

# **Alternative Worldview: The Naga Weretiger, an Ecolegend in *When the Millet Fields Flower***

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**Abstract** This paper analyses the Naga Eco-legend tekhumevi to introduce an alternative worldview through Indigenous communities' philosophy and lived experience. In the context of contemporary environmental discourses, literature plays a significant part in highlighting the affective folklore guiding ethical, environmental practices in regions that are considered ecologically rich areas. Foregrounding the vibrant tapestry of North East Indian Indigenous cultures, it aims to discuss the impact of extraordinary stories on the lives of Nagas and how they shape the community's worldviews. This includes their relationships with the non-human world and their cultural identity. The paper also discusses the vitality of the traditional ecological knowledge of the Indigenous communities and its potential to offer alternative ecological sustenance ethics through holistic worldviews. The oral tradition of the Naga community has re-emerged time and again as a potent tool in offering ecological solutions and abiding by the ethics of sustenance and co-existence. The paper discusses an example of such a tool—the Naga weretiger, or tekhumevi's colonial imagery in the Naga oral histories and lore. However, the perception of such philosophical instruments sees a change because of social and ideological shifts that may be attributed to the intervention of scientific technologies, religion, worldviews, and rationale. Similarly, the accelerated climate health crisis has shifted the focus to an inclusive approach in the 'literature of nature', especially towards the more-than-human, as an alternative to this crisis. The paper reinforces the importance of folk literature and its relevance

in the contemporary Naga community, reaffirming Indigenous cosmovision and epistemologies as spaces of resistance and representation. Avinuo Kire's "When the Millet Fields Flower" from *The Last Light of Glory Days* (2021) intersects magic, terror, community, spiritualism, and ecological ethics. The tekhumevi narrative reinstates the Naga ecological wisdom of bridging the gap and promoting a liminal existence/relationship between the Naga people and non-human entities and spirits.

**Keywords** Peoplestories; nativized Christianity; identity; folklore; Tekhumevi

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## Introduction

The perceptions of humans towards the non-human world have been rapidly shifting because of social and ideological changes, including the intervention of scientific technologies, religion, worldviews, and rationale. However, the accelerated climate health crisis has given rise to a focus on a reversed or an alternative solution to this crisis. In this regard, the traditional Ecological Knowledge of the Indigenous communities has recently gained prominence because of its potential to offer alternative ecological sustenance ethics through holistic worldviews. Thus, the oral tradition of the Naga community has understandably re-emerged as a potent tool in offering ecological solutions and ethics of sustenance and co-existence. Avinuo Kire is a contemporary voice from Nagaland, India. Her writings offer insights into the Indigenous community of the Angami Nagas and their Life Worlds. The co-existence and co-subjectivity of the human and the non-human world is a part of the Naga worldview. Jelle JP Wouters calls it "More-than-human-Naga-world," a world that offers "alternative worlding practice and pluri-versal worlds, and human and more than human" (par. 1), it is a world of all entities including the human, non-

human, animate and inanimate spirits. Contextually, Avinuo Kire's writings are a cultural and spiritual revival of the Angami people and their stories. Her narratives intend to challenge the epistemological prisons of colonisation and Christianity responsible for dismantling Naga cultural identities, cultures, and histories.

One such work by Kire, "When the Millet Fields Flowers," revolves around Aleno and Sevizo's love story in Kohima. The author builds the narrative showcasing Aleno's inexplicable affection for a tekhumevi and explores the events leading to a human being debating her feelings towards a weretiger. The story deals with the themes of Naga spiritualism, inter-species kinship and ecological ethics of the Angami Naga tribe. The narrative portrays fluid boundaries and co-existence of the Naga world of the humans and the non-humans, moving beyond Anthropocentrism. The short story delves into a revival of the Angami Naga epistemologies through the reinvention of their eco-legend tekhumevi and the community's storytelling. Kire repositions the Naga mythical legends through her narratives by breaking down epistemological prisons of colonisation. Community narratives, including Naga Eco-legends such as Tekhumevi, represent legends or mythical stories. These mythical figures and stories are part of the Naga worldview and lifeworlds.

In a mystical tale of romance, Kire's story introduces the idea of human beings' allure towards the existence of spirits and beastly forces that can be conveniently posited as human extremities. This could also point to the idea of humans placing the non-human world at a higher degree of their capabilities. Such idolisation may also explain the fascination with the so-called superpowers depicted in the Indigenous legends and folklore. For example, Kire describes Aleno's fascination with Sevizo's "odd little habits" (Kire 122) as a product of her father's deep conditioning of her beliefs. By accepting that "the coexistence of "the laws of the physical and supernatural world" is "necessary to maintain the right balance between the two worlds" (125), her father established the need for a spiritual awareness of the physical life. In such a depiction, Kire's philosophy resonates with Stacy Alaimo's who writes that it is impossible to "separate bodies from their environments" (Alaimo 34; Nash 89). The connection also poses the question of ecology's role in determining physiology and correspondingly arising folklore analogy.

To probe the matter further, it is imperative to address the beginning of the connection between the human and the more-than-human. To begin with, it may be readily assumed that colonisation and Proselytisation overturned the worldview of the Indigenous people through the dismantling of their belief systems, cultures, rites,

and rituals, leading to the irreparable psychological colonisation of the people. The impact of Proselytisation has affected Naga worldview, thereby affecting the true essence of Naga identity. In the process of decolonizing, the animist worldviews of Indigenous communities emerged as a potential tool towards the restoration of Indigenous people's traditions and history. The revising of the traditional worldviews of Indigenous societies reveals the layered and silenced history of the community. Relationship and coexistence in indigenous Naga society arise from their animist belief systems: their worldview is embedded in "a sense of cosmic oneness, all entities are seen to share a fundamental bond, that connects them in their interaction with each other" (Deka 221). It reinvents the significance of the Indigenous philosophies and epistemologies with the potential to offer conservation ethics, co-existence, and respect between human and non-human entities.

The weretiger narratives exist in several Southeast Asian countries and the Northeastern Region of India. Portrayed as part of Indigenous mythology, narratives of humans transforming into non-humans have also been severally depicted. Notable among them is *Bhediya* (2022) based on Arunachal Pradesh folklore of 'yapum' (a virus), or a transfiguring werewolf who attempts to safeguard the Indigenous wealth of forests. However, the research paper addresses the stark distinguishing factors of the weretiger as a persona through a cultural viewpoint. In some regions and cultures, a weretiger is a shaman, a beast or a demon, while in others, it is a disease. The weretiger is a popular image among the Malays, Chinese, and Burma folklore and myths. For instance, in the Southern tribes, people were portrayed as weretigers to demonise them and repress them, whereas, among the Garos in Meghalaya, it is often considered as "tiger disease." However, it is not entirely negative because the ability to transform is associated with power, indicating a cultural significance beyond Western rationale (Brighenti 1).

Additionally, in among the Nagas, the weretiger is a persona who is not only present in the folktales but exists in the personal accounts of the community (Sutter 2). In her study, Sutter mentions that in the remote areas of Nagaland, the tigermen or weretigers still exist and continue to act as local diviners and healers. The weretiger phenomenon is built on supernatural, spiritual, and familial bonds for the Naga community. The weretiger is a persona who is often associated with a village. Therefore, they are part of society, and their existence is accepted almost naturally among the community.

Furthermore, Limajungla Jamir projects the intertwining of Naga myths, traditional beliefs, and supernatural elements in contemporary Naga writings (Jamir 359). The *tekhumevi* represents the intersection of human and non-human persons

through the duality of being a human and a tiger. The belief in a supernatural being possessing a human soul represents the Indigenous belief system and community experience (Jamir 362). Although the study does not carry out in-depth research on the weretiger phenomenon, it highlights the relevance of the persona, especially in cultural and community narratives.

Similarly, Lavanya Upadhya analyses the weretiger as a mythical creature and a significant cultural symbol within Naga folklore, representing the community's deep-rooted beliefs and traditions (Upadhya 740). It explores the role of the tiger as an anthropomorphic being which Easterine Kire employs as a symbol to represent marginalised Northeastern identities where the symbolism adds multiple layers to Naga histories, identities, and cultures. The study also mentions how Kire's work effectively communicates the symbiotic relationship and mutual reliance between humans and the environment through the narratives of the mythical being. Additionally, Micheal Heneise mentions the lack of familiarity with the *tekhumiavi* [*sic*] myth among the younger generations of Naga in the urban space in Nagaland. Although it was once a widespread practice and belief, it may still be traced in some areas of Nagaland" (Heneise 93). Heneise explains that an in-depth study of the human and the non-human complex will help elucidate truths behind the inextricable life links that bind humans, non-human animals, and the natural world (91). The narrative of *tekhumevi* is immensely important for its role in endorsing a more than human world, unveiling layers of Naga epistemologies and cultures.

### **Alternative Worldviews and Animism**

Alternative Worldviews is a research theory emerging from the Indigenous space, designed as a counterpoint to the present knowledge systems, including Western science and technology. Alternative worldviews offer alternative realities and ecologies. Andreas Weber in *Alternative Worldviews* (2020) mentions that alternative worldviews are a space curated as an inquiry into the alternative ecology of knowledge and ecological practices. Alternative worldviews, therefore, question the very foundation of Western or scientific models of development and anthropocentric worldviews. The book *Alternative Worldviews* includes the writings of selected scholars from Northeast India exploring the Indigenous worldviews, philosophies, kinships, animism, and ecological knowledge of the community. Using the worldviews, the study proposes an eco-alterity through the alternative reality found in the traditional ecological knowledge of the community (Weber 205). The environmental knowledge embedded in the oral traditions of the Northeast community highlights the need to understand local realities by breaking down

boundaries between human-animal and nature-culture. Through eco-alterity, there is also the need to critique existing knowledge systems that promote binaries, hinder interconnectedness, and promote anthropocentric worldviews. Weber also highlights the importance of unlearning and re-learning the supremacy of colonisation. Instead, it promotes local ecological knowledge and worldviews such as animism. The present study uses Indigenous worldviews and animistic beliefs as a lens to explore the local ecological knowledge of the community.

Northeast scholars challenge epistemological prisons and binaries in their writings through their eco-alterity, holistic worldview, and philosophies. Bhagat Oinam observes how Western worldviews, especially scientific models of development, need scrutiny, especially for causing ecological imbalance, as “Ecological crises owe their origin to the kind of scientific epistemologies and development models originated from the West” (Oinam 21). He further critiques the binary between the human and the non-human world, where the human becomes the central focal, and the non-humans become instruments or means for meeting human needs. For example, in Kire’s story, Ania Neiu, a pastor’s wife, is seemingly more distressed at the damages caused by a weretiger than the origin or role of the weretiger in the village. Though she asks Aleno to understand that Sevizo is a weretiger, she also expects Aleno not to be carried away by the inescapable charm and power of the weretiger (Kire 121-122). Here, the author points to the conflicting belief system that Aleno and her siblings have been raised in. Aleno is expected to acknowledge the reality of a creature from a folk legend, but she is not to engage in humane interactions with him.

Furthermore, it may be argued that the uncompromising Indigenous stance of protecting the environment results from deep affective conditioning through their literature, including folklore and folk legends that have been cherished for centuries. The perpetuation of similar belief systems has only strengthened their present unapologetic conviction in the power of the natural elements blending with the supernatural, especially when it comes to protecting the environment. For instance, in her conversation with her father, Aleno understands his pride in their “ancestral heritage” as the Indigenous populace who “belong to the Tsiakra Liede Yie” who “maintain the right balance between the two worlds” (Kire 125-126). Franky Varah articulates the Tangkhul Naga worldview and its interrelatedness with the non-human world of animals and spirits. Varah establishes a more-than-human world through the projection of the Tangkhul Naga worldviews. “There are no boundaries between man [*sic*] and animals in the world of imagination and even in the real world.” (Varah 251), emphasises the lack of boundary between humans and animals

because man, tiger, and spirits are brothers. In this sense, they share a common ancestry and kinship and are considered equals.

Additionally, Kaustubh Deka remarks, “Weber’s emphasis on ‘indigeneity’ as emancipatory and animism being the ‘cosmology of Indigenous peoples’ – the most radical form to think and to enact reciprocity among beings” (220). Deka emphasizes an approach towards viewing the Northeast region as an “eco-cultural landscape” (220). Deka highlights the interconnection between Indigenous worldviews and Andreas Weber’s idea of reciprocity among beings. Kire also hints at the fallible notion of equating nature with human progress in ecologically rich areas (*Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean*) by depicting how far-removed the Indian mainland is from the Northeast of India (Kire 122). Thus, the idea of development at the cost of ecological balance disruption is not only a suspicious notion to the Indigenous populace but also reiterates the need for mindful advancement plans. Deka and Weber’s opinions resonate with the cultural depiction of Nagaland in the recent Indian web series *Paatal Lok* (2025), wherein a Naga individual is seen calling out the idea of exploitation in the name of “development, and industrialization” and says that “the last thing I will do is trust people [...] who use my land and my people” for the same (Season 2 ep 5. 2:14, 2:17).

Therefore, the paper posits that Indigenous ecological ethics also offers the opportunity to reverse our current destructive relationship with nature through respect, reciprocity, and co-existence. Hence, an alternative worldview focuses on the need to acknowledge the existence of a world that is more than a human world and a world of co-existence with other beings. An alternative worldview has the potential to provide sustenance to the value of nature and the Anthropocene.

### **Naga Eco-legend: Fluid Boundaries and Co-existence**

Kire’s narrative focus is on the Indigenous worldview of the people, where the presence of modernity is seen through schools, churches, and towns; however, it is present only as a background in the narrative. The supernatural forces cohabit as part of the Naga people’s worldview, becoming a natural phenomenon. In the Naga lifeworld, the weretiger persona is a part of the village community. Although he or she is considered a person who is gifted with supernatural powers, they coexist alongside humans. Sevizo is a tekhumevi, but he leads an everyday life as he belongs to a village and a community. The narrative depicts the traditional Naga worldview and their knowledge amidst the rapid modernization and the influence of colonisation, where the Nagas were still engaged in a life and worldview of co-existence with non-human beings. The co-existence portrayed in the story highlights

Indigenous ecology, replete with both positive and negative attributes and the power of non-human persons. For example, Avinuo Kire's opening lines of the short story, "She awoke in a fright, hand clutching her throat, gasping for air. Aleno could still feel the bristly touch of the enormous animal paw against her cheek, stroking her tenderly..." (Kire 113), establishes the feeling of fear, magic, and terror, further emphasising the people's belief in *tekhumevi* as a supernatural being. Apart from humanising the supernatural here, Kire also depicts the central notion of Aleno's inexplicable attraction to the beastly *tekhumevi* and her awe of the non-human spirit inhabiting a human body.

Further, the ordinary life of the people also becomes extraordinary as supernatural elements are accepted and shared as part of the ordinary world. The existence of *tekhumevi* in Naga society is further established when Ania Neiu asks Aleno whether she is aware that Sevizo is a *tekhumevi*. She mentions, "The phenomenon of becoming *tekhumevi* runs strong in their family. Almost all the males from his great-great-grandfather down have been known to transform their spirits into tigers" (Kire 121). The acknowledgement of intergenerational existence and inheritance of becoming *tekhumevi* further establishes the co-existence and fluid boundaries in the Naga worldview. Arguably, the portrayal of such details peculiar to "the fiction of nature" (Swarup) also builds the credibility of the belief system.

The weretiger is a "transpecies persona" in the Naga lore (Wouters, par. 2). It is an important mythical legend in the Naga lore currently revived as an Eco-legend in contemporary narratives. The *tekhumevi* is a familiar lore among the Angami community, who, in the past, coexist with the villagers. A *tekhumevi* is a person who shares his or her soul with the tiger, and therefore, he or she has a foot in both worlds. The *tekhumevi*, a folkloric legend, symbolises the Naga Animist belief and spiritualism. He is a mediator, a shaman who has access to the human, spirit, and animal world. In the olden days, *tekhumevi* was considered a seer (*themoumia*) who could foresee the future, pronounce about the future, communicate with the spirit and nature, and heal people from diseases. However, *tekhumevi* became a taboo narrative after the rapid spread of Christianity among the Nagas. The *tekhumevi* stories that were the rich repository of the Naga folkloric legend were shunned among the Nagas as the *tekhumevi* was referred to by the colonisers as "lycanthropy, a mental disorder in which the patient thinks that he is an animal" (Wouters par. 7).

In pre-colonial times, the Nagas were pagans who revered nature, including the sky, earth, rivers, rocks, and forests. Additionally, every cultural or traditional activities or rituals are performed in consultation and giving offerings or respect

to the spirit and animal world. Temsula Ao observes Naga identity is linked to the cycles of nature, land, and forests, including trees, rivers, mountains, etc., are not inanimate objects, and non-human animals and spirits are considered kin to humans (3). The mountains, forests, rivers, and rocks are attributed to a being with a living soul. The Nagas were also taught that “political decision-making is the rightful prerogative of humans only, to the exclusion of ancestors, animals, and numinous beings, that for long had their sayings in the political lives of Naga humans” (Wouters par. 7). Therefore, the new worldview and belief introduced by colonisers through the New religion led to the division of the Naga world of human and non-human where boundaries were established and a new materialistic worldview is enforced upon the people. The newly manufactured colonial knowledge rapidly spread in the hills.

Avinuo’s Kire narrative establishes how Indigenous ecologies are attributed with both good and evil; therefore, there is a caution not to take the Indigenous as “timeless or pure” (Deka 230). Here, tekhumevi is not a pure good persona; there are few negative attributions to the character. For instance, the tekhumevi sometimes lose control over themselves and do not have the right mind. This may lead to attacking villagers and killing herds, causing immense agricultural and economic distress in the villages (Kire 122). By introducing Sevizo as a tekhumevi in the story, the author establishes a positionality for Indigenous Naga epistemologies and ecological knowledge, further legitimising her people’s and community’s oral traditions and beliefs. Sevizo is a tekhumevi, meaning half human and half tiger, and he shares his soul with a tiger. Sevizo challenges the Anthropocentric worldview and breaks down binaries and boundaries between humans and animals. Existing in the oral tradition of the Angami tribe, the tekhumevi is a human, tiger, and spirit being. In this narrative, Kire introduces Sevizo as a persona representing the Naga cosmology of animism and co-existence, propagating a more-than-human world.

Micheal Henise explains, “Angami beliefs about the tekhumavi straddle two worlds- the world of human, waking reality, and a very different seemingly-mythological one” (99). Therefore, a tekhumevi person like Sevizo belongs to both the human and the non-human world as an in-between being; he introduces and represents a liminal space and world of beings. Sevizo galvanizes the animistic worldview of the Naga community, which has a liminal boundary where humans, animals, and spirits cross each other. A similar portrayal of a blurred line between the human and non-human world and merging with the supernatural can also be found in the novel *Latitudes of Longing* (2018) by Shubhangi Swarup. Swarup explains treating humans as animals (*Latitudes of Longing* 155) and supernatural or

mythical creatures receiving human conviction of existence (288).

Similarly, the story portrays Sevizo as “a tall, wiry constitution and was unusually attractive with dark eyebrows and proud aquiline features” (Kire 116). The physical description of Sevizo is seemingly majestic, unreal, and, at the same time, a beastly image. In many Naga narratives, *tekhumevi* are often described as quite different from an ordinary human because of their unique physical traits. In the story, Sevizo takes the form of a tiger in a few episodes; for instance, first, he appears in the dream of Aleno, where he caresses her like a lover, and Aleno picturizes the image she sees as “she vividly felt, rather than saw, the colour pattern of fur. Red. Striped. Striped. Vertical” (Kire 113). When Aleno was in the forest, she felt the presence of Sevizo in the tiger form, protecting her and teasing her with grunts and howls. Consequently, the idea of Indigenous cosmology and kinship as not pure and timeless (Deka 230) is reflected when Aleno feels the threat of Sevizo when she hears him howl and grind his teeth at the forest, and this also leads her to flee away from the forest.

Micheal Heneise also mentions that Naga author Easterine Kire situates the “*tekhumiavi* in relation to family, and village life, and relation to larger historical imperatives” (Heneise 99). Similarly, while the villagers, including Aleno, know his *tekhumevi* traits, it is not a significant issue for them. From an alternative worldview perspective, the *tekhumevi* character of Sevizo represents the liminality of the time and cultural history of the Angami tribe.

### **Animism versus Nativized Christianity**

The traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of Naga society executes their deep ecological knowledge through kinships, co-existence, and the ethics of living. This knowledge system has been shared through the oral storytelling tradition in Naga society. As recorded by Micheal Heneise, the *tekhumevi* lore has disappeared in the Naga urban space and even in many villages. Heneise describes the disappearance of *tekhumevi*, especially in urban areas, as primarily due to modernity and Christianity. Consequently, he mentions, “it was once a widespread practice and belief, and that it may still be traced in some areas of Nagaland” (Heneise 93). Therefore, reinventing the lore by contextualising it in contemporary narratives provides a potent way to reinterpret the lore and the legend. The *tekhumevi*, like Sevizo, who is from the Chakhabama Angami village, is also like the other villagers, a vendor who sells charcoal and other local vegetables at the local market in Kohima. Although many people are aware of him being a *tekhumevi*, there is acknowledgement and respect for him as a *tekhumevi*. Heneise mentions the lack

of scholarship about the tekhumevi as oral histories in the writings of colonial anthropologists such as J.H. Hutton and J.P. Mills. Recently, decolonial research has led to the revival and repositioning of the Indigenous knowledge systems. In this, tekhumevi, as an oral history of the people, reappeared in Temsula Ao, Rebekka Sutter, and Micheal Heneise's observation about the weretiger. One possible reason for the disappearance is the emergence of urbanism, deforestation, and reduction of forest settlements; however, the more prominent reason is possibly the influence of colonial missionaries.

Naga Animism refers to the spiritual worldview of the Naga community, including its approach to cohabitation with the non-human world. The Naga community revered the earth, sky, stones, rivers, mountains, and beings, including animal and forest spirits. The belief reflects interdependence and co-existence between human and non-human. In the Naga context, Animism is a world that includes humans as non-human beings, and nothing is inanimate in their worldview. Animism in the Angami belief system is referred to as pfutsana, the belief that nature, including forests, rivers, mountains, and spirits, is revered. Reverence is extended to non-human spirit beings, including the weretiger. According to Harris, animism is the cosmology of indigenous people enacting reciprocity among beings. The animistic cosmos is always performative. Its members enact creation by fulfilling their due role in it (Harris 92), as for the Angami community, tekhumevi has existed for many generations. Deka remarks, “Weber’s emphasis on ‘indigeneity’ as emancipatory and animism being the ‘cosmology of Indigenous peoples – ‘the most radical form to think and to enact reciprocity among beings’” (Deka 220).

The paper reiterates that the Indigenous philosophies and epistemologies coincidentally are imbued with many ethics and wisdom of responsible use of resources, co-subjectivity, and holistic approach. Additionally, it provides multiple ecological lessons on sustainability and conservation ethics procured from the community culture and traditional practices. In support of the argument, Kire’s story also represents the clash of tradition and modernity, Christianity, and tribal faith through the tekhumevi persona and Ania Neiu, the pastor’s wife. Ania Neiu represents the new religion, and her beliefs directly contradict the old faith. She detests Sevizo, the tekhumevi, a non-Christian persona from the Naga Animist world. Ania Neiu confronts Aleno to avoid the tekhumevi because she sees him as a threat and an abomination. She describes him as a “handsome devil” (Kire 123), a constant negative imagery often used in describing the tekhumevi re-enacting the colonial view of the colonized as exotic and savage. Here Neiu’s attitude towards the tekhumevi as a destructive figure reflects the impact of Christianity

on the Naga spiritual worldview in the context of demonizing Indigenous belief systems. The tekhumevi becomes a negative persona, establishing the deteriorating interconnectedness and reciprocal relationships the Nagas share with the non-human world.

The protagonist, Aleno, is very fond of his late father and his knowledge of the Angami culture and traditions. Despite the establishment of Christianity and marrying a Christian woman, Aleno's father lived as a pagan, following the rites and rituals of the ancestors and spirits until his later conversion. Aleno learns about the supernatural world of her community through her father's shared knowledge. "Our ancestors understood the laws of the physical and supernatural world and would always execute well-thought rituals and prayers before beginning or ending any activity. This is necessary to maintain the right balance between the two worlds" (Kire 125). The narrative, thus, creates a dichotomy of the Christian versus the non-Christian among the Angami people. Ania Neiu, the church pastor's wife, represents the strong convert Naga Christian who rejects the animist beliefs and practices of the ancestral Naga society. However, Aleno contradicts her view as the tekhumevi, although strange and commanding an aura of fear, is more acceptable to her than her divided beliefs. Aleno's love for Sevizo blurs the boundary between humans and animals because she is ready to accept him despite knowing about his personality. Aleno wishes to have a life partner, a strong man like Sevizo; however, it is the fear and terror Sevizo created in the forest that makes her ponder her decision. Her dilemma represents the manipulation of Christianity that alters the spiritual and the nature and culture continuum among the Nagas.

Aleno, who hails from a family that has passed on the traditional ecological knowledge, becomes trapped between the old faith and the new religion. Aleno comes from a family whose great-grandparents and grandparents are elders who initiated agricultural rituals and practices. Her grandmother is a Tsiekra Liedepfu, who is responsible for declaring when to sow seeds or harvesting paddy in the village. Therefore, Aleno herself comes from the lineage of a Liedepfu. She also shares a strong bond with his late father, who profoundly respects her ancestors and traditional knowledge. Only in the later years of his life was he converted to Christianity when he developed a bond with an American missionary and anthropologist. By passing down the stronghold of the oral tradition to his daughter, he passed on the community's traditional knowledge. Aleno's character is symbolic of the clash between Christianity and Naga spirituality, the strong influence of Christianity in taking over the Naga psyche, and the struggle to preserve the worldview.

Aleno's deep love for Sevizo promotes ecological kinship through the romantic interests of Aleno for Sevizo. Despite being aware of him being a tekhumevi, Aleno ponders, "[w]hy should his being a Tekhumevi be considered an obstacle?" (Kire 129), her question reflects her animistic worldview, one that is shared and reciprocated, reflecting upon how "humans who follow an animistic mindset connect with the local actors (again, human and non-human) and let a story of mutual exchange unfold. From this perspective, ecological practices can never be the unfettered application of general rules; they must always be local, reciprocal, felt, and experiential. (Oinam 102). Aleno represents Naga spiritualism and the traditional worldview of the Angami community. She does not believe in the boundaries and divisions between humans, spirits, and animals, promoting a reflective and alternative worldview.

Aleno character is symbolic of Naga spiritualism as her acceptance of Sevizo and her constant chanting of the prayer "Tei, Apfu, Kidzu, Apf" (Kire 129), meaning Sky is my Father, Earth is Mother, emphasizing her view against the division of the Naga world. Along with the community's belief lies the tekhumevi persona, which represents the resilience within nature and embodies the fierce and protective aspects of the natural world. The weretiger symbolises the intertwining of the supernatural elements in the community's daily life. there are specific rules, rituals, and boundaries, but co-existence exists when approaching the weretiger. The weretiger person is synonymous with humans because while it has supernatural abilities, it also has flaws similar to humankind, dismantling the social barrier between the community and the environment.

## **Conclusion**

The paper finds that the tekhumevi persona in the story represents a liminal ontology of co-existence between humans and non-humans, nature, spirits, and animals. The notion of tekhumevi bridges the gap between the two worlds of the Nagas through their cohabitation and transition from the human to the non-human persona. This bridge also serves to bring closer the two worlds of the scientific ecosystem and the supernatural. Kire reinvents the folk and eco legend of the tekhumevi, stating that they coexist with the villagers and propagate a multiversal world of the Nagas where humans, animals, and spirits live in a shared space and are equal. The paper establishes that the Indigenous worldview informs the readers of an alternative worldview indicating how humans can forge a new relationship with the other species built on respect, reciprocity, and interrelatedness. An alternative worlding practice advocates a human and non-human interaction and co-existence, using

Indigenous worldviews to address the deteriorating and materialistic worldview.

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