



# Resistance and Revival: Representation of Women and Nature in Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud*

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## Abstract

*This paper investigates the relationships between women and nature in Easterine Kire's work Son of the Thundercloud, focusing on the bond between the women characters and nature. Easterine Kire's work Son of the Thundercloud (2015) provides rich narratives that reflect the female characters, such as Kethonuo, Siedze, Mesanuo and Vinuo, in connection with the spiritual journey of the protagonist, Pelevotso. Her novels are not meant to be read as historical works; rather, they bring out the strong character of the protagonist and the representation of the female characters by breaking the patriarchal and spiritual constraints. This work, Son of the Thundercloud, talks of protagonist Pele's journey, where he met female characters like Kethonuo and Siedze, a supernatural, unreal sister, and Mesanuo. Pele travelled from his place due to famine. Though it continued as a personal journey, he faced many characters from whom he got support from the villagers.*

**Keywords:** nagaland, ecocriticism, northeast india, self-identity, customs, female characters, environment

## Introduction

Easterine Kire, a prominent author, was born in March 1959 in Kohima, Nagaland, and she is the founding member of Barkweaver Publications in Northeast India. She intricately weaves philosophies such as hope and acceptance of life, and most of her works reflect the lives of people of Nagaland. In her novels, the survival and growth of the protagonists and other characters allow us to visualise cultural occurrences and historical events, which bring us vivid experiences in a picturesque way. Throughout

this work, Kire brings out the elements like the disappearance of the sun, raindrop setting, spirit tigers, and hope, which are a part of the Naga tradition, along with the themes of women characters having respect and an interdependent relationship with the environment. The female characters in Kire's work are resilient and play a significant role in shaping the environment. Kire observes the Nagaland landscape and skillfully intertwines characters in her works.



### Literature Review

In "Rediscovering Narratives in Easterine Kire's Son of the Thundercloud" by Akanksha Rai and Shiv Govind Puri, the article explores the narrative techniques that highlight the discussion on Indigenous Storytelling, covering the Naga community's historical and cultural contexts through the lens of postcolonial literature and indigenous representation. "The Ethos on River: An Ecocritical Study of Easterine Kire's Son of the Thundercloud" highlights the relationship between humans and the environment.

### Methodology

A text analysis will be conducted by closely reading key passages that navigate the themes of the real and supernatural world. It is further found in a thematic description of Kire's work, taking lead from literary essays and critical articles that expand more on issues of complex identities and how the villagers have shaped these. This is where the methodology aims to bridge a gap with existing literature—by bringing in textual analysis and how Kire has been able to fulfill this idea of supernatural beings or elements in her works.

### Analysis of the Relationship between Women and Nature

By closely analyzing the text, using key parts of the text, it respects and recognises the bond between women and nature. This shows how the female characters fight with the actual world and with supernatural elements. It helps to shape a picture of how Kire presents healing stories in the surroundings of Nagaland.

Ecofeminism is a branch of feminist and political ecology; the term was coined by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* in 1974. Ecofeminists examine the connections between women and nature in religion, culture, and literature, and the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. For this work, cultural ecofeminism envisions the restoration of a balance between women, nature, and spirits. From Kire's work, *Son of*

*the Thundercloud*, literature is not only a reflection, but it recovers and reclaims the land and identity of an individual woman. However, Kire's fictional landscape is an active component that shapes the environment and selfhood of women.

### Pele's Grandmother as Strong Woman

People in Pele village are fond of their homeland, but they fear losing the village to the next generation. Here, the village is depicted as a holy place to live because of its richness and abundance. Social, cultural and environmental issues are narrated through the folktales or songs to the younger generations. Yet, the older generations lament that the younger generations have not shown as much affection for the village as they loved and cared for it. In Nagaland, people believe that nature is connected with God. Their neighbouring villages were abandoned. In one village, the rice in the granaries went down. Because of their carelessness in believing in taboos, the grains were swarmed in their field by insects, which forced the villagers to leave. In the second village, a clash between the upper clan and the lower clan leads to a riot. The villagers now understand the power and dependence of nature after they witnessed the famine. It teaches that nature should not be taken for granted, but to value the environmental landscapes.

During his young age, Pele's grandmother took care of him, and his parents were happy that he loved his grandmother. But they didn't want him to be influenced by his grandmother's words. Pele's grandmother is considered strong and was once the pillar of Pele's family. The lady, who named the child Pele, has now been ignored by her son and daughter-in-law, as they didn't want her to encourage Pele to do any adventurous activities or to move from his own village. Here, the oppression plays a major role, as Pele's grandmother has been taken advantage of by her own son. Here, Pele's grandmother is the caregiver and manager of her family, but in later years, she got suppressed by her own family.



### **Pele's Journey**

Pele, the protagonist, headed to Weaver's village as his village vanished due to drought and famine. He lost his wife and children due to natural disasters. Even his family and friends died due to starvation. The rumours had spread that Weaver's village has enough water and food. As Greta Gaard says, "Ecofeminism calls for new stories that reconnect humans with the natural world and with each other" (Gaard 22). Pele crossed two dark figures named Kethonuo and Siedze and was confused whether they were humans or spirits in the village of Nouné. In Nagaland, humans and the non-human beings and even spirits are believed to share a common ancestral root, with a focus on kinship and interconnectedness.

The sisters had a skeleton body covered in tattered cloth with stringy hair that had not been combed it for years. As per the customs followed by the ancestors, a woman should lead her life that should not depend on her husband or father. Yet, the sisters lived without male support for seven hundred years. At the arrival of Pele, the sisters—Kethonuo and Siedze—looked upon thunder, storm, and rain. It shocked Pele, as they had never witnessed rain for four hundred years. Kire intricately blended the themes of myths and folk elements, which she observed and modified according to her landscape, along with the environmental crisis.

They insisted on staying with them as the stars would appear in the east. The situation connects with the environment and the human relationship. Even though they were separated from the village, the sisters showed love towards every human; thus, they protected Pele from letting go at night due to the movement of wolves. The sisters often strove between tradition and customs.

They watched the skies, and the clouds moved westward. The environmental setup at night was different. The sisters, even in this situation, were never used to being afraid of others; they politely smiled at him, and the distant thunder rolled over the hills, and one of the sisters knew that it was a sign for the rain. Women who live in mountains or hills have a special bond with men. They are intertwined with the whole environmental setup and can predict

climate changes. The word "rain" just excited them most, as they hadn't witnessed the rain for years. Gayathri Spivak's concept of "Strategic Essentialism" gives a reclaiming from an ecological perspective. The sisters ran back to their home after they spent time in the rain, as they looked like happy children. Lawrence Buell suggests that the concept of "environmental imagination" shapes human attitudes towards nature and sustainability (Buell, 1995). It rained all morning, and the river was emptying onto the earth. The chasm had opened up the night before, drawn in water, and the village was saved from the flood. They believed that it was time for the arrival of the son of the thundercloud. People in Nagaland respect land; they believe the loss of land may lead to the loss of village, identity, and clan.

### **A Visit to Mesanuo's Home**

The sisters hurried to leave the Weavers' village, and Pele followed them with surprise. They reached Mesanuo's place. Mesanuo was a widowed woman, as her husband and seven sons were killed by the tiger. Thus, she is also called as "tiger widow." She lives separately from her village. Mesanuo took care of her family immediately, and even after the birth of her son, she managed to stand on her own. Women are not encouraged to live alone in society, as they have to seek support from a father, son or husband. Sometimes, it is hard to accept, but a woman is criticized by society if she stays alone. When she was bringing in the herbs that had to be dried, she heard of rain coming, and before she reached home, a drop of rain had fallen on her. She realized the growth of the baby as soon as the raindrop fell on her. According to Ariel Salleh, "giving birth is a biological act, but it is not only biological; it is also sociological and economic, since the continuity of species life, society, and economy is fully dependent on it" (Ariel). The Tiger-Widow and the two sisters are separated from their own villages, which reflects the patriarchal structure followed by the villagers.

The environmental setup for planting is perfect, as Pele noticed when he was walking around the village. This describes that a woman's birth to the child reflects the development of the plants. Kire



mirrors the taboos that are followed and heard from the Naga tradition. In Nagaland, identity is connected with land; they consider land as one of the beings.

The dead river, which was rejuvenated because of rainwater. The villagers are healed, which gave a life support and sustenance. The headman, along with the villagers, came to believe the prophecy about a virgin shall conceive and give birth to a son, who would save the village people. The revival of the river, which has been dead for years, symbolised the gentle and powerful bond between woman and nature. The long-awaited rains never disappoint the villagers, as it awakened not only the dry earth but also the hearts of the villagers who had even forgotten the sound of thunder and the smell of wet soil. The land, which was once dry, gave a fresh life as Mesanuo has through the miraculous birth of a child. As the prophecy came to life, the villagers came to understand nature's power working through Mesanuo. Together, they reminded that renewal is not only an act of creation but also an everlasting continuity of existence and love.

The villagers said that the river was called their mother, as it provides them with food, fish, frogs, herbs, and water. The soil is now ready for harvest, and villagers were thrilled to do great work on the harvest and to build more granaries. Now, the Weavers' village was filled with more edible foods, as they had extra food for the visitors. Pele decided to stay at Weaver's village. Rhalie becomes four, and now he learns to work in the field.

### **A Visit to Spirit's sisters**

During the visit to the spirit sisters, halfway through, it started to rain, and it was not natural; it almost obstructed their journey. At the curve in the path, the rain stopped, and Mesanuo said it was the spirit's activity to stop their visit to her sisters; however, they continued to climb. Siedze and Kethonuo got excited, and Rhalie maintained a good relationship with them.

### **Attack on the tiger**

In Weaver's Village, Pele teaches Rhalie to attack a tiger. Rhalie was eager to take revenge on the tiger.

One day, they went for a hunt and killed the tiger. In Angami customs, the one who killed the tiger is not allowed to enter the village gate. The people considered the tiger as their elder brother and followed a separate ritual to escape from the curse.

The Naga customs bury the dead person with the ceremonies. In this novel, Kire shattered the traditions and customs as Mesanuo did all the rituals for her dead son. She didn't allow any male from her village to touch her dead son; she bravely took her own decision without seeking advice from the elders. Only Pele, along with four men, helped to carry Rhalie. It is common in Nagaland to bury the dead person before dawn and not to stay after dawn in the graveyard, as it is not safe for humans, as they are threatened by spirits. But the superstitions were broken by Mesanuo as she stayed near her son's tomb.

### **Conclusion**

In this work, Easterine Kire blended the themes of Nagaland's myths along with ancient taboos. The work follows the hope and faith that connects humans and the environmental situations. The portrayal of nature shaping the cultural beliefs and the ecological understanding between nature and women is critically engaged in *Son of the Thundercloud*. Kire's depiction of female characters has patience, endurance, and a deep spiritual wisdom that is closely tied with the tradition of Naga and the environment. Kire also highlighted that women's role in society contributes strength to the community by maintaining peace among nature, culture, and gender relationships.

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