

Representation of Nature in Easterine Kire's Select Fictional Works: An Analysis

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Abstract:

The depiction of nature in works of fiction serves as more than just a backdrop for human action; it is an essential element in the formation of narratives, the improvement of thematic depth, and the reflection of values in society and environmental concerns. The way in which nature is portrayed in works of fiction such as literature, film, and other kinds of fiction can have an effect on how readers and viewers perceive the natural world, which can lead to more in-depth contemplations on the relationship that humans have with the environment.

Easterine Kire's works of fiction have fascinated readers with their vibrant and poetic depictions of nature. Her stories frequently incorporate elements from the diverse cultural traditions and natural surroundings of Nagaland, resulting in a unique blend of mythology, folktales, and present-day concerns. Kire's portrayal of nature is not only a background for her stories, but rather a vibrant and essential force that significantly influences the lives and fates of her characters. Kire's writings shed light on the close relationship between humans and the natural world, exploring topics such as spirituality, cultural identity, and environmental preservation.

This research paper attempts to analyse the representation of nature in Easterine Kire's fictional works, *When the River Sleeps* and *Son of the Thundercloud*.

Keywords: Ecology, Fiction, Nagaland, Nature

Introduction:

Easterine Kire, a notable figure in modern Naga literature, skillfully integrates the natural world into her works, demonstrating the strong bond between the indigenous Naga community and the natural world. Kire has beautifully portrayed the Naga people's belief in the peaceful coexistence of the natural world, the supernatural, and humans and nonhumans. Her works provide an in-depth exploration of the natural world, not just as a context but as an essential component of the narrative, reflecting cultural identity, spiritual values, and ecological awareness. The natural setting in many of her fictional works functions as a reservoir of shared memory and cultural wisdom. The natural world serves as a dynamic repository that preserves the narratives, customs, and chronicles of the Naga community.

Easterine Kire's fictional writings depict nature as a living entity, fostering a harmonious relationship between the Naga people and the natural world. This is apparent in the novel *When the River Sleeps*, where the protagonist, Vilie, sets out on a mission to locate a mystical stone that is speculated to be hidden in the bottom of a river called 'the sleeping river' amidst the forest. In this narrative, the forest and the river are depicted as more than just physical entities; they are portrayed as spiritual entities infused with magical abilities and the presence of ancestral spirits. Kire's writing frequently represents the spiritual beliefs of the Naga community, wherein each aspect of the natural world, ranging from rivers to trees, possesses profound sacred significance.

On the other hand, *Son of the Thundercloud* looks into the transformative power of nature by following the expedition of Pele, an individual who comes across a mystical child born from a cloud. The novel is filled with vivid representations of the natural world and incorporates mythological themes, presenting nature as a reservoir of age-old wisdom and potent transformational abilities. The narrative implies that by reestablishing a connection with nature and gaining insight into its enigmas, individuals and communities can experience healing on both personal and community levels.

Background of the Study:

Easterine Kire's novels, particularly *When the River Sleeps* and *Son of the Thundercloud*, have been the subject of extensive research. Kire's work, *When the River Sleeps*, has received significant acclaim from critics due to its subtle and sophisticated portrayal of the natural world. The narrative takes place in the picturesque and mysterious landscapes of Nagaland and depicts the voyage of Vilie, a solitary hunter in pursuit of a mythical river called 'the sleeping river'. Researchers have emphasised the way in which Kire's depiction of nature in this novel goes beyond being just a supporting element, instead becoming an important character that shapes the storyline and underlying themes.

On the other hand, Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud* has also garnered praise from critics for its captivating depiction of the natural world and skillfully interweaving elements of mythology, spirituality, and environmental concerns. Numerous scholars have endeavored to explore various facets of the novel, situated in the breathtaking landscapes of Nagaland. The story skillfully blends myth and reality to provide insight into the profound interconnections between mankind and the natural world. Critics have praised Kire's portrayal of nature for its subtle and detailed representation, emphasising its importance in the story, its cultural and spiritual meaning, and its exploration of current environmental concerns.

This particular research is so significant that it will be helpful to uncover so many aspects of the representation of nature in both the novels of Easterine Kire.

Objective:

The sole objective of this study is to analyse the representation of nature in Kire's select fictional works, *When the River Sleeps* and *Son of the Thundercloud*.

Methodology:

This research paper is going to be interpretative in nature. *When the River Sleeps* and *Son of the Thundercloud* are the two fictional texts that serve as the sole foundation for the critical examination. Easterine Kire is the author of both texts, which are novels. An analysis of the aforementioned novels by Easterine Kire serves as the research approach. The research article is written following the MLA 9th edition.

Results and Discussion:

When the River Sleeps by Kire is set in the heart of Nagaland's deep forest. The protagonist, Vilie, lives by himself in the forest. For the past two years, the same kind of dream has often interrupted him. Vilie dreams of visiting the sleeping river in his dream and attempting to get the "heart stone" from its bottom. A "heart stone" is a type of precious stone that has supernatural abilities that allow it to be used for anything.

After pondering for many days, Vilie finally embarks on his mission to find the heart stone at the bottom of the sleeping river. He has encountered a great deal of experience along the way. Through Vilie's journey, Kire specifically depicts the spiritual world of the Nagas, given the many different supernatural beings he encounters along the way. Several customs, rituals, and traditional beliefs that are parts of Nagaland's folklore are also disclosed through Vilie's experience and understanding. Thus, it can be concluded that Kire's story is replete with folkloric aspects that clearly characterise the social and cultural heritage of the Naga people.

In the region, Vilie is honoured as the protector of the forest. He takes care of the forest and the wildlife that inhabits it in order to prevent the needless killing of wild animals. When his aunts push him into getting married, he declares the forest to be his wife because he loves it so much. Of his forty-eight years of life, Vilie has spent twenty-five of them in the wilderness. He is the official defender of the endangered tragopans, which roam inside the designated region of the forest, and he also serves as the caretaker of the giant mithun, or *Bos frontalis*, known as the gwi.

Kire portrays numerous extraordinary and mysterious ecological elements that are integral parts of Naga folklore. For instance, the existence of tiger spirits strongly implies the enduring connection between humans and animals. Currently, it is believed that there are still individuals who possess diverse animal spirits. On a night at a Zeliang man's field, he encounters a weretiger. The tiger is forced to retreat into the darkness due to a gunshot from his gun. However, the tiger appears again, leading Vilie to boldly state that this specific tiger is not of the ordinary type.

Vilie meets the barkweavers as they venture into the nettle forest. Barkweaving is a traditional Naga weaving technique that uses yarn made from nettle plant fibres that have been taken out. Another important ecological component of the novel's story is the inclusion of the Naga herbal culture. Kire displays a wide variety of native plants used for mending injuries, curing ailments, and warding off evil spirits.

The locals refer to the rainforest as "Rarhuria," or unclean forest. Neither the local hunters nor the residents venture there. Still, Vilie believes that the unclean forest is a place of refuge and puts his trust in it. Certainly, he considers the forest his wife. In his worst moments, the forest provides him with food and shelter. Also, the forest shields him from the evil that exists in human hearts. Kire claims that Vilie feels a strong emotional connection to the forest. The only reason he is not lynched is because he is the forest's defender, which is home to threatened species of birds and animals. As a result, it is clear that the forest serves him justice, emphasising the idea that protecting the environment eventually benefits humans.

As Vilie walks towards the river, the landscape and vegetation undergo a gradual transformation. The ferns display vibrant green expansion. He perceives the auditory sound of water cascading over rocks in the distance. Upon arriving at the river he had always desired, he realises that the river is, in fact, a spiritual entity. Vilie dives into the swiftly moving water at the opportune moment to retrieve the heart stone from the bottom of it. The river exerts significant force to submerge him and nearly suffocate him. Vilie's courage and ethical uprightness make him a charming representation of the "greater spirit" that encompasses both the sky and earth spirits. Thus, as a result of his moral excellence and deep respect for the environment, he

possesses the ability to obtain the desired heart stone. Consequently, it can be inferred that people who value and protect the essence of nature have been granted protection.

Kire's narrative effectively depicts the interconnectedness of humans, nonhumans, the physical environment, and the spiritual world, prompting a thorough ecocritical analysis. In this story, nature has the utmost position in the power hierarchy. Nature is depicted as possessing an underlying force and being impervious to subjugation. The natural world possesses the capacity to provide benefits and fulfil desires. The river referenced in the title of the novel serves as an excellent example. Nature possesses absolute sovereignty, but mankind depends on nature to obtain blessings.

Nature can be seen as a generous guardian that is comparable to God in the novel. It provides ample provisions of food, shelter, and other necessary facilities to everyone who desires them. Despite the diverse threats posed by nature, including wild animals, Vilie has made the deliberate decision to reside in the forest for the past twenty five years. Despite the arguments with his relatives, he remains resolute in his decision not to return to his home in the village. Furthermore, a Nepali couple also opts to establish their residence within the forest. Opting to reside in the magnificent surroundings of nature, they never feel the desire to go elsewhere.

Kire highlights the healing powers of nature in this novel. Nature provides a cure and solution for various ailments, and people rely largely on it for treating diverse conditions. After Vilie gets stung by nettle plants, Idele looks for an antidote by exploring her surroundings. The woman extracts leaves from a small, bitter wormwood tree and crushes them into a smooth paste by hand. Vilie continues to apply the paste to his skin, which seems to relieve the stinging sensation. In addition, she furnishes him with rock bee honey, affirming its efficacy as a treatment. Besides, Vilie produces "pastes of ciená" to treat open wounds. Although it is suitable for minor injuries, he prefers to use powerful Japan nha and rock bee honey for larger wounds. Within the village, people afflicted with a fever would receive a remedy from the seer that included ginseng and tsohhou, which are native wild sour seeds that grow on trees.

Nature, instead of simply being a background element, plays a significant and active role in the narrative, almost like a character. Vilie's fear has been eradicated by the power of nature.

After observing a murder in an area where he takes shelter at night, his immediate reaction is to quickly escape. He seeks refuge to ensure his own safety, not realising that he may be held responsible for the murder, as all three individuals present, including the murderer, are siblings. He finds refuge in the forest to avoid the pursuing men. However, his thoughts become distinct and cohesive in nature. The tranquil surroundings of nature enhance his cognitive clarity and empower him to make a wise decision, specifically to make his way to his ancestral village in pursuit of justice. Through the power of nature, he is able to conquer not just the fear of humans, but also the fear that is spiritual.

When it comes to *Son of the Thundercloud*, a famine is mentioned, which has been continuing for centuries. Physically, the famine refers to the complete devastation of nature, resulting in the loss of a significant section of the population. This could be caused by mankind's apathy for the environment and their actions that harm it. On the other hand, it is reasonable to interpret the famine allegorically as a scarcity of wisdom and spiritual knowledge among the people, rather than a physical famine. The occurrence of the storytellers being killed by the dark ones serves as compelling evidence, as it has effectively halted the transmission of wisdom from one generation to the next.

A significant character of the novel, Mesanuo, whose name refers to "the pure one," is an embodiment of the purity of nature. She is a representation of mother earth, which needs water, or rain, to be impregnated with greenery again. Similar to this, in the narrative, Mesanuo becomes impregnated with a single drop of rain and gives birth to Rhalietuo, who later kills the tiger in order to get revenge for killing his father and brothers.

The work has references to Wilderness. The author vividly portrays the picturesque charm of Pelevotso's village prior to the famine, which ultimately disrupts the tranquility of the natural surroundings.

“...Below the hills, there were many forests where the young men learned to hunt, and two small rivers where they fished and bathed.” (Kire 12)

Once again, when the son of the thundercloud is born, Kire eloquently depicts the resplendence of nature following its rejuvenation.

“Eventually dawn came flooding the valley with golden light. Pele went out of the house to look at the new phantom trees. But they were real. Young saplings that were not newly planted but had sprouted up overnight. There was no other way to describe it. They were healthy and straight and tall. Their roots were already travelling into the earth, sucking up moisture and securing a place where they had sprung up. That was not all. He walked around the village and saw that rocks and stones were standing in places where there had been none before.” (Kire 40)

Following the birth of the son of the thundercloud, the people are astonished to witness the wilderness that surrounds them. The headman questions Mesanuo about the dramatic changes driven by his curiosity.

“Just one question before I go. Where have those trees and rocks come from?” (Kire 46)

Subsequently, Mesanuo responds to his inquiry:

“It’s called birthing, headman. The earth has birthed trees, rocks, stones, and grain, just as a mother births her offspring. The trees and rocks are the sons of the earth. Take care of them and they will take care of you and your children.” (Kire 46)

Thus, based on the aforementioned quotations from Kire's novel *Son of the Thundercloud*, it can be concluded that the author makes many references to 'wilderness'. The formerly absent wilderness has now gained significance among people. Its rapid arrival brings both delight and wealth after generations have hoped for it.

According to Achingliu Kamei, the river in *Son of the Thundercloud* symbolises prosperity, although it can also be treacherous. Similarly, prosperity may be treacherous when it becomes uncontrollable due to excessive growth. Kire establishes a connection between the concept of prosperity and the river, emphasising the significance of showing reverence towards both of these influential entities. The dual nature of a river, serving as both a source of benefit and danger, is evident in *Son of the Thundercloud*.

The river flowing through the Village of Weavers is depicted as a symbol of prosperity. The people refer to it as 'our mother' because it is their vital source of life. While the river is

often seen as the village's lifeline, it can also be unpredictable and dangerous, occasionally becoming uncontrollable for humans.

Kamei further says that the Nagas harbour both fear and respect for the natural environment. The people's survival in an agrarian society relies upon the success of their harvest. They perform as a community. They reap the earth's boundaries using efficient and cost-effective methods.

Kire's works offer an intriguing observation, portraying nature as the savior. Nature offers a wide range of solutions for various ailments and accidents. Observing the indigenous people's profound understanding of traditional medicinal practices, depending entirely on natural herbs, is fascinating. They rely almost exclusively on nature for all types of healthcare problems.

Above all, it can be said that the narrative of *Son of the Thundercloud* portrays nature as a provider. Kire symbolically connects the human mother with the mother earth, as both possess the ability to conceive and reproduce. However, it is disheartening because both are disregarded by patriarchal and capitalist societies, each in their own way.

Conclusion:

Easterine Kire's fictional works provide a comprehensive and insightful portrayal of nature, emphasising its cultural, spiritual, and ecological importance. Kire's compelling narratives depict nature as a vibrant and dynamic entity that both influences and is influenced by the lives of the Naga community. Kire's works highlight the deeply connected relationship between humans and the natural world, focusing on concepts of healing, wisdom, and ecological awareness. Through integrating aspects of nature into her narratives, Kire not only enhances her storytelling but also promotes a more thoughtful and balanced connection with the environment. The ecocritical study makes it possible to fully understand and appreciate the profound and subtle way Kire depicts nature and its ongoing relevance to present-day ecological and cultural concerns.

Overall, it can be said that the depiction of natural settings in works of fiction is exceptionally important for plenty of reasons. As a result, thematic depth and symbolism are enhanced, environmental issues are reflected and critiqued, public attitudes and values are shaped, and emotional and psychological connections are fostered. In light of the tremendous environmental challenges that the world is currently facing, the role that fiction plays in depicting nature is becoming even more important. Fiction has the power to motivate individuals and cultures to protect and cherish the environment by providing them with a deeper understanding and appreciation of the natural world. This can be achieved through the combination of captivating storytelling and vivid imagery.

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