

**Hidden Loveliness of Naga Woods:
An Eco-perspective Reading of Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps*.**

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ABSTRACT

*Culture of Nagaland is centered on nature, myths and religious beliefs. Easterine Kire acts as a poignant literary voice of Nagaland. Her writings open up the unique Indigenous tradition and culture of the Nagaland to the entire world. She has been awarded Governor's Medal of excellence in Naga literature in the year 2011. This paper titled "Hidden Loveliness of Naga Woods: An Eco-perspective Reading of Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps*" attempts a nature walk-through to understand the lifestyle of the Naga people. The aim of this paper is to conduct an eco-perspective reading of Kire's novel *When the River Sleeps* to understand the lifestyle and deep bond between the Naga people and nature. It sheds light to the unique relationship between the nature and the Naga people. Nature is an indispensable component in the life of every human being. When nature is given its own importance and protected by the human beings, it showers prosperity on human beings. The importance of growing trees and conserving nature must be explained to the younger generation. Kire explains the deep bond nature has with the human beings. The culture bound people consider nature as a sibling. They have a large number of clans and they live a life without any stress or tension of the corporate world. They have their own myths and dreams and they go behind their dreams to succeed in their life.*

Keywords: Native people, culture, nature, dreams, modernity.

Introduction

Nature is one among the greatest blessings showered upon earth by God. When there is a coherent relationship between the nature and human beings, which would lead to the physical and mental affluence of the human beings. The objective of this paper is to analyse the profound relationship between the Naga people and nature and to create awareness regarding the importance of nature in the hearts of every human being. Reviewers have reviewed the writing of Kire as a delight. And her novel *When the River Sleeps* has been reviewed as the book which takes the readers deep into the woods of the Nagaland. It also focuses on the myths and legends of the state which has been deeply related to the nature. The relationship between the human beings and nature has been discussed by the eco critics and the theory eco criticism has been developed.

Eco criticism

Eco criticism is an interdisciplinary field connecting writers, historians, natural scientists,

anthropologists, literary critics etc. It acts as a medium to connect the human beings with the world around them. Greg Garrard defined Eco criticism as “the study of the relationship between human and the non- human, throughout the human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself” (Magade 113).

The term Eco criticism has been coined by William Reuckert in his article titled *Literature and Ecology* in the year 1978. Cheryll Glotfelty, father of Eco criticism, in his work *The Eco criticism Reader* states that “Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, environmental critics explore how much nature and natural world are imagined through literary texts” (qtd in Roy, 14). In short it can be stated that, Eco criticism is a relationship between nature and literature or the relationship between literature and physical environment.

Easterine Kire

Easterine Kire who has written novels, volumes of poetry and short stories, is one of the greatest literary voices of her region. She opens up her Naga tradition and culture throughout the world using her literary works as a tool. She has woven the plot of the novel miraculously that it takes the reader to the situation where the relationship of nature with the human beings and the prominence of conserving nature have been clearly explored.

Through *When the River Sleeps*, Kire takes her readers to remote mountains of Nagaland in the north eastern part of India. There are a number of natural and supernatural wonders which amuses the readers as well as explains the importance of the nature in human life. She invites the readers to know the lives and the minds of the people of Nagaland especially the rituals, traditions, culture, beliefs, life style etc. This novel is jam-packed with supernatural elements such as spirits, sleeping river, dirty forest, stone with powers etc. In addition to it, she unveils the beauty of the woods of Nagaland. The heart of the human beings has been suppressed by various tensions, stress either from their work space or from their loved ones. There is no treatment for the wounded hearts. But Nature’s beauty is the virtuous beauty that soothes the mind of such human beings. Kire portrays this beauty of nature in her novels.

Plot of the novel

Vilie, who is the protagonist of the novel, takes a journey to make his dream come true. He has already heard the story of the sleeping river and the stones with power in it. That was the dream that disturbs Vilie often. According to him, the forest is his wife. “THE FOREST IS MY WIFE” (Kire 7). He lives in the forest lonely with trees and animals as his companions. He is also accompanied by some Nepali families as his neighbours who live in some distance

to Vilie. Many men from various tribes come to Vilie just to hear from him. He has a dream in which he takes the heart stone from the sleeping river. He travels to make his dream true. On his way, he faces a lot of obstruction. But his positivity, oneness with nature and the help from some people helped him to get the stone from the sleeping river. Through his journey Vilie takes every reader to the Naga woods and the hidden beauty of the Naga woods have been revealed.

Medicine and seers

The ancient human beings lived one with nature. They know every movement of nature including the change in monsoons and climates. Similarly, the people of Nagaland still live one with nature and they understand the importance of nature as well as every movement of it. Mother Nature is filled with answers for every question within her. She carries medicine for every disease just to save living organisms. Kire cleverly brings out certain medicinal herbs which the tribes of Nagaland use and which is available for plenty in the woods of the Nagaland. Vilie on his way to the sleeping river meets an old man who explains him about the importance of two herbs named Ciena or Bitter wormwood, ginseng, vilhuunha, senyiega, tsomhou and Tierhutiefu which are considered to be the best remedy for many ailments. “He recalled the names of the herbs that he should not be without, Ciena or bitter wormwood and Tierhutiefu, a soft leafed plant with a rather unpleasant smell” (Kire 32). Similarly, Kire brings out how the seers cure viral fever using herbs “He thought of the people from his village who used to fall sick when they wandered into the Rarhuria while out hunting or cutting wood. To cure them the seer would give them a drink made of ginseng and tsomhou, the wild sour seeds that grew on trees” (Kire 54). These incidents prove how nature becomes the best healer. In another incident, Vilie used the herb named ginseng to smear its paste and drink the juice of its root to protect him from the insects and the climatic condition of the forest in which he stays for that night. The leaves of the nettle plants are also used as medicine. Nature acts as a best healer for most of the diseases of the human beings.

Trees

Jesus uses Fig tree in his parables to teach human beings about life. Similarly, Kire used fig tree to explain the relationship of Nagas with nature. The Angami tribes consider the fig trees as their brothers. “Along the way, he saw many fig trees. The Zeliangs did not like to cut down the fig tree. They called it their brother - tree” (Kire 116). Considering the trees as one’s sibling prevents him/her from cutting down the trees. When nature is considered as Mother Nature, the trees, plants, birds and animals which she bore must be considered as her children. There is a deep relationship between the human beings and nature due to which

without nature, human beings cannot survive. But Nature is immortal. So, even without human beings, nature can survive. Nagas depends entirely on Nature. They build their houses using the bamboos and other logs taken only from the thickly dense forest. This in turn never affects the Ecosystem. Children are sent to the forests to collect herbs. This practice helps the children to get connected with the nature. Their festivals and feasts are also connected with the Nature. So, these people lead a happy life without worrying about anything. The woods of Nagaland are filled with resources. It feeds everyone who approaches it. No one is left in hunger. Vilie carries food only for few days of his travel. And for the remaining days, it is the forest which provides food and shelter for him.

Man's psychological dependence on nature

Nature is the best healer in every situation of human life. The interdependency is evident as "No human beings can claim to survive without getting influenced by some sort of external environment" (Myles 2). In certain situation, nature also becomes the subaltern because, it is voiceless and it has to face the oppressions by human beings. But when nature comes out of its oppressions and reacts against the oppressors, human beings suffer as they can't face the anger of nature. It is the work by the eco-friendly writers that gives voice for the nature. John Charles Ryan (2018) in his article "The year's work in Critical and Cultural Theory" focuses on the Climatic change which is the major problem the world is facing today. According to him, the publications on Eco criticism mainly focus on the ways to create awareness among the people. When the advantage of the lovely woods of the Nagaland has been preached through the writings of the Indigenous writer, the readers would be tempted to conserve the woods and to plant more trees. This might prevent deforestation and might pave way for afforestation.

River

River must be given much importance as; water is the major source of life. Kire through her writing brings out that the heart stone in the sleeping river acts as a boon that gives whatever one asks for. Through the heart stone of the river, she explains river as a source of fertility, life and happiness. Where there is river, there is fertility and life. The river also acts a source of income to the people around the river. The people, who belong to the village of weavers, collect fishes and frogs from the river. No one returns empty handed from the river. The mothers collect frogs from the river and dry them and save t for later because, frog is considered as the best medicine for many diseases. These days many rivers have disappeared due to the climatic changes, rise in temperature and aggression of river by human beings. This may lead to the drought in the future generation.

Nettle plants

The life of Nagas is totally dependent on nature. The nettle plants, that grows at the heart of the forest acts as the major source of income for the Angami tribes. This plant has been transformed into various forms by the people and sold. Even the protagonist Vilie once tried to knit using the nettle fibers. Woods of Nagaland plays a major role in the life of the people in Nagaland. It is the journey of Vilie into the woods lights up the truth that, nature acts as the life source of the human beings. Kire acts as the first woman writer from Nagaland to bring out such information which clearly portrays the relationship between the human beings and nature.

Conclusion

There must be awareness among the people regarding the importance of nature. This awareness never occurs without stimulations. Kire through the heart stone stimulates the heart of every human being regarding the importance of nature and the relationship nature has with human beings. It is well known that, when one hand is put in the effort to create a new environment, the gain would be less. But with the initiative of the single hand, when other hands come together, then the result would be great. With the narration of the Kire, one can have a clear picture of the beauty and fertility of the woods in the Nagaland and the oneness of nature by the people on Nagaland. The damages created by the human beings to the nature can be rectified by the preventive measures such as afforestation, not using the agricultural lands for other purposes such as building houses or other buildings, maintaining the rivers and ponds by cleaning it regularly and taking care of the plants, trees and animals around us. To conclude, it can be stated that, the woods mentioned in the novel can be considered as a mere example for understanding the importance of nature. So, with the deep understanding, let's be happy by living in communion with nature.

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