AN INDIGENOUS HISTORY OF TRADITIONAL NAGA FOOD RESILIENCE DURING BRITISH COLONIAL BATTLES

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Abstract

Postcolonial Indigenous writers, according to Boehmer (2005), believe that writing back is a significant step towards 'historical reconstruction' that can reconcile the precolonial indigenous identity and tradition of the past with the present. However, reconstruction of such history is fraught with several layers of cultural silencing. Therefore, it needs unique methodologies because official forms of historical archives or written records do not exist. The Naga territory, according to Wouters (2018), was the victim of colonial geopolitical objectification. However, the only authoritative work on Naga history, according to Sanyü (2023) was offered by a British administrator in Naga Hills, J.H. Hutton. The Naga 'people stories' are potent windows to Naga lived history and indigenous Naga knowledge systems that have endured the whitewashing of dominant historical representations of the Naga people. Kire's novels *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* (2018) and *A Respectable Woman* (2019 a), based on 'people stories,' make visible the colonial food crisis projects during the Battle of Khonoma (1879) and the Battle of Kohima (1944) respectively. They also make visible the Naga food resilience systems that helped the Naga people to prevent community starvation when India was hit by anthropogenic famines due to British colonial food policies. The Naga people's lived history of colonial resistance and indigenous food peace has undergone several layers of invisibilization: absence of written records, cultural flattening of indigenous languages and culture. Therefore, this study reconstructs Naga indigenous historical narratives of colonial India vis-à-vis pre-

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colonial Naga food ways during the Battle of Khonoma (1879) and the Battle of Kohima (1944) by making a parallel reading of Kire's novels and available historical documentations of the two war situations- *Walking the Roadless Road: Exploring the Tribes of Nagaland* (Kire 2019 b) and *A History of Nagas and Nagaland: Dynamics of Oral Tradition in Village Formation* (Sanyü 2023) – by Indigenous Naga historians. In so doing, it situates the indigenousNaga foodsovereignty systems of 'staying alive' (a word derived from Shiva 2010) in the present-day dystopia of food uncertainty.

Key Words: Naga, indigenous, reconstruction, history, food, security, colonial violence, 'people story'

Introduction

The Naga territory, according to Wouters (2018), was the victim of colonial geopolitical objectification. Unfortunately, the only authoritative work on Naga history, according to Sanyü (2023) was offered by a British administrator in Naga Hills, J.H. Hutton. However, Kire's novels based on Naga 'people stories' are potent windows on Naga lived history and knowledge systems that have endured the whitewashing of dominant historical documentations of the Naga people. Kire's *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* (2018) and *A Respectable Woman* (2019 a) make visible the colonial food crisis projects during the Battle of Khonoma (1879) and the Battle of Kohima (1944) respectively. They also make visible the indigenous Naga food security or/and resilience systems that helped the Naga people to prevent a famine situation when India was starving or semi-starving. The Naga people's lived history of colonial resistance and indigenous food peace has undergone several layers of invisibilization: absence of written records or/and cultural flattening of indigenous languages and culture. Therefore, the present study reconstructs indigenous Naga historical narratives of colonial India vis-à-vis pre-colonial Naga food ways practised during the Battle of Khonoma (1879) and the Battle of Kohima (1944) by braiding in Kire's novels and available historical documentations of the two war situations. It is divided into four sections: The first section offers a methodology to reconstruct Indigenous Naga history during the British colonization of Naga territories (Khonoma and Kohima). In so doing, the second section explicates the food violence on Naga people during the Battle of Khonoma. The third section shows how a forgotten episode of Second World War wrecked the food security of the people of Kohima. The fourth section draws conclusions wherein

the indigenous Naga deep knowledge of 'staying alive'[1] is recognized and made visible. The present study is unique as, for the first time, it restores Naga history of the colonial times to deconstruct-and-reconstruct the indigenous Naga narratives of trauma-and-resilience, of hunger-and-survival, of suffering-and-choice. Moreover, the study perhaps is a blueprint for reconstruction of indigenous food resilience histories in the context of colonial India.

The historical narrativization of writing back has been a significant postcolonial concern. In this context, Boehmer identifies three 'constituencies of postcolonial writers' (p. 214) who have been invisibilized by dominant postcolonial studies – woman writers, Indigenous writers, and diasporic writers. Postcolonial Indigenous writers, according to Boehmer, believe that writing back is a significant step towards 'historical reconstruction' (p. 221) that can reconcile the precolonial indigenous identity and tradition of the past with the present: the Koori writers of Australia, the Maori New Zealanders, the native Canadian writers, the Naga Anglophone writers, although coming from widely different indigenous situations, share a similar political commitment of reconstructing indigenous history. The reconstruction of such historical black holes is fraught with several forms of cultural suppression, but Boehmer explicates how Indigenous writers respond to these problem areas:

> As also happened in the Caribbean, to fill those spaces where mother tongues were reduced or lost, Indigenous writers focus on revising the language, narrative styles, and historical representations of the colonialist invader, refracting their experience in and on their own terms, acknowledging the enduring traces of the past. (p. 222)

Therefore, reconstruction of indigenous history in general and indigenous Naga history in particular requires a unique methodology where conventional forms of historical archives or written records do not exist. Vansina designs a methodology to restore and reconstruct indigenous history of the kingdoms of Savanna:

> Whether memory changes or not, culture is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds. The mind through memory carries culture from generation to generation. How it is possible for a mind to remember and out of nothing to spin complex ideas, messages and instructions for living which manifest continuity over time is one of the greatest wonders one can study, comparable only to human intelligence and thought itself. Oral tradition should be central to students of ideology, of society, of psychology, of art, and finally, of history. (p. xi)

Unfortunately, the only authoritative work on Naga history,

according to Sanyü was offered by a British administrator in Naga Hills, J.H. Hutton. When British colonial agents marched towards the North Eastern region of India, the Naga Hills were 'either under tribal chiefs or managed by the tribal councils and were left untouched by Indians' (Sanyü, p. 86). The colonial occupation of the indigenous ecologies in the borders of Assam was crucial to British colonial agents because of its strategic location (adjacent to Burma) and its commercial prospects in terms of tea, coal, and petroleum (Sanyü, p. 87). Consequently, several forms of hunger projects were brought about by the British colonial agents to subjugate Naga resistance. But these projects remain invisible in historical and cultural documentation of British famine projects in India.

The Naga region alone faced three successive battles from 1879 to 1944 – the Battle of Khonoma (1879), Naga involvement in World War I (1914-18), and the Battle of Kohima (1944). The British colonial agents during the country-building period weaponized native foods and wrecked indigenous food ecologies and food sovereignties. India faced major food crises during this period and millions of people suffered due to starvation, malnutrition, and abject poverty. Artists and poets created rich textual documentations of Hungry India in sketches, theatres, and prints. Historical, demographic, literary, or artistic research have recorded that the 'major' food crises during colonial India occurred from 1869 to 1945 in the British territories of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, North India, Bombay, Hyderabad, and Mysore[2] based on the visual and textual documentations of Hungry India. However, serious academic works on colonial hunger projects in India have under-noticed the anthropogenic food insecurities and/or food resilience of the Naga people, in what is now Nagaland in Northeast India. The invisibility is (even) reflected in historical documentation of the Naga people wherein Naga history and culture has received protective conscientiousness: In *Walking the Roadless Road: Exploring the Tribes of Nagaland* (2019 b) or *A History of Nagas and Nagaland: Dynamics of Oral Tradition in Village Formation*(2023), though Kire or Sanyü respectively allude to the colonial war situations, they remain reticent about the colonial strategies of disrupting indigenous food sovereignty. Sanyü confesses early on that despite conducting detailed work and interviews of the older generation and traditional story tellers, 'discussion with regard to politico-judicial, ideological and superstructural aspects remains limited particularly during the pre-colonial times' (p.4). Howbeit, Kire's novels based on Naga 'people stories' are potent windows to Naga lived history and indigenous knowledge repertoires that have

endured the whitewashing of dominant historical representations of the Naga people. *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* and *A Respectable Woman* make visible the colonial food crisis projects during the Battle of Khonoma and the Battle of Kohima respectively. Here, eco-ethical and esoteric traditions and taboos are woven in with the Naga history of meaningful resistance or/and response to the colonial agents of war and violence. As a result, the present study reconstructs indigenous Naga historical narratives of colonial India vis-à-vis pre-colonial Naga food ways practised during the Battle of Khonoma (1879) and the Battle of Kohima (1944) through simultaneous readings of Kire's select novels vis-à-vis available historical documentation of the two war situations. However, to visibilize an indigenous history of Naga resistance and resilience during colonial invasions and food weaponizations – which has undergone several layers of cultural and historical suppressions – a unique methodology is required.

Section I: Methodology and Purpose

Postcolonial attempts at archiving Naga history vis-à-vis Naga cultural representations must be probed to look for the hidden interstices of a society that is deprived of authentic visual or textual documentations in sketches or prints. While other hungry regions in India responded with hunger poems, paintings, plays and journals, Naga regions followed and practised their indigenous instincts for food security and community wellbeing. Narratives of Naga history, as lived and injected into the bloodstream of Naga cultural memory, is couched in Naga 'people stories' that includes folk tales, legends, proverbs, rituals, taboos, prayers, visions, and dreams.

Stories are significant in indigenous culture. Archibald et al. observe, '…story is the most powerful intergenerational manifestation of hope' (p. 13) rendering it almost indispensable in the indigenous oral tradition. But however effective story sharing, and story researching might be as a methodology in the context of indigenous lived history, the practice is nuanced. Hence, Kovach notes:

> We need to be aware of the nuances of storytelling within indigenous culture and of the responsibilities that hearing story carries. (p. 159)

In this context, the term 'people stories,' derived from Avinuo Kire and Meneno Vamuzo Rhakho's edited collection entitled *People Stories: Volume One*, is a unique entry point to indigenous

Nagaknowledge systems in general and the Naga political resistance against the agents of war and violence in particular. The indigenous Naga food sovereignty, deep understanding of food ecology and unique techniques of growing, gathering, preserving, and fermenting of food by the Naga farmers, hunters, and gatherers -as represented in Kire's 'people stories'- are the powerful staying-alive stories of the Naga people during the colonial hunger projects. Pou (p. 241) defines 'people stories' as those tales representing 'the active proponent of treasuring the traditional system' (p. 241). Furthermore, Kire (2018) unfolds how Naga 'stories' are potent signifiers of Naga belief systems and values:

> (…) The village was full of them [stories], the unclean places of the forest, the dark water sources which were death to bathe in; how stories nestled in them but would give up life to go near them and listen to their stories, no matter how sweet, how powerful! There they stayed, dark brooding secrets each village hinted at but were powerless to disclose. (pp. 51-52)

Each story emerges out of a deep connection with the ecosystem and posits Naga cultural resistance to dominant cultural suppression and labelling. The two places, Khonoma (in Section II) and Kohima (in Section III), referenced in this study, are two significant seats of Angami culture groups. These two villages, according to Sanyü have experienced various phases of transition and transformation. Their histories, though strategically silenced, can be reconstructed by using Naga 'people stories' as entry points to their food resilience systems during severe colonial hunger projects and fierce war situations. Naga Anglophone literature is committed – with an 'overpowering' (Patton) urge – to archive Naga 'people stories.'The following sections, therefore,examine Kire's novels based on Naga 'people stories' to identify colonial hunger projects vis-à-vis Naga foodways. In so doing, they narrativize an invisible chapter in the world history – the history of the indigenous Naga colonial resistance and food resilience.

Section II: The Battle of Khonoma and Food Insecurity in *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*

This section examines the anthropogenic food crisis during the Battle of Khonoma in1879 as narrativized in Kire's *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*. Johnstone reports that the village of Khonoma, located in a rugged terrain on the Naga Hills, was the most powerful threat to the British colonial agents (p. 47). Kire in her "Introduction"

to *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* refers to historical records to explicate how several punitive British expeditions against the Nagas from 1839 onwards led to regular burning of Naga villages and food supply (p. ix). National Geographic Society points out:

> Wars are inherently violent and harmful, but destruction of resources can sometimes create more catastrophic harm than bombs and bullets. Warring parties may plunder an enemy's food supply, deliberately destroying farms, livestock, and other civilian infrastructure. Conflict can cause food shortages and the severe disruption of economic infrastructure. (2022)

Kire's well-researched metatext of the 'village world' (p. viii) of Khonoma in *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* urges the readers to recognize the novel as a Naga meta history of fierce resistance against repeated political violence of the British army since the beginning of the 1800s. The novel vivifies the Naga experiential history of colonial hunger projects that wrecked the village's food stock during several British invasions from 1839 to 1880. The attack on Khonoma village came on 22 November 1879 and the women of the village could foresee a food crisis early on:

> The rains eased off in late September, and there were long balmy days of sun in October helping the long-eared paddy to mature. Women were anxious to harvest, for the tension was so great by now that they expected to be attacked any day… (p. 87)

The villagers held out against the British for four months but meanwhile, 'provisions were gradually running out, and the lot of their women and children sheltering in other villages had to be considered' (p.105). The British had also lost 'too many lives' (p. 104). General Nation, therefore, on hearing the 'legendary fame' (p. 105) of Pelhu decided to enter into a treaty but not without Pelhu. However, Pelhu was deeply anguished because the British had killed his brothers. The elders of the clan in Khonoma, seeking a peace treaty with General Nation, articulated their dismal situation to Pelhu:

> 'It is for the sake of our women and children that we want you to reconsider. They are suffering so much. There is great mortality and sickness. Is it not better to relent today and live tomorrow?' (p. 105)

In fact, the dispossessed lot, unaccustomed to dependence on the charity of other villages, suffered from severe food insecurity as they were forced to live in temporary shelters in the jungles as refugees (p. 109). Once the oral treaty of peace was reached between the

elder members of the Khonoma village and the representatives of the British administration in March 1880, the dislocated women and children went back to the village. However, the village by then had been dispossessed of food supplies:

> British Government justice was swift and harsh. After the treaty, Khonoma was burnt completely with restrictions on rebuilding the village. Her inhabitants were dispersed to other villages (…) The villages [Piphema, Meriema, Sechuma, Tsiepama, Pfuchama, Kigwema, Viswema and Jotsoma] that had joined together in the uprising against the Kohima garrison were attacked and destroyed. (p. xiv)

Colonial violence to this extent, in the context of the Australian indigenous culture groups, has been identified by Jalata as 'terrorism' and 'genocide' (p. 7). Kire's historical documentation of the Battle of Khonoma in *Walking the Roadless Road: Exploring the Tribes of Nagaland* (2019 b) records similar colonial 'terrorism' and 'genocide:'

> Collection of taxes and revenues imposed by the British was alien to the Nagas and the tax of Rs 3 per house was a great burden for an agrarian society not used to dealing in cash. Forcible collection of taxes had not endeared the government to the people either. The British officers saw only one way to deal with the various levels of defiance: crush rebellious villages and burn their houses as a warning to other villages. (p. 220)

Kire's novel *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* further vivifies the strategic wrecking of indigenous food security by the British colonial agents in Khonoma:

> Even after two days, smoke still rose from the smoldering remains of some of the houses. The thatch roofs had burnt easily but the posts of houses took a long time to burn out completely. Finally, half-burnt posts and ashes were all that remained, blackening the whole site. This was the punishment of proud people who had dared to control their own destinies. Women wept as they saw their homes turned into charred ruins… (p. 108-109)

However, community food insecurity reinvigorated in Levi (the male protagonist of *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*), the ancestral value system of indigenous food practices so much so that he united the members of his village community using traditional food wisdom and local cultivation techniques. When he returned to the Khonoma village after six years of British imprisonment, the view of the Merhu Kuda fort in Khonoma reminded him of the village's glorious history of resilience and recovery in the face of mythical

and historical invasions. Levi lifted a bit of soil from the village field and brooded on the village's food ecotopia:

> He (Levi) felt bonded to the village, to the land, and feelings surged up in him that he'd never known before (…). From his vantage point the village of Khonoma spread out before him rather majestically, the fields to his left and the village in front of him and at his back (…). Fed by the rivers, these yielded good harvests each year. (p. 50)

Levi remembered that his village had never been haunted by a year of food uncertainty. He eventually became newly aware of the community's interactions with its land and water and its people's contribution to the zero-hunger tradition.

Levi's community members attempted to fortify their village's food security system by valuing pre-colonial indigenous Naga taboos and sacred traditions in relation to food cultivation, preservation, and distribution ethics. They observed Genna[3] days and the belief was that those who defied Genna days would be penalised with injuries and accidents even resulting in death. In *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*, Levi's mother Piano had been educated in indigenous food production, preservation, and distribution knowledge systems by her father. She religiously observed Genna days to safeguard her agricultural fields from infertility. Genna practices were also effective in maintaining food security during natural disasters and unforeseeable circumstances. While natural disasters during the British rule in other parts of India aggravated food crises (for example, the 1876 Bengal cyclone as referenced in Kingsbury2018), they could not utterly devastate the Naga food security system.Moreover, the novel shows how the village community practised food cultivation during the most horrific British invasion on the village people in October 1879:

> … By day, they [the warriors of Khonoma] sniped at sentries or ambushed British detachments. Under the cover of night, warriors went down to the partially harvested fields so that they could harvest their fields and provide food for the battling men. (p. 104)

The female members of the Khonoma village played a vital role in maintaining the food sovereignty systems. They had been the carriers of profound knowledge pertaining to agricultural work since the pre-colonial era. They were principal in maintaining peace and harmony within the community. Levi's mother, Piano, had taught her sons, Levi and Lato, not to engage in weaving during the morning hours 'when the field is calling us' (p. 11). She had taught them field work

by explaining how 'a little rain refreshes you and keeps you cool enough to work on' (p. 12) and 'people did not work as keenly on a full stomach' (p. 13). She trained the two young minds:

> 'Push the soil down like this with your finger,' … She pushed her index finger into the dark loam and deftly planted a paddy stalk in the hole. Muddy water swirled in but she had firmly stuck the plant in the loam. She filled in the soil before moving on to the next one. (p. 12)

Piano had inspired her sons to restore community peace, harmony, diversity and sustainability by valuing food resilience and food sovereignty:

> Son, when our granaries are filled you may feel free to trap or shoot all the birds you want, but remember, a household is not worthy of its name if its granaries are empty. The sun and rain are the Creator's blessings. They rain and shine in turns for us to make our fields and get our harvests. War is part of a village's life but if we have grain, we can withstand war. If we do not have grain, a few days of war will overcome us. (p. 13)

Famine foods, within the dynamics of Indian famines during colonial times, are certain foods that were consumed during extreme poverty and food crises. These foods include particular parts of plants, insects, worms, and animals (Famine Foods, 2009). However, indigenous foods in general and indigenous Naga foods in particular include a lot of 'famine foods' as a part of the everyday diet which are locally accessible, essentially nutritious, and conveniently preserved. In *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*, Keviselie's wife preserved such foods in her house as an integral part of everyday meals:

> Meat hung over the fire, partially dried. In a corner of the large room, cluster of garlic dangled from a long bamboo. Dried herbs tied with twine hung alongside the garlic, food for the winter months when fresh herbs would be difficult to obtain. (p. 22)

Such indigenous food ways, if followed, could not only facilitate food resilience from anthropogenic or natural food crises but could also help in tiding over present-day policies of food corporatization and commodification. The next segment is situated in the context of one of the fiercest food-violence episodes on Indigenous people in world history.

Section III: The Battle of Kohima and Food Insecurity in Kire's *A Respectable Woman*

The present section explores the anthropogenic food crises during the Battle of Kohima (1944) in *A Respectable Woman*. The British made Kohima the headquarters in the later part of the nineteenth century (Barpujari, p. 50-69) but there are no written records of colonial violence on the dwellers of Kohima. Kire, in her historical documentation of the Naga tribes (*Walking the Roadless Road: Exploring the Tribes of Nagaland* 2019 b), records that British forces built a large number of roads across Khonoma 'keeping in mind the eventuality of a Japanese invasion' (p. 224), which was ultimately fought by the British against the Japanese from 4 April to 22 June 1944. While British historians look at this war as the first British triumph over the Japanese, Naga intellectuals like Kire (2019 b) or Chasie feel the necessity to foreground how Naga people were manipulated in making Kohima a campaign in the battle between the British and the Japanese. Chasie observes:

> World War II, and indeed the Battle of Kohima, was not the doing of our people. But the war came to our lands all the same and made our people participants including those who did not feel this was their war. (Qtd in Kire, 2019 b, p. 224)

The impact of the war on Kohima was disastrous. Naga elders reported to Kire (2019 b) how Kohima village and Kohima town were affected:

> …Terrible battles ensued between the Allied Forces and the Japanese Forces and because of which many lives were lost, countless properties destroyed, and unspeakable sufferings took place for no faults of ours… (p. 225)

After the war, the villagers built houses and sowed their fields with a new type of seed grain that would sprout at three-quarters the speed of their native grain. But Naga instinct and value for agriculture and food ecology shifted to 'money economy' (2019 b, p. 236), which prioritized trade and government jobs. *A Respectable Woman* (Kire 2019 a), in this context, recreates the lived realities of the Naga natives and their post-war trauma that remains undocumented in historical documentations of the Battle of Kohima. It also makes visible the traces of indigenous food security systems that were practised through domestic performances and everyday rituals.

Kire in the "Acknowledgements" section of *A Respectable Woman* points out that 'oral information of our [Naga] history and culture

and stories' (p. vii) has helped her in imagining a postwar Kohima. The battle was a part of the Second World War (1939-1945) and was fought in three phases from April 4 to June 22, 1944. The British Indian troops and the Japanese fought against each other causing food insecurity, disease, and death to the Naga people of Kohima. The novel unfolds the lived history of the Battle of Kohima during the Second World War as remembered by Khonuo, the female Naga World War II survivor of Kohima. The trauma and stress of the Battle was so deep that Khonuo remained silent for almost forty years. She was a ten-year-old girl then. Almost forty years after the war, she can vividly remember the moment of devastation when she returned to her hometown of Khonoma along with other Naga refugees after the Japanese raids: 'there was nothing' (p. 8). The short but heart-wrenching recollection of sheer nothingness underscores the freshness of Khonuo's forty-five-year-old wound of a disillusioned refugee child's return to her hearth and home.

The British government forced the people of Khonoma to evacuate the village for two months during the approaching Japanese attack against the British troops of India. On their return, the natives were shocked to discover the utter devastation of the land they had called their home. Khonuo unfolds to her daughter how forty years ago as a little girl she first experienced the trauma of food insecurity:

> There was no food when we came back from Dimapur because all the Marwaris had gone away. The Marwaris who sold groceries in their town shops had all abandoned Kohima so there was no food to be had. (p. 9)

In this way, food stocks and food supply were disrupted as the local food traders fled the war-torn city of Kohima. The Kohima village was destroyed due to constant bombing by the British allied force to oust the Japanese troops who had occupied the village. Meanwhile, the Naga people who could not follow the District Commissioner's orders to evacuate and continued to live in their houses with aged parents suffered an acute food crisis: 'The Japanese had occupied the village and they routinely ransacked houses looking for food' (p. 6). Food crisis, an obvious offshoot of war, violence, disharmony, infested the past and thereby the present of Kohima. During the long-lasting war, people either used up their food stocks or suffered helplessly as the Japanese invaders stole their agricultural produce. They depended on rationed food because during the invasion they could not till their fields. With the help of a British supply of paddy seeds, they were able to cultivate their fields again. The seeds were embraced by the hungry villagers as a 'fast-growing variety' (p. 13),

and everyone called it 'rosho lha' intending to mean 'ration lha.' However, the dependence on rationed seeds could have disrupted the food sovereignty system. It is due to the indigenous tradition of seed preservation techniques that the culture group was able to control the local food production, food distribution and food consumption systems thereby maintaining indigenous food sovereignty. Bultin's (p. 53) three-tier colonial project of disrupting indigenous Australian society – through disease, the withdrawal of resources, and killing – applies to the Naga ecology as well. However, every site of the anthropogenic food crises of the Naga communities – manifesting in starvation, semi-starvation, food damage, or agricultural stagnancy – becomes the site for renewed hope and food resilience. Going back to their fields; remembering and practising indigenous food preservation techniques, and managing the natural resources helped the Naga people to sustain the indigenous communities while many states of India were being torn apart by famine situations.

The novel depicts Khonuo's unique way of maintaining food security through everyday domestic chores in a post-war Kohima. The domestic routinization of food certainty is maintained by storing and hanging bunches of dried basil, garlic, chives, and maize over the kitchen fire; by filling the domestic space with the aroma of food; by warming rice; by preparing *galho*[4] from locally dried mustard leaves; and by cooking shreds of meat in simmering chili, red sorrel leaves, and red chili flakes within the households. Khonuo exhibits deep empathy and love to families, who mourn the death of loved ones, in the language of food certainty:

> At funerals, we don't know how to ask how the bereaved persons are feeling. Instead, we keep asking them to eat some food. Making food for the family becomes our way of showing them sympathy and a way to partake in their sorrow. (p. 35)

Forty years later, Khonuo strategically chooses to forget the military tactics displayed by the British Indian troops against the Japanese armies in Khonoma during the Battle. Here, both the agents of war, the British and the Japanese, are identified as destructive initiators of anthropogenic hunger projects. Khonuo and her daughter, therefore, prefer to gain insights into the local food resilience systems that sustained the people of Kohima during the 1944 Battle:

> How had the people survived? What was it like to see one's village bombed? What did they eat when there was no food to be found? ... These were the questions we often asked. (p. 6)

Khonuo represents the Naga people's choice of ensuring food security when things seem to be falling apart. Human survival demands food resilience, and the Naga tradition has always valued this wisdom in theory and practice. *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* and *A Respectable Woman* are more than mere stories – they are the Naga 'people stories' that are productively fed with everyday agricultural topologies, climate knowledge, food production and distribution techniques, food habits and dietary preparations.

Conclusion

This section situates the twofold necessity of the present study – firstly, its indigenous reconstruction of Naga history and secondly, the context of the present-day food environment. The reconstruction of indigenous Naga history is based on the two Naga Anglophone novels, which are based on memory-making pertaining to food peace. Both remembering and forgetting are integral to memory-making wherein the order of time is re-ordered to posit embedded individual memories vis-a-vis the dominant social memory (Brockmeier). Indigenous Anglophone literary reconstructions of history involve certain unique narrative styles and cultural commitments. Boehmer identifies these narrative tools in the context of Maori Anglophone novels: incorporation of indigenous legends and customs that extend back to pre-colonial cultural memory, inclusion of indigenous word images (not necessarily explained or entered in a glossary), and foregrounding of indigenous ceremony, value systems pertaining to land and water ethics (p. 224). Kire's novels *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* and *A Respectable Woman* use memory and imagination to reconstruct embedded indigenous Naga histories of war-and-(food) peace. They are collected from sources as Kire would describe while explicating the nature of Khonuo's stories that exist without a beginning, middle, or an end:

> You would just have to be around at the right moment to catch the story as it appeared, dredged up from her [Khonuo's] memory bank, and pondered upon as though it had been another lifetime altogether. She [Khonuo] sometimes seemed to doubt that what she was telling us had really happened. She never answered my [Khonuo's daughter's] many questions directly; she simply narrated what she remembered of that time period. (Kire, 2019 a, p. 9)

Using cultural memory as a potent tool, Kire creates several spaces of indigenous survival stories by making visible historical and mythical food wars versus Indigenous peoples' choice of food

peace. She balances vivid imagination with highly contextualized indigenous knowledge pertaining to Naga food resilience systems. This response is possible because of her extensive field-based research work (evident from the elaborate metatexts in all her 'people stories'). Moreover, Kire's'staying alive' stories amidst severe food uncertainty – at both the individual and community level – provide meaningful insights into indigenous Naga food resilience systems. These Naga 'people stories' of environmental food systems within a specific Himalayan ecology, if systematically studied, might offer ways of learning environmental food security from place-based, experiential and deep knowledge repertoires of indigenous communities for India and the world.

Shiva, who has worked extensively on the Himalayan ecology of Uttarakhand, believes:

> Every aspect of the food crisis – non-sustainability, injustice, unemployment, hunger, and disease – is linked to the globalised, industrialised food system, and every dimension of the crisis can be addressed through ecological agriculture and local food systems. To grow sustainability, nutrition and food democracy, we must think small not big; local not global. (p. 94)

Kire's narratives make visible pre-colonial indigenous Naga means of maintaining food sovereignty through cultivation and management of natural resources at 'small' and 'local' levels. Moreover, in the present times of food corporatization, the classification of 'real food' and 'famine food' needs to be revisited: according to "Famine Foods" (2009), expensive premium wheat, rice, or even pedigree cattle are promoted as 'real' foods by multinational food companies. These companies dump farm surpluses from the global north and label them as food aid. Consequently, these companies dismantle indigenous systems of cultivation and nutrition. Therefore, time has come to consider indigenous food systems as the blueprints for classifying our 'real food' production, distribution, and consumption systems.

The present study of colonial hunger projects vis-a-vis the Naga individual and community food resilience systems is relevant to the ongoing discourses on the need to develop localised strategies to mitigate the continuing global food crises (in forms of natural and anthropogenic food insecurities). During the present industrial mode of food production, cultural flattening of local food systems and agriculture, globalisation, and corporate profit (the agents of the modern world's food crisis as identified by Shiva in *Who Really Feeds the World?*), the indigenous Naga food wisdom and food sovereignty

might provide a blueprint for human survival. Ikerd identifies four important principals attributed to indigenous food sovereignty, accumulated, and disseminated for more than thousands years:

> (1) Sacred or divine sovereignty – Food is a gift from the Creator, and the right to food is sacred; (2) Participatory – Active involvement in cultural harvesting strategies; (3) Self-determination – Meet individual needs for culturally adapted foods; (4) Policy – Reconcile indigenous food values with laws and the mainstream economy.

Indigenous knowledge systems of food sovereignty, therefore, are based on deep knowledge, which are ecologically contextualised and are climate resilient. Naga food sovereignty, couched in Naga 'people stories,' is shared and passed down through generations orally and through cultural practices and rituals. The present study is a humble endeavour to reconstruct the past survival stories of Naga people in the context of colonial food crises in order to build a blueprint for a zero-hunger world. It underscores the need to undertake simultaneous readings of written records, oral narratives and literary writings pertaining to invisible indigenous historical moments to reconstruct and benefit from the deep pre-colonial indigenous knowledge of Naga food resilience and environmental foodways.

Notes

1. An idea derived from Shiva (2010)
2. See Mohanty, 2022; Maharatna,1996; Siegel, 2018; Sharma, 2001; Mishra et al., 2019; Purkait et al., 2020; Bhattacharya, 2020.
3. A Genna day is a day declared as a no-work day. It is taboo to work on Genna days.
   Willaert explicates how the people of Manipur and Naga Hills (the present-day Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Myanmar) performed Genna. It is the traditional lock down practice that could curb cholera and smallpox (diseases strategically transmitted in India by British colonizing agents) among Naga communities.
4. *Galho* is a Naga food made from a mixture of rice, vegetables, and various meats.

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