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The Journey Towards Nature: Re-interpreting Selected Writings of Easterine Kire Through the Lens of Ecocriticism

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Abstract

Eco-critical study investigates the relationship between culture and nature. Cheryll Glotfelty defines it as the relationship between culture and nature and “interrelationships”, especially the arts and culture of language and literature. The selected writings of Easterine Kire will examine how these writings provide a bridge between the people and the physical environment of Nagaland. The novels deal with Naga roots and narrate the story of hills, rocks, rivers, trees, and other elements of nature along with the socio-cultural life of Naga people. Glotfelty argues as “Ecocritics encourage others to think seriously about the relationship of humans to nature, about the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis, and about how language and literature transmit values with profound environmental implications”. This paper is an attempt of re-interpreting Kire’s eco-critical concern of North-Eastern India, especially Nagaland. How Kire has portrayed the problem of environmental crisis in the relationship with literature and nature, is the prime motif of the present paper. The present paper will explore the writings of Easterine Kire named *Sky is my Father: A Naga Village Remembered, When the River Sleeps* as an eco-critical text.

Keywords: Eco-Criticism, Nature, Culture, Environment, Nagaland.

Introduction:

Easterine Kire, a writer from north-east India, embellishes her writings with the socio-cultural crisis of Naga people. Kire has represented Nagaland through her writing where she immensely responds to the ecological crisis and sheds light on the indigenous practices, traditions, rituals, and belief system that adds the value of eco-sensible livelihood of Naga people. Her writings captured the aspects of eco-consciousness in the forms of Naga’s beliefs, cultures, and their relation with nature which is displaying the vitality and vibrancy of their cultural system. The present paper will explore the writings of Easterine Kire named *Sky is my Father: A Naga Village Remembered, When the River Sleeps* as an eco-critical text.

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and nature. William Rueckert in his writing *Literature and ecology: an experiment in ecocriticism* (1978) first coined the term ‘eco-criticism’. Cheryll Glotfelty has given the definition of eco-criticism in *The Ecocriticism Reader* as “ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” (Glotfelty 1996 xix) So, eco-criticism is a literary genre that

The Journey Towards Nature: Re-interpreting Selected Writings of Easterine Kire Through the... Pritam Ghosh combines the tangible connection between literature and nature. The principal aim of eco-criticism is inclined towards the justice of the physical environment. The human beings who are living in vicinity with nature have their own myths, rituals, and belief systems about mother nature.

Glotfelty argues as "Ecocritics encourage others to think seriously about the relationship of humans to nature, about the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis, and about how language and literature transmit values with profound environmental implications". In her writing *When the River Sleeps*, Kire unfolds the journey of a solitary hunter who undergoes an adventurous journey to find a sleeping river. Vilie, the protagonist of the story whose aim is to discover the 'mysterious river' and "catch it when it went to sleep" (Kire, 12). The story begins with a 'waking dream' where Vilie touches the river and feels the water of the mysterious river- "Vilie plunged his hand into the river. It was cold-close to freezing -and perfectly still" (Kire, 11).

The narration delves into a close connection between Vilie and the natural world as the narrator states "The forest was home to vilie". Being enchanted with the elixir of deep dense forest, Vilie had spent twenty-five of his forty-eight years in the forest. He had relished the pleasure of life in the greenery of the nature. This is the predominant reason behind his unmarried life. He never preferred human companion; nature with its outstretched beauty charmed Vilie for ever -as the narration unveils several times forest is the wife of Vilie- "Forest is my wife". And Vilie occasionally thought "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 answers".

He could not think about leaving the forest. He had always the sensation that the separation between him and the forest would prove him as a betrayer in their relationship. This notion justifies the main concern of the eco-criticism. As eco-criticism prevails the crucial matter of the relationship between culture and nature. According to Peter Berry, 'nature really exists, out there beyond ourselves'. This concern is clearly manifested in the undercurrent of Vilie's thought. Being departed from the forest seems to Vilie an act of unfaithfulness, as Vilie always ponders with the words "...leaving the forest would be the same as abandoning his wife" (Kire,19). This concern imparts an intimate and passionate relationship between Vilie and the world of forest.

Eco-criticism bears the purpose of naturalising the 'social inequality'- *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* exhibits this objective of eco-criticism where inequalities and injustices are portrayed with the presentation of the resistance of the people in the Angami region of Nagaland. This region is predominantly the dwelling place of the Semos, Thevo, and Mehru clans. The story narrates their fight against the British soldiers.

Being devoured by the Christianity, the inhabitants of the Angami region come near to bid their indigenous rituals and customs. Where Karl Marx in his Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right exposes that "religion is the opium of the people". Kire's writings knot history and fiction to portray the connection of nature with the simple life of khonoma. She delves deep into this connection.

The traditional practices and rituals with the land illuminate the importance of a symbiotic relationship with the natural world. Safeguarding these indigenous cultures and practices are representative of the striving of the Naga people to maintain the equilibrium

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between the environment and human race. The presentation of the rituals and beliefs helps the readers to comprehend the fostering essence of mother nature. For instance, the tiger-hunting ceremony performed by a young Naga warrior can be mentioned in this aspect. The elder members of their clan give him the command of performing this ritual after his killing a tiger for the first time in his life. It is explored through the examples of such rituals that indigenous knowledge is important in connection with the preservation of the natural world. This indigenous knowledge makes the indigenous people aware of their natural resources and the way to preserve them. Through these prevailing rituals, the native people get to know their roots also. This can be described as a journey to rediscover the wisdom of their ancestors as well as their roots. This journey explores the peaceful coexistence between humans and the environment.

Predominantly, the focus has been laid by Easterine Kire in her novel-*Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* on this peaceful coexistence through these customs and practices. Besides, how the external forces violate this peaceful coexistence is also another motif of this writing. The story of this novel portrays a deep concern for the suffering of both the native people and the mother nature due to colonial expansion. The colonial impact shatters the physical and spiritual charm of their coexistence. In this respect Gifford's quotation from Liu can be referred "nature is the name under which we use the non-human to validate the human, to interpose a mediation able to make humanity easier with itself." The beauty of the lives of the Naga people is deeply inclined with the natural world where the demon of the colonial expansion tried to disrupt this situation. Levi, a tribal warrior in the Angami region devotes his life to evacuate the British impact from their ancestral land. According to the Naga people, their abode is in the lap of nature. Their struggle is for protecting their home which implies the protection of mother nature. The spirit of the Khonoma warriors is similar to the protector of mother nature. As Kire points out "Her warriors were muscular and wiry a stock of men for whom an agility of mind was an important as an agile body. " (Kire, 2)

In this novel, Easterin Kire urges to save the lap of nature. This aspect promotes the ecological concern in this anthropocentric modern society. Deep ecological perspective is pervaded by Kire throughout the narrative where a genuine awareness of environmental issues is expressed with the urge of avoiding some actions that can harm the environment. Afterall, it encompasses the cultural, societal and religious aspects of the Naga people. The writer has focused on the personification of the power of mother nature.

The inhabitants of the Angami region are profoundly concerned about the security and safety of their land. There is a reference to Pelhu village whose community always firmly takes steps against people trying to assault their land. One incident has been described where the inhabitants of Pelhu village have collaborated with the Khonoma community and planned for an expedition against Garipheju village. The motto of their expedition was to ensure the protection of their land. They have the intense belief that external influences weaken mother nature. They always keep their faith in nature as the ultimate savior of humans.

In eco-criticism, the idea of 'place' bears a great significance which includes a significant emotional attachment of the native people with a particular place. This emotional connection is portrayed minutely through the texts of Easterine Kire. The native people of the land worship their village as an ideal place for the abundance and richness of natural resources. The Khonoma warriors in *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*, proved their deep

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attachment with their native place, but comparatively the younger generation feel the lack of affection for their village as well as the natural environment. The Khonoma warriors sacrificed their lives for these elevated feelings towards their ideal place. On the contrary, in *When the River Sleeps*, the common inhabitants of the locality receive only the essence of nature. They have the lack of affection which Vilie shares. During his journey, Vilie makes other people aware of the elixir of the environment.

Different cultural festivals as well as rituals indicate the ecological identities along with a deep comprehension of the environment by the natives. This concept is manifested in both the selected novels. Some of these practices help to build a sense of responsibility among the younger regeneration. Besides, some rituals show the practical skills they need to sustain their lives amidst the forest. They have fostering nature of togetherness within themselves and this kind of rituals help them to retain such togetherness. Kire narrates the relevance of festivals, feasts, rituals, and beliefs. In her writings, Kire mentions the dormitories and thehou, a common place where the younger ones learn the importance of abiding their rituals- "If you break the taboos, you break yourself." (Kire, 31)

Kire has chosen the village Khonoma as the background of the novel and she has given vivid description of the animal world which awakens nature, "In the early evening, they came to the Themhru river just as the sun was setting behind them, and birds were making their roosting sounds..." (Kire, 4). So, it is very clear that the life of the Naga people is closely associated and attached with nature. This feeling is transparent in the character of Vilie who repeatedly exclaims forest as his wife. In *When the River Sleeps*, through the character of Vilie, it is presented that nature is not the other for Nagas, nature is an inseparable self for themselves.

Forest songs are representative of their inner connection with nature which are frequently used by Kire-"Sky is my father, earth is my mother." (Kire, 71). They are intimately connected with nature in such a manner that they connect themselves profoundly with the environment. How much a person can be dependent on nature that they call the sky as their father and earth as their mother. They feel the attachment with natural elements from the core of their heart.

In *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*, the narrative of Levi, a warrior against the British Government makes the readers aware of the importance of their birthplace. Levi was imprisoned for six years and after being freed from imprisonment he expresses his keen interest to the changeable mentality of the natives as well as the developing condition of nature. He finds out nature as part of his existence and spreads out the concept that the well-being of the villagers lies in the wellbeing of nature. "Where he had been taken, the villages were much larger. At the same time, he felt a deep bond with his ancestral village, and he thought he would cry." (Kire, 47) Here, Levi is the representative of that indigenous group who sacrificed their lives to protect the otherness they celebrate every day. The touch of modernity which initiates the annihilation of natural resources cannot grab their mentality. They stand still in their place as the savior of their mother nature. They rejected the tumultuous process of making a better world through uprooting the equilibrium of nature which was pervaded by the colonial masters.

Conclusion:

Cheryll Glotfelty in the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* describes eco-criticism as "... the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment... eco-criticism Volume-XIV, Issue-III, April 2026

The Journey Towards Nature: Re-interpreting Selected Writings of Easterine Kire Through the... Pritam Ghosh takes an earth centred approach to literary studies. " The reference of this earth centred rituals and practices form an integral part of the literature of Nagaland. Kire fulfills this notion with her writing purely based on the environment of Nagaland. The reciprocal bond with nature is beautifully formed by the character Vilie in the novel *When the River Sleeps*. Even the officials of the forest department grant Vilie as protector of nature and allow him to spend a solitary life amidst the dense forest. He has surpassed the fear and gained the courage to enter into the heart of the forest. It is nature who helped him to conquer fear and enjoy the proximity of nature. This courage persuades him to make a cordial relationship with mother nature. Vilie's sacrifice to protect the heart stone of the river proves the depth of this reciprocal relationship.

Throughout the selected novels Kire expresses the notion of eco-consciousness and the lifestyle of Nagas with all living and non-living organisms where the Nagas consider "The sun and rain are the creator's blessings." (Kire, 13).

People usually do work or perform activities for the well-being of human beings. But we should think for every living as well as non-living objects of our eco-system. Anthropocentric consideration or conception should be left out not only for the good and healthy existence of the other elements of eco-system but it will effuse a sound co-existence of human beings also. During the age of eco crisis, Kire's Naga literature attempts to find the ways of sustainable development where the rites-rituals, beliefs, and stories of Nagas serve as 'ecoconscious selves'.

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