

Nagaland as Utopia: A Study of Easterine Kire's Kelhoukevira

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Abstract:

Easterine Kire, a prolific writer from Nagaland, has recorded the pensive narratives of her people in her writings. Her works deal with the culture and tradition of her tribal people who are the very fabrics of Nagaland. She is an active writer struggling for pulling her community off from a deep fathom of dejection. Her writings, culled from oral traditions, are a compendium of the Naga community and their struggles against the British and the Indian government, ethnic and psychological conflicts, language barriers and the feeling of being alien to the Non-Nagas.

Keywords: land, oppression, war, and oral tradition.

North-East Indian literature has gained its prominence over the years since many writers have started expounding the untold stories of tribal communities and their experiences. Together called “the Seven Sister States” Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, and Manipur form the omphalos of North-East India. In particular, Nagaland is known for its vast resources and a paradise to the inhabitants living closely with heaven-blessed land. It is bestowed with sixteen different tribal groups who have rich oral narratives and traditions to be spoken of.

Easterine Kire, a prolific writer from Nagaland, has recorded the pensive narratives of her people in her writings. She has said in an interview, “We felt we needed to create written Naga Literature. We have so many oral narratives but with oral dying out, it’s all going to be lost”. All her writings deal with the culture and tradition of her tribal people who are the very fabrics of Nagaland. She is an active writer struggling for pulling her community off from a deep fathom of dejection. Her writings, culled from oral traditions, are a compendium of the Naga community and their struggles against the British and the Indian government, ethnic and psychological conflicts, language barriers and the feeling of being alien to the non-Nagas.

Easterine Kire is a pioneer especially in digging out the Naga history which is so far understood only from oral narratives. Her writings- poems, short stories, novels- all revolve around the Naga culture which is deep rooted in their lives. Her oeuvre includes works like *When the River Sleeps*, *A Terrible Matriarchy*, *Sky is My father: A Naga village Remembered*, *Son of the Thundercloud*, *Don't Run*, *My Love*, *Bitter Wormwood*, *Life on Hold*. In one way, Kire has become a warrior in protecting her people’s history and lives by recording them in her writings.

Kire’s poetry has equally gained attention for its thematic representation of the struggles and expedition for a better living for Nagas. Her poetry collection, *Kelhoukevira*, marks the lyrical depiction of the sufferings and misfortunes of her community as a result of the Indian army’s ambush. The word *Kelhoukevira*, is an Angami word which means “life in a better place/paradise” (Kire, 01). She portrays

Nagaland as a land full of bloodshed and violence due to the ongoing political issues. Nagaland claims to be a separate place independent of any political affiliation and it does not want to be a part of India and this becomes the reason for the excruciating battle with the Indian army.

The poem explicates the untold and harsh realities of war which sacrificed the lives of many Naga soldiers. "They brought in their dead by night. Their proud warriors, their mighty warriors" (Kire, 02). The poem opens with the knell of the parting day- the night time when the dead soldiers are brought back to their home. These warriors are very mighty, masculine and proud to become a martyr for the sake of their land. Kire details the yearning of the soldiers to free Nagaland as a separate country. They are very much attached to their land and fight till their last breath to extricate Nagaland from the clutches of any invasion. This feeling of the Naga soldiers resonate with Rupert Brooke's lines "If I should die, think only this of me: / That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is forever England". (Brooke, 45)

Brooke talks about the invasion of foreign lands by the British army. But in Nagaland, Naga soldiers try to protect their land from the foreign intruders. "That some portion of a vanquished field. May forever remain Nagaland, forever Nagaland" (Kire, 01). Kire uses adjectives like proud, mighty and brave to describe the patriotic feelings of the soldiers- "Their proud warriors, their mighty warriors The brave beloved of the gods" (Kire 02). Kire brings out the stark contrast between the land before and after war. Nagaland is a place where nature can be enjoyed the most. Surrounded by hills and forest, Nagaland is very pure and unadulterated. War becomes an antisocial movement and it pollutes the pristine nature of the land. Once Nagaland is a soil of purity and peacefulness. But when war happened, the virgin land was spoiled and there was a turmoil prevalent in the territory. "To rest under troubled skies? / And battle-scarred lands" (Kire, 03).

Kelhoukevira in many aspects can be compared to Wilfred Owen's war poem "Anthem for Doomed Youth". 1950's became dark and black years in the history of Nagas as many invasions happened during this time. Even though many nagas joined the Naga troop, they are outnumbered by the massive Indian army and they cannot defeat the larger troop. The dead soldiers are brought back to their lands and the women in the houses suffer due to the loss of their beloved souls. The land becomes spoiled, stained with blood "Like a thousand scarlet sunsets" (Kire, 02). She envisions Nagaland as a utopian nation where everything is set in an apple pie order. She dreams of Nagaland as an ideal place for living which is not so in the contemporary situation due to war.

Kire envisions Nagaland as a utopian nation where everything is set in an apple pie order. She dreams of Nagaland as an ideal place for living which is not so in the contemporary situation due to war. The poem stands as a testimony for the acute turmoil faced by the Naga people. This agitation disturbed the serene, peaceful and nature-dependent lives of the tribal people. The land is compared to a fertile woman which becomes barren, futile and dry after war- "While her fields lay barren and desecrated" (Kire, 02). The great spirited warriors lose their lives and become martyrs of war.

The poem records a pensive element etched the aftermath of war and how the loveable people of Nagaland are destroyed with no reasons. The land has been ruined beyond mending. This event remembers the lines of Oliver Goldsmith, "Where wealth accumulates men decay" (Abrham, 678). During 1950s, the Naga Army is to fight of the Indian aggression on their lands. The land is worshipped by people and it has been part and parcel of their life. They give respect to lands as their forefathers. This poem personifies the land as an animated deity. It gives great strength to the people and their posterity. The poet loves her people because she is the part of a community and she witnesses the struggle inflicted upon her. She wants create a utopian world where everything is tidy and neat and free from war. The brotherhood should be revived

in order to save the world from the hands of war and bloodshed. She advises people to avert war because it is highly unwholesome to the entire world.

Works Cited

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1. [In Conversation With: Easterine Kire - Purple Pencil Project](#)