act of 'being', 'belonging', and 'becoming' as argued by Henri Lefebvre, "the act of rhythmanalysis integrates these things-this wall, this table, these trees-in a dramatic becoming, in an ensemble full of meaning, transforming them no longer into diverse things, but into presences" (33).

Similarly, *When the River Sleeps* celebrates the constant performance of such presences as the narratives of rapturous discontinuity are validated in the context of the community's complex relation with the territoriality of the nation-state. Each object here upholds the integrated rhythm of everyday life in an indigenous community no one else can relate to. This is a world of believers, and outsiders cannot integrate themselves into the art of becoming. To elaborate: trees in the unclean forest, spirit faces reflected in water, the presence of spirits in the market, indigenous herbs used for healing, etc., are completely different and hardly fit into the homogenisation of identity the nation-state valorises, a problematic domain in Northeast literature and culture. To blur the threshold of the visible and invisible worlds is to contest hegemonic narratives of cohesive progress and unity. Most importantly, the heart-stone retrieved from the sleeping river is the best example of 'becoming' as it dramatically changes its colour depending on the situation and the nature of the owner. The heart-stone symbolises the complexity and dynamics of maintaining, representing, and differentiating identities in intersecting territories-material as well as spiritual occupied by both humans and non-humans.

The notion of 'interconnectedness' governs the world of the novel. Consequently, the safety of the village is interconnected to the safety of the forest dwellers as well, and the community appears to be the guardian to ensure and reciprocate the 'interconnectedness' embedded in Vilie's continual presence as the spiritual guardian even after his supposed murder. His presence highlights the continuity of the tradition of protection as endorsed in the morale of the community, and the young hunter Roko experiences the alluring 'presence' "in the house which was not frightening but different. He actually referred to it as companionable" (Kire, *When the River Sleeps* 237). The symbolic and customary value of the 'village gate' in the novel is repeatedly established in the context of claiming and asserting spatial boundaries, but the boundaries are categorically and progressively challenged, traversed, and intermediated as communication with the world of spirits and non-human forms an integral part of 'being' in the community which demands collaborative conformity as "the Naga tribes depend on conformist behaviour for their survival" (Kire, *Walking the Roadless Road* 57).

In *When the River Sleeps*, Vilie, the "guardian of the *gw*" (Kire 4), personifies as well as challenges the collaborative conformity in his repeated transgressions; since the beginning of the novel, Vilie is found torn between the two worlds embodying 'cosubjectivity' in the true sense of the term. Vilie's existence exemplifies the interchange and intermingling of the multiplicity of 'subject' eventually established by his ultimate transformation into a weretiger, which further enhances the existence of 'cosubjects' in the community. After the spirit-induced death of Mechuseno (Vilie's love), she has to be buried outside the village gate as "she had died in what were considered 'ominous circumstances'" (Kire, *When the River Sleeps* 5-6) following the customary regulation of not allowing any clan member dying after encountering a spirit the honour of burial within the space of the village to protect the villagers. But this act also adds to the increasing absence of Vilie as the community interprets his absence in terms of 'presence' in a different world, "his absence was felt in the community, and many believed that he had also passed to the other side. Rumours

circulated that the two lovers used to meet in their spirit forms in the woods” (Kire, *When the River sleeps* 6).

Each encounter with the spirit is essentially cathartic as purgation of the human spirit is essential for the purity of the human soul as part of the art of ‘being’ and ‘belonging’. Consequently, fever and sickness followed by delirium characterise the encounter with the spirits as one tries to bridge the gap between the world of humans and spirits by traversing into the limitless zone, as evidenced in Vilie’s plight. As Kire argues, “negotiating his spirit-infested world, the Angami avoids certain places in the forests that are believed to be unclean and sickness-inducing. All sickness is spirit-induced. The Angami believes in life after death” (*Walking the Roadless Road* 64). Nothing could alleviate Vilie’s trembling after he came back from his expedition, and Kani explains the root cause of the severity of his suffering, “this is what comes after a spirit encounter. The flesh trembles even while the spirit is triumphant, because the flesh cannot understand that you have won the battle, and it struggles with its own memories of fear” (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 106).

The novel projects a world of faith and belief in the notion of ‘interconnectedness’ and ‘cosubjectivity’ strongly embedded in the representation of Nature as a spirit. Nature is also humanised as a co-subject, sometimes more humane and vigorous than their human counterpart. The representation of the multiple facets of Nature is part of the Angami worldview, and the text is replete with examples of the duality inherent in Nature. Vilie’s journey exemplifies the duality as not only does he struggle with the violence of Nature in the form of the onslaughts of the sleeping river and unclean forest, but also receives the healing touch of Nature in various ways.

To elaborate, the presence of *Rarhuria*, the unclean forest in village terminology, foregrounds the presence of subterranean spaces widely feared and strictly avoided by the community, and Vilie genuinely lives the reality of the *Rarhuria* thereby endorsing the Angami worldview. Vilie’s encounter with the angry spirits in the forest, at first, seems to be a figment of his imagination, but the dreamlike experience turns out to be real to the core, as evident in the following gruesome description of spirit-inflicted terror and acute physical violence and pain:

VILIE COULD NOT MOVE. He was being chased by angry spirits that were about to catch up with him. The leader of the spirits was a hair-covered old man who was in a terrible rage. Cursing and spitting, he jumped on Vilie’s back and began to pull out his hair. The pain made Vilie cry out. He saw that other spirits were closing in on him and he was terrified of what horrific death they would visit upon him. (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 82)

Vilie wakes up from the trance-like state reassuming the spirit encounter to be only a dream, but gradually experiences the bleak reality of the encounter. He proceeds to fight it by asserting the enormity and prominence of his spirit as per the instruction of the seer, the spiritual knowledge shared by every member of the community, and eventually emerges victorious.

The mesmerising and out-of-the-world experience and appeal of the *Rarhuria* continue as Vilie again encounters a beautiful female spirit with long hair but “nobody attached to it” (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 85) in the water, and he fears to linger in the unclean forest and understands why the villagers religiously avoided the forest. The engulfing fear is expressive of Vilie’s inner turmoil regarding the space of *Rarhuria* as he finds the forest moving towards him as if chasing him to death. Therefore, the *Rarhuria* achieves a mythic proportion in the prescriptive censorship of the community archive.

The spatial-spiritual “world view” of the Angamis, as proposed by Kire, “acknowledges the presence of spirits in his everyday world. Believing that their influence is real, man, therefore, tries to live aright so as not to incur the anger of spirits” (*Walking the*

Roadless Road 77). As we witness in Vilie's plight, he is repeatedly tormented by the spirits as he plans to embark on the journey to find the sleeping river, which is, indeed, a spirit as justified by Kani, the fisherman, in response to Vilie's query, "Indeed the river is a spirit. Spirit responds to spirit. Your gun is useless against the things of the spirit for these are not flesh and blood" (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 108). Chapter twenty-five, entitled "The River is a Spirit," describing Vilie's plunge into the sleeping river, contributes to the idea of 'cosubjectivity' valorised in the novel as we see the almost 'humane' existence of the river resisting Vilie's efforts:

Vilie was flung back like a bit of driftwood by the intruding waters. His mouth and nostrils filled up with water as he felt himself being sucked down by the treacherous undercurrent. *The river was almost human* as it pushed him down and under, down and under, and the water rushed at him as though it would strangle him. He was shocked at the violence of the river. "I'm going to get out of this alive!" he swore as he fought back. (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 105) (Italics mine)

Although initially, Vilie thought the struggle to be a figment of his dream, the terrifying reality of the river's continuing violence woke him up, and he stopped struggling physically and took recourse to the wisdom and spiritual knowledge the community thrives on. The acknowledgement of the cohabitation of the world of spirit and human is essential to access the community archive of spiritual knowledge, and Vilie succeeds by asserting the supremacy of the greater spirit in the order of being.

As witnessed, the order of spirits is an integral part of community living which thrives on taboos as well as the endorsement of certain values implicit in customary rituals and beliefs. The rhythm of everyday life in the community acknowledges the presence of spirits and other creatures as a compulsory component of the life of the community. Hence, rituals for appeasement of spirits form an integral part of their everyday life, and "the Angamis also acknowledge spirits of stones, spirits of trees, spirits of lakes, spirits of the earth and shade-spirits of the dead. While walking through forest areas, people put an Indian wormwood leaf behind their ears to protect themselves from attack by spirits" (Kire *Walking the Roadless Road*, 65).

Unlike humans, the spirits are represented as violent and aggressive, and their presence is disruptive in nature; *When the River Sleeps* is replete with numerous references to such spirits and their coexistence as the community lives by the conformist codes of cultural recommendations and ritualistic practices. Everyday Life in the community involves bridging the gap between the world of the spirit and the human, and encounters with the spirits are a mundane and regular affair. That is, even spirits seek the heart-stone Vilie possesses, and consequently, he encounters the violence of the spirits in their varied forms. The reference to the alluring beauty of the river spirits who seek their prey in the markets alludes to the community archive where stories of enchantment and consequent death circulate as the young men chosen as bridegrooms by the spirits often die young.

The chapter entitled "Death is Unquiet" is perhaps the best illustration of spirit encounters in terms of Vilie's consequent transgression to the terrifying territory of spirits to revive Ate, a victim of the spirit tiger. As he proceeds to use the heart-stone to revive her, Vilie invokes the evil and hurls out challenges to the spirits of darkness, unfurling their horrible shapes and forms. The enactment of Vilie's challenge to the spirits moves to the point of traversing the boundary between the human and non-human worlds of existence. Even the terrifying shapes of the spirits with "red-eyed and bloodied with long claws" (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 195) were not deterrents to Vilie's will power who refused to submit to their oppression and took recourse to the ancient wisdom to garner physical and spiritual energy. The practice of invoking the creator deity as the weapon against the evil forces is common in Angamis, and Vilie, too, uses the name of the creator deity as his ultimate weapon to defeat the spirits.

Chapter thirty-seven, entitled “When Evil Meets Evil,” is another gruesome example of the violence implicit in spirit encounter when Zote appears like “a dark spirit” (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 157) and defiles the council hall of the incinerated village and ignites the consequent vengeance of the ancestor-spirits. The symbolic nuances of defilement of the council hall invoke “the wrath of the ancestor spirits” (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 158), and the spirit-warriors administer “their ghastly justice” (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 159), which lingers through their grim ululations even after they are gone:

As the flames grew in number, opening out to reveal what appeared now as tall human-like figures with long spears and shields. It was a blood-curdling sight. As the intensity of the scene grew, they could feel the heat it radiated on their uncovered faces. The spirit-warriors seemed to have assembled from the charred remains, and formed a column, marching slowly but deliberately toward the hall. (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 158)

Kire’s universe is replete with the practices of collective and homogenous identity in terms of the valorisation of ‘cosubjectivity’ as different and deviant subjects and spaces merge into the spaces of community. For example, the spirit widow-women are entrusted with the task of guarding the sleeping river, and Vilie cannot but help to notice their uncanny resemblance to human forms as if they embody the duality of existence in terms of occupying the liminal zone of cosubjectivity:

They carried baskets on their backs and walked into the fog and down to the river. They looked as though they were fetching water but their water pots stayed in their baskets. After the strange ritual, they retreated and went up the bank. They chanted as they walked back-a haunting little chant that Vilie thought he had heard before....In the half-light it was difficult to make out whether they were human or not, but Vilie was quite sure that there could be nothing human about the basket-carrying, black-clad figures retreating up the hillside.” (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 101)

Unlike the representative apparatus of Eurocentric systems of knowledge formation, the idea of ‘interconnectedness’ is the governing principle of indigenous epistemologies, and as represented in *When the River Sleeps*, a shared sense of collective cognitive experience as part of Naga consciousness is basically a critique of the celebration of objectivity and individualism implicit in Eurocentric systems. As we witness in the novel, the epistemological inquiry into the nature and grounds of knowledge is often mediated by the experience of elders of the Angami community, and the knowledge conferred on them by their ancestors is unique to the formation of the indigenous archive. As argued by Michel Foucault, “the archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events” (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 145-146) and the culturally relevant art of strategic intermingling of varied forms of knowledge imparts the sense of uniqueness the community foregrounds in terms of valorising self-determination and privileging indigenous voices.

The archived knowledge demands conformist behaviour as each member of the community must accept the knowledge imparted as valid truth to ensure the continuation and sustenance of the indigenous archive. Although the nuances of Michel Foucault’s conceptualisation of power/knowledge cannot be missed, the formation of an indigenous archive often takes recourse to the authority, agency, legitimacy, and sovereignty of the people considered gifted to aid the community in differentiating between ‘truth’ and ‘falsehood’.

Interestingly, in the context of the indigenous archive, ancient wisdom and spiritual knowledge passed on to generations through age groups, seers, and indigenous elders are crucial as they demand a conformist response in exchange for the knowledge empowering in nature, “that is what the age-group houses are for, to impart knowledge of the natural and

the supernatural to you so that you go out into the world with knowledge of both, and not disrespectful of either world as some people are.” (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 28)

The seer and the age-group houses ensure holistic community participation, and the role of the seer is highlighted in his strategic functionality as he is well-versed in “the things of the spiritual world, and whatever he had prophesied for the village had always come to pass.” (Kire, *When the River Sleeps* 31). Nobody aids the spatial-spiritual transition more than the seer, an intermediary between the worlds of beings, an integral part of the community, as he acts as a coordinator between the two worlds. His advice to Vilie to use his gun sparingly sums up the moral oeuvre/crux of the novel as he further highlights the inadequacy of earthly, materialistic weapons against spiritual powers as one must go beyond the world of flesh and blood to experience spiritual knowledge.

The sleeping river is the ultimate symbol of the spatial-cultural fluidity embedded in the formation of an archive indigenous to nature. The river is a storehouse of ancient wisdom and spiritual knowledge; it is power and also empowers the one who believes; it is human and also a spirit. The river in the novel basically symbolises the enigmatic notion of ‘absent presence’ deeply embedded in indigenous practices. The sleeping river harbours spiritual knowledge and responds only to the greater spirit, as summed up by the seer, “*Let your spirit be the bigger one. They are spirits, they will submit to the authority of the spirit that asserts itself*” (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 83). It sustains a unique system of indigenous knowledge, and the magic of the river works “only for a believer” (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 11).

The sustenance of the community depends on the creation and preservation of an archive of indigenous knowledge, symbolic of progressive unity and harmony. As elaborated in the text, the community is “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” (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 15). Vilie’s knowledge of traditional medicinal herbs, edible ferns, and the practice of healing with indigenous forms of medicine foregrounds the practice of archiving traditional modes of knowledge. The reference to the paste of *Vilhuii nha* leaves to stop bleeding, *tierhutiepfu* as a blood purifier, and rock bee honey as a cure for all, drink made of ginseng and *tsomhou*, stalks of *jotho*, the soft-stalked herb that can be added to any broth, reference to young gara and gapa, native tobacco as a cure for wounds, pastes of *ciena* for open wounds, pungent *Japan nha* add to the storehouse of indigenous knowledge, best seen in the context of the poetics of resistance to the onslaught of hegemonic epistemologies.

As the text foregrounds the name of plants indigenous to the land of emergence in the context of Vilie’s recuperative journey, the politics and poetics of resistance become indelible as Vilie remembers the herbs as part of the unique system of knowledge, “he recalled the names of herbs that he should not be without, *Ciena* or bitter wormwood and *Tierhutiepfu*, a soft leafed plant with a rather unpleasant smell. While *Ciena* was good for warding off evil spirits, the other herb was supposed to be good for a number of ailments” (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 32)

The prevalence of and preference for such an archive of indigenous knowledge, apparently disruptive and resisting the common methodology of ‘progress’ foregrounds the poetics of resistance, best understood in the context of the formation of the ‘subject’, widely constituted and dispersed through the modalities of discursive and resistant practices. Michel Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality* that resistance always accompanies the modalities of power. Similarly, the novel foregrounds the possibility of alternate history and epistemology in terms of an archive unique to the community, thereby problematising the idea of singularity of pedagogical and spiritual resistance. Unlike the western enterprise based only on the binaries as modes of survival, indigenous epistemologies are manifested through counter-discourses translated in the context of the presence of disruptive groups and ideas, transgressive in form, manner and act, and appearance.

To elaborate, *When the River Sleeps* celebrates deviancy as the normative requirement of 'being' and 'belonging', and the communities of Kirhupmia and the Spirit-widow women guarding the sleeping river exemplify the coexistence of deviancy in the representation of the community of women. Surprisingly, the human and the spirit uphold unique shared characteristics of violence and otherness as they occupy the "epistemological threshold" (Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 10). Moreover, the Kirhupmia also contributes to the 'archive' the community thrives on in terms of their diffused and distributed system of indigenous knowledge as the ostracised community of the Kirhupmia teaches the community to address "the phenomena of rupture, of discontinuity" (Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 4) implicit in the process of construction and preservation of an indigenous archive. Showcasing a "vast store of knowledge that was garnered from their respective villages" (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 146-147), these women celebrate epistemic diversity in terms of the diverse archive of knowledge essential for the community consisting of cures for sickness, herbs for healing, festivals, genna-days and so on.

The production of knowledge follows a trajectory of exclusion, prohibition, and provisional acceptance as the archive is a liminal and fluid space, constantly mediated as well as transgressed, the borderline of which is non-conformity and demystified existence. The regulatory modalities of the archive depend on "displacements and transformations of concepts" (Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 5) as Foucault dwells on:

But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities. (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 145-46)

The community depicted in the novel depends on such "principle of dispersion and redistribution" (Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 121) and proceeds through various modalities of exclusion, prohibition, and preservation. To elaborate, when translated in the context of the art and practice of nettle harvesting, the survival of the community and the continuity of the indigenous tradition is the primary focus. Harvesting nettle is commonly viewed as a source of resistance in terms of building an alternate source of traditional knowledge as the community takes the onus of preserving the knowledge of the dying art as part of the elucidation of the alternate history. The art of bark weaving or stripping the nettles for fibre to make into yarn is elevated and metamorphosed into a strategy for prolonged survival as the community undertakes renewed struggle to preserve the heirloom to avert the pressure tactics of the hegemonic discourses often mediated through the hierarchy of established knowledge. As exemplified in the discursive field of transformative knowledge, an indispensable part of the community archive, each member of the clan is familiarised with the parallel and harmonious coexistence of men and spirits. The text is replete with the epistemological question of 'being' and 'belonging' in terms of the idea of transformation and transgression as we are directed to a world where men transform their spirits into tigers, snakes and women's spirits become monkeys, thereby critiquing the anthropocentric model which asserts the supremacy of the human agency.

Such familiarity between 'self' and 'non-self' is strategic and necessary for the ensuing harmonious existence between the two, as any disruption will amount to the annihilation of the community. Hence, the community offers a profound analysis of the behavioural complexity of men turning into weretigers as Vilie traces the tales surrounding the origin, history, and practices of the weretiger ritual and the consequent metamorphosis of the spirit of man into the spirit of the tiger. Vilie recalls "with wonder at the fierce strangeness of the weretiger or *tekhumiavi*" (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 26) and the long, arduous process to reach the final stage of weretigerhood where the spirit becomes one with the tiger. But the process of reversal involves experiencing living death involving intense pain

and suffering. Killing a weretiger, therefore, implies killing a man as a weretiger is not a real tiger; it embodies the spirit of a man who dies shortly after the tiger is killed. We witness a poignant moment of mutual acknowledgement as part of the everyday rhythm of fusion of spatiotemporality into the notion of faith as the ultimate 'presence' when Vilie hurls a challenge to the weretiger on the basis of mutual familiarity to which the tiger responds and retreats:

"Kuovi! Menuolhoulie! Wetsho! Is this the way to treat your clansman? I am Vilie, son of Kedo, your clansman. I am not here to do you harm. Why are you treating me as a stranger? I come in peace. You owe me your hospitality. I am your guest!" He shouted these words out with *absolute faith that they were being listened to and heeded*. (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 26) (Italics mine)

The community, therefore, appears to be a scopic field replete with the rhythms of transgressive regularity and "the miracle of transformation" (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 28). To attempt a rhythmanalysis of the community values and practices, in Lefebvre's words, is to negotiate the complexity of representational spaces and time in terms of the integration of past and present. The rhythmanalyst, as argued by Lefebvre, dwells on the rhythmic and dialectic relation between the past and the present, "neither incompatibility, nor identity – neither exclusion nor inclusion. One calls the other, substitutes itself for this other. The present sometimes imitates (stimulates) to the point of mistaking itself for presence: a portrait, a copy, a double, a facsimilie, etc., but (a) presence survives and imposes itself by introducing a rhythm (a time)." (Lefebvre 33)

As quoted, the world of the novel does not simply refer to the weretiger, a mythical creature infusing the forms of man and tiger into a totality; lycanthropy is definitely "present and presence" as a lived reality in the community embodying cosubjectivity and metamorphosis. The narratives of the weretiger are perceptibly lived in the novel as a narrative of unifying continuity between the worlds of human and the spirit, and "under linguistic taboos, hunters do not say the word tiger when they are in the forest. They refer to him as 'elder brother'" (Kire *Walking the Roadless Road*, 63). Chapter Six, entitled "Speaking to the Tiger," dwells on Vilie's vivid experience of the violence and aggression of the tiger spirit, which only withered when he took recourse to the name of the creator deity, "the tiger crumpled before their eyes, dissolving into mist and sulphurous fumes, no sign of its might visible any longer" (Kire *When the River Sleeps*, 189). To elaborate, the practice of performing the complex tiger-killing ritual is a community affair and requires the presence of many members of the community and clan. Vilie's multiple encounters with the weretiger, which is basically a spirit, address the complex nuances of the transformative potential of man into animal, fusion, and interchange of the subject status as described in the novel. The Angami ritual justifies Lefebvre's argument that the "act of rhythmanalysis [*le geste rythmanalytique*] transforms *everything* presence, including the *present*, grasped and perceived as such" (33).

To continue Lefebvre's argument, the performative secrecy of the weretiger ritual among the Angamis foregrounds the art to be a 'presence' the community secretly guards as part of their way of inhabiting the world. The epistemological framework of the western, colonial archive can hardly accommodate the strange and complex behavioural changes dawning on a man in the process of transforming his spirit into a weretiger who is found suddenly pouncing and scratching on cattle, making grunting and mewling sounds and gnawing on raw meat. But, in an indigenous community, such a practice is a lived reality and forms the crux of its unique identity. Such folk practices are inherently complex.

To conclude, the manifold ways of boundary spanning with physical and psychological markers to improve the morale and solidarity of the community draw our attention to psychic and physical complexity implicit in the process of cohabitation and

'cosubjectivity' as Kire foregrounds the poetics of coexistence. Spirits and weretigers coexist with human beings in her fictional world, and together, they "experience a rhythm analysis of the function of inhabiting" (Bachelard 65). The reconstituted community space is, therefore, characterised by the practice of discontinuous rhythms and ruptures where both the individual and the collective meet at a vantage point, and non-human forms an integral part of human existence. Such strategic ways of representing the art of inhabiting in terms of valorising 'cosubjectivity' and blurring of the visible and invisible worlds continue to be a part of conceptualising and reclaiming ethnic boundaries.

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