

## Chapter III

### Memory, Music, and Healing

Memories that mingle joy and grief, light and darkness. More on some days and less on others.

– Easterine Kire, *Mari*

Memory is one of the chief truncheons in the hands of a man he has been consecrated with. Seeing it from a scientific-biological ground, humans can keep the memories because of the working of the neuro-mental system inside them. The events that happened in the past, the childhood farm visits, climbing up the plum tree, the games played in the courtyard, those little talks and the serious conversations done, etc. are being visited in remembrance because of the memory neurons our brain cells work with. These become the personal memories. Individuals collect these relevant past experiences and store them in their brains. However, every of the personal memory takes place in the presence of other people or articles. It is never a purely individual event happening in isolation. It always involves communication, interaction, and intermingling with other members of the family and the society considering the social level of memory. Putting it in simple terms, it can be surmised that, memory is socialization for it is only when one lives in close connection with the group one can build memories. Community intermingling is the way forward for memory making, after all man is a social being.

Maurice Halbwachs, one of the renowned French sociologists, is accredited for providing, in clear terms, the connection between memory and society. In his work *Les cadres*

*sociaux de la mémoire*, Halbwachs speaks to “show that our memory depends, like consciousness in general, on socialization and communication, and that memory can be analyzed as a function of our social life” (qtd. in Assmann 109). In the *Memory Studies, A Brief Concept Paper*, Tanja E. Bosch, discussing memory, states:

Halbwachs argued that memory is not simply an individual phenomenon, but is relational in terms of family and friends, and also societal and collective in terms of the social frameworks of social groups. (2)

Bosch, mentioning J. K. Olick and Robbins’ 1998 article, “Social Memory Studies: From Collective Memory to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices,” brings to light the etymology and growth of the term collective memory expressing that “the term collective memory was first coined by Hugo Van Hofmannsthal in 1902 (Olick and Robbins, 1998), but the French sociologist Halbwachs is generally recognized as the founder of collective memory research” (3).

Speaking on the value attached to collective memory, Qi Wang in her work “On the cultural constitution of cultural memory” reiterates that “collective memory can serve as a therapeutic practice for a community and its members, as it comprises an active constructive process during which the members of a community participate in interpreting and processing shared past experiences (particularly traumas) into eventual memory representations, often in such forms as narratives, dramatisations, art, and ritual” (qtd. in Bosch 5). With societies expanding in spatial and temporal contexts, there is not just one memory that binds the whole human population as one. Societies vary and each society has an identity of its own. The identity is the product of the respective cultures the members are born into and are molded by. This leads to the concept of cultural memory which is no different from collective memory. Jan Assmann in

his “Memory: Individual, Social and Cultural” states, “Cultural memory is a form of collective memory, in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective, that is, cultural, identity” (110). Assmann did not differentiate between cultural and collective memory on stricter lines rather he expressed cultural memory as collective memory with the only difference being “...that communicative memory is “non-institutional: it is not supported by any institutions of learning, transmission, and interpretation; ... it is not formalized and stabilized by any forms of material symbolization; it lives in everyday interaction and communication...” (Assmann 111), while cultural memories are actualized, institutionalized. These are the shared memories which are instilled with cultural connotations. It is the memory of the past, experienced by the group and shared together, that makes all cultural memories to be collective memory of the group or the society at large.

Each of the social groups is a result of the past which is essentially exclusive to that group. One must claim the events that happened in the past as his or her own and not something that happens commonly to all the independent societies. Only when one connects with the events at a personal level, the consciousness becomes a memory, not just mere knowledge of the previous. This is because only then can the cultural identity be guaranteed. This memory must be preserved. The same memory must be passed along so that a sense of belongingness is generated.

The memories that we possess are because of the interactions that we have, not only with the other humans, but also with the objects, symbols, feasts, rites, stories, artifacts, texts, literary records, landscapes, festivals, and others. These objects of culture are the objects that remind the human mind of something that resuscitates the memory. These memories are stored as the cultural heritage of a particular group and are being revisited again and again as they get passed down from one generation to the other. People of the particular group start identifying

themselves with one another based on the unified image these texts, objects, rituals, etc., provide to them as expresses Jan Assmann, about cultural memory, in his ground-breaking 1988 essay “Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität” (“Collective Memory and Cultural Identity”), as “...a collectively shared knowledge of preferably (yet not exclusively) the past, on which a group bases its awareness of unity and character” (15).

“On the cultural constitution of collective memory,” Qi Wang argues that, “to understand the processes, practices, and outcomes of social sharing of memory, or collective remembering, one must take into account the characteristics of the community to which a significant event occurred and in which memory for the event was subsequently formed, shared, transmitted, and transformed. In other words, one must look into the social- social-cultural-historical context where the remembering takes place” (305). Cultural memory sees into the past where and when the events took place. Unlike communicative memory which is just the day-to-day oral memory, cultural memory’s grounds are the texts, monuments, etc., conveyed through practices, observations, etc. Jan Assmann focused on these identity offering instruments. This identity is to be running from generation to generation, and not be forgotten in a span of few decades or a few generations. Collective cultural memory thus works towards the preservation and transmission of the common identity amongst and within a group as it helps people to remember and accustom oneself to the culture letting the newer generation do the same.

Memories identifying one culture from the other culture, based on the identity delivered upon, are being transmitted over and across generations. Our cultural memories are extraordinary. The divide between the modern civilization and the indigenous people has always been great. The indigenes have constantly suffered stagnant progress at the hands of the affluent. The turn of civilization had attacked the otherwise rich culture of the minorities. Globalization

no doubt has brought with it the higher propensity of living and advancement but it also has acted as a negative force in undermining this rich culture of the lower subgroups. The traditional practices and rituals, which were a guide to living just and right in parity with the non-living world, were strictly adhered to. These even reached the morals of the new generations with the transmission of memory by the storytellers, earlier transmitting orally which later got scripted for permanent preservation. Credit should be acknowledged to the fiction writers who preserved this identity of the culture in their works which were brought to them by the memories of the people. “Intangible cultural heritage is not just the memory of past cultures, but is also a laboratory for inventing the future heritage” as stated by Kōichirō Matsuura, the Japanese diplomat and former Director General of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. Maria-Àngels Roque in her article “A Living and Dynamic Heritage” mentions:

According to UNESCO, “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that provide communities, groups, and individuals with a feeling of identity and continuity. The cultural instruments, objects and spaces associated with these practices form an integral part of this heritage. This includes oral traditions and expressions such as language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rites, knowledge, and practices concerning nature and the universe, craftsmanship, architecture and “other arts.” The production of cultural heritage has involved the establishment of the relation between nature and culture as two interconnected fields. Thus, today emphasis is placed on the dynamic interaction between social and ecological processes. (Roque)

Due to “vast domains of information far beyond the capacity of a single human brain, banked in an array of different stores, from artefacts and constructed environments, through to libraries and

the World Wide Web” (Laland and Rendell) cultural information gets accurately passed. One of the eminent storehouses and transmitters of memory has been the literary representation of it. The oral tradition, which most of the indigenous societies around the globe were practicing, owing to no or late arrival of writing and printing, got faded as they were transmitted orally because word of mouth did not have permanent durability. People forget them in a short span of time. However, literary studies, focusing on memory studies, help in portraying and preserving the past of the groups or the individuals. The texts “construct identities on the basis of recollected memories” (Neumann 333). Literary fiction essentially disseminates past happenings rendering its effect on the present of the individual or the society the individual is a part of. They help to retain the past for the generations to come.

John Steinbeck and Easterine Kire brought the memories of their place and people to reality through their fictional narratives. Not just the place, Salinas Valley in California for Steinbeck, and Kohima in Nagaland for Kire, but the conditions of the people residing there due to the harsh historical proceedings, their beliefs and the traditions, the reverence to the land and the environment, etc., all became a striking reference in their works. Overall, the cultural memory of their people they brought to light through their fictional account. They pictured the memories of their people in the pattern of what Jeffrey K. Olick regarded to be the two levels of intersection of culture and memory. The two aspects of cultural memory, Kire and Steinbeck based their work on, are in likeness to what Jeffrey Olick maintains in his work “Collective Memory: The Two Cultures” saying that, “two radically different concepts of culture are involved here, one that sees culture as a subjective category of meanings contained in people’s minds versus one that sees culture as patterns of publicly available symbols objectified in society” (336). This surmises to the “cognitive” and “social-medial” (5) levels of memory as

Astrid Erll forwards in his “Towards a Conceptual Foundation for Cultural Memory Studies.” Kire and Steinbeck relate to both the levels of their memory i.e., biological, and symbolic levels respectively of Astrid Erll.

With written documentation coming late to Nagaland, all the factual past as well as the beliefs and practices were delivered to the next generation by the storytellers orally. The external factors which trigger the memories shaped the same in the socio-cultural context which Kire and Steinbeck brought through their writing. Likewise, they reconstructed the past through the symbolic order of the memory through the beliefs, practices, etc. the social groups collectively shared. Their sharing of the cultural memories of their people, however, is in consonance with Emile Zola’s statement:

Naturalist subject matter: that at all levels of society the same guiding principles prevail and all men are shown to be fundamentally alike. The scientific, physiological, mechanistic view of human life is heedless of class; it reduces all men to the same formula- creatures ruled by heredity, milieu, and the pressures of moment. (Furst and Skrine 51)

This social reality thereby affecting the behavioral pattern of the individuals provides them with their collective memories. Kire and Steinbeck’s portrayal of memory was also deeply inspired by the first and the second principles of Deep Ecology summarized by Arne Naess and George Sessions in April 1984 reading as

the well- being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes. Richness and diversity of life

forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.  
(Devall and Sessions 70)

Question here arises as to what must be studied to remember the culture i.e., the mode of cultural remembrance. Bosch argues that our memory of the events that happened in the past is to be recreated continually. While this recreation goes on at the individual and the collective level, the one same event can be seen from differently varying aspects. Astrid Erll in the *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* edited by him and Ansgar Nünning writes:

This holds true not only for *what* is remembered (facts, data), but also for *how* it is remembered, that is, for the quality and meaning the past assumes. As a result, there are different modes of remembering identical past events. A war, for example, can be remembered as a mythic event (“the war as apocalypse”), as part of political history (the First World War as “the great seminal catastrophe of the twentieth century”), as a traumatic experience (“the horror of the trenches, the shells, the barrage of gunfire,” etc.), as a part of family history (“the war my great-uncle served in”), as a focus of bitter contestation (“the war which was waged by the old generation, by the fascists, by men”). Myth, religious memory, political history, trauma, family remembrance, or generational memory are different modes of referring to the past. (7)

Seeing the collective cultural memory in this way, the mythical beliefs and the rituals that make up the memories of the inhabitants, the experiences of the past related to the place and the traumas it created, the attributes of nature and their relation to the inhabitants, all these rendering identities to the group of people, are some of the cultural memories of the groups, Kire and Steinbeck, in connection to Naturalism and Deep Ecology, expressed through their works of



fiction. It becomes imperative to have an in-depth knowledge of these vehicles of memory because, only then, people will be able to acknowledge the situations and the events that guided the living of the community in the past and understand their effect on the present generation, and also place recognition to the entities residing in nature thereby understanding their essentiality in ones living and survival.

## **Mythical Beliefs as Memory**

Every culture must have a storyteller who would shoulder a great responsibility in passing the knowledge of their ancestral beliefs and practices, customs, and traditions. These storytellers are the memory-keepers who through their skills of orality transmit the past knowledge of their group to the generations that follow. Myths form an important knowledge which needs transmission. These are the stories of ancient times taken as sacred lore that explain the experiences witnessed by men. Myths are in themselves storehouses of knowledge and wisdom imbibing in men the good virtues. “What is a myth?” an article published in the *pbs.org* states that, “A myth taps into a universal cultural narrative, the collective wisdom of man. An excellent illustration of the universality of these themes is that so many peoples who have had no contact with each other create myths that are remarkably similar” (“What is a myth?”). Myths show that cultural narratives are highly enlightening because they talk about the social norms which are to be either followed or are to be refused in practice. The myth, through the words of the storytellers, unknowingly get into a man’s thoughts and he starts to relate himself with it.

Although the truthfulness and the uniqueness of many of the mythical tales remain questionable because of the absence of any scientific explanation, it however, does not mean they are of no essentiality. “Joseph Campbell explains that the main significance of mythology is

the fact that it served as a basis, from which moral systems of all the societies arouse” (Štanglová 8). Claude Lévi-Strauss, the known anthropologist and structuralist, while discussing about myths in his “The Structural Study of Myth” comments, “Myths are still widely interpreted in conflicting ways: collective dreams, the outcome of a kind of esthetic play, the foundation of ritual... Mythological figures are considered as personified abstractions, divinized heroes or decayed gods” (428). In the work *Myth and Meaning* he describes myth as a “lived experience” (Lévi-Strauss 1). They being lived experiences have truthfulness in them, though many deny this truthfulness to be based on no scientific explanation of their happening. Štanglová favors the trustworthiness by mentioning what Karen Armstrong had mentioned in her book *Krátká historie mýtu* where she was of the opinion that myths have a deep effect on people and because they affect people, they are truthful. Further arguing she states:

If it can make us think, if it can change our opinions, give us new hope and lead us to a better life, it completes its function and therefore is true. It certainly is not an early attempt to write history and does not describe objective facts. It is a kind of fiction, similar to an opera, a ballet or a novel. (Štanglová 9)

As they guide humans in an organizational way, they are to be the experiences lived in the past. These lived experiences are important to be known because they form an integral part of a culture’s memory. Seeing the myths from the indigenous point of view, it appears that most of the myths are in consonant rhyme with nature and the entities residing in nature. The entities of nature are acknowledged in the mythic tales which is to let the people offer their respect to these figures. Destruction of nature is hence not practiced owing to the myths which talk of the values innate in the elements. This supports the Deep Ecological norm of “biocentric equality” (Devall and Sessions 66) whereby all the elements of nature are equal counterparts. One element is not

superior to the other and so each of the elements is to be revered with profound respect and admiration.

Kire, through her writing, gives expression to the traditional beliefs, practices, taboos, and rituals of her people. “By writing about the myths and legends of the Nagas, Kire demonstrates that the Nagas weren’t a “primitive” people but a people guided by a strong belief system” (Ralte 216). She tries to do a restoring of the identity of the Nagas. Nagas have always had a deep interconnection with the non-human world. Every element, especially the non-living, has a mythical tale attributed to it. “In *Son of the Thundercloud*, Kire writes of the “way” of her people, their traditions, and the taboos that must be obeyed to avoid misfortune” (Ralte 226). It is a popular belief that if one goes against the rules set by the elements of nature, a disaster is next to impossible to be avoided.

Nagas being mostly people living in the forests and villages have proximity to nature. There used to be fear of invasions from the people of the other villages and it was imperative for all the little hamlets of houses and villages, scattered in the hills, to safeguard themselves from the enemy villages. The village gate helped in this purpose. But this gate used to be not just any gate made of any wood from the forest. There was a belief attached to the selection of the tree for the purpose. The village gate was a symbol of undefeatable strength and power. It was believed that the seer would get a dream from the spirits who would reveal the location of the tree to be brought for the purpose of erecting it as the village gate. Men will then advance to the tree and only after a prayer ritual would the tree be cut, and brought inside the village. After that, few preferred men would be carving figures on it. Once carved, it will be set up at the entrance. The carving also had to follow a traditional way to it. Kire narrates:

Figures of four men in headdresses and cowrie kilts were carved on either side of the gate. Each figure held a spear and a shield. Carvings of female breasts were lined up below the male figures. These were symbols of fertility promising wealth, and bounteous harvests to the village. The village gate itself was a symbol of life. The carvings represented virility in men and fruitfulness in women. Both were significant qualities for the continued existence of the village. (Kire, *Journey of the Stone* 33).

Vilie, the protagonist of Kire's fictional work *Journey of the Stone*, encounters the widow-spirit, which is a thought-provoking incident colored by Easterine Kire, especially for the present generation who are under the influence of modernization and their contemporary knowledge forces them to make a mockery of the mythic rituals and practices followed by the ancestors. Kire, through the creation of the old-widow spirit explains the significance behind following of mythic practices amongst the people of her region. Deliverance of a soul is always in obedience to the spirits living in nature as per the belief pattern of the indigenous Nagas. Kire brings to an understanding the attainment of salvation that is associated with the reverence one acknowledges to the mythic and ritualistic beliefs, when the old-widow spirit talks to Vilie saying:

“Why do people perform any rituals in their daily lives? Why do they conduct a religion of rituals? Isn't it because they hope to gain salvation if they have performed all the appropriate rituals all their lives? ...We are not much different from the people in the upper realm when we do what we do.” (Kire, *Journey of the Stone* 77)

It is an established truth that following the rituals which had been practiced by the ancestors have always been a source of protection for the people. Even today in the villages people religiously obey the tradition of the genna-day, the day when it is taboo to do anything

related to that particular genna if people do not want death by drowning, fire, or any other dreaded furies of nature viz., “a *dzü penie*, the genna-day for water. It was a taboo to do any kind of work on a *dzü penie* day, for fear that people would die in flash floods or have their property destroyed by rivers in full spate” (Kire, *Journey of the Stone* 78). Likewise, the myth of belief that a stone had immense power in it and this power of the stone was something the inhabitants looked to possess, so on the “*ketsie penie* day” (Kire, *Journey of the Stone* 78) contact with stones was avoided. Similarly, another taboo was not to be in any contact with wood, which was observed as the “*sei penie*” (Kire, *Journey of the Stone* 78), and to do that the widow-spirits would be seen spending their day amidst the rocks so that the day would end and the next day they would be able to go back to the woods. Till this day, all these demarcated days of taboo are still practiced in the villages so as to protect themselves from the wraths of the spirits, which indirectly is a means of protecting nature from the unprecedented selfish harms meted by humans on nature.

The association of the Nagas with the natural world and the afterlife spiritual realm speak of the close Deep Ecological concern which is an integral part of the collective memory of the people. Their belief in a reunion with the ones who left the earth makes their dependence on the mythic beliefs highly strong. This afterlife meeting makes them follow the ritual of the seed-grain which is buried with the death. In the *Spirit Nights* Kire brings this traditional practice of the indigens to reorientate one’s belief in their culture. Namu, who has lost his parents and is living with his grandmother is ascertained by Tola, his grandmother, that he will surely be meeting his parents after his death. There is a different world where all the dead move up to after leaving the earth. It is there the reunification takes place. Once someone is in the world of the

dead, there is a continuation of life out there, and the preparation for this reunion is done by the ones left behind alive. Tola narrates this preparation as she says:

The elders say that life continues in the land of the dead very much the same way as we lived it here on earth. That is why when we die, we are buried with some seed-grains, so that we may carry it with us, and plant it and have food in our new homes. (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 8)

Steinbeck was a Naturalist who believed in the scientific explanation behind the existence of any phenomenon or element. As a Literary Naturalist, his works always highlighted the social realities that unfavorably affected the physical, mental, and the social state of living of the people. His writings brought the suffering as were faced by the have-nots. However, to this scientific-biological side of Steinbeck, he also had a touch of mythic connection. While on a visit to his Aunt Molly's house, she gave Steinbeck the Thomas Malory's version of the Arthurian legend and since that summer of 1912, Steinbeck immersed legends and myths to his creative fictions. He was deeply influenced by the Biblical tales and the mythology of King Arthur and his Knights and later wrote a book on the same which was his own version. Steinbeck's Naturalism was influenced by the myths that he was so connected to. In the Introduction to *Arthur, Lancelot and the Psychodrama of Steinbeck* by Laura F. Hodges, Steinbeck says, "I think my sense of right and wrong, my feeling of noblesse oblige, and any thought I may have against the oppressor and for the oppressed came from this secret book" (Štanglová 13). His secret book was the one his aunt had given him to read. His confession clearly puts into evidence his non-scientific side of thoughts which came to him through his inclinations towards mythic tales.

The mythical tales are of great essence because they stimulate a society and the people's morals and ethics. Steinbeck knew about this essence and these tales, which were some thousand

and more years old, were taken by him as a base for his own tales. The influence of the Biblical story of Cain and Abel was starkly seen in his timeless work *East of Eden*. Steinbeck keeping his characters in hand, was developing this work with an intention in his mind to give out to humanity the inseparable dual truths of life. This duality is the existence of goodness and evil, the pairing presence of loving and hating one another, and also the inseparability of the weak with whom exists the strong. The Biblical parable of Cain and Abel was a stirring in the heart of Steinbeck.

Steinbeck attached relationship with the natural components following the beliefs of spirits which was an animist belief. Trees have always been attached with spiritual bearings. In the novel *To a God Unknown*, Joseph Wayne, who leaves his home and goes West to California and takes ownership of the land in Nuestra Señora, for homesteading, sees a giant Oak tree in his land and draws himself to it. He gets so connected to the tree that he initially thinks of building his house under it. However, he is stopped by Romas, the driver. Later, when he gets the news of the death of his father, Joseph starts to envision the tree as his father. He starts to revere the tree more now because to him it has become the protector of the family and the “guardian spirit of the land” (Post 34). Steinbeck was deeply influenced by Sir James G Frazer and this influence of Frazer was one of the reasons behind the veneration attached to the oak tree by Joseph. Connie Post in his work *History's Myth: John Steinbeck and the Twilight of Western Culture* supplements this belief as claimed by Frazer of what Frazer cites in his *The Golden Bough*. According to Frazer, "Sometimes it is the souls of the dead which are believed to animate trees" (qtd. in Post 37).

“But I want to talk about that, Juanito, because you are my friend. For myself I am not sorry, because my father is here.”

“The dead are always here, señor. They never go away.”

“No,” Joseph said earnestly. “It is more than that. My father is in that tree. My father is that tree! It is silly, but I want to believe it!” (Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown* 19)

Joseph well-regarded the tree because he believed that the tree was a medium to his identity that he got from his father. This same practice is followed by many of the indigenes making it form a part of their collective memory. Taking blessings from elders is a part of all the societies' cultural traditions. Joseph does the same by offering his firstborn child to the oak tree with the belief of letting the child receive his grandfather's blessings. Joseph demands Elizabeth saying, “Give the baby to me now. I'll put him in the arms” (Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown* 114) and then “Joseph was holding the baby within the crotch of the tree” (Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown* 117). The traditional practice of receiving blessings is a ritual passed down from generation to generation.

The ancestral belief of the spirits residing in natural elements furnishes in Steinbeck's other works too. In *Burning Bright*, the play novelette divided into four scenes, Steinbeck connects the four major characters, separately portraying them in individual acts but making them a part of the whole novelette. The morality of this play talks of the archetypes of the forefathers. Joe Saul is a circus man who is married to Mordeen. Joe Saul yearns for a child but is not aware that he is sterile. Mordeen conceives for Joe's happiness, but the father is Victor and not Joe Saul. Things get known and situations get worse, but in the end Joe Saul readily accepts the baby to be his own. Steinbeck discusses of the respect that was given to the spirits which were believed to be the residents of nature in ancient times by the community of people. This respect and allegiance to the spirits formed a part of their identity rooted in the mythic beliefs



and ritualistic practices to honor the mythic characters, as Joe Saul narrates the words of his grandfather Old Joe Saul to Friend Ed,

He used to say we were nature spirits once—you know, in trees and streams. We lived in the wind and in the black storms. ‘That’s what your great- granddads were,’ he’d say... Then he said we were the first doctors,...We troubled the waters and drove the thunder back over the edge, and we jumped like the streams over rocks, and we sailed—arms out—like the wind. (Steinbeck, *Burning Bright* 7)

Steinbeck tells how these beliefs and practices belonged to the times before antiquity, ever since the time of Old Joe Saul’s forefathers. The people had deep faith in them and these practices were transmitted to the next generation and they furthered it, this memory transmission of Steinbeck spoke of the identity of the people. The belief of the people in the healing properties of nature stopped the people from destroying the trees and the herbs indirectly helping in the safety of the environment. The ancestral beliefs of myths, accompanied by rituals and practices of sacrifices, assisted in appeasing the spirits. These sacrifices were a part of the communities’ practices which became cultural symbols like the way, in *To a God Unknown*, Steinbeck’s character “worships the tree and provides it with sacrificial dead hawks and ear notchings from branded calves, the blood of slaughtered pigs, wine and even the burnt offering of barbequed meat” (Post 44).

The myths, rituals, and traditional practices are important memories of a group that are the essential bearers of the cultural identity. These are the significant metaphors that instill in people the rightful conduct of living. Steinbeck and Kire’s retelling of the past traditional practices, the sacraments, the prohibitions, etc. in their work serve the purpose of not only

transmitting the belief system, which formed a significant part of their memory, but also in the protection of the nonhuman world by the humans.

## **Memory and Trauma**

Astrid Erll in his “Traumatic pasts, literary afterlives, and transcultural memory: new directions of literary and media memory studies” presents how the harsh events, war, invasion, bloodshed, occupation, etc., shared by the people of a particular community, had a deep influence on the lives of the ones who faced it that they could not come out of it. This pain of destruction is so intensely deep to be forgotten by any means, affecting their cultural well-being. As this damaging memory gets transmitted to the later generation, there only arises more and more anger and pain. The past, the present, and the future are all linked together only because of the collective memories of the cultural groups. This memory, necessitating to the social history of a group of people, is the traumatic memory of the group who faced its negative harm. The awful recollection of these harms, to be persistently residing in the present-day people, is the trauma of the age or the group they are the descendants of.

The memories of war, killing, and terror, which were utterly violent in nature, were left in the minds of those who were witnessing it with a trauma for life. Astrid Erll discussing the traumatic past mentions that the “memory of the world wars, the experience of colonialism and decolonization, of authoritarian regimes, genocide, and of global terror” (2) states that these memories are transmitted to the next generation of family as well as the other members of the society thereby creating a passive behavior. The traumatic memory, which is attached to the place and the culture, talks about the Naturalist writer’s distrust on humanity. The ill fate of the people due to war and subjugation provided the people with their identity, no doubt, but it also

gave the people the strength to revoke the tortures through agitations and protests which at times led to successful outcomes.

Kire's novel *A Respectable Woman* is a work of memory in which the memory of the past trauma passes to the daughter when her mother, who comes to the age of forty-five, connects the pieces of memory of the times when her land was under the siege of foreign power. Expressing Kire's documentation and deft presentation of the past traumas of her people Lalthansangi Ralte mentions:

Memories of war, of an unrecognizable Kohima in the aftermath of the War, are forever etched in the people's hearts. The end of the war was a moment of victory and triumph, but the people were brought back to reality when they were unable to find their homes. In her novel, she writes about the pain of her community, their grief and horror as they mourned loudly the homes and family members they lost to the War. (221)

Khonuo was only ten years old when in 1944 the Japanese invasion of the hills started, and the first painful event in their life was to leave their home and spend months seeking for safety, sometimes in the forest and at times in the villages which were considered safe hideouts. As the invasion of the Japanese came to an end and the displaced community returned to their heaths and homes, the memory of loss was etched with deep scars in their hearts. It was a depressing sight to witness, as pictures Kire in this work. Nothing on earth can be compared to seeing the house of someone's birth and growth shattered to shards with only debris of reminiscence left behind in place of the concrete, which was breathed with feelings by the inmates once. After the end of the Japanese invasion, as the village folks returned, the air of Kohima was resonating to the cry of women weeping at the inability to locate their homes. The

houses were nowhere to be found. This trauma of loss was too hard to tolerate. Everywhere they walked, they sighted only ruins of ache.

Slowly the town of Kohima was regaining back. The Britishers were helping the people to get back to living. Shops slowly opened. Education gradually started. Life was back to normal. But, again, the withdrawal of the British in 1947, led to another series of trauma people had to face with the harsh ill-doings of the Indian Army. The Naga army was formed and a lot of hardships were felt by the ones fighting for freedom. With the passage of time, cease-fire was imposed and the situation of strife, gunshots, frisking, killing, etc., stopped. However, another traumatic event that started was the growing menace of alcoholism amongst the Nagas. Its influence made people a slave to the wrongdoings. Kevinuo's friend Beinuo married Meselhou who was an alcoholic. He was an abusive husband. On the pretext of alcohol indulgence, one day, he beat Beinuo to death leaving behind their infant daughter Uvi. Kire talks about the dreaded customary laws that gave all power to men considering women to be always submissive to the needs of the husband. Later Kevinuo was able to get hold of Uvi after Meselhou's death, and she took it upon herself to look after the security of Uvi for the rest of her life.

Through this retelling of the past, Kire talks about the traumatic memory of the Angami Naga tribe who faced the invasion of the Japanese and the war retaliation by the British. The dreadful streets of Kohima and the atrocities inflicted on the people by the Japanese and later by the people of the Indian State make her a writer of Naturalism.

War has never brought any good to anyone. It is during wars when the happy faces of people get loomed with fear of losing "everything almost overnight, homes, loved ones, and life as we knew it before the war" (Kire, *A Respectable Woman* 37). There was fear of death hovering in the air of Kohima because death was witnessed by them at close quarters. For them

nothing seemed more important than saving the life of the loved ones. War brought with it hunger. This was the most traumatic mishapening because the locals witnessed the strangest deeds with “some people doing the meanest things” (Kire, *A Respectable Woman* 38).

One of the most dreaded memories of the war which distressed the locals and still brings rage, when mention is made of, is the molestation of women. It was not safe for women to come within the range of the soldiers. Many of the women were raped by the Japanese soldiers. To protect themselves from the troops, women had to go to the extent of smearing their faces with ash and wearing old, dirty clothes. They were usually inside the houses or were in the hide-outs to ensure safety from being physically assaulted by the soldiers. This was one of the utmost appalling misconducts which left memories of suffering.

Not only did the war with the external forces leave the people with torturing memories, but the internal conflicts did not do any better. The sudden bombing of the Ruby cinema hall was a lasting memory. The blast killed several people and many others were crippled for life. Kire mentions how

[t]he families that lost their sons were inconsolable. In our lifetime it was one of the worst local tragedies... The bomb blast destroyed the illusion of peace and progress in the new state of Nagaland. The road back to normalcy was long and painful. Every school held a condolence service for the students who had been killed in the blast. (*A Respectable Woman* 97–98)

Qi Wang in her “On the cultural constitution of collective memory” argues that the memories of the past are very essential in identifying the community’s identity owing to the shared past. The past trauma felt due to the historical experience of war and bloodshed is one

such way of the interlacing of cultural identity. Wang says, "...memory has been central to the creation of community, from a small unit such as a family to an entire nation. The social practices of collective remembering allow the members of a community to preserve a conception of their past" (307). The collective remembering of the traumas of the war years through Kire's fictional account gives a clear picture of the oneness of their cultural history. Almost everywhere people have suffered some traumatic past. Steinbeck also amassed and transmitted the hurting memory faced by the people, and employed the same as the metaphor for the creation of consciousness in the people not only within that group but also amongst people outside that group.

Through his short work of fiction, *The Red Pony*, Steinbeck instilled in people the virtues of empathy, love, and leadership. The internal trauma faced by a little boy named Jody is portrayed. Carl Tiflin was the owner of the ranch where he had employed only Billy Buck. Jody was gifted a horse by his father Carl. He named it Gabilan. Along with Billy, Jody used to take care of the horse and started to train the horse. Gabilan was a tough horse but unfortunately, he caught cold because of being out in the rain. Billy and Jody looked after him. Jody got depressed seeing the plight of the horse. Billy had to cut open the throat of Gabilan to insert a pipe so that he could breathe. Gabilan's condition, though was improving, yet one night he escaped and was found dead with buzzards trying to devour his body. The sight was so painful and this made Jody catch hold of the buzzard. He started to continuously hit the buzzard. Carl Tiflin remained unmoved. Jody was lonely at the death of Gabilan and started to spend time with Doubletree Mutt, the dog. He was however not able to come out of the memories of the horse. He became a little irritated. His encounter with the thrush was the outcome of the trauma he had been suffering since the day Gabilan died. He could not control the pain of frustration at the sight of

Gabilan's lifeless body and "so he took out his pocketknife and cut off the bird's head. Then he disemboweled it, and took off its wings; and finally, he threw all the pieces into the brush" (Steinbeck, *The Red Pony* 47). The trauma of seeing the dear ones suffer was too hard for him to bear and he did not think twice to control the rush of emotions he was undergoing. Jody did not bother at that moment but was ashamed to be facing the old people who would be with their opinion of Jody's heartlessness.

Looking towards the Great Mountain, an old Mexican man, named Gitano, came to the ranch claiming that he was born there and wanted to stay there till his death. The coldness of Carl did not allow him to stay there. Gitano started talking about the Great Mountains to Jody. The neighbors reported of seeing a man going towards the Great Mountain on horseback. Carl and Billy decided to let Jody look after Nellie, a pony, and mate her with Jess Taylor's stallion, Sundog. Jody was promised that the colt would be purely Jody's. The past trauma of losing Gabilan made Jody do everything to look after Nellie who was pregnant by that time. Jody was becoming restless as the months were passing with the birth not taking place. Finally, Nellie was with the spasm but there was a fear of Nellie facing difficulty birthing the colt. Billy had to smash Nellie's head, and cut open the belly with his pocket knife. He took out the little black colt and gave it to Jody. Jody was again affected by this suffering of Nellie, which haunted his innocent heart. The pain suffered by Nellie housed so deeply inside Jody that he could not stay in the barn any longer and it made him rush out. The painful sighting produced an inexpressible ache inside him. A strange kind of numbness took over his body. The memories of Nellie and Billy Buck's trying to help Nellie were so traumatic that, even the happy sight of the little colt could not make him happy rather "the bloody face, and the haunted, tired eyes of Billy Buck hung in the air ahead of him" (Steinbeck, *The Red Pony* 95).

Jody's grandfather was home. Carl never was in the liking of his father-in-law because he repeated the stories of the Great Plains, and in the father-in-law's absence made fun of him. Grandfather overheard the mocking and was displeased. He was silent. Jody felt hurt seeing him alone and sat with him listening to his stories about the Great Plains and how he crossed it. Jody was astounded to learn that his grandfather was a great leader. He hatched the dream of becoming a leader too one day. Jody, the young boy of ten years, had to see a lot at that age and all the encounters he had with Gabilan, Nellie, the thrush, his father Carl, grandfather, the old Mexican man Gitano, and Billy Buck were his memories of pain that left him in trauma.

Metaphorically, Steinbeck picturing these traumatic memories of Jody added in the little boy the virtues of a responsible person teaching him the compassionate responsibility of a leader. The trauma of the war was felt so heavily by the citizens in Steinbeck's *The Moon Is Down*. Colonel Lancer recollects about the horror of war and the piles of traumatic memories the war had left behind for the people of all generations. He thinks, "- that war is treachery and hatred, the muddling of incompetent generals, the torture and killing and sickness and tiredness, until at last it is over and nothing has changed except for new weariness and new hatreds" (Steinbeck, *The Moon Is Down* 23). The memories of war are sickening as they carry along pain and disturbance meted to the people. The trauma always impresses pessimistic thoughts in the sufferers. This is the pessimism the Literary Naturalists confess, the suffering owing to the conditions of milieu and moment that grips an individual or a community.

## **Musicality of Nature**

Asenla Yanger and Krishna Barua in their work, "Shielding the Earth Through the Folklores and Traditional Practices of the Nagas in the Select Novels of Easterine Kire: A Deep



Ecological Study” discuss the musicality that is found in nature terming it as ‘Ecomusic’ (b559). It is this music that acts as the binding element interlacing the human and the nonhuman world. Songs or music provide calmness. They are generally the carriers of socio-cultural emotions as they add rhythm to a society’s varied features. From the time one wakes up, the ears get captivated by different sounds around. These enveloping varied sounds can be best heard while traversing the rock-cut hilly roads with trees and foliage all around, the rhythmic sounds produced by the twittering of birds in the far wide jungle, the shrill sound of the cicada, or the music of leaves rubbing against one another as the wind gushes through them, all these create music of their own which soothes the weary ears. This musicality of the undisturbed nature, however, is barely heard in the urban technologically dominated landscape.

The indigenous people, who are very closely connected to their non-urban world, dance to the tempos inherent in the entities around them. Though no written documents are handy with the records of any musical elements of nature, community memory provides a lot of information about the songs and their connotations as were believed to be rooted in the natural entities. The folk songs of the indigenes were a means of glorifying the events that happened in the past which orally got transmitted, and they are now written in textual format for the preservation of the cultural memory of the collective members of the society. Interpreting the Naga society, oral tradition was, and to some extent is still, one of the most sought after means for the transmission of the events of the past. This was owing to the lack of written knowledge amongst the Nagas. The storytellers, through word of mouth, used to pass the stories of conquest and defeat, nature’s compassion and fury, the spiritual and supernatural entities residing in nature, the myths, and tales, etc., to the younger generations. This orality had a musical note to it and sometimes they were added with music making them folksongs. With these songs, they worshiped nature with

admiration because to them every entity was valuable and needed to be revered. These songs, however, were of added value because through these nature songs or the music of nature people were instilled with good values and ethics. The 'ecomusic' (Yanger and Barua b559) has metaphorical suggestions.

Deep Ecological view of the value implanted in the elements of nature is carved out in Kire's works when she discusses of the spirits residing in nature as one of the many entities. Mentions can be made of the Naga's belief in the river-spirits, tree-spirits, and the forest-spirits. Though the supernatural elements are without any scientific basis to prove of their existence, Naga tradition gives high regard to the presence of the spirits as against the philosophy of Naturalism which looks for scientific proof behind the existence of any entity. This reverence is owing to the experience of the indigenes, before the coming of Christianity, which they transmitted orally.

One of the collective cultural memories of the Nagas is about the forest song. Villagers pass through the forest every day, on their way to and back from the fields. Sometimes while passing, some are drawn inside the forest due to a sweet melody that envelopes the forest and the hearer. The hearer is so mesmerized by the song that he starts walking deep inside the forest unaware of his consciousness. Though the forest song brings the pain of loss, yet people show respect to the forest and worship the trees for protection so that the forest does not get raged and send calamity. In *The Rain-Maiden and the Bear-Man*, Kire brought the story of Zevino, the lost girl. Zevino or Zeno's father had gone to the woods to collect firewood for the household. Her mother sent Zeno to her father with freshly cooked food and a brew of rice. Zeno's father was known in the village to be with weak eyes for women. It was already dark when Zeno started off the journey only to be terrified thinking Zeno's father was following her. Running for safety she

took the northward direction. The forest cover was thicker in that part. Suddenly she dashed against an old lady and was lost. The villagers searched for twelve consecutive days for her but later stopped their search unable to get even the slightest trace of Zeno's presence. It was believed that the forest spirit took her away with its song. The forest song was the "inexplicable phenomenon of people going missing from the village, only to be found three or four days later, or, like Nito, ten days later" (Kire, *The Rain-Maiden and the Bear-Man* 9). The community believes that the forest is a revered entity of nature and the songs of this entity

draw them into the forest, deeper and deeper into the heart of the dark woods, until they grow so loud that the singing seems to be inside their heads, sung up close into their ears, their harmonies swaying back and forth and sending them into a deep slumber. (Kire, *The Rain-Maiden and the Bear-Man* 9)

It is still a belief that the forest sings and some souls get mesmerizingly trapped by the music of the trees, either to be found or not to be found at all, teaching the inhabitants of the locality to be in deep allegiance with their natural non-living world.

Music in nature is not only witnessed in the Naga cultural belief. The indigenous west also rhythmmed to the music of their land. In *The Pearl* Steinbeck's little population of pearl-divers and fishermen lived in the coastal fishing village, La Paz, of the Gulf of Mexico. These people were so rooted in nature that they made songs of everything they saw in the natural air around them. "His people had once been great makers of songs so that everything they saw or thought or did or heard became a song" (Steinbeck, *The Pearl* 1). Nature does not come with musical instruments, but when one starts to see joy and peace in nature, even a still ocean can be heard with rhythmic notes. Kino, the protagonist of *The Pearl*, was living a life of a bare minimum, but instead of being frustrated with this life which was not like the lifestyle of the rich

of his town, he started to find joy in his menial pearl diving work because of the joy he found in his environment. His surroundings added solace to him just like the solace one finds in music. Every morning, he would look at the waves splashing and he would start creating happy music in his mind. This was something common to all the indigenes of La Paz. Music rested in the elements of their natural environment, and this music remained a source of motivation to keep them going on even in the dreaded situation of living under the mercy of the rich.

Steinbeck tried to bring to light the cultural tradition of the people through the songs sung by the indigenes with which they were so well connected. Every of their practice was backed by the music of nature, as Steinbeck presents when Juana sings her song which was an ancient song, very limited in its notes, yet with unending intervals. In the course of time, this soft calm song of Juana was their family song. Everything was seen with a musical note. Every element had a song attached to it to be sung like how Kino's people

had made songs to the fishes, to the sea in anger and to the sea in calm, to the light and the dark and the sun and the moon, the songs were all in Kino and in his people – every song that had ever been made and, even the ones forgotten...and the melody of the song was the grey- green water and the little scuttling animals and the clouds of fish that flitted by and were gone. (Steinbeck, *The Pearl* 15)

The living and the non-living entities of nature have value inherent in them as is the claim of Deep Ecology. These living and non-living entities are many a times given a metaphorical dimension teaching the living world the morals of life and living well. Steinbeck and Kire added music to the natural beings as “‘Ecomusic’ is about the lesson non-human entities teach the otherwise destructive human world” (Yanger and Barua b560).

The ill meted on the fisherman by the people was so starkly visible in the society. Life was not easy for the poor. Living in deplorable conditions made the people doubtful of their surroundings. Kino and Juana, affected by the doctor's rejection to treat their child Coyotito, followed by the greed of the people to possess their pearl that carried all the future dreams, made them listen to the music of nature which was not the happy music anymore. The songs had turned out to be evil. These songs were an image of the ills of humanity. "In his mind a new song had come, the Song of Evil, the music of the enemy, of any foe of the family, a savage, a secret, dangerous melody, and underneath, the Song of the Family cried plaintively" (Steinbeck, *The Pearl* 4). The vices Kino saw in the society around him turned the joyous note of nature to depressive evil notes. The happy family, the three of them were, was a representation of joy that is found in the love that attaches the members together producing a family song. But as soon as the scorpion was sighted and the greed of the people to occupy the pearl became visible to Kino, there was fear and pain of the unforeseen and suddenly the happy song of the family turned to the song of the evil. The pearl was evil. This Ecomusic, however, provided humanity with the morals of being satisfied with what they have without letting greed grow in their hearts, to let the music in the entities of nature be joyous one and not turning the music of nature to be evil and painful.

Similarly, Kire's *Songry* is about the compassion and kindness that one must learn from the trees and the other elements of nature. Kire personified the Barkmen, the forest trees, as humankind. *Songry* is about the songs the lifeless bark held. The Barkwood (forest) had the Barkmen who were very rough in their outer appearance but were with a heart which knew only kindness. The dark branches of the trees were the flutes that produced music and "the Barkwood was full of flutesongs, single pitched notes soaring upward or baritones hovering above the

woods like a taut canopy” (Kire, *Songry* 7). The belief of the people that “the bark held songs” (Kire, *Songry* 7) was so deeply rooted that the people, while walking in the forest, whenever they came across a bark would bring it home along with them. Hunters and wanderers would then place the bark by the side of their bed so that the breeze, which flows inside the room from the doorway, would add musical notes to the dry abandoned bark adding it with life.

However, untrue stories of the Barkmen floated and children were asked not to be alone in the forest or else the Barkmen would catch them and roast their liver and eat. They were a threat to all others in the forest. However, it was the Barkman who had saved a lady out of kindness but was instead killed due to the greed of the warriors of gorge. Kire attributed the power of music, to bring soothing peace, even to the insignificant bark which is of no use except to be used for igniting fire. By doing this she brings the value of selflessness in nature, nature selflessly surrendering itself to add rhythm to humankind.

Songs were used as a medium of communicating the situation people were going through. Be it death or war, the humming of a tune served as an indication as well as a warning of what has either befallen them or what was coming towards them. The war-cry, the war songs, the festive songs, etc. all were based on and derived from nature. During that time, unlike these times, there were no mediums of transmitting the messages, so the message-bearing songs were carried to the hearer through air. The indigenes, again, depended on nature for the transmission of their feelings. Nature sends signals. Kino, Juana, and the little ailing Coyotito, in *The Pearl*, while escaping for life entered the greens but were being followed by three hunters with rifles. Kino secured Juana and Coyotito inside the cave, taking his position, he pounced on the hunters. Unknowingly the shot from the rifle blew off the baby’s head. Even without sighting the death of Coyotito, Kino could sense it because the stillness that covered the air with the silence of the

cicada and the frogs was the sound of death for “he knew the sound – the keening, moaning, rising hysterical cry from the little cave in the side of the stone mountain, the cry of death” (Steinbeck, *The Pearl* 77).

In Kire’s *Spirit Nights* “dirge singing became the new form of communication in the dark time” (91). Tola used her song as a metaphor to tell the people to wash away the ill thoughts. Nature supported her in sending her song far and wide throughout the village. Namu and Thongdi supported Tola to the door from where she sent her dirge as she told both of them, “I won’t go out, but I need my voice to carry and it will carry best when I am seated by the door.’ She was referring to the slats in the door that let in air.” (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 100). The songs carried forward, by the non-living element, air, taught the villagers about the goodness one should house at heart, and the same wisdom is what all the generations should tap from the nature around. Tola “ended the funeral song by making the plea to her listeners to cleanse themselves of fearful and suspicious thoughts. She bade them protect their spirits so that the village could live again... Let us stop hating, stop fearing, most of all, let us stop all complaining and all ill speaking” (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 102). Kire, through the music of nature, tries to imbibe in the people the cultivation of a heart of compassion. Tola’s dirge, being carried by the air, was a moving step for the villagers. Her urge for the termination of hate and ill feelings towards others acted as a source of inspiration to the people. For long her words were repeated and practiced in the households. This song of virtue carried by the insignificant element of nature spread so many wise thoughts, and this is what nature’s music is all about, this is what nonhuman nature is to humans.

Music resting in nature is calm and restful telling of the values all are to inherit. Just like the bark which had the forest song trapped in it, and it needed patience of the quiet to listen to

the “songs like bird songs or the water from a brook, the wind in the trees, and the rain in the forest” (Kire, *Songry* 24), so does human world need to quietly understand the importance of all the entities in nature to imbibe into themselves the values of life. Songs of nature and the songs for nature are the storehouses of wisdom as they speak of the deep interconnection of man with nature, the nourisher and nurturer of life forms. Pelevotso singing the lullaby to the raindrop son in the *Son of the Thundercloud*, which his mother used to sing for him, is the knowledge behind the birth of a river due to the importance of rain as he passes this knowledge by singing:

*The river runs*

*And it runs*

*Into the sea*

*And the sea runs*

*And it runs*

*Into the rain*

*Where it all comes from. (Kire, Son of the Thundercloud 47)*

The music and songs of nature are an integral part of addressing and showing commitments to the values each of the entity of nature holds as well as the morality they spread. Kire and Steinbeck brought this Ecomusic of nature to support the biocentric equality of Deep Ecology carrying forward the memories of wisdom.



## Healing in Nature

Another vehicle of preserving and transmitting the cultural memory is through the property of healing the natural entities are empowered with. Indigenous people have a way of finding comfort for their sicknesses and diseases through their close connection with nature. From the dawn of civilization, it is nature that has been providing comfort and solace, and so could people derive their cure in nature. It was very late that the science of medications reached the indigenes residing in the deep forests and valleys. People were aware of the properties a particular variety of leaf housed, and also about its use in curing ailments before the invasion of medical science. People were aware of the cure insects and animals too could provide.

The knowledge of the curative value of nature travelled from generation to generation. This alternate knowledge, as Achingliu Kamei discusses in her “An Ecocritical Study of Easterine Kire’s *When the River Sleeps* and *Son of the Thundercloud*,” is “founded upon principles that favour connection rather than isolation and protection rather than exploitation” (206). Modernization, though has brought remarkable advancements in the lives of the people with its scientific and technological discoveries, however, it is essential that the ancient knowledge of the ancestors should not be forgotten. Rather it should be instilled in the present human generation. This will help men to return to nature with faith which will stop human civilization from destroying the elements of value found in nature. These practices of treating people suffering with sickness and diseases, using natural elements, form an important part of the collective cultural memory.

Kire through her works has always attempted to express how nature has always served humanity as something which provides not just the means of sustenance, but also nature acts as

the protector, healer, and benefactor. Nature is the therapist. It balms man from the burns. The close affinity the Nagas have with their immediate nature has provided them with the knowledge of the herbs or the plants which have medicinal usages. Whenever ailments strike on any member of the group, someone would go to the forest and collect the plants which could ward off not only the ailment but also the evil spirits. Bitter wormwood is an herb commonly found in the forests of Naga Hills. It is believed that bitter wormwood keeps the bad spirits away, and along with its medicinal properties, it helps in curing wounds and injuries. Wandering in the jungle, during the years of Indo-Naga conflict, "Neituo cut his hand on a sharp piece of bamboo while making a shelter. Mose quickly plucked some bitter wormwood and made a paste of it. He laid it on the wound and immediately stopped the blood flow. He then took a bit of the leaf and stuck it behind Neituo's ear" (Kire, *Bitter Wormwood* 87). An insignificant plant growing in the wild could stop the wound from bleeding. Even today the same herb is looked for by the villagers and wanderers while exploring their way through the forests and jungles of this region.

Not only the bitter wormwood but there are other herbs and plants with medicinal properties which are still used by the people living in close quarters with nature in the villages. The Crofton weed or *japa nha* is a commonly used herb to cure wounds. The medicinal property inherent in the rock bee honey is still greatly made use of by the people. In *Spirit Nights*, Kire expresses the healing properties of these two elements of nature as a practice of the indigenes. Namu was sharpening the point of his own spear one morning when the sharpening slipped rendering him a cut. When two of his uncles, uncle Choba and uncle Chongshen, come to see him and inquire about the cut, Namu replies saying,

‘It healed in two days.’ ... ‘I used some Crofton weed on it, and every morning I covered it with rock bee honey until the cut closed. Look it’s completely healed now’ (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 152).

Namu’s knowledge of the elements of nature cured him of the cut. When Puse’s left arm had some ligaments badly torn the herbalist of the village tied a sling to it. “The old herbalist brought pastes of ginseng, *tierhutiepfü* and *Vilhuü nha*, forest herbs for their curative properties... ‘Let him drink the ginseng in a mixture of warm water and rock bee honey. That should hasten the healing of tissues’” (Kire, *Journey of the Stone* 109) and Puse was healed. The natives even had the knowledge of what was to be avoided like ginger, red meat, and chicken as they slowed the healing process, and this same knowledge has traveled times and is practiced by the people of the contemporary times as well.

Steinbeck’s indigenes living in La Paz in the Gulf of Mexico knew their physical non-human nature very well. They too shared the same knowledge of the healing properties plants and leaves were valued with. In his momentous fictional narrative, *The Pearl*, when the infant Coyotito’s shoulder was swollen because of the scorpion bite and the doctor was too cruel, drowned in his greed, that he disagreed to give his service for a fee of only eight small misshapen valueless ugly seed pearls to treat the toddler, Juana, little Coyotito’s mother, took resort to her native knowledge of making a poultice of the herbs and weeds found in the coast. Steinbeck narrates:

Juana went to the water and waded in. She gathered some brown seaweed and made a flat damp poultice of it, and this she applied to the baby’s swollen shoulder, which was as good a remedy as any and probably better than the doctor could have done. (Steinbeck, *The Pearl* 13–14)

Juana making a poultice of brown seaweed is a practice of soothing any pain. This practice was known to the coastal fisherman because of their close connection with their natural habitat. In fact, this curative property of the brown seaweeds led to their preservation and easy thriving.

With modernization, most of these practices could not reach the new generation especially those residing in the urban landscape. Also due to the lack of keeping written records of these practices, those years, acted as a barrier in transmitting this cultural exercise of the people. However, the rootedness of the people to nature has kept most of these memories alive. “Even now, the inhabitants believe in the healing property of the non-human entity. Today, as soon as a young mother gives birth, she is given frog soup believing it to heal the stitch wounds in no time” (Yanger and Barua b561). Kire writes in *Spirit Nights*, “Frog meat was considered medicinal in many tribes, and highly recommended for wounds and injuries, fever and infections; people had such great faith in its healing properties” (7). For the people frogs, snails, and crabs were food and they used to catch them from nature. The surplus was usually dried and stored to be used in later days when the need would arise.

The affinity to nature, considering nature to be a healer, and getting cured by applying or consuming plants, weeds, insects, etc., was a traditional practice of the people. Even today there are groups of people living in the wilderness who depend on nature for therapy rather than depending on medical science. Leaves of some wild flowers are used to join fractured bones. A popular practice and belief of the Nagas is the rubbing of the dried feet of a Sea Otter on the throat if a fishbone gets stuck in the throat. These memories and practices relating to the healing properties of the elements in nature form the collective memory of the indigenous people. Ascribing medicinal qualities to nature gave people an identity of their own thereby acknowledging the blessings hidden in nature which need our protection and preservation.

Considering the indigenous people and the minorities, the intangible heritage renders them their identity. These intangible cultural heritages are stored in the collective memories of the indigenous people and are transmitted through their memory to the next group of their people. John Steinbeck and Easterine Kire bravely did this by the “highly successful transliteration of the collective memories of the people” (A. Kire 73). Both of their works show a convergence of their concern towards the nonhuman world with value attached to all that existed. Different cultures but vast similarity comes to light with their metaphorical representation of the music embedded in nature and the healing properties of the plants and herbs along with the lasting pain of the characters because of the trauma they faced. This comparative study of the memories, Steinbeck and Kire brought out through their fictional narrative, indicates of the similar beliefs and practices of the indigenes when it comes to respecting nature through a non-anthropocentric understanding. Collective memory thus acts as a very essential element in living and learning about one’s own as well as another’s culture because at the end of all “memories are all that remain” (ix) as mentioned by Kire in her novel *Mari*.

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