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Post-Colonial Perspectives-Reading Easterine Kire's *Don't Run, My Love*

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Abstract:

Post-colonialism as a doctrine developed in relation to the ideas related to colonialism, orientalism and imperialism. It relates to the ideas and ideologies perpetrated by the colonizing agents. Colonialism maintains a sharp distinction/binary between the ruler/colonizer, and the ruled /colonized. The difference / 'otherness' of the conquered country is emphasized to bring out its inferiority. Post-colonialist discourses study the effect of these binaries and the structures/ideologies through which these binaries operate and are perpetrated.

The present article proposes to study the text *Don't Run, My Love* in the light of the post-colonialist discourse. It attempts to analyze the thematic ideas to understand how the text operates on a post-colonial ideology and subverts the colonial/imperialistic/oriental discourses associated with the idea of a Naga. Consequently, an effort is also made to study the related concept of identity, its construction and representation in the literary narrative.

Keywords: Post-colonialism, British colonialism, Christianity, Naga identity, *Don't Run, My Love*.

The beginnings of European colonial expansion in the 15th century evolved out of a complex process of social, historical and economic factors. The Age of discovery was marked by voyages exploring and navigating the sea in an effort to find new routes to distant lands. These expeditions were often fueled by economic prospectives. The spice markets of the East, the lucrative slave trade, the resource rich soils of Asia and the Middle-East, all of these lured the colonial powers into dominating and legitimizing their claim over these territories.

Britain emerged as a colonial power during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The period of colonial expansion for Britain can be traced back to the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-

1603) and continued through the subsequent Stuart monarchs, including James I (1603-1625) and Charles I (1625-1649).

The year 1600 marks the historic moment of the formation of the British East India Company. The company had an iconic role in the formation and establishment of Britain as a colonial nation. By the 18th century, Britain had established a significant colonial empire, including territories in North America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. The 19th century saw Britain's rise to dominance and power as a colonial nation. The Government of India Act 1858 transferred the governance of India directly to the British Crown.

The Victorian period was marked by its intensity and fervor. The century marked an age of progress in relation to industrialization and technical and scientific advancements. Britain had a comparatively peaceful period and the stability of the long reign of Queen Victoria. The development of railways and factory system, new strides in the areas of health and sanitation, the mass migration of the rural poor, the development of urban centers and the colonial conquests contributed immensely in transforming Britain to one of the superpowers eager in investing capital and exploiting the labor market in its colonies.

British rule in India resulted in the exploitation of India's resources, the transformation of its economy to serve British interests, the introduction of English education and legal systems, and the marginalization of local cultures and traditions. The foundations of imperial authority were centered around the tenets of enlightenment -power and knowledge. This idea of knowing was used as a political tool in subjugating the natives/colonized:

“The most formidable ally of economic and political control had long been the business of ‘knowing’ other peoples because this ‘knowing’ underpinned imperial dominance and became the mode by which they were increasingly persuaded to know themselves: that is, as subordinate to Europe. A consequence of this process of knowing became the export to the colonies of European language, literature and learning as part of a civilizing mission that involved the suppression of a vast wealth of indigenous cultures beneath the weight of imperial control.” (Ashcroft 1)

Post-colonial criticisms undertake to dismantle the layers of this subjugation which has made the native undermine their own literature/accept the superiority of Western cultural practices. “Postcolonialism examines and analyses the aftermath of colonization, and the effects of colonial oppression” (Nagarajan 185). It also analyses the psychological effect of this suzerainty imposed upon the colonized. In this sense ‘retrieving the past’ becomes the

prime ideological concern. The re-writing of that past in an attempt to regain centrality and as a form of resistance and control also forms an important tenet of post-colonialist writings.

Post-colonialism maintained a sharp distinction/binary between the ruler/ colonizer, and the ruled /colonized:

“Structures of colonial domination were of course racialized in the sense that they were created and administered by acknowledging and reinforcing the racial difference between the native and the colonial masters. The European master possessed the power to govern, and the natives were subjects to the system created by the master. These structures were sustained not merely by the use of military and economic powers -though these were, expectedly, central to it- but through a complex dynamic of *representation* and *discourse*. Colonial presence produced images and representations of natives- by which I take to mean, essentially, non-white races and ethnic groups in Africa, Asia and South America -that were consumed by both colonial races back in Europe as well as the natives themselves. This latter phenomenon, where the native assimilated and believed and believed his/her prejudiced, skewed and often downright representation of him/herself by the European was made possible through the education system, religion and the law. The history of nations like India and the countries in Africa is, therefore, very often, a history written (documented) by the Europeans. Colonial modernity is thus a conjugation of acts of representation and acts of political and economic power. (Nayar 154).

Postcolonial literary criticism is heavily influenced by the concepts of decentering, poststructuralism, and postmodernism. Post colonialist theory challenges Euro-centric perspectives, emphasizing the diversity and validity of non-European cultures. It challenges the idea of universality in literature and exposes colonial biases within the canon. Instead of accepting colonial narratives, it seeks to rewrite history and assert cultural identities through various strategies like separatism, nativism, cultural syncretism, hybridity, mimicry, active participation, and assimilation. Influential works in postcolonial theory are Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), Gayatri Spivak’s *In Other Worlds* (1987), Bill Ashcroft’s *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Homi K Bhabha’s *Nation and Narration* (1990), and Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

“The ancestry of post-colonial criticism can be traced to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in French in 1961, and voicing what might be called ‘cultural resistance’ to France’s African empire. Fanon (a psychiatrist from Martinique) argued that the

first step for 'colonized' people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past. For centuries the European colonizing power will have devalued the nation's past, seeing its pre-colonial era as a pre-civilized limbo, or even as a historical void. Children both black and white, will have been taught to see history, culture and progress as beginning with the arrival of the Europeans. If the first step towards a postcolonial perspective is to reclaim one's own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past has been devalued." (Barry 195)

The 'marginalized' and indigenous/ethnic communities and tribes now use literature as a tool in reclaiming their voices and identity. Literature is also used as a medium to write/rewrite their own histories. Postcolonial criticism aims to expose the underlying imperial assumptions and prejudices in literary texts by analyzing the modes of representation used and examining the historical and cultural contexts in which they were created. Postcolonial criticism delves into the modes of representation in literature to expose the politically prejudiced ways in which Europeans constructed natives, aiming to unveil the imperial assumptions that have enforced colonial domination and Western hegemony.

The theoretical framework of post-colonialism is centered on ideas related to who the orient is and concepts like 'othering', 'hybridity', 'mimicry', 'diaspora', 'double-consciousness' and the 'subaltern'. Post-colonialism as a theory aims to understand how colonial powers exert control over colonized territories and how they continue to grapple with the effects of colonization even after achieving political independence. Postcolonialism acknowledges that while formal colonial rule may have ended, neocolonial practices continue to perpetuate economic and political inequalities. This includes economic dependency, exploitation of resources, and unequal global power dynamics.

Postcolonial theorists also explore the concept of cultural hybridity, where indigenous cultures and colonial influences intermingle, creating unique and complex cultural identities. Hybridity challenges the notion of cultural purity and highlights the creative ways in which cultures adapt and evolve. The theory also critiques the exportation of dominant cultures and values through media, literature, and education, which can lead to the erosion of local traditions and identities.

In her work *The Many That I Am*, Anungla Zoe LongKumer poignantly describes how she has attempted to connect to her identity as a person from the North-East and her roots. She states: "Nagaland holds many stories in her each with the need for telling."

(LongKumer,5). She also underlines the need in the present state to explore the “relevance of past values” (LongKumer,7). Her work is therefore an attempt to connect the past and the present and to make meaning by understanding and analyzing the past.

Kire has taken pioneering efforts in preserving the oral tradition of her land by showcasing it in her literary works. She has also translated 200 oral poems from her native language. Her first book was published in 1982 titled *Kelhoukevira*. This was also first book of Naga poetry published in English. *A Naga Village Remembered* was published in 2003 was the first novel by a Naga writer in English. Other works include *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), *Mari* (2010) and *Bitter Wormwood* (2011) *When the River Sleeps*(2014),*Son of the Thundercloud*(2016),*A Terrible Matriarchy*(2007),*Don't Run, My Love*(2017), *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*(2018), *A Respectable Woman*(2019),*The Rain-Maiden and the Bear-Man: and Other Stories*(2021),*Spirit Nights*(2022).She has also written books for children, scholarly articles and essays. In many of these stories she has focused on the Naga identity and on the life of the Naga men and women who harmoniously coexisted with the spiritual and the natural world until the recent past.

Don't Run, My Love, is the story of Atunuo and her mother Visuenuo who owns fields on the mountainside. Visuenuo is a widow and is dependent on her daughter's help for the work in the fields. Their life is dictated by the seasons and is closely bound to the earth that they depend for a living. The story propels itself with the intrusion of Kevi in the life of the mother-daughter duo. Kevi is a 'tekhumevi'/were-tiger as Atunuo soon finds out and her relationship with Kevi fills her life with terror and bitterness. Atunuo and Visuenuo is forced to flee their village and they seek help from Pfenuo from the 'Village of Seers'. Kevi is finally killed by Keyo, the woodcutter thus freeing the mother and daughter from the perils that followed Kevi's rejection by Atunuo.

Don't Run My Love opens with a detailed description of the harvest, the weather and describing the bond that the Nagas share with the earth and the elements:

“Some weeks ago, the water in the terraces had dried up as the stocks of paddy stood in the sun and ripened in golden sheaves. The harvest in the village had been delayed by a week because the 'liedepfu' -the ritual initiator of the harvest had lain sick in her bed for a week. Precious days had been lost and now the race against time and elements that begun to bring in the harvest before unseasonal rain came and destroyed the hard work of several months.” (Kire 2)

The passage also tells us about the Angami way of life and their technique of irrigating the fields:

“...unlike the Northern Naga who follows ‘jhumming’ cultivation, the Angami had developed an efficient system of terracing and irrigation well before the colonial times. Water is brought down from the upper streams to channels and bamboo pipes. Some fields are so terraced that water can be made to flow around a spur and back again to almost the same point from where it flowed into the fields. The Angamis have an elaborate system of water rights, water inheritance and ownership of water. Unlike in jhum fields, terraced fields are owned by individuals.” (Arya 25)

Globalisation and modernity have made inroads into the Naga way of life but in rural countryside life is closely bound to the earth. Men and women practice agriculture as their means of living and it is the main occupation in the village economy:

“In the first months of each new year they hired workers to help with the ploughing, breaking up hard clods of earth, and coaxing the soil to be more malleable for the seeds that would be sown after the rain had softened the earth. The early rain in the months of March and April was used for planting beans, pumpkins and any vegetable belonging to the gourd family. But work began in earnest only when the monsoon rains came to the ancient green valley, and farmers could flood their fields with sufficient water to plant rice. Harvest time made all their hard work worthwhile and no one missed a day’s work then.” (Kire 5).

The book has many instances where the writer ‘constructs’ the identity/self of a Naga. The narrative is centered around the practices, social customs, rituals and taboos that informed the Naga self before the advent of British and the missionary zeal that transformed the socio-political and religious scenario of Nagaland. The narratorial voice is that of a proud native narrating the core elements that inform his /her personality. The text can then be seen an attempt of reconstruct/reclaim a past that was lost after the advent of the colonizing agents in Nagaland.

The essence of Naga spirituality is based on the interconnectedness between the physical and metaphysical realms. It is a belief system that transcends mere rituals and prayers - it is a way of life that fosters deep respect for nature and its inhabitants. This profound connection between the natural and spiritual worlds shapes every aspect of Naga culture, from their daily practices to their sacred ceremonies.

The novel presents a clear insight into the religious beliefs pertaining to the indigenous communities of the Naga tribes. “Kruna” (Arya,82) was the old religion and it was based on spirit worship. The traditional belief system had at least one major deity. It also involved the worship of minor deities believed to dwell in water bodies, stones and in deep jungles.

The old Naga religion accepted the parallel existence of the natural and the spiritual world. The Nagas never hunt a tiger for sport as the tiger is considered as man’s brother. Tigers are hunted only when a tekhumevi/tiger troubles man’s world. According to a Naga myth, the three were brothers. The tiger was always a trouble maker. Once their mother, in order to settle their quarrel, decided to hold a race between the man and the tiger. It was decided that the winner would continue to live in the village and the loser would have to leave for the jungle. It is said that man won the race with the help of the spirit and the tiger had to leave for the jungle. The Angamis, Chakhesang, Lotha, Sumi and Rengma Naga share the same myth relating to the tiger as an elder brother. However, the North and the North-western Naga does not acknowledge their kinship with the tiger.

A strong belief in lycanthropy exists in all the Naga tribes. It is believed that some individuals possessed dual souls- of that of a human and an animal, often a tiger or a leopard. Tekhu-rho is considered as the mythical lord of the tigers. This belief system is central to the story where Kevi is a were-tiger/tekhumevi. “The conversion to Christianity of Naga tiger-men and tiger-women has brought down the rate of lycanthropic activities.” (Kire,153).

The Naga way of life was bound by strict societal norms and respect for the elders. The life in the community was taught to the young in the morungs/kichuki which was the central institution in every Naga tribe in the past. The values of the tribe and tales of valor was handed on to the younger generation in oral tales by the elders in the morungs: “Naga oral traditions were kept alive in the morung and passed on from one generation to the next in the form of folk songs, dances and folk tales.” (Kire,32). The Importance of the morung as a cultural centre declined after the spread of Christianity - “...the place of the church is central to new Naga society. It is in many ways, the new morung.” (Kire,205)

Easterine Kire’s book *Walking the Roadless Road* details the traditional functioning and hierarchy of a morung:

“The morung is a key social institution and is usually spacious enough to accommodate all the young men and boys in the village. The members are divided on the

basis of age groups into Sungpur, Tenapang, Tekumchet, Yhanga and Juzen in the order youngest to the oldest respectively. The morung also initiated its members into a unique and complex moral code termed as 'sobaliba'. In the past members of the morung received training on tactics of warfare. It also trained its members for everyday life and also imparted skills in various crafts including house building. The morung also ensured that the values upheld by the tribe passed on to the next generation." (Kire 25)

Atunuo too advises her daughter about the sanctity and importance of morung in shaping the identity of a Naga: "Since the *thehou* is the communal house where men spend their nights, *thehou nuo* means child of the thehou. The boys who have been brought up in that tradition learn things about our culture. They use it to guide them through life, and when people see them behaving in a certain way, people refer to them as *thehou nuo*. A girl can also earn such a title when people see that she knows the ways of the village." (Kire 18)

The Village of Seers in the novel combines the ideas of magic, superstition and the unreal to give us a realistic picture of the what Nagaland has been in the past. It is yet another attempt by the writer to create/narrate her identity as a Naga:

"Many people suspected that the village of Seers moved location on a regular basis. Men got into endless arguments over its geographical location ...Men would crouch on earthen floors, draw maps and almost come to blows over what they thought was the exact location of the Village of Seers. Each man had a completely different idea of where the village stood...What was the truth? No human could tell ...because it was inarguably the most powerful village, the village that held answers for all the problems that man could counter in his physical existence. And by virtue of that power, the village was quite capable of shifting location as it pleased." (Kire 82)

This attempt is also clearly visible in the writer's description of the rural Naga village and the way of life in the community:

"Happy that they would reach their destination before dark, they continued on the path and soon entered the village gate....As they came in, they saw some people out on the *dahou*, the circular sitting place at the entrance to the village. The hard stone seats were shiny from constant use. The small assembly of people called out greetings to which the women gave the appropriate response. Most of the company were men sitting with their tall horns of brew, watching the field -goers coming home.

A number of young mothers were also standing at the *dahou*, which was also popular viewing point as it offered a panoramic view of the fields in the horizon. Carrying their babies on their backs with the straps tied in front, they walked back and forth on the elevated platform singing lullabies...These men and women would return home and inform their families how late or early the harvesters had come home, and if they thought they were carrying heavy or medium loads. It was just the kind of small talk that was common when a community lived at such close quarters.” (Kire 25)

The text also talks about the village gates which served many purposes. These strong gates defended the Nagas who were essentially warring tribes. They also functioned as spots where information was exchanged among the villagers. Additionally, they were a vantage point for village elders to oversee the activities in the community. Decorated with symbols and relief carvings, they symbolize abundance, bravery, and fertility:

“They serve not only their primary function of security in restricting entry into the village, but are also symbols of clan and village cohesion and their achievements in head taking raids. Villages have a main gate and clan gates. When these gates are closed for any celebration or rituals such as those for births and deaths, no outsider is permitted entry. There are elaborate rituals when the gate is replaced...a sacred stone, *kipuchie*, is placed near the gate signifying the importance of the gate. The thick, wooden one -door gates cannot be battered down easily and are part of the extensive village defences consisting of stone walls, ditches and *panjis*. Look out towers near the gates provide early warning of any danger. The gates are carved in high relief with symbolic figures, each village having its own style of representation.” (Arya 108)

Don't Run My Love interestingly present a study on the food and rituals and the spices, utensils and ingredients that was a part of the Naga rural life. There are also detailed descriptions in the text related to the food and culture:

“Khonuo would tell them that it was important for their parents to eat those frogs in particular. Since the frogs slept for months without food, they were taken as a symbol that foods in the house would last very long. In this way, the Harvest festival had its own list of taboos, each intended to propitiate the spirits and prevent the destruction of the grain that had been brought into the granaries. For instance, there was a taboo on eating grasshoppers and dragonflies as these were insects that destroyed the crops -it would not do to anger them.” (Kire 52)

“The meat was cut up into smaller pieces, mixed with dried red chilli, and left to simmer in a little water...They used an earthen pot.... Visenuo insisted on using it as meat cooked in an earthen pot tasted far better than food cooked in an aluminium pot.... Atuonuo had dug up some country ginger from their backyard. She thoroughly cleaned off the soil, washed it several times and pounded it for the pot. They grew spices such as basil, chilli, garlic and ginger for their kitchen in their backyard.... In one corner was a large patch of *japan nha*, Crofton weed. They had not uprooted it because it was said to be effective against malaria and stomach aches. Everyday household had a small garden space similar to theirs to supply their kitchen needs.” (Kire 27)

Conclusion:

The book *Progress and its impact on the Nagas* by Dr. Tezenlo Thong which discusses the importance of ‘recording’ the memory. Dr. Thong speaks about the importance that oral stories had in indigenous communities and how it helped enforcing and ensuring the survival of the community life and traditional values. He states an instance in the book where he asks His mother to narrate a story from her childhood memory. His mother was a traditional Naga story teller But she failed to recollect the story in its entirety. He tried this experiment again when he invited a group of elders who were in their 80’s and asked them to narrate the stories of the past related to their culture. He records that “the entire group struggled to remember and share the cultural practices and stories they grew up with.” (Thong, 1).

Dr. Thong reiterates the importance of storytelling and orality in a non-literate culture: “...unlike in a literate culture, stories, myths and traditional knowledge and wisdom are retained in the memories of the people and then passed on to the succeeding generations. These traditional treasures are not written down in books or recorded with modern technology. As a result, failure to rehash and retell over a long period of time causes the memory to fail to recollect and preserve.” (Thong 1).

Easterine Kire too vocalizes her concern relating to the erosion of cultural elements and how, her attempt has always been to record this memory/culture, when she says: “In a society like Naga society where written literature is so young, I felt the need to chronicle history – all that the people have gone through, historical events that shaped the community and produced the socio – cultural changes that we see now in place ...” (Longkumer,396).

Don't Run My Love thus can be read as a complex and powerful cultural metaphor which transcends the markers of time. On one level it describes/recreates the Naga spiritual

world. The work is also an attempt to revive the ancient customs and traditions revered in the land at a time when modernization has brought in drastic changes in the Naga lifestyle. It also ‘records’ this world and empowers the ‘memory’ of a generation with the written word. The narrative thus, ‘rewrites’ the colonial narratives and remediates the erasure of a history-a history which is preserved in the memory of the Naga elders. The text thus takes an anti-colonial stand where the native has been described by the ‘outsider’ in oriental hues.

“One lingering result of colonialism and its aftermath is that the colonized become so numbed over a couple of centuries of oppression that they internalize the narrative created by their colonial conquerors as their own narrative once the oral traditions begin to fade under the light of printed (colonizer) text...The colonizer histories persistently miscast Nagas and other Indigenous Peoples through a device that Seneca scholar Barbara Mann calls ‘euro-forming’” (Thong, viii)

Kire’s attempt is to rewrite the historical texts of ‘othering’. *Don’t Run my love* juxtaposes the individuality of the ‘real Naga’ to the hyped images that have been presented to the world by the colonial narratives and by the centre who have failed in many ways in appropriating the people and their culture by divisional binaries both on the physical and the material realm. The visual regime has often demarcated boundaries in separating the people from the North-East creating bias and often mutual hatred and suspicion: “The visual regime of the stereotypical Naga as a brutal and violent tribe, rebels, insurgents and headhunters are often hyped via films and other media. This image intensifies in the stories of the soldiers from the mainland who speak of ‘treacherous’ rebels hiding behind bamboo groves and jungles”. (Baruah,167).

In the book *The Many That I Am: Writings from Nagaland*, Easterine Kire quotes an instance where she talks about the disturbing ‘visual regimes’/tropes that has been used time and again to describe a Naga: “...They have their own definition of a North -East that is always violent and bloodthirsty, a “North -East is burning” stereotypical image fed by the national media...their imaginations, if they have any, are limited to the stereotypical images that their TV screens feed them, and they should not be allowed to define what writing from North-East India is like or should be like!”(Longkumer ,398).

The novel *Don't Run My Love*, can therefore be viewed as an effort on the part of the writer in ‘rewriting’ the written records /hyped images of her land. Kire highlights the strong foundations of tradition and culture on which her society is rooted. The book offers a glimpse

of the spiritual world of the Naga society located in a pre-Christian era. The book does not pose any political dilemma or the challenges of the present-day Naga society. It is rather, an answer to the dilemmas, complexities and the present political crisis. The writer seems to suggest through her work that the answer to the complexities and dilemmas of the present lies in the past.

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