

Indian Poetry in English
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Lecture - 36
Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire

Good morning friends, and welcome back to NPTEL online certification course on Indian Poetry in English. You remember well that presently we are dealing with ethnographic voices in Indian poetry in English, and in the last lecture we had talked about Mamang Dai. In this lecture, we are going to undertake two more poets namely Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire under the caption of ethnographic voices.

Friends, you remember well that ethnographic voices are those voices which actually talk about a particular region, a particular race because the word ethnos is a Greek one which actually means race. And that is why, the poets who have got ethnographic voices talk more about their own land, their own culture, their own identity and of course, their own landscape.

If you remember well, while talking about the poetic oeuvre of Mamang Dai, we had already touched upon these things, but in this lecture, we are going to take up two voices because the voices of these people in some way or the other have got a sort of parallelism. And in this regard, it is very difficult to say who is lesser ethnographic and who is more and that is why I thought I should have a combined talk on these two poets.

Now before we go to discuss these poets because I do not think it is mandatory to talk more about ethnographic voices, as we have already talked about in the previous lecture, but straight way we will come to Temsula Ao.

Now, it is actually quite ironical that these two people I mean, Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire though they are still writing, but they have not yet attracted the attention of Indian critics the way other poets have been discussed with.

Many of the anthologies especially, the major or the representative anthologies have not included these poets. Of course, there are stray papers by research scholars and faculty members on these two poets. So, we shall frame our discussion on the basis of some of

their poems because there is a sort of commonality between these two poets. Now, who was Temsula Ao?

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Temsula Ao

- ✓ Born in 1945 in Jorhat, Assam
- ✓ Fulbright Fellow at the University of Minnesota 1985–86.
- ✓ Poet, novelist, short story writer, and ethnographer
- ✓ Retired as Professor from NEHU
- ✓ Has been the Director of North East Zonal Cultural Centre
- ✓ Honoured with Padmashri in 2007
- ✓ Conferred with Sahitya Akademi in 2013
- ✓ Has been translated into Odia, Bengali, Kannada, and German

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Temsula Ao was born in the year 1945 in Jorhat, in Assam. She actually had her education and then she also got a chance to visit University of Minnesota as a Fulbright fellow. Temsula Ao is a poet, novelist, short story writer and ethnographer. Majority of us know these two names more as a novelist than as poets, but the poetry that they have carved out, is also very significant and that is why I thought of taking up these two voices under the caption ethnographic voices.

Temsula Ao retired as a Professor from NEHU fine, she has actually also been the Director of North East Zonal Cultural Centre. She was honoured with the **Padmashri** in 2007 and in 2013 she was awarded **Sahitya Akademi** Award. Majority of her works have been translated into Oriya, Bengali, Kannada and German.

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Her Literary Corpus



- Poetry Collections
 - *Songs that Tell* (1988)
 - *Songs that Try to Say* (1992)
 - *Songs of Many Moods* (1995)
 - *Songs from Here and There* (2003)
 - *Songs from the Other Life* (2003)
 - *Book of Songs* (2013)




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Now, as I mentioned earlier Temsula Ao has a lot to her credit. She has got more poetry collections than Easterine Kire and both these poets belong to the same region, fine? So, her poetry collections include ***Songs that Tell*** which came out in the year 1988.

In Temsula's world, you will find that there is a multiplicity of voices apart from the voices of nature, apart from the voices of mountains, hills as we have also talked about the same thing in the lecture on Mamang Dai. Then there came in 1992 ***Songs that Try to Say***, ***Songs of Many Moods***, ***Songs from Here and There***, ***Songs from the Other Life*** and ***Book of Songs*** in 2013.

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- Short Story Collection
 - *These Hills Called Home- Stories from a War Zone* (2006)
 - *Laburnum for My Head* (2009)
- Memoir
 - *Once Upon a Life* (2013)
- Ethnography
 - *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999)
 - *The Tombstone in My Garden*







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As we have been saying that Tamsula Ao also has to her credit some short story collections which also became very famous. *These Hills Called Home*-- it came out in the year 2006, this is stories from a War Zone, and then came *Laburnum for My Head* in 2009, there is also a memoir, fine?

Once Upon a Time in 2013 which is actually one of a very significant works of Tamsula Ao. And then, two other voices which actually depict ethnography namely, *The Ao Naga Oral Tradition*, *The Tombstone in My Garden* which actually is in the press and maybe any moment of time this can be released. So may be this book is going to come this year only. *The Tombstone in My Garden* this is again a book of stories.

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General Themes of Her Poetry

- ❖ Cultural significance of Ao-Nagas
- ❖ Clash of cultural values
- ❖ Oral history of Ao-Naga
- ❖ Politics of place
- ❖ Commodification of nature
- ❖ Destruction of natural grandeur because of industrialization and development projects
- ❖ Dislocation because of the unwanted change and transformation
- ❖ Integration of present and past

"But to-day
I no longer know my
hills,
The birdsong is gone,
Replaced by the
staccato
Of sophisticated
weaponry." (*My Hills*)

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Now, one might wonder as to how Tamsula Ao who is actually living in the hills and had her childhood in the hills, how she made a lot of contribution to Indian English literature and what are actually the themes of her poetry.

Because she began writing as a poet, and we find that both Tamsula Ao and Easterine Kire. They belong to a Naga community and while Tamsula Ao belongs to Ao community, Ao Naga fine. And these two have certain differences, but both these poets actually want to delineate in their works are the myth fine, the myth of their own area.

There is often a clash of cultural values, majority of the works of Nagaland are actually in the form of oral tradition and that is why in majority of the poets, we find memory

being unfolded fine. Because of several disturbances and chaos in Nagaland we find that there is actually a politics of place found in majority of the works of these two poets. Of course, the nature is at the backdrop, but with Nature or under the guise of Nature these poets actually try to convey a different sort of their ideas.

The way natural grandeur or the natural splendour is being demolished, because of the fast pace of technology, industrialization, another developmental projects. The poets actually are very much shuddered and they ruefully have delineated the theme like this in majority of their poems. Many of them have also felt dislocation to be one common theme because of the unwanted change and transformation.

And of course, since these tribals do not have too much of, you know, written records, that is why Temsula Ao as well as Easterine Kire. They actually got the chance to bring to all these stories and experiences in the form of their works of art. We can take some of the lines from one of the poems: “My Hills”, where she says--- “But to-day I no longer/ know my hills,/ The bird song is gone,/ Replaced by the/ staccato Of sophisticated weaponry.” So, see here refers to the sort of chaos that was prevalent in her state, fine.

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Temsula Ao's Views on Loss of Identity, Culture, and Tradition of Northeast India

“The cultures of North East India are already facing tremendous challenges from education and modernization. In the evolution of such cultures and the identities that they embody, the loss of distinctive identity does not bode well for the tribes of the region. If the trend is allowed to continue in an indiscriminate and mindless manner, globalization will create a market in which Naga, Khasi or Mizo communities will become mere brand names and commodity markers stripped of all human significance and which will definitely mutate the ethnic and symbolic identities of a proud people.”

Swayam 6

Temsula Ao's views, because Temsula Ao not only writes about hills, but then with hill she identifies her own recognition, so her own culture and the tradition of Northeast India. So, what she says is very significant and pertinent. “The cultures of Northeast are

already facing tremendous challenges, and these challenges actually form the backdrop of many of the themes of her poetry as well as stories from education and modernization.

In the evolution of such cultures and the identities that they embody, the loss of distinctive identity does not bode well for the tribes of the region.” That is why we say ethnographic voices. They feel that their identity is being endangered, it is being threatened.

“If the trend is allowed to continue in an indiscriminate and mindless manner, globalization will create a market in which Naga, Khasi or Mizo communities will become mere brand names and commodity markers stripped of all human significance and which will definitely mutate the ethnic and symbolic identities of a proud people.”

Now, these poets are very much worried about their own identity, their own land, their own culture and they say that with the advance of technology and with the advance of industrialization, fine. Their own identity their indigenous identity is at stake and that is why these voices actually experience a danger to the ethnic and symbolic identities of a proud people.

Now, let us take some of the poems of Temsula Ao first. And we shall see, because through their poems, they actually try to convey their ideas, their sense of belonging which they feel at times, which they feel at times are being threatened.

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“The Old Story-Teller- A Nagaland Poem”

I have lived my life believing
Story-telling was my proud legacy.
The ones I inherited
From grandfather became
My primary treasure
And the ones I garnered
From other chroniclers
Added to the lore.
When my time came I told stories
As though they ran in my blood
Because each telling revitalized
My life-force
And each story reinforced
My racial reminiscence.
The stories told of the moment
When we broke into being
From the six stones and
How the first fathers founded
Our ancient villages and
Worshipped the forces of nature.

Swajal 7

So, this is a poem entitled *The Old Story Teller- A Nagaland Poem*, she calls it a Nagaland poem. Now, the way she mentions or depicts she composes her lines you will find that there is a natural push, there is a natural flow maybe it is not rhythmic, but it looks as if it were telling its own story.

“I have lived my life believing/ Storytelling was my proud legacy.”

It is said that these Nagas believed in storytelling. We have already talked about in the previous lecture that how animism was a part of their faith, we have also mentioned deep ecology where we have said that both man and animals and nature, they can live in communion with each other. And since they do not have any recorded history or recorded story. They believed in oral tradition and that is why they say storytelling was my proud legacy.

“The ones I inherited
from grandfather became
my primary treasure
and the ones I garnered
from other chroniclers
added to the lore.
when my time came, I told stories
So, the continuation of a tradition.
As though they ran in my blood
because each telling revitalized
My life-force
And each story reinforced
My racial reminiscence,
My racial reminiscence
the stories told of the moment
when we broke into being
from the six stones
how the first father is founded.”

So, there is a myth and in this myth, we shall also discuss later on that they believed in 6 stones, and out of these 6 stone, 3 stones were of males and 3 of females and they believed in the continuation of the tradition.

“Our ancient villages and /worshipped the forces of nature.”

The Northeast people and especially the tribal people found themselves very close to nature and they worshipped nature like anything. They believed that nature also has a life of their own, and then warriors and world tigers came alive through the tales as did the various animals who were once our brothers until we invented human language we were.

So, in a way they also take a dig because on many occasions they have been actually treated like animals and they say because we until we invented human language, we did not have our own language. And that is why we can find in several stories and poems that they bear a sort of resemblance, they bear a sort of parallelism with the animals, they also have got. I mean these people have got a sort of familiarity with them and they find that in them lies their spirit as well.

“And began calling them savage,/ grandfather constantly warned/ that forgetting the stories/ would be catastrophic.” So, now, you see the danger that they feel and from one generation to another because storytelling was a sort of practice that was going on. “We would lose our history,/ territory and most certainly/ our intrinsic identity. So, I told stories/ at my racial responsibility/ to in still in the young/ the art of perpetuating,/ existential history and essential tradition/ to be passed on to the next generation. “

Because we do not have any written history, we do not have any written legacy and this is storytelling, this oral tradition is our legacy, but now a new era has downed insidiously displacing the old. So, with the arrival of the new era all our storytelling act is actually being relegated.

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Contd.....

My own grandsons dismiss
Our stories as ancient gibberish
From the dark ages, outmoded
In the present times and ask
Who needs rambling stories
When books will do just fine?
The rejection from my own
Has stemmed the flow
And the stories seem to regress
Into un-reachable recesses
Of a mind once vibrant with stories
Now reduced to un-imaginable stillness.
So when memory fails and words falter
I am overcome by a bestial craving
To wrench the thieving guts
Out of that Original Dog
And consign all my stories
To the script in his ancient entrails.

“My own grandsons dismiss /our stories as ancient gibberish”.

The time you know with time comes the change. And the poet says, my own grandsons dismiss our stories as ancient gibberish

“from the dark ages, outmoded
in the present times and ask
who needs rambling stories,”

Who are the listeners to the stories?

“when books will do just fine?

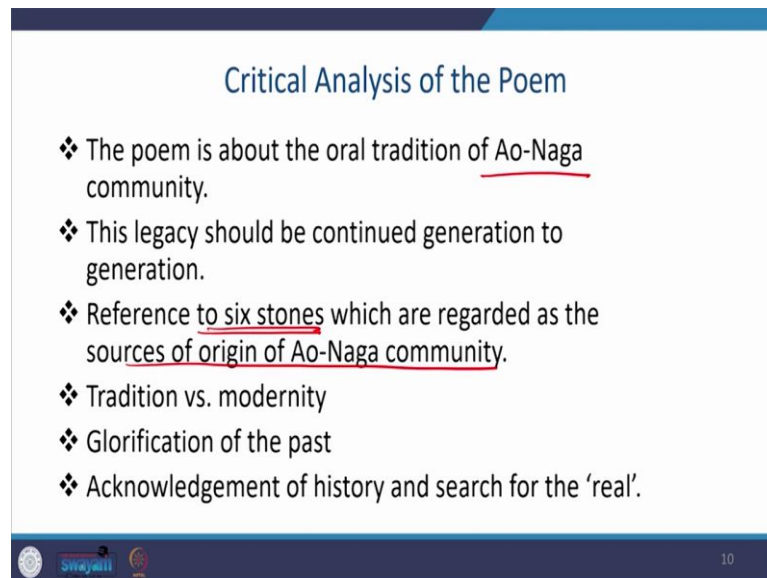
The rejection from my own
has stemmed the flow,
and the stories seem to regress
into an unreachable recesses of mind
of a mind once vibrant with stories
now reduced to unimaginable stillness.
So, when memory fails and words falter,
I am overcome by a bestial craving
to wrench the thieving guts
out of that original Dog
And consign all my stories

To the script in his ancient entrails.”

So, the poet is actually very much unnerved at the loss of a tradition, that actually was a legacy of theirs and even the coming generations, they also dismiss this practice of oral traditions and say that in an age of books who will listen to your stories. And, but then the loss of the story is a loss of the culture. It is actually a loss of their tradition; it is a loss of their legacy that they had inherited from their forefathers.

If we have a serious look and critically appreciate the poem, we will find that it is actually about the continuation of the tradition of Ao Naga community. There are two communities Ao Naga communities and then Angami community.

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Critical Analysis of the Poem

- ❖ The poem is about the oral tradition of Ao-Naga community.
- ❖ This legacy should be continued generation to generation.
- ❖ Reference to six stones which are regarded as the sources of origin of Ao-Naga community.
- ❖ Tradition vs. modernity
- ❖ Glorification of the past
- ❖ Acknowledgement of history and search for the 'real'.

Swajal 10

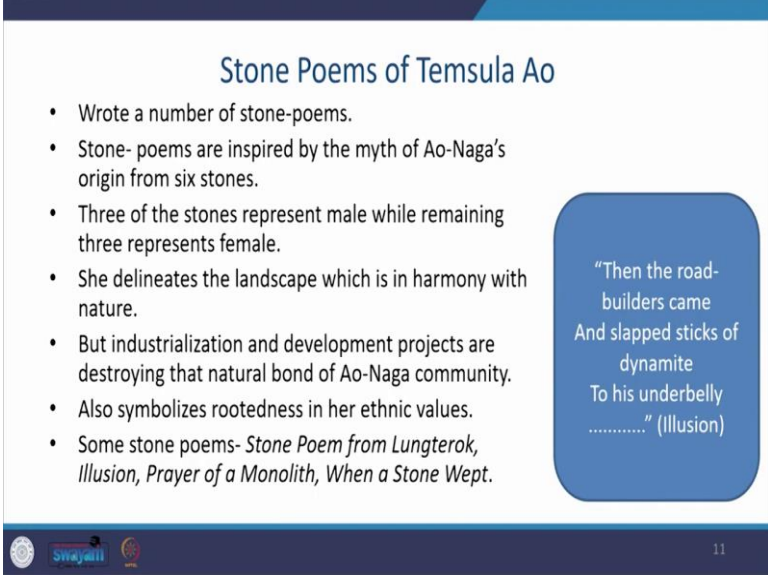
And then there can be many more the way you go into their historical details. So, this legacy should be continued from one generation to another, that is what actually the poet wishes for. And then the six stones reference that I had mentioned.

So, they are regarded as the sources of the origin of Ao-Naga community and one can also find the conflict between tradition and modernity fine, the conflict between tradition and the industrialization. And of course, at the same time there were several things being done in their land which the common people were being a victim of.

So, the glorification of the past, because in the loss of their legacy, in the loss of the oral tradition they feel that their past is being relegated and that is why the poet wants

actually to glorify the past, and there is an immediate search for the loss that they are going to face. Now, the question is-- Should in an age where we are looking for globalization and all, should we really relegate the oral tradition of a particular race, of a particular community?

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The slide is titled "Stone Poems of Temsula Ao" and contains a bulleted list of points and a quote. The list includes: "Wrote a number of stone-poems.", "Stone-poems are inspired by the myth of Ao-Naga's origin from six stones.", "Three of the stones represent male while remaining three represents female.", "She delineates the landscape which is in harmony with nature.", "But industrialization and development projects are destroying that natural bond of Ao-Naga community.", "Also symbolizes rootedness in her ethnic values.", "Some stone poems- *Stone Poem from Lungterok, Illusion, Prayer of a Monolith, When a Stone Wept.*"

The quote in a blue box reads: "Then the road-builders came And slapped sticks of dynamite To his underbelly " (Illusion)

At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for "Vijaya" and "11".

My dear friends, if something is very important to somebody that is one's culture and the loss of the culture has not been our tradition. We actually should try our level best to recover, to regain the cultural loss that we have faced because every culture has got a sort of distinct identity. Temsula Ao wrote many stone poems. Now, why they wrote stone poems because most of the time they were surrounded by mountains, hills, rivers, stones and all and these stone poems as I have been saying that they are inspired by the myth of Ao Nagas origin from six stones.

Out of these six stones, three represent male while remaining three represent female. Temsula Ao delineates the landscape which is actually in harmony with nature. If you read the poems of Temsula Ao, you can find that how an effort has been made not only to delineate the land and its beauty, but at the same time to continue the tradition which once upon a time was a sort of legacy which they got from their forefathers.

Industrialization and development of several projects, have actually destroyed their natural bond of Ao community. Ao Naga believed, that they were having a sort of communion with nature and that is why when a new project comes, a development

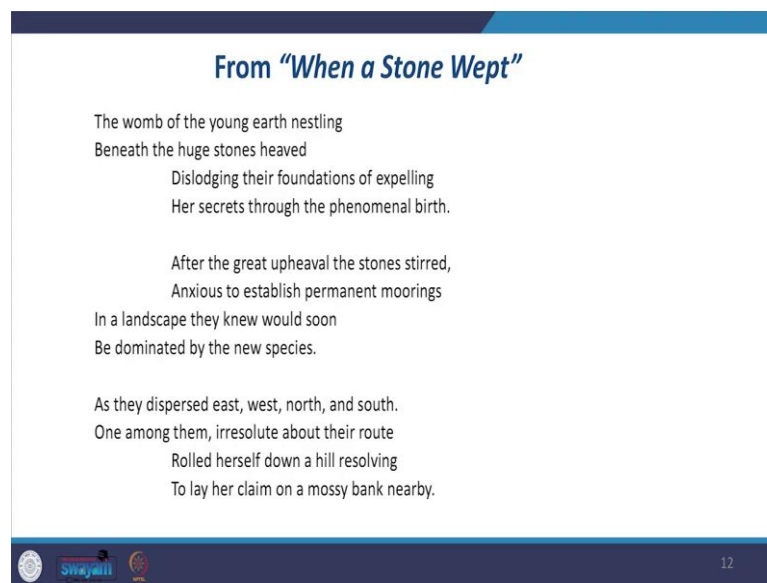
project comes and if that poses a danger to it, in a way they feel that their culture actually receives a sort of impending danger. They also find that they are being you know deprived of their roots, in terms of their ethnic values.

There are some stone poems namely Stone Poem from *Lungterok*. Lungterok is a place in Nagaland fine. Then “*Illusion*,” “Prayer of a Monolith,” “When a Stone Wept”. Now, see these poets also try to find tongue in brooks, tongue in mountains and let us take some lines from one very famous poem entitled “Illusion” where the poet says,

“Then the road builders came/ and slapped sticks of dynamite, to his underbelly.”

So, in a way they feel that all these developmental projects are not in conformity with the identity of the Ao communities. Because they feel that it is actually a menace, it is actually menace to their mythical identity, to their racial identity.

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Let us take one poem and see the sort of emotions that the poet generates and the poet actually feels the poem is titled *from “When a Stone Wept”*.

“The womb of the young earth nestling/ beneath the huge stones heaved/ Dislodging their foundations of expelling/ Her secrets through the phenomenal birth.”

So, giving you know human attribute to the stone

“After the great upheaval the stones stirred.”

These upheavals may be in different ways fine. When, the projects come and they actually try to break these mountains or hills with the help of the dynamites just for a development. But then these people feel

“anxious to establish permanent moorings/ in a landscape, they knew would soon/ be dominated by the new species.”

The people of these communities feel that with the development new people will come, new species will come and that will actually prove dangerous to their ethnic identity.

“As they dispersed east, west, north and south/One among them, irresolute about their root/Rolled herself down a hill resolving/To lay her claim on a mossy bank nearby./ So, many people opposed.”

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Where the west-bound stone stopped
To propose that she join him on his quest
 She politely refused and being weary
 Slipped into heedless carefree sleep.

 In the morning she found him gone
 But strangely felt his presence
As if a deep imprint was left
Somewhere in her deepest self.

“Turning it into graveyard of the earth
Where an abandoned stone-mother
And her disowned children still
conspire
To create a shroud of stones
.....”

Swayam 13

Where the west bound stone stopped,
to propose that she joined him on his quest.
She politely refused and being weary,
slipped into heedless carefree sleep.
In the morning she found him gone,
but strangely felt his presence
as if a deep imprint was left
somewhere in her deepest self.

So, here the poet actually talks about the life that even the mountains and the hills can also have and how they feel intimidated, how they feel threatened. We can take some more lines,

“Turning it into a graveyard of the earth “

By all these actions it appears as if the entire land will become a graveyard of the earth where an abandoned stone- mother

“And her disowned children still conspired/ To create a shroud of stones.”

So, since the stone is associated with the myth, with the culture, with their cultural belief, so, these people feel that by destroying it, by breaking it, perhaps the mythical tradition is going to be broken. And then the earth will become a sort of graveyard and abandoned stone mother because you know we have already said that three of these stones represented a female, and the other three represented males. So, the mother stone and her disowned children still conspire to create a shroud of stones.

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The slide is titled "Critical Analysis of the Poem" in blue text. It features a list of four bullet points on the left and a circular blue graphic on the right containing a quote. At the bottom left, there are logos for Swayam and a globe, and at the bottom right, the number "14".

- Demand for a territory which will lead them to relocate their lost identity.
- Delineation of myth has become a site to reclaim the forgotten past.
- This 'myth' is a part of collective memory of Ao-Naga community.
- Preservation of place and natural surrounding around her

“To All
Who can still
Sense the earth
Touch the wind
Talk to the rain
And embrace the sun
In every rainbow”
(Preface to *Songs from the Other Life*)

We actually find that through these poems, the poet actually expresses the common people's demand for a territory which will lead them to relocate their lost identity, and that is why they feel that such projects are inimical, fine. So, the delineation of myth has become a site to reclaim the forgotten past, my dear friend.

It is actually a forgotten past. This myth is a part of collective memory of Ao Naga community. It is actually a part of their collective consciousness fine, and preservation of place and natural surrounding around her.

So, when Temsula Ao composed another book of poems you know in the in the preface what she writes,

“To all who can still sense the earth.

Touch the wind

Talk to the rain

And embrace the sun

In every rainbow.”

This is what she writes in the preface of one of her books. So, sense the earth meaning thereby when we are going to bring development projects and all perhaps, we are unable to understand that these mountains and the hills also have got a life of their own.

Perhaps we are not able to, understand the language of the wind. We are not able to talk to the rain and my dear friends in a way as we see man's actions in a way it appears as if we are exploiting nature. And then finally, we are trying once again to go back and there are different ways through which we want to bring once again we want to create nature, is that possible?

Human limitations can come to a close, but the natural glories that we are going to lose, we cannot recover them and that is why today we have less rains, we have loss of water, we talk about ecological imbalance. So, in a way when we look at these poems and these poets very seriously, we find that their closeness or their proximity with nature was not devoid of a philosophic significance, a philosophic message.

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From Songs from the Other Life

And entangled my woman-self
in an un-seemly mesh
Of spirit, human and beast.
So I implore,
Grant me this last prayer
So that when I cross over
To the region
Beyond the sun
Like all others of my kind
The iridescent fumes
Of the last sunset
Will dissolve my several selves
Be they spirit, woman or tiger
And raise a rainbow there
Against our composite tears. ("A Tiger-Woman's Prayer")

He calls me barren and says I am a curse
On his clan and demands a son by next harvest
Or he'll take another woman who will
Hold his seed and give him sons.

The old woman still remembers
How the frightened eyes concentrated
On the leaf she shredded to determine
The mystery of the young wife's despair.

When she finished divining
She looked at the hopeful wife
And whispered 'Go home my child,
You will bear many sons.

She chuckles now in recalling
The part she left unsaid, and how
The woman bore many sons
But for another man.
("The Leaf-Shredder")

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Now, there is one a very significant collection by Temsula Ao entitled *Songs from the Other life* and the one that I was telling you before, about the preface where she says to 'all who can still sense the earth,'. The book was dedicated to all who can sense the earth, touch the wind, talk to the rain and embrace the sun in every rainbow. Now, in this poem we will rather find there are more than I mean around 16 poem's and majority of the poems talk about life, culture and many more.

We can take some of the poems. it is actually believed there is a poem entitled "A Tiger-Woman's Prayer" where the poet tells us that in Naga Ao community some men and women are believed to have some amount of familiarity, and they actually bear a resemblance with the spirit of tiger and other animals. And this they say they actually had this power; they had this power, but these powers are now eroding, these powers are now decreased, these powers are now deteriorating.

And then the poem is the longer one, but I have taken some of the lines where the poet says,

And entangled my woman-self
in an un-seemly mesh
of spirit, human and beast.
So I implore,
grant me this last prayer.
So, that when I cross over
To the region
Beyond the sun

Like all others of my kind
The iridescent fumes
Of the last sunset
will dissolve my several selves,
Be thy spirit woman or tiger
and raise a rainbow there
Against our composite tears.

So, the poet apprehends that with all these things there will be a loss, but then it will actually be a loss of the spirit, loss of the tiger spirit that even many men and women have. And that is why she says before they actually lose it fine, before they lose it they actually go for a prayer. So, that when I cross over to the region beyond the sun like all others of my kind, the iridescent fumes of the last sunset because that is not going to be recovered now.

Again, there is another poem that I am very much tempted to take and this poem is entitled "*The Leaf Shredder.*" In this poem we find that many of these people Naga Ao community people, they actually had the power to predict, *the power to predict* they used to foretell future. And because, they have been listening to stories, and through their stories only because the stories were the only way of entertainment.

But then the sort of mythical powers, the sort of divine powers that many of them had and one such lady is being described here, where many people used to go to know about their future. And in this poem the leaf shredder it is said; that there used to be one *era sent sur*. It is actually the word for soothsayer. And this *era sent sur* had actually the boon or the merit that such a person could tell you something more about future, they could look in look into the seeds of time.

How by shredding a leaf; by shredding a leaf and this was called aam, a a m, aam fine.
He calls me baron and says I am a curse

this is actually about a lady who goes to such an era sent sur such a soothsayer and she narrates her own problems and she also gets the remedy and the poem goes like this.

"He calls me baron and says I am a curse
On his clan and demands a son by next harvest
Or he will take another woman who will
Hold his seed and give his sons."

Now, through this poem not only does the poet actually talk about how they had got some super powers, but anyway she also says that even in their community also there used to be people who were, who believed in having actually a clan of sons. I mean the patriarchal order. And then this soothsayer,

The old woman still remembers
How the frightened eyes concentrated
On the leaf she shredded to determine
The mystery of the young wife's despair.

So, this young lady who had gone to this soothsayer and was trying to know about her own future because she was going to be deserted by her husband. And the soothsayer says

When she finished divining
She looked at the hopeful wife
And whispered, 'go home my child,
You will bear many sons.
So, this is what this soothsayer says and
She chuckles now in recalling.

And this lady who is soothsayer actually recalls her own days when how she had foretold that particular lady will have so many sons.

"The parts she left unsaid, and how/
The woman bore many sons, /But for another man;/
the woman bore many sons, but for another man."

Now, the question is what the poet actually tries to say is that the fault does not lie only in the woman alone, the fault may also be with the man, fine. So, the question is not only through the stories, not only through the prediction, but through this the poet also tries to take a dig at the patriarchal order that is prevalent in even among her own community.

Now, as I have been talking about the myth and the cultural values of the Naga Ao community, there is another poem named "*Soul Bird*" and in this poem the poet actually talks about a death, how a death takes place, how somebody is dead, but then there is actually a belief among these Naga Ao community, that so long as when we die our soul actually flees.

Our soul flees, and then unless and until a bird is found flapping its wings in the sky, fine. So, they do not believe that the soul has finally gone to its own place and the poem's lines go like this.

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From Songs from the Other Life

She slowly turns heavenwards
As her red-rimmed eyes
Settle on the circling
And silhouette, then with a sudden
Unseemly whoop
She draws me closer
Whispering in my ear,

"See that keening bird in the sky?
That's your mother's soul
Saying her final good-bye,
It is over
Come, let us go home now". ("Soul-Bird")

In your Arju too I hear
You are the best story teller...

So when your maternal uncle comes
I shall tell my mother to tell my father

~~That his daughter prefers
The house of bamboo and thatch~~

~~Where the bonfire of our hearts
Will shame the flame of the hearth~~

~~And in that house I shall place
My precious loom~~

~~To wear you a langtem every season
And a sunok at every Moatsu~~

("Woman to Man")

16

She slowly turns heavenwards
As her red-rimmed eyes
Settle on the circling
And silhouette, then with a sudden
Unseemly whoop,
She draws me closer
Whispering in my ear,

Somebody who had lost her dear and near ones was actually waiting unless and until the hawk will appear in the sky, perhaps the soul will not have a sort of perfection. And that is why the other lady says,

“ See that keening bird in the sky?
That is your mother's soul
Saying her final good-bye,
it is over
Come, let us go home now.”

So, such a belief persisted among this Ao Naga community and that is why the poem has been titled “*Soul Bird*.” Dear friends, Temsula Ao did not write only about the myth and the culture and all, but she also believed that women of that community wanted to marry

not those people who actually were very ambitious, but those people who had actually got some love for their counterpart.

And this poem entitled “*Woman to Man*” now how a woman tells a man when a woman's question is being popped. The father looks for a pertinent candidate to be the groom for her daughter, but the daughter says, because the daughter is very ethnographic, the daughter is very close to her own race. And she says, she tells her mother no, perhaps you do not know what is my preference in your Arju;

In your Arju too I hear/you are the best storyteller...

this is about a man. She tells a man that in your Arju, Arju is the word for them which actually means dormitory and she says-- I may not be very beautiful, but why I want to be wed by you is because in your dormitory you are supposed to be the best storyteller.

“So, when your maternal uncle comes,

I shall tell my mother to tell my father

that his daughter prefers

the house of bamboo and thatch,”

I do not need any sky-high building where I cannot get love, but I simply because till now I have lived in a house of bamboo and thatch. So, that is very close to me, how I am bound to nature and the house of bamboo and thatch

“Where the bonfires of our hearts/ Will shame the flame of the hearth.”

What I actually need is my own land, my own tradition, my own culture. A man who can bring me all sorts of satisfaction, and in whose hearts there can be a bonfire of love--“ in that house I shall place/my precious loom and,”

What I want to do there? I will be very much satisfied simply to bring a loom and I shall be wearing you a langtem every season/and a sunak at every Moatsu.

A langtem is a loin cloth and now again very close to, I will bring fine I will spin a langtem every season for you and a sunak; and a sunak, sunak is a traditional shawl fine at every Moatsu, at every spring festival. So, the question is that even through her own

poems, she tries to say that these people are very close to their own tradition and to their own culture.

They do not want as any ambitious people to go to high rise buildings and to a very prosperous one, but they want to be wed only to a man who could fulfil their desires and who could satisfy them even being in a bamboo house and a thatched house. My dear friends, we have seen that Temsula Ao was very close to nature and in her poems we have found how not only does she rues the loss of nature because of the exploitation of man, because of their crash commercial desires.

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Easterine Kire

- ✓ Born in 1959 to an Angami Naga family in Kohima, Nagaland, India.
- ✓ Poet, novelist, translator, and short story writer.
- ✓ Interested in performing Jazz poetry
- ✓ Also writes children books
- ✓ Settled in Norway
- ✓ Conferred with Sahitya Akademi in 2018.

"I felt we needed to create written Naga literature. We have so much oral narratives but with oral dying out, it's all going to be lost." (Kire)

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But then, the other poet that I have intended to take is Easterine Kire. As I had already told you in the beginning, that both these poets bear a close resemblance. So, let us also take some of the poems since these poets have not been included in many more anthologies other than the North east anthologies and all. So, I have found some poem's from here and there and have tried to formulate my lecture.

Now, Eastherine Kire was born in 1959 to Angami Naga, you remember Temsula Ao was to Ao Naga and Eastherine Kire was to Angami Naga family in Kohima, Nagaland, India. Kire is a poet, novelist, translator and short story writer.

She is interested in performing jazz poetry of course, her poetry collections are too less, because she is more known for story writing and for her fiction. She also writes

children's books and of course, because of the problems at in her home state, as she has now switched over to Norway and there she lives.

She was actually conferred with many prizes, one of the most famous being *Sahitya Akademi* Prize in 2018, what Kire says about the oral Naga tradition is--- "I felt we needed to create written Naga literature. We have so much oral narratives, but with oral dying out, it is all going to be lost."

Since we do not have a written history and that is why both Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire they decided to bring that oral tradition in the form of writing and that is why they have taken up writing poems, short stories and of course, novels.

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Her Literary Corpus

- Poetry Collections
 - *Kelhoukevira* (1982)- first book of poetry in English by a Naga poet.
 - *Jazz Poetry and Other Poems* (2012)
 - Translated many oral poems of her homeland into English
- Non-Fiction
 - *Walking the Roadless Road: Exploring the Tribes of Nagaland* (2019)- about the history and life-style of Naga people

The slide features two book covers: 'Jazz Poetry and Other Poems' on the left and 'Walking the Roadless Road: Exploring the Tribes of Nagaland' on the right. The slide also includes logos for Swajathi and a page number 18.

So, her literary corpus includes some poetry collections: the one that is actually very famous entitled *Kelhoukevira* came out in 1982. It is considered to be the first book of poetry in English by a Naga poet.

This book came out in 1982 and then in 2012 came her *Jazz Poetry and Other Poems* and she has also translated more than 200 oral poems of her homeland into English. Some of her non-fiction works are also very important namely: *Walking the Roadless Road: Exploring the Tribes of Nagaland* about the history and lifestyle of Naga people.

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Fiction

- A Naga Village Remembered* (2003)- First novel in English by any Naga writer
- A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007)
- Mari* (2010)
- Bitter Womanhood* (2011)
- When the River Sleeps*(2012)
- Don't Run, My Love* (2017)



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Then in fiction *A Naga Village Remembered* which came out in 2003, it was actually a first novel in English by any Naga writer. Then came *A Terrible Matriarchy* in 2007 then came *Mari*, a *Bitter Womanhood*, *When the River Sleeps*, *Don't Run, My Love*. So, these are some of her novels and as a novelist she is more popular than as a poet.

(Refer Slide Time: 41:27)

***Kelhoukevira* (1982)**

- First book of poetry by any Naga poet in English.
- The title is a word from the Angami dialect which means "life in a better place/paradise".
- It mourns the warriors of Nagaland who lost their lives in Indo-Naga conflict of 1950s.
- The conflict resulted in great displacement and unrest in Naga region.
- Many youth took arms to fight for the state which caused lots of violence and unrest in the area.
- The poet also shows the great cultural tradition of Nagaland.

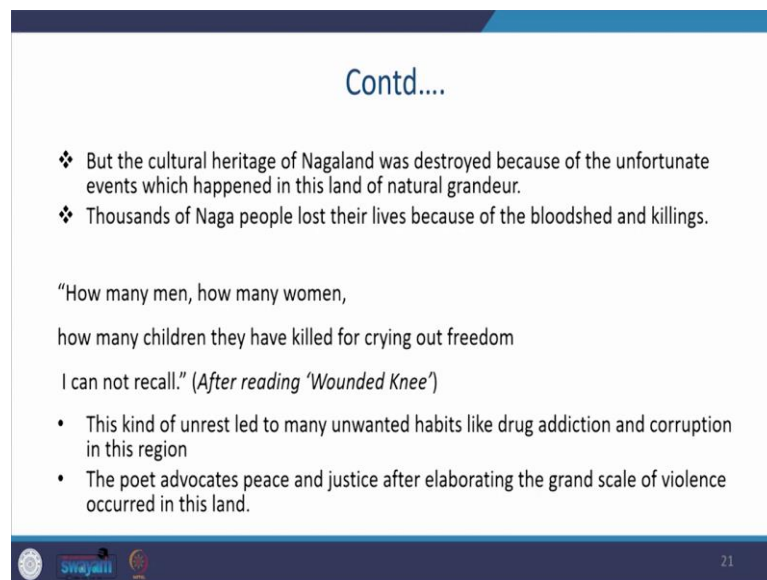
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But then since we are discussing Easterine Kire as a poet we shall take up her poetry collection *Kelhoukevira* which came out in the year 1982. This title of this book is from the Angami dialect which actually means life in a better place or paradise. Now, what does it indicate? It indicates that the life that she was living, Easterine Kire was living was a life she was not satisfied with my dear friends fine.

She is not satisfied with the life that she was living, there was in her home state a conflict which actually resulted in great displacement and unrest in Naga region. And this collection *Kelhoukevira*, it actually is a sort of mourning; it mourns the loss of the warriors of Nagaland who lost their lives in Indo-Naga conflict of the 1950's. Many youths had actually taken to arms taken to fight for the state which caused lots of violence and unrest in the area.

They found that their own culture was being intimidated and they wanted a space for their own. The poet Easterine Kire also shows great cultural tradition of Nagaland through her writings.

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Contd....

- ❖ But the cultural heritage of Nagaland was destroyed because of the unfortunate events which happened in this land of natural grandeur.
- ❖ Thousands of Naga people lost their lives because of the bloodshed and killings.

“How many men, how many women,
how many children they have killed for crying out freedom
I can not recall.” (After reading ‘Wounded Knee’)

- This kind of unrest led to many unwanted habits like drug addiction and corruption in this region
- The poet advocates peace and justice after elaborating the grand scale of violence occurred in this land.

Swajati 21

And, the cultural heritage of Nagaland, we can find that it was destroyed because of many unfortunate events which took place in this state, many Naga people not only lost their lives, but many of them got displaced, some of them actually changed their locations. In one of the poems some lines which actually are very pathetic.

“How many men, how many women, / how many children they have killed for crying out freedom.”

So, in a way the poet also talks about those people who are fighting for their own rights of saving their own culture, saving their own identity I cannot recall. This is from her poem “After reading Wounded Knee.” There is such a sort of chaos and unrest led to

many unwanted habits like alcoholism fine, corruption. The poet actually longs for peace, the poet yearns for peace and justice after elaborating the grand scale of violence which actually took place in this land.

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Some lines from *Kelhoukevira*

“They brought in their dead by night
Their proud warriors, their mighty warriors
The brave beloved of the gods
To rest under troubled skies
And battle-scarred lands
That some portion of a vanquished field
May forever remain Nagaland, forever Nagaland.”

“The golden fields, they lay unreaped
As blood freely flowed
And mingled with the rains
And stained the virgin soil
Like a thousand scarlet sunsets
Back of the blue, blue hills.”

Swayam 22

We can take some lines from *Kelhoukevira* as I said, that her poetry collections are less in number, but then through this collection and if we take some of the lines we can find out, how the poet's heart goes out to these warriors.

They brought in their dead
They brought in their dead by night
Their proud warriors fine.
Their mighty warriors
The brave beloved of the Gods,
To rest under troubled skies
And battle-scarred lands
That some portion of a vanquished field
May forever remain Nagaland; forever Nagaland.”

So, a cry for their own homeland,

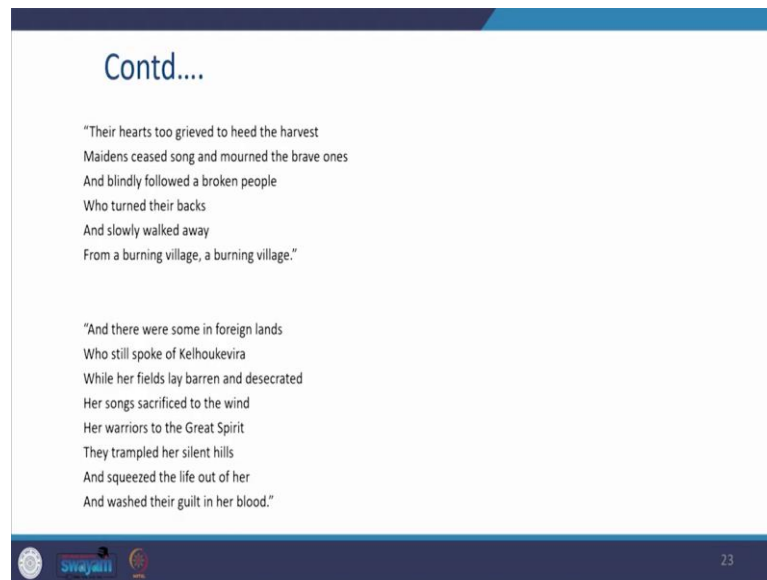
“The golden fields, they lay unreaped.”

They are very close to Nature and they say that these warriors will not return and who will actually reap these golden fields,

As blood freely flowed
And mingled with the rains
And stained the virgin soil
Like a thousand scarlet sunsets,
Back of the blue, blue hills.”

So, the blue hills suddenly got red because of the disturbance, because of the chaos.

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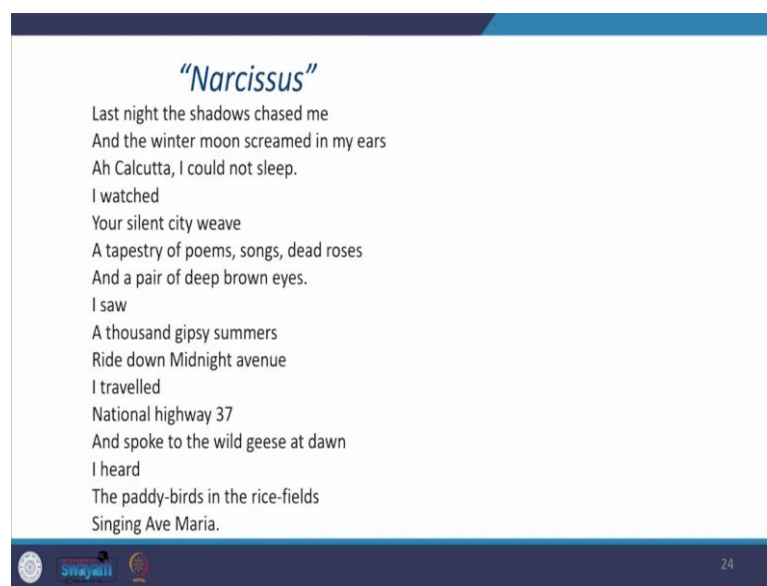
“Their hearts too grieved to heed the harvest
Maidens ceased song.
So, their natural ability of singing came to a halt
and mourned the brave ones
And blindly followed a broken people
Who turned their backs
And slowly walked away
From a burning village; a burning village.
“And there were some in foreign lands
displacement and there were some in foreign lands

Who still spoke of Kelhoukevira the better place. So, they call their own land the better place a paradise who does not love one's own home; who does not love one's own state.

While her fields lay barren and desecrated.

Her song sacrificed to the wind,
her warriors to the great spirit,
they trampled her silent hills fine
and squeezed the life out of her
and washed their guilt in her blood.

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So, the land finally, the land became a bloody land, and instead of the harvest what could be seen there was only cry; only tears and all. So, the poet expresses her own pathos with the people, with the warrior who actually would not return because they have returned with their dead bodies.

There is another poem named "*Narcissus*" I think all of you know that *Narcissus* actually was a hunter, who did not have any love and who only loved himself and till he died, he was much in love with himself and after his death there spotted a flower which was named "Narcissus." So, this poem let us have a look at the lines of this poem.

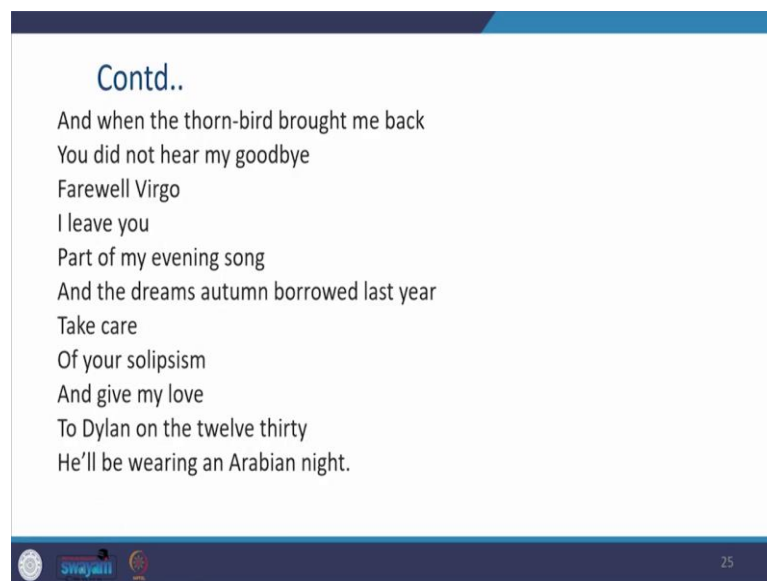
Last night the shadow chased me
and the winter moon screamed in my ear's
Ah Calcutta, I could not sleep.

I watched
your silent city weave
A tapestry of poems, songs, dead roses
And a pair of deep brown eyes.
I saw
A thousand gypsy summers.

We are reminded of William Wordsworth fine, like the thousand daffodils know.

“Ride down Midnight avenue
I travelled
National highway 37
And spoke to the wild geese at dawn
I heard
The paddy- birds in the rice- fields
Singing Ave Maria”.

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Contd..

And when the thorn-bird brought me back
You did not hear my goodbye
Farewell Virgo
I leave you
Part of my evening song
And the dreams autumn borrowed last year
Take care
Of your solipsism
And give my love
To Dylan on the twelve thirty
He'll be wearing an Arabian night.

Swayam 25

“And, when the thorn-bird brought me back
You did not hear my goodbye
Farewell Virgo.
I leave you
Part of my evening song
And the dreams autumn borrowed last year
Take care

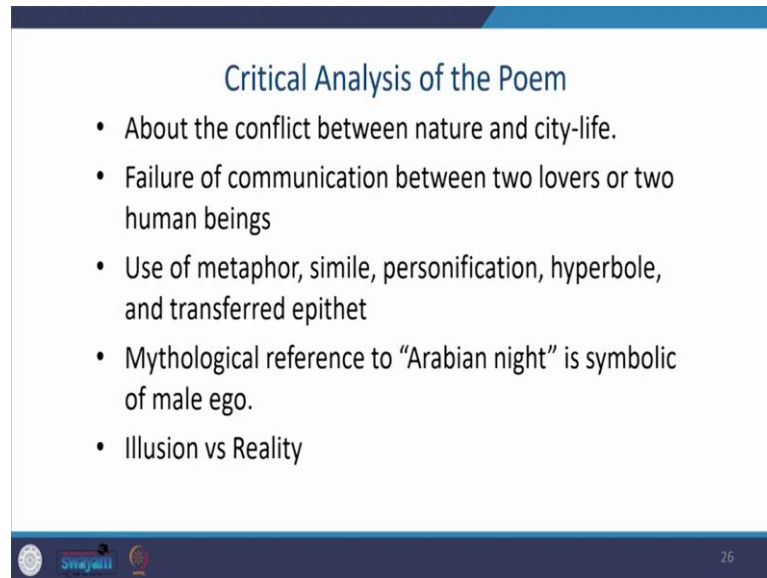
Of your solipsism

And give my love

To Dylan on the twelve thirty

He will be wearing an Arabian night.”

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Critical Analysis of the Poem

- About the conflict between nature and city-life.
- Failure of communication between two lovers or two human beings
- Use of metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, and transferred epithet
- Mythological reference to “Arabian night” is symbolic of male ego.
- Illusion vs Reality

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So, if we analyze this poem also critically, we find that there is a conflict between Nature and the urban life, the city life. There is also found a sort of lack of communication between two lovers or two human beings. Of course, the poet has made use of abundant use of simile, metaphor, personification and hyperbole, but then there is also a mythical reference to Arabian night which is symbolic of the male ego or the patriarchal ego. The poem can also be understood and interpreted as a conflict between illusion and reality.

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Oral tradition of Nagaland

Every man is a story.
Every story has something in common
With the stories of the rest of humanity.
And yet, each story is different from the others.
In every story that we tell, we validate lives,
When we share the stories of our people,
We add meaning to their action,
The choices they make and the values they live by
The need to tell one's story is a common need.
(Easterine Kire in *Barcelona Dreamtime*)

swajati 27

Now, when we talk about the tradition of the Northeast and especially of for the oral tradition of Nagaland what is Easterine Kire wrote in the famous Barcelona Dreamtime is actually very significant where she says ,

“Every man is a story,
Every story has something in common.
With the stories of the rest of humanity
And yet, each story is different from the others.
In every story that we tell, we validate lives,
When we share the stories of our people,
We add meaning to their action,
The choices they make and the values they live by
The need to tell one’s story is a common need.”


In a way, the poet actually tries to unfold and say that every story that we say has got some relation with other stories and every man is a story. Meaning thereby, it is actually a memory, it is a history and in every story that we tell, we are perhaps validating, we are perhaps glorifying. And when we share the stories of other people even then we are actually trying to add meaning to it.

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Her Views on Naga Culture

- Her Connection to Naga Culture

“..... I maintain that the Nagas are my first audience, because I write things that are familiar to them: we have shared memories, shared story-banks from the past, both from the natural world and the spiritual world.”
- Her Views on Naga Movement
 - “my people and I have been living with an invisible prison for many years, denied freedom of expression, freedom to nationhood and most painfully, freedom to life itself.” (*Featured Writers*)
 - “Very sadly, a cause that started so nobly was destroyed from within by factionalism, and it suffered the erosion of unity that factionalism always brings. We started well, no doubt about that. But we are not finishing well, that is what makes our story so sad. Disunity and the struggle for power has diminished the aspects that made the struggle noble and worthy.”


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If we have a look at what is Easterine Kire views on Naga culture what she says is--

“I maintain that Nagas are my first audience because the write things that are familiar to them. We have shared memories, shared story banks from the past both from the natural world and the spiritual world.”

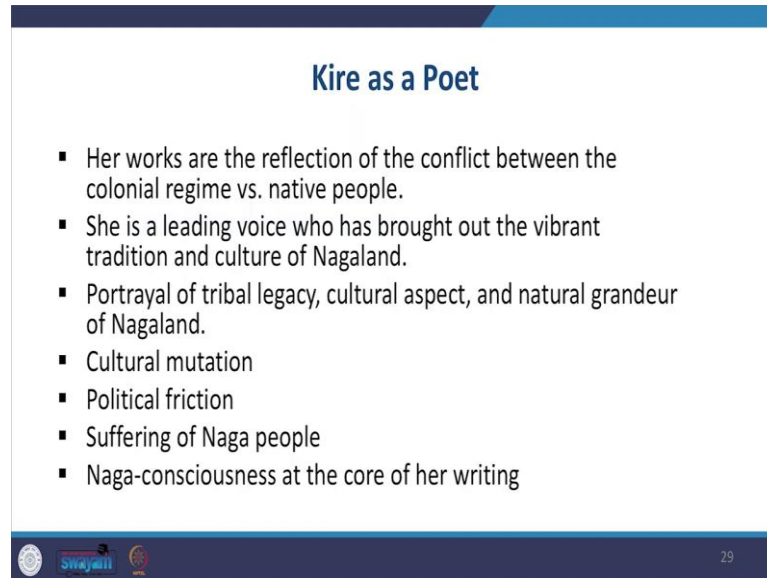
Here they try to bring a sort of connection between what the Naga people believe and how their reverence for nature also sustains. For her your belief on Naga movement we can also find out my people and I have been living with an invisible prison for many years denied freedom of expression that is what every movement in a way talks about.

They actually want to have something of their own, freedom to nationhood and most painfully freedom to life itself that somebody who does not have or who cannot have a claim for their own land, their own identity, their own culture. Perhaps, they are not free despite the fact that we are living in an air of freedom, in an age of freedom. “Very sadly a cause that started so nobly was destroyed from within by factionalism...” Here she actually refers to how there were certain groups how there were certain splits while they were demanding for their own land, why they are thinking of their own culture and it suffered the erosion of unity that factionalism always brings.

“...We started well no doubt about that, but we are not finishing well. That is what makes our story so sad. This unity and this struggle for power has diminished the aspects that made the struggle noble and worthy.”

So, once we do not have a common goal; once we do not have a collective goal, perhaps we are not going to succeed whether it is for our identity, for our culture, for our own belief, for our own system.

(Refer Slide Time: 51:54)



Kire as a Poet

- Her works are the reflection of the conflict between the colonial regime vs. native people.
- She is a leading voice who has brought out the vibrant tradition and culture of Nagaland.
- Portrayal of tribal legacy, cultural aspect, and natural grandeur of Nagaland.
- Cultural mutation
- Political friction
- Suffering of Naga people
- Naga-consciousness at the core of her writing

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So, when we have discussed both these poets, we find that there are certain commonalities between the two, but when we discuss them separately, we find that while Temsula Ao has got multiplicity of voices. Easterine Kire believes more in myth; more in her people, being very close to nature. So, Kire's works are the reflection of the conflict between colonial regime versus native people fine. She is of course, the leading voice who actually tries to delineate the vibrant tradition and culture of Nagaland fine.

There is a mention of cultural mutation, a cultural friction and the sufferings of Naga people. So, one can always say that Easterine Kire's works are more of Naga consciousness and that is also at the core of her writing.

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Contd...

- Portrayal of Naga folk-culture and their oral tradition.
- Resistance against the 'silencing' of native voice
- Depiction of violence, unrest, and disturbance in her homeland
- Also shows her concern over women's respectability and reputation.
- Eco-consciousness in her work

Naga folk culture which is actually day- by- day eroding its own values are being discovered to be brought into the limelight through the writings of these people. They are actually also delineating the resistance against the silencing of the native voice, the native ethos. The depiction of violence unrest and disturbance in her homeland in their homeland rather, have really caused havoc and that actually becomes a part of their writing.

One can also find a concern over women's respectability and reputation. We have already taken one poem where we see, how a woman wants her own voice and how she says that, she would like to love and she would like to live in a bamboo and thatch house and she would like to place her own loom. So, that she can weave the dreams of her own man. There is of course, a sort of eco consciousness in the majority of the works that is Easterine Kire has carved out.

It is actually time, because you know we are always running short of time and I took these two points together because there were lots of common things in and between, but before we end, let us take some beautiful lines from both the poets as we have been doing. First from Temsula Ao's poem *Mirror, Mirror*.

(Refer Slide Time: 54:06)

I look into the mirror
And see a face
which now parodies
The one that I once knew....
To counter lost landscape
And degenerated visage?
Is this compensation?
And my only consolation?
("Mirror, Mirror", Temsula Ao)

"We were proud and we were true
A race of men like you
We, too, were once, free
Children of those spaces
Of sky and mountain range and rock-bound river
Bequeathed us by the Great Spirit of these hills.
The white man came
And then the brown man came
And fifty years it has been now
That they have been telling us
We are not our own." (After reading "Wounded
Knee")

Swyathi 31

Now see, this poet has multiplicity of voices as I say where she says

“ I look into the mirror

And see a face

which now parodies

The one that I once knew...”

So, there is actually a beautiful play between past and present and she says that age can also have its own imprint even upon our body, even upon our face.

“To counter lost landscape

And degenerated visage?

Is this compensation?

And my only consolation.?”

So, see while she talks about her own progress and her own deterioration, but then in her mind is the deterioration of our own identity, of our own land.

We can also take some lines from you know Easterine Kire’s poem.” After reading “Wounded Knee” where she says,

“We were proud and we were true

A race of men like you.

So, why are we facing this discrimination?
We, too, were once, free
Children of those spaces
Of a sky and mountain range and rock-bound river
Bequeathed us by the great spirit of these hills.
Our hills had a spirit of its own
The white man came
And then the brown man came.
And fifty years it has been now
That they have been telling us
We are not our own.”

So, she talks about colonialism. She also talks about splits in and between and then she says, that even after fifty years where are we where is our tradition, where is our history, where is our identity, where is our language, where is our culture. Ultimately, we are still suffering a sort of loss and we try to regain, we try to overcome that loss. We try to recover that culture and in the recovery of the culture alone can be our triumph, alone can be our nativity songs.

So, my dear friends we have seen that both these poets have talked about their own culture, tradition, nativity songs and many more and there is a conflict between Nature and man. And we find that how man has exploited nature for their own benefits, but one should always try to preserve one's own culture, one's own identity, one's own language.

And, with this we come to the end of today's talk. I think this will ignite you to more and more readings of the poems of these two celebrated poets who are actually vying for a space in the poetic world of Indian poetry in English.

Thank you very much. I wish you all a good day.