

Intersection of Ecology and Literature in Kire's when the River Sleeps

P.S Luireiphy

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English, University of Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intersection of ecology and literature in Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps* by analyzing how Kire's narrative brings forward an ecological perspective by intertwining ecological consciousness with storytelling. Easterine Kire uses storytelling to reveal the intrinsic connection between the indigenous Naga people and their environment, depicting nature as living, sacred presence with which humans interact respectfully and reciprocally. Through literature, Kire advocates for a form of ecological guardianship rooted in cultural heritage, engaging readers in a broader dialogue about sustainability, respect for the natural world, and the urgent need to protect these ecosystems and the knowledge they hold. She uses literature to convey deep ecological knowledge, values, and cultural beliefs to readers, fostering a profound awareness of the natural world.

Keywords: ecology, storytelling, advocates, indigenous, sustainability, values.

I. INTRODUCTION

Easterine Kire is a poet and author born in March 1959 to an Angami Naga family in Nagaland, India. She currently lives in northern Norway. Kire's works are deeply rooted in Naga society. Most of her writing was based on her experiences of life. Kire mentions a lot about the Naga spirit world co-existing with the natural world in her book and she believes in this reality. She uses her novel to shed light on the traditional Naga cosmology, which regards nature as a sacred, living and interconnected whole. This indigenous perspective on nature challenges

dominant western notions of environmental exploitation and resonates with contemporary ecological thought particularly within eco-literature and ecofeminism. This study explores the intersection of ecology and literature in Easterine Kire's *When the Rivers Sleeps*, through the characters of Vilie and the significant female characters, while the study focusses on how Kire uses her writing as a tool to promote the present environmental concern.

In a times where environmental degradation has become a crucial global issue, literature has progressively emerged as a platform for promoting ecological awareness. Easterine Kire uses her novel,

When the River Sleeps not only tells a story but serves as an ecological platform grounded in indigenous perspectives highlighting the value of nature to the native's people and their harmonious co-existence. The novel is set in a beautiful landscape of Nagaland, the story follows the protagonist, Vilie as he begins his journey on a quest to catch the heart-stone draws him into the heart of nature and its spiritual powers. Through his journey Kire presents the Naga cultural view of nature as a sacred entity, exploring how this reverence shapes a sustainable approach to environmental stewardship. This paper attempt to bring out how Kire weaves ecological themes into her story, depicting nature as a character and illustrate how indigenous perspective can give a valuable insight into contemporary ecological issues. she presents her concern for the preservation of the ecosystem in a world dominated by the greed of man to extend or mark their territory wherever they step into.

II. INTERSECTIONS OF ECOLOGY AND LITERATURE

Cheryll Glotfelty succinctly defines ecocriticism as the study of the interaction between literature and the physical environment. Another definition by Yamuna Prasad as quoted by Anupama in her journal "Eco-Criticism may be defined as an art of making judgments on ecoliterature or the relationships between environment and literature and ecoliterature is a mirror of the relationships between man and environment (V,2011:2)". Abrams and Harpham, refers ecocriticism to "critical writings which explore the relationship between literature and the biological and physical environment with an acute awareness of the devastation wrought on that environment by human activities" (81). This interdisciplinary field examines the interplay between literature and the environment, soliciting contributions from diverse disciplines to address contemporary environmental issues.

Easterine Kire, once in her conversation with MUSE INDIA, 2015, clearly said that the national media has a tendency to project the Northeast as a region simmering with violence that could erupt at any given moment, and they considered them to write only about the political conflict in the place. But what said was there is much more to the Northeast than just political conflict; there is a whole undiscovered world of ordinary people and they're not so ordinary lives.

We writers from the Northeast are refusing to be defined by the political conflicts that are an unhappy presence in our lands. We are saying there is more: there is great beauty, not just the breathtaking landscapes of mountains and rivers and cloud covered villages but the beauty of the people who live there and the stories they have to share. The spiritual world is a big part of the Naga worldview and it comes naturally to me to write about it.

Kire's *When the River Sleeps* from the ecological perspective, is clearly a study about human relationships with nature. As mentioned above, Kire uses Vilie's journey to highlight the indigenous view on nature as a sacred entity, exploring human and nature relationship and Vilie respectful approach to his environment, where he takes only what he needs and appreciate the nature power. Kire has presented, river, forest, spirits as living characters in the novel, they are not just a mere setting or a landscape, but they actively participate in the Vilie's life and in the other female characters journey.

Vilie, the protagonist of the story of *When the River Sleeps*, relationship with the natural world is vital to the story and give a deep exploration of ecological consciousness through an indigenous perspective. Vilie had spent twenty-five of his forty years in the forest. He had become a forest settler, and he looks after the great mithuns (*bos frontalis*) and the tragopan that liked to nest in Vilie's part of the forest. Vilie had no thought of returning to village as he called the forest as his wife. He had said many times, and he thought that leaving the forest would be like

the same as abandoning his wife, it would be considered as unfaithful spouse. "The forest is my wife, and perhaps this is what marriage is like; with periods when a chasm of loneliness separates the partners leaving each one alone with their own thoughts, groping for answer," (Kire 90). Since the forest is providing all his needs- foods, vegetables, fruits, medicinal herbs for any sickness and shelter, he doesn't need to go home to his village. Vilie is depicted as a lone hunter who live in a forest, so deeply attuned to the rhythm of the natural world. His relationship with nature is deeply spiritual, deeply rooted in the native belief that the natural world is alive with spirits and energy. The heart-stone he was after symbolizes the sacred power of nature and its ability to grant wishes, however, to receive this power, he has to follow the rules of nature and respects its boundaries. Nature blesses with heart-stone to those people who seek the stone with good intentions but people who seek for selfish gain will bring destruction to themselves and to the people. " The wisdom of the stone is more spiritual than physical. It helps us discover the spiritual identity that is within us, so we can use it to combat the dark forces that are always trying to control and suppress us" stone with 238). Vilie was blessed with the heart-stone, and he used the stone for good purpose which reflects Vilie's spiritual and moral responsibility of the natural provision. This perspective reflects the traditional indigenous belief that nature should be preserved and respected.

The forest is depicted as a motherly figure, providing food and shelter for the inhabitants dwelling within her. The people whenever gather herbs and edible food from the forest, they never forget to acknowledge the owner for the provision. Vilie's mother will always say "Terhuomia Peziem" which means thanks be to the spirits. That is the way of thanking the creator deity, Ukepenuopfu for the provision. And Vilie never forget to the nature and the creator deity for giving him food, shelter and protection. His actions and treatment to the nature

shows that harming the environment disrupt not only the ecosystem but also spiritual balance that sustain life. Vilie take only what he required for his survival which demonstrate an ethic of restraint and respect to the nature that gave him shelter. His characters reflect a balance between human needs and preservation and nurturing quality. This sustainable relationship indicates and indigenous worldview that perceive humans as apart of nature. Vilie had never harm the forest, animals, birds neither the spirits living in the forest, this reflects a moral code that aligns with the ecological balance upheld in traditional Naga culture. Kire use Vilie's relationship with the natural world to show the readers as an example for environmental stewardship. For the Naga people mother-earth is a sacred, as the soil give him the food, so he gives it back to him respect and nurture the earth. As mentioned in her book *Walking the Roadless Road* "The Naga believes that the wrongdoing on the part of humans cause infertility in the soil. Man saw himself as a caretaker of the earth, and therefore allowing jhum fields to lie fallow for number of years was faithfully practiced in former times" (Kire 46) .

The female characters like the spirits widow who guard the sleeping river is depicted as a protector and nurtural of our environment. The spirit widow protects the stone from the selfish human who come to crest the stone for their personal benefits. Again, the Zeliang women who strip the fibre from the nettle plant to make into yarn then weave a nettle cloth called bark weaving is a dying art. Harvesting nettle is a difficult task as it stings if your hand if it is not properly covered with a thick cloth. The senior women taught the younger women on the task of harvesting and weaving nettle cloth and that was how Zeliang women kept the art of bark weaving alive and ensuring that cultural practices and values are not lost. Bark weaving is passed down from one generation to another, through the women of the community ensuring that weaving skills and tradition are preserved over time. The art of bark weaving is an

integral part of the Naga culture, symbolizing their relationship with nature and traditional craftsmanship. Through the changing of time and despite the pressure of westernization Zeliang women in particular and Naga women in general strive to traditional craft alive. Through the portrayal of the Zeliang women, Kire highlights the enduring spirit and cultural significance embedded in the women of Nagaland.

The women characters in the novel are portrayed as resilient and strong, capable of withstanding challenges while maintaining their cultural and environmental responsibility. The women not only preserved traditions, but they passed down sustainable practices ensuring that natural resources are used wisely, and that the environment are not depleted.

III.CONCLUSION

So, the novel *When the River Sleeps* reflect a complex ecological ethic rooted in the native Naga culture. Kire presented her protagonist and the female characters' as carrying the principles of sustainability, reverence and harmonious co-existence with the natural world. Especially Vilie through his journey in the forest, nature- the forest, river, animals, spirits he encounters had been an active guide and wisdom to him. It acts as an agency, leading to his path and giving him a lesson of resilience and humility. She presents the readers through her storytelling that nature is a companion, guide, and sacred entity to the human. Through her writing, Kire celebrates nature and advocate for protection, making her voice in contemporary ecological literature.

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