

Tracing Ethnic Folklore and Cultural Identity: A Tribal Study in the Select Works of North-East English Writers

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Abstract: *Easterine Kire Iralu is one of the major socio-cultural voices of “seven sisters” in Northeastern India. She through her notable texts has written sensitively about a landscape and tribal folk culture that she recognizes very well. Her written novels explore the indigenous socio-cultural elements and ethnic folklore of sixteen Naga tribes. While, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih is also one of the modern active voices of Khasi legends in Northeast India. Himself being a Khasi tribe, he in his well known books illustrates about Khasi socio-culture, material lore, verbal lore, customary lore, folk songs, dances, fables, religious beliefs, agriculture, trade and industry through his English literary books. On the other hands, Mamang Dai is one of the versatile English writers as well as is a continuous active tribal voice from Arunachal Pradesh, Northeast India. Her powerful tribal voices for indigenous tribal community interpret primitive culture, customs, regional language and folklore of the Abor and Mishmee tribes that she knows very well. Kire, Mamang Dai and Nongkynrih biologically belong to the three different tribal cultures. The present paper, in their texts, portrays, in deferent ways, the social, cultural, economical, political, folklore, primitive fables, legends, myth, local songs, stories, dances, fairy tales and ghost tales of their tribal lives which have been explored from North-East communities to better understand for the Indian societal people and also across the world.*

Keywords: Verbal lore, folktales, cultural identity, ethnicity and traditional believe

Introduction:

The present paper will face Kire's, Dai's and Nongkynrih's literary fictional and non-fictional works- *When the River Sleeps* (2014), *The Black Hill* (2014), *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) and *Around the Hearth Kashi Legends* (2007). An indigenous society or a human being society is a bunch of native people sponging together within a cultural community through constant entity relations and share geographical, cultural, political, economical, graphical, educational, regional and ethnic existence since its origin. On the other hand, ethnic culture is experiences, skills, knowledge and learning processes of a special group of community people, representing regional languages, customs, dressing, caste, race, religious belief, nurturing system, farming technique, music, arts, handcraft, dance, songs, cooking style, fable, lyric, folk drama, folk story, narrative, legend, myth, and other elements. The term 'culture' has been etymologically taken from a Latin word "Cult" or "Cultu" meaning farming, gardening, and nurturing.

The modern English ethnic term "tribe" has been typically borrowed from Middle English "tribus", but finally taken from Latin "tribus". Indian North-Eastern comprises of the seven states so called popularly "The seven sisters" including Nagaland, Tripura, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Mizoram; being "seven sisters" they share their custom, culture, religious belief, dialect, politic, biodiversity and economic with each other and similarly depend biologically on each other because of their tribal culture and life. NE tribes are socially, politically, economically and biologically peasant classes, workers, backward status, poor fellow, hunters, uncivilized, primitive; excluded from modernity and civilization society.

The only term folks are traditionally used to refer to downtrodden groups, peasant classes, letter less fellows, pastoral and poor people living in the countryside. Folks always are considered commonly two persons or a group of people allocating out cultural identity, daily expressive exercise through their verbal lore, actions, material lore, customary lore and artifacts.. Thus Major socio-cultural elements of the folk studies are the subjects to anatomize **verbal folklore** (own language, style, custom, ethnicity, dialectic accent, age matter, profession, folktale, dance, Song, myth, legend, story, religious), **customary lore** (death feast, birthday party, wedding ceremony, harvesting feast, paddy festival, slaughter festival, thanksgiving and new annual festival year and **material lore** (- Hand-made clay pots, dedication books, design books, kinsfolk costume, domestic recipe, handcraft, clay toy, break and stone break, fence, wood made utensils, embroidery, domestic chore designs, drawing works, field works, harvesting, bamboo flute and plough as well.

Folklore variety genres

Verbal folklore:

NE primitive tribal communities are mostly popular and traditionally proverbial in the verbal folklore is the aboriginal cultural written or oral talks shared by an indigenous society in where each countryside people has their own language, style, custom, ethnicity, dialectic accent, age matter, profession, folktale, dance, Song, myth, legend, story, religious belief, marriage

system, birth-rule, death-grave- cemetery procedure, comic story, dressing fashion and ghost tale belief in several ways.. Some examples of verbal oral folk culture in NE tribal people are given bellow-

Fairy saga tell

Kinsfolk's speech

Idiom

Proverb

Fable

Folk conventional phrase

Folk song

Folk dirge

Anthem

Kinsfolk's ballad

People music/ melody

Harvesting chant

Rainy lullaby

Street passer by song

Phantom tale

Shepherd song

Mouth curse

Customary superstition

Child lore

Mourning chant

Melancholy note

Cowboy ethnic song

Field working song

Customary lore:

Each community of NE tribes has different customs and interested to follow ancestral heritages in the societal way. These native communities in NE zone are loving people to keep their culture alive and seasonally execute their lore, religious performance, festival, event and ethnic-cultural action in the several way lives. All these performances of customary culture can be socially shown within a community or a group having posture or gesture as a customary symbols including bow down, hug, handclasp, greeting, handshake, thumb up-down and religious performance. Different community has different folklore and customs in different manners. Social celebration party within each community is the broad part of a custom such as Muslim Eids, Moharam, Ramazan festive, Haaz party, Hindu Durgapuja, Kalipuja, Rath Jatra, Christian New Year, Valentine day, carnival feast as well. These three parts of social custom are very common within each community across all over India and beyond it. It can essentially be better to give an example of community folk customary lore for better understand-

Birthday celebration

Eids

Moharam

Durga puja

Kali puja

Individual jokes

Domestic medicine

Herb practice

Christmas

Material folk culture

Most of the NE primitive tribes have been based on the real life Material folk culture is the most importance and a long-established rich cultural heritage, kept animate and conveyed by traditional folk community from one generation to the other for the sake of community culture in the society. The purpose of material folk culture from prior to present is to protect countryside identity, rural and peasant lives of the pastoral folk. It is culturally prominent to each regional folk that all the material cultures of handicraft are found within the traditional museums and magic place across the world. Material lore is the objects of skills, practices and experiences so called the studies of material culture. The lists of material objects are- Hand-made clay pots, dedication books, design books, kinsfolk costume, domestic recipe, handicraft, clay toy, break and stone break, fence, wood made utensils, embroidery, domestic chore designs, drawing works, field works, harvesting, bamboo flute and plough as well. Material lore is the objects of skills, practices and experiences so called the studies of material culture. The lists of material objects are- Hand-made clay pots, dedication books, design books, kinsfolk costume, domestic recipe, handicraft, clay toy, break and stone break, fence, wood made utensils, embroidery, domestic chore designs, drawing works, field works, harvesting, bamboo flute and plough as well.

In *When The River Sleeps*, Kire represents her mythical hero Vilie knowing the spiritual knowledge and experience of socio-cultural lives of Angami community has been resolved primitively by verbal narrative folk. In Angami society, every people like Vilie have experience and practice of myths (hunting, weretiger) in every sphere of life. All these myths represent the socio-cultural folk practice of local people who are busy to practice spiritual wisdom about the sleeping river. There is cultural myth about the sleeping river in the Angami community that one who can fetch a stone from "the bottom of the river"; will get supernatural and unvoiced power to make his life's line affluent and successful. Kire, hence, notes about Vilie's mythical dream-

Vilie plunged his hand into the river... he slid forward and entered the water and plucked a smooth stone from the bottom of the river... the river come alive! Vilie's struggles were feeble against the force of the rushing water... in a final panicked outburst, he struck out against the power that consuming him (Kire 1-2).

Khasi cultural myths and memories always rely on the traditional oral storytelling told by their ancestors. They as tribes know cultivation, trade, industry, commerce and way of human life. They are the great master of cultural storytelling. Khasi tribes, therefore, are called creation of myth. Their folktales believe in gods, goddesses, beasts, stones, magic, mountains, hills, rivers, lakes, trees and ancestors. The Khasi folk stories through the one generation to another generation are in oral form from village people to community, from uncles to nephews; and from parents and grandparents to children. The allegorical phenomenon of the Adi, Abor and Mismee tribes in Northeast frontier region has placed Mamang Dai as one of the most cultural and mythical writers; is revealed in the dimension of her writings. In these two cultural novels, Dai portrays only three tribal communities (Adis, Abor and Mismee) and shows their oral culture, ethnicity, biological identity as well as mythical world among them. The folk tales and cultures are the focus area of this present study. Each of these three tribes have their own unlike culture, dialects, languages, customary laws, traditional beliefs and allegorical events which again illustrate in the oral form of socio-cultural element as such- folk tales, songs, fables, moralities, fairy tales, supernatural beliefs, dance, village festival, dresses, life style, wrestling festival, harvest festival, hunting day, slaughter festival, religious devotion and nature cum life. The focus area of this study is to have been voicing the culture, ethnic identity and mythical world of Adis, Abor and Mismee tribes in every possible way.

Conclusion: To conclude, the present paper, in their texts, has socially and biologically portrayed, in deferent ways, the ethnic folklore, cultural identity of several NE indigenous tribal communities including Adis, Abor, Mismee, Angami, as well as Khasi primitive tribes. This proposed research paper has traced the social, economical, political, folklore, primitive fables, legends, myth, local songs, stories, dances, fairy tales and ghost tales of their tribal lives which have been explored from North-East community tribes to better understand for the Indian societal people and also across the world.

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