

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND SPATIAL DYNAMICS IN EASTERINE KIRE'S *SKY IS MY FATHER*

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Abstract

Easterine Kire's novels provide intricate narratives about the Angami Naga tribe. This research paper focuses on her novel Sky is my Father analyzing the vivid narratives of cultural landscape and the power dynamics and conflicts involve between tribes as well as with nature. The places narrated in the novel are not just mere settings, but they play an active role in defining the social, cultural, and historical context of the Angami tribes. This paper studies the unique perspective on the Angami tribes' experiences and their relationship with their land which the novel offers. It highlights the deep connection between the Angami people and their land, emphasizing how their traditions, rituals, and livelihoods are intimately tied to the spaces they inhabit. By describing the physical characteristics and spatial organization of Angami villages, Kire's novel offer insights into the social structure and daily life of the tribe. They also explore the relationship between the Angami people and their surrounding environment, illustrating how their livelihoods are shaped by factors such as geography, climate, and natural resources. The paper observes the intricate cultural geography of the community and the significance of place in portraying their way of life, providing a nuanced understanding of the Angami experience. Examining the spatial dynamics in Kire's novel can provide valuable insights into the social organization, settlement patterns, and relationship with surrounding ecosystems of the Angami tribes.

Keywords: cultural landscape; space; power; changes and conflicts; spatial dynamics.

Introduction

Easterine Kire Iralu writes about the culture, traditions and practices of Angami Nagas, a North-East Indian Naga tribe to which she is born into. In the novel *Sky Is My Father*, the author narrates the story of the people from the village Khonoma from the period of late 1800s to early 1900s. Like any tribe in the world, Angami Naga people of Khonoma are bound with their land in many ways. Their relationship with the land determines their cultural habits and any variation in their culture alters the shape of the landscape around them. The theory of Cultural Landscape offers similar perspective in understanding it. Analyzing the cultural landscape is an efficient visual representation of the relationship between people and the land they are in. It also creates a sense of belongingness which leads to the formation of the identity. This analysis involves understanding of the culture and impact of the culture on land.

Landscape of Khonoma

According to Urszula Myga-Piątek, Landscape consists of elements of both natural and anthropogenic (cultural) origin, which mutually interact (Myga-Piątek 52). Based on her study, this paper also classifies the landscape of Khonoma into three categories namely, natural landscape, anthropogenic landscape and cultural landscape.

Natural Landscape

Natural landscape of a region refers to the whole, undisturbed natural environment which are developed without any human intervention. Natural landscape is further classified into primary landscapes and semi-natural landscapes. Primary landscapes refer to the initial development of landscape as the part of evolution in natural environment. These are the structures which evolved before human being or any other creatures. For instance, giant rock formation, etc. According to Andreychouk V, such primary natural landscape are now

protected for their ecological or aesthetic function. In the novel *Sky Is My Father*, there is a mention of the monolith named Terhuo tsiese which is believed to be the only remain out of three, is considered to be the worshipping space for the Nagas. Another example of a primary natural landscape is Japfu which refers to the tallest peak on the southern Angami village. Semi-natural landscapes are landscapes that are penetrated by humans but not altered. The narrations about the rivers like Themhiru and Dzunha represent the semi-natural landscape of the region.

Anthropogenic Landscape

Anthropogenic landscape refers to landscapes that once were natural and altered or changed due to human intervention over time. This may point to the human settlement areas like village, cities, agricultural fields, etc. Sometimes even forest lands are considered to be anthropogenic landscape when utilized for its natural resources. In the text, there are several areas or landscapes that fall under this category can be traced. The following list provides a detailed view of anthropogenic landscapes in the novel *Sky Is My Father*.

1. Thehou- The community house where men of the village gather and important affairs of the village are discussed and decisions are taken.
2. Kichuki- The dormitory where young adolescent boys of the village stay at night to safeguard the village. It is also the place where men and boys of different age groups meet and share their knowledge and stories with each other.
3. Kuda- A fort which is built to protect the clan.

Besides the three anthropogenic structures, narrations about the agricultural fields where characters like Vipiano, and her sons, Levi and Lato, and all other villagers engage themselves in are found inside the text. There are also references about how once a young man is married, the newly wedded couple is given their share of land to build their own houses using wood and agricultural fields are allotted to produce and harvest their own food. This practice can be found in the narration of the character Levi's marriage.

Under anthropogenic landscape, a subtype named anthropic landscape is classified to represent the anthropogenic landscape that are transformed without any

intention. According to Urszula, these landscapes are developed as a result of heavy anthropopressure like war, mining, etc. The text consists of numerous representations of anthropic landscape while narrating the tragedies of several attacks held by Britishers on the village of Khonoma and raids conducted by the villagers of Khonoma on other villagers of Kohima who supported the British intervention in the region. The descriptions of the bloodshed war, destruction of the village gates and reconstruction of the village houses after every war portray the alterations of the anthropogenic landscape in anthropic landscape.

Cultural Landscape

The term Cultural Landscape was coined by Carl O Sauer in 1925 in his article, *The Morphology of Landscape*. He defines the terms as, 'fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent; the natural area is the medium; the cultural landscape the result' (Sauer 24). He considered it as a blend of both natural and anthropogenic landscape that evolved from time to time. According to Dolores Hayden, "the cultural landscape is more densely inhabited, the economic and social forces that shape it are more complex, change is more rapid, layers proliferate, and abrupt spatial discontinuities often result" (Hayden). Denis Cosgrove (Cosgrove 125) further developed the idea and provided a perspective where cultural landscape is not just natural landscape influenced by humans, but also as socially constructed and associated with symbolic meanings. He mentions it as, 'all landscapes are symbolic, although the link between the symbols and what it stands for (it referent) may appear very tenuous.' On these basis, the descriptions of the cultural landscape can be studied.

In *Sky Is My Father*, there are narrations of places that draws the picture of culture landscape in the Angami Naga village of Khonoma. Instances of cultural landscape in the novel are forests, agricultural fields, settlement, and suburban, water, military, communicative, and religious. Based on Viacheslav Andreychouk's (Andreychouk 7) *Function of Landscape*, these cultural landscapes in the novel are categorized according to their functions. Andreychouk's list of functions of landscapes are as follows,

1. Spatial consists in providing man with living and economic space. In the novel, the village settlements of Khonoma, Kohima, Kigwema, Sendenyu, Kenoria, Bakieria, Zotshuria, Viseria, Mezeria, Jakhama, Mima, Phesama, Tuophe, and Nerhe perform the function of spatial cultural landscape. Inside the village settlement, places like Thehou, and Kichuki, also does this spatial function.
2. Ecological involves providing man as a living organism with the necessary physiological substances (water, air, light, etc.), that is, the environment suitable for living. In the select novel, rivers like Themhiru, Khuru, and Dzunha, and natural spaces like Samaria forest engage in this ecological function.
3. Nature conservation is to provide suitable ecological conditions for other living organisms, being the organic (biotic) part of the environment and landscape system. In the novel, the forest area is perceived as a border between human and spirits which eventually perform the function of preserving the nature.
4. Materials and their supply (manufacturing of material goods) provides man with goods necessary for life and activity (raw materials, functional objects, tools, etc.). In this novel, forest acts as a space of material supply as the Angami Nagas use the woods and other resources for building their house, cooking, etc. The village women tend to fetch water from the nearby river in the early mornings. The village and suburban settlement area also performs this function as they provide weapons for the war.
5. Supply of energy (electricity production) consists in equipping man with energy, necessary for the activity of processing. Such landscape is absent in the novel as it covers the period of 1800s to early 1900s.
6. Communication enables man to communicate, move in space, and transport materials, energy, and information. In the novel, place like Thehou, Kichuki acts as the ground for building communication among the villagers.
7. Cognitive enables human development and broadens their knowledge of man, society, living environment, etc. In the novel, forest space where hunting is carried out, war field, etc., are projected as the cognitive spaces.
8. Recreational provides human opportunities, improving the health and mental state. In the text, homes, thehou and kichuki acts as the recreational space.
9. Sacral meets needs of a higher order, that is, spiritual. The forest region in the novel is often associated with the spirits, worship of the monolith, etc.
10. Aesthetic-provides human experience and aesthetic experience, necessary for man's spiritual and moral development and well-being. The descriptions of such space is much liminal in the text.

Spatial Dynamics

Culture is subject to evolve due to various factors over time. This evolution or alteration directly or indirectly contributes to the evolution or alteration in landscape of the region. Hence it is necessary to understand the spatio-temporal dynamics. According to Sergio J Rey, 'Both space and time have been viewed in a variety of ways, which makes the consideration even more complex' (Rey 2018). He quotes Irwin's definition as, 'the term spatial dynamics is used to imply a transitional dynamic process of changes in spatial pattern over time.' (Irwin 140).

In *Sky Is My Father*, spatial dynamics of the cultural landscape can be understood by analyzing its narration with the live of three generations of characters. The three generations include Vipiano, Levi and Sato. In Vipiano's generation, the space for natural landscape were forests, and rivers. The anthropogenic landscape spaces were village settlement like houses, thehou, and kichuki. The spaces considered to be cultural landscape in her time were forest as hunting space and evident border between humans and spirits, and agricultural fields were associated with practices like the genna days, thekranyi and sekrenyi.

In Vipiano's son, Levi's period, the natural landscape remained much of the same but there was an addition of anthropic landscape as there was constant war between the villagers of Khonoma and the British armed forces from Kohima. During this period, the land was attacked and reformed several times.

During Levi's son, Sato's period, the landscape again underwent major changes as there was drastic reduction in the anthropic landscape which was eventually converted

into anthropogenic landscape. The cultural landscapes are altered by inclusion of the church as a result of major shift in the religious faith from indigenous culture to western Christianity.

Summation

The paper studied the various forms of landscape found in the novel *Sky Is My Father*. Analyzing the different forms of landscapes paved way for the understanding of cultural landscape as described in the novel. This paper also made a chorological study of spatial dynamics in the novel. The study of functions of the identified landscapes in the novel provided deep insights into the spatial dynamics of the region. This gives a clear understanding of how the land is perceived physically, and mentally by its people and how the idea of identity is associated with it.

Primary Source

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