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Oral Traditions and Indigenous Knowledge as Cultural Resistance: A Comparative Study of Easterine Kire and Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀

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Abstract:

Drawing from North East Indian and Sub-Saharan African contexts, this paper aims to study the cultural resistance that emerges through the preservation, transmission and reassertion of oral tradition and indigenous knowledge in the works of Easterine Kire and Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ that challenge colonial and postcolonial modernity.

In Easterine Kire's narratives, oral traditions operate as cultural heritage that claim back silenced histories and advocate indigenous Naga identity. Storytelling becomes a collective practice of resistance that challenges colonial and postcolonial narratives renewing cultural survival into a revolutionary act. In the similar manner, the narratives of Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ stress on the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems of marriage and fertility in the Yoruba belief system within post-independence Nigeria. These epistemologies reshape emotional and domestic negotiations subtly resisting the rationalist and individualist values associated with colonial modernity and westernized progress.

This paper aims to examine how indigenous worldviews portrayed through oral traditions, cultural memory and rooted epistemologies work as powerful forms of resistance through a comparative reading of marginal literatures from North East India and Sub-Saharan Africa. The study attempts to advocate that revolution in these narratives does not primarily emerge through armed struggle or overt political revolt but through cultural continuity and ancestral memory with the help of selected texts by Easterine Kire and Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀. The present paper envisions highlighting that the selected texts challenge Eurocentric models of revolution by emphasizing quiet, every day and epistemic modes of resistance rooted in lived cultural practices and reaffirm the political significance of indigenous ways of knowing in world literature from the margins.

Keywords: Oral Traditions, Indigenous Knowledge System, Cultural Resistance, Marginal Literatures, Comparative Postcolonial Theory.

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Introduction:

Postcolonial literature refers to a form of literary writings that responds to the cultural, political and psychological history of colonial rule primarily from formerly colonized nations. The domain explores themes of identity, displacement, resistance, indigenous knowledge and hybridity and challenges Western narratives while bringing the marginalized voices kept under shadows of misrepresentation by the western narratives for a very long period.

North East Indian and Sub-Saharan African literatures foreground a significant place in the postcolonial writings as these bring marginalized voices, indigenous cultures and world perspectives into a global literary discourse. Easterine Kire and Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ are representatives in the realm of this field of literature who represent how these regions contribute to the expansion of postcolonial literary studies encompassing the indigenous and distinct literary corpus in the world literature which helps deepen the understanding of cultural realities of these societies after the colonial dominance.

The marginalized literature from these geotropically secluded regions has been strongly marking its presence through the preservation of Cultural Memory, Indigenous Knowledge Systems and oral traditions which has resulted into strengthening cultural identity, resistance to the cultural dominance of westernization that has brought attention to the misrepresentation of these regions done in the past. The present paper aims to examine how Easterine Kire in *When the River Sleeps* and *Son of the Thundercloud* and Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ in *Stay with Me* and *A Spell of Good Things* represent oral traditions and indigenous knowledge through a close textual analysis of how these cultural elements function as forms of resistance against colonial and dominant cultural narratives. A comparative analysis of narratives from both the regions helps this paper to explore perseverance of indigenous knowledge in cultural memory and identity in the form of storytelling, folklore, myths and proverbs. The paper moreover aims to highlight how the selected texts contribute to the

preservation and continuity of native cultures within postcolonial societies and challenge the Eurocentric models of revolution.

Literature Review:

The postcolonial writings emphasize the vital role of oral traditions and indigenous knowledge in preserving cultural identity. The research shows that this step has led to a strong resistance to the colonial dominance in the recent past. Folklore, myths and communal storytelling are integral to the narratives of writers from North East India. "The village was the only life they knew" *(*Kire 7*).* The literature from this region has been serving as a vehicle to sustain cultural and collective memory that echoes in the World literature. Situated geographically distant yet similar in a manner, Sub-Saharan African literature authors incorporate indigenous myths and oral traditions into their stories to preserve communal histories and cultural identities of Nigeria. Critical analysis of Easterine Kire's novels emphasizes themes of identity and gender in Naga indigenous communities highlighting social dynamics. Studies on Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀'s fiction explore gender representation, identity and social issues within Yoruba and Nigerian indigenous contexts.

Comparative studies examining oral traditions as cultural resistance in North East Indian and Sub-Saharan African literature are scarce and research comparing indigenous knowledge systems as resistance mechanisms in the literary outputs of these regions remains limited. This study bridges the gap via comparative postcolonial analysis and textual reading of selected works *When the River Sleeps* and *Son of the Thundercloud* by Easterine Kire and *Stay with Me* and *A Spell of Good Things* by Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀. By applying a postcolonial framework for a comparison the study analyzes narratives from these authors to address the identified research void and aims to bridge the probable gap. This research employs a comparative approach in literary narratives from North East India and Sub-Saharan Africa, revealing shared elements in storytelling traditions.

Postcolonial literature has emphasized the importance of oral traditions and indigenous knowledge systems in celebrating cultural identity. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind* argues that language and collective memory are integral to resisting colonial. This view point is relevant to literary works emerging from marginalized communities. Postcolonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak throw a light on the power dynamics in the post-colonial realm. Bhabha's concept of ‘Hybridity’ speaks volumes of the interaction between indigenous belief and modernity and their eventual coalition. Spivak's discussion of the subaltern gives us insights on the voices from the marginalized historically been silenced for a very long time and their recovery from it. These theoretical perspectives offer a grounding foundation of how literature has been a platform to reclaim and recover the long lost voices of the marginalized.

Literature from Africa and North East has gained attention from the academic scholars from all walks of the world due to its given role to oral tradition and native knowledge in shaping narratives and thematic concerns they deal with. It is recognized that such themes in literature preserve cultural heritage that the native has to offer to the world literature. The rooted human nature relation is another familiar thematic concern that the authors form North East India and Sub-Saharan Africa focuses on. With the contribution of these narratives literature acts as a mediator that documents cultural memory and reaffirms regional identities.

Even though the marginalized literature has been getting attention in the global literature since the recent past, there is still limited research on a North East Indian and Sub-Saharan African Literature studied under the spectacles of comparative analysis. Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap in the research domain and exploration to highlight resistance through preservation of oral storytelling and native knowledge.

Objective:

1. To examine oral traditions and indigenous knowledge in preserving cultural memory in the literary works of Easterine Kire and Ayobami Adebayo.
2. To analyze cultural elements as resistance strategies within a postcolonial analytical framework in the selected works of Kire and Adebayo.
3. To make a comparative analysis of North East Indian and Sub-Saharan African narratives to understand similarities and differences between the two.

Theoretical Framework:

This research paper is based on postcolonial theory that helps examine how marginalized literature from the North East India and Sub-Saharan Africa contribute to the ever-evolving world literature as a whole and offers a new perspective on cultural resistance, identity, oral storytelling and native knowledge. Ideas by scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha's 'Hybridity', Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'Subaltern Theory' and Edward W. Said's '*Orientalism*' have been taken into discussion to examine cultural representation, marginalization and resistance.

A comparative approach has been implemented to analyze representation of oral tradition and indigenous knowledge in the narratives from both the regions to examine the similarities and common foundation for the cultural resistance evidently marked by Easterine Kire and Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀.

Methodology:

The present research incorporates a qualitative analysis and a close textual reading of the selected texts of North East Indian and Sub-Saharan African literature. It aims to make a comparative analysis of the themes of oral tradition and indigenous knowledge portrayed in the works namely *When the River Sleeps* and *Son of the Thundercloud* by Easterine Kire and Stay with Me and *A Spell of Good Things* by Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀. The study is guided by a

comparative approach within a theoretical postcolonial perspective to examine the representation of cultural elements as forms of resistance.

Research Questions:

1. How have Easterine Kire and Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ represented oral traditions and indigenous knowledge system in their works?
2. How has cultural resistance been reflected in the selected texts from the marginalized literature leading to preservation of identity?
3. What similarities and differences can be identified in the works of North East Indian and Sub-Saharan African literatures with a comparative postcolonial perspective?

Findings and Discussion:

Taking into discussion the North East Indian Narrative, *When the River Sleeps* by Easterine Kire is deeply rooted in the land and spiritual beliefs of the Naga community where nature and spirituality are interconnected and are inseparable from one another. It tells a tale of Vilie, the protagonist who sets out on a spiritual journey through forest to find a magical stone believed to bring prosperity. “Men whose spirits were turning into weretigers would began to behave strangely” (Kire 27). The novel holds the grip over the rooted faith in nature passed on by ancestors therefore nature being used as a living entity and a guiding phenomenon instead of just a geographical setting.

Another novel of Kire titled *Son of the Thundercloud* follows the hero's journey as he grows and fulfills his destiny while protecting his community. The novel upholds indigenous culture strongly which is seen in its depiction of mythological stories, oral tradition, Naga folklores and highlights the importance of transmitting native knowledge from generation to generations.

Set in Nigeria *Stay with Me* (2017) by Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ tells a story of a married

couple namely Yejide and Akin who are struggling with infertility. The novel explores cultural beliefs and expectations of society along with ethnic views on marriage and motherhood that continue to influence contemporary life and social relationships. Adébáyọ̀'s Spell of Good Things (2023) portrays two young Nigerians from different social backgrounds whose love intersect with one another and speaks out loud about inequality, individual struggles and moral complexities within Nigerian societal norms. The novel also critiques socio-political disparities while preserving cultural perspectives within the narrative.

1. Representation of Oral Traditions:

The North East Indian author, Easterine Kire's narratives strongly reflect the influence of oral traditions, an essential part of Naga cultural heritage. These stories in the selected texts reflect Naga beliefs such as spirits, nature as a living entity and ancestral wisdom where oral narratives are preserved and transmitted. “The forest also protected him from the evil in the heart of man. He felt truly wedded to her at this moment” *(*Kire 51*)*. The presence of supernatural elements, spiritual journeys and mythical figures emphasize on the rooted bonds of human-nature relation that advocates storytelling and the cultural imagination of the Naga community. Kire reclaims histories that were often marginalized during colonial period predominantly by the Eurocentric views on indigenous knowledge. Easterine Kire affirms the value of Naga traditions in both her novels within the broader framework of postcolonial literature through a successful transformation of oral narratives into written literature that marks its existence powerfully in the realm of world literature. Storytelling becomes a collective practice in the selected texts. This helps sustain the cultural continuity across generations.

2. Reflection of Indigenous Knowledge:

The Sub-Saharan African Literature adds its contribution to the growing new

literature that has been kept under marginalization with the colonial perspective. The importance of lineage and motherhood depicted in the *Stay with Me* are heavily influenced by cultural practices surrounding marriage and family life in Yoruba tribe.

The narratives in *Stay with Me* and *A Spell of Good Things* by Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ deal with the themes of marriage and fertility. These elements dealt in the selected works are closely connected to Yoruba cultural beliefs when it comes to kinship and spirituality. The novels emphasize the sustenance of traditional values even within modern and postcolonial settings. Adébáyọ̀'s narratives reflect how community values and traditional expectations have a strong impact on personal relationships, decision making and social responsibilities in these characters.

3. Cultural Resistance:

The North East Indian narratives by Easterine Kire and Sub-Saharan African narratives by Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ cleverly deal with the representation of oral traditions and indigenous knowledge as practices that maintain the cultural continuity. These practices act as forms of cultural resistance within the postcolonial domain. The native knowledge is celebrated through the character portrayal in both the novels that challenges the dominance of Eurocentric misrepresentation and rationalism imposed during the colonial time.

The rebirth of Naga folklore and ancestral memory in Kire's works combat historical marginalization and reaffirm significance of nativity. The narratives of Adébáyọ̀ uphold indigenous social belief that shapes the personal and communal relations within the post independent Nigeria.

4. Comparative Analysis:

The works of Easterine Kire and Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ reveal both similarities and differences in the representation of cultural memory and indigenous knowledge when looked

through the glares of comparative notion. Thinkers such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Frantz Fanon have been referred for the themes like identity formation, hybridity, subalternity, resistance and reclamation of culture to connect with the theoretical framework. It can be seen in the comparative analysis that Oral storytelling, myths and folklore take a place in the center in Kire's narratives whereas Adébáyọ̀'s works focus more on social and domestic contexts. Both writers highlight the importance of cultural memory and indigenous epistemologies despite these differences in narrative emphasis when analyzed closely together. They also draw attention to how these elements contribute in shaping identity. The comparative perspective thus showcases how geographically distant literary traditions share a common ground for cultural preservation and collective resistance.

5. Contribution to Marginal and New Literatures

The findings of this study have broader implications for postcolonial literary studies and comparative literature. This study contributes to the understanding of marginalized and New Literatures in English. It highlights how indigenous cultural knowledge and oral traditions function as significant narrative elements in the works of Easterine Kire and Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ in order to sustain nativity. The study unveils how marginalized regions though situated geographically distant incorporate similar cultural response to resist colonial and cultural domination. The present research foregrounds voices and cultural experiences that have often remained either underrepresented or misrepresented in mainstream literature for a very long time. The study attempts to reinforce the vital place of regional and indigenous narratives in expanding the scope of global literary studies. The comparative approach supports in depth understanding of cross cultural connections between North-East Indian and Sub-Saharan African literatures. It stresses the fact that it is integral to acknowledge the diversity of cultural expressions within postcolonial literature.

Conclusion:

This paper explores selected works of Easterine Kire and Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ to study how oral traditions and indigenous knowledge function as forms of cultural resistance against the colonial misrepresentation. With a help of comparative analysis of North East Indian and Sub-Saharan African literature, the paper highlights role of storytelling, collective memory and folklore in the marginalized literature that preserves cultural memory and acts as cultural resistance against the Eurocentric notion. Kire's *When the River Sleeps* and *Son of the Thundercloud* uphold oral traditions of Naga community whereas Adébáyọ̀'s *Stay with Me* and *A Spell of Good Things* portray strong belief in native knowledge of Yoruba tribe. The chosen narratives reclaim suppressed voices and affirm the cultural identity of indigenous communities. Through the post- colonial lenses the research shows the expanding scope of marginalized literature in terms of cultural resistance in the face of western perspectives in the colonial period. The Eurocentric notion of progress and modernity is challenged by a firm belief in indigenous knowledge system in the works of Easterine Kire and Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ from North East Indian and Sub-Saharan African literature respectively.

The comparative approach helps to understand how geographically and culturally distant forms of literature share the similar intention and commitment towards preservation of oral traditions and indigenous knowledge under postcolonial glare. Both the authors emphasize on the similar themes of identity, folklore, oral storytelling and belief system to reflect cultural resistance. The paper highlights the importance of marginalized literature in the growing scope of postcolonial and comparative literature. The works of Easterine Kire in North East Indian and Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ in Sub-Saharan African literature contribute with new perspectives of cultural preservation in the realm of world literature.

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