

Taboos as Mechanics of Environmental Stewardship in *Son of the Thundercloud* by Easterine Kire

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Wilderness, Ecological Balance, Retrospective Approach, Science, Organicism, Taboo, Parallelism, Mercenary, Esoteric Sayings, Social Allegory	Nagaland is one of the North eastern states, which is known for its profound variety of ecological resources. Through the novels of Easterine Kire, one can get an authentic insight of traditional beliefs and practices of Nagaland. Folklore is one of the best facets of representing culture of the region. The collective wisdom of native tribes is brought through eco-spirituality. Unlinear narrative is prominent in the works of folklore. Kire makes the best use of unlinear narrative to inculcate eco-awareness among the younger generation. In the name of industrialization, people exploit nature for personal gratification which hinders the balance which exists in the natural world. Easterine Kire through folklore warns the younger generation from destroying the pristine nature of Naga hills through the protuberant characters which exist in her fictional world. This paper attempts to bring out the importance of folklore in propagating eco-awareness among the younger generation. It also emphasizes the importance of folklore in propagating culture of Angami tribe.

Easterine Kire is one of the pre-eminent writers from North-Eastern India, whose works reflect the lifestyle of indigenous Angami tribe. She is one of the first women writers of Nagaland, who focuses on the profound nature of oral tradition and myths which revolve around the Naga culture. Nagaland is a place in India, which is known for its profuse variety of flora and fauna. The people of this region succumb to ancient practices and beliefs which behold the culture of the region and also sustain the natural beauty of the place. Kire reconstructs the beliefs of native people of Nagaland and presents it in the form of oral traditions and narratives. Easterine Kire brings out the aesthetic perception of the Naga people, which have some bearing with nature.

Folklore plays an important role in disseminating the culture of particular region. Easterine Kire makes the best use of folk tales, taboos, and myths to propagate the lifestyle of the Angami tribe. Folklore is the oral stories which are transmitted from one generation to another by means of myths, folktale, oral poems etc. Folklore has no special authorship, as it passes from one generation to another orally. "Folklore is, first and foremost, the art of the oppressed classes, both peasants and workers, but also of the intermediate strata that gravitate toward the lower social classes" (Propp 5). Folklore remains folklore, unless it is sung by unprofessional authors. Folklore doesn't have particular author, as it passes from one generation to another orally. Day workers like woodcutters, farmers and wanderers are the

pioneers in imparting folk knowledge among younger generations. Pele is a peasant worker, who teaches Rhalie regarding the customs and traditions of Angami tribe. Pele uses retrospective approach to influence younger generation in the Village of Weavers. Pele imparts the oral knowledge among younger generation through the folk tales which is passed on by his ancestors.

Peter Barry in his *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* divides outdoor environment into four types. They are “the wilderness”, “the scenic sublime”, “the countryside:” and “the domestic picaresque:” (Barry 246). Wilderness may refer to the natural landscape, which is uninterrupted due to human intervention and the Naga people try to shield the wilderness for future generation. The Naga people through folktale and taboos try to influence the younger generation from destroying the wilderness which is associated with the adjoining landscape. The oral tales restrict the younger generation from finding solace in the urban areas. They are brought up in such a way that, they are destined to wander in the wilderness of the Naga Hills. The people depend upon the forest for their food and shelter and they maintain the ecological balance in the wilderness.

The metaphors of the land play an important role in preserving the biodiversity of the area. Pele is held as the torch-bearer of upholding the balance which exists in the wilderness of Nagaland. Pele builds his house out of the woods gathered from various places. He avoids cutting trees from a specific place to avoid ecological imbalance in the village of Weavers. Eco-consciousness is buried deep inside the minds of Naga people right from the childhood. Though the people are not well-educated, they have extensive knowledge of the environment.

Pele chose to walk long distances into the woods to collect material for the house, taking care not to cut too many trees in the same area. His reason for going far from the mountaintop was that he did not wish to disturb the fragile ecology around the abandoned village site. The vegetation was new and young, and he feared that any sudden disturbance of that newly found balance would cause greater damage than could be repaired. (Kire 102)

Anthropologists have made research in folklore and “they showed that in tribal lore are often exhibited cultural stages and cultural traits; indeed his lore was part of early man’s science and religion” (Pound101). Sir James. G. Frazer and other anthropologists suggested that the representation of folklore to be science. Adhering to the concept of the anthropologists, the story in the novel *Son of the Thundercloud* has some leaning with the basic facts of science in the novel. In the novel *Son of the Thundercloud* a child is being conceived by the drop of rain. The birth paradigm of son of the thundercloud is mentioned in the novel. The people of the village in the novel suffer due to famine for longer years. But there is a story in the village which asserts that the widow, who has lost her husband and seven sons due to tiger, will conceive a baby by drop of rain. With the birth of the baby, the poverty-stricken village will be turned into a fertile land. The land will bear fruits and vegetable for the people.

In the novel, Mesanuo is the tiger-widow, who gives birth to a baby named Rhalie when a raindrop descends upon Mesanuo. Upon the birth of Rhalie, the village becomes fertile. The Naga folk tale revolving around the birth of the son of the thundercloud, exhibits the cultural traits and thereby the science associated with it. The widow may represent the soil which is left unfertile for many decades. When the raindrop, fell upon the widow she gets conceived. Rhalie represents the young sapling, which is yet to bloom in the world. The birth of Rhalie, is represented like that of a tree which serves its purpose to serve the people until its decomposition. The science revolving around the process of seed germination is retold in the form of fable. Rhalie loved each and every people around him till his death. Like the same way nature renders its selfless service to the people till its death.

Angami tribe of Nagaland believe in the concept of organicism. They believe that each and every organism is connected to the whole. Each and every organism in the food chain is given importance. The people treat the animals as their own sibling. In the novel, Rhalie kills a tiger. After returning from the hunting session, he is not allowed to enter the village. The headman of the village confronts Rhalie by mentioning that he has killed his elder brother. He is given a rest of five days, in which he has to prepare food of his own. Even though the man-eating tiger has killed many human beings, it is given due respect in the community.

The Naga people have the custom of preserving seed grains for next harvest. A village in Naga Hills fail to safeguard the seed grains, due to the abundant harvest in the previous season. The entire grains get destroyed by mice. At last, the people were forced to leave the village. This taboo reminds the younger generation to safeguard the seed grains for another season and also to prevent the intrusion of hybrid seeds among the Angami tribe. The folk tale also makes the people to guard native seeds of the place. In another village, the people get involved in fight with other clan. At last blood gets spilled over the entire area. The elder people considered it as a taboo to live in the village, and so they flee to the nearby villages. The aesthetic purpose of myths finds an underlying role in cultivating moral value among the people.

India is one of the countries, which is known for its antique tales and myths. Parallelism is found across different culture in the form of myths and folktale. Folktale has common connections with other countries, and some stories are being narrated in different forms. In Greek mythology Zeus is the god, who is known to shower his blessings in the form of rain among common people. In Naga culture, the rain strikes the poverty laden land through the birth of son of the thundercloud. Parallelism is also found in the heroic deal of hunting the tiger. The person who hunts the man-eating tiger is given utmost respect in the society. Rhalie kills the tiger and he is given due respect in the community. Even young women of his age get attracted to the marvellous deeds done by Rhalie. The heroic deed of killing the violent animal is an imagery which is prevalent across many cultures.

Esoteric sayings provide a recurrent reference to the fearful aspect of folk literature. The annotation of folklore is presented through esoteric sayings. Kire castigates Rhalie, through the myth of son of the thundercloud. The ultimate purpose of Rhalie in the Village of Weavers is understood by a few members like Pele, Mesanuo, Kethonuo and Sideze. The village people remain ignorant regarding the Esoteric saying of the elderly people. Mesanuo worries regarding the oral prophesy which revolve around the life of Rhalie. Esoteric sayings in the novel *Son of the Thundercloud* provides a cultural insight of Naga community.

Space and time are perceived differently in the folklore. In the novel *Son of the Thundercloud*, time is perceived differently. The sisters of Mesanuo say that the famine lasted for nearly seven hundred years in the drought laden land. It is typical of the folktale to elaborate the time period. The sisters of Mesanuo say that they have resided in the drought laden land for nearly four hundred years. This is an imaginary tale, which doesn't happen in real life situations. No one can exist in the world for four hundred years without proper food and it exceeds the normal life line of human being. The sisters Kethonuo and Siedze waited long in the drought laden land for nearly seven hundred years to see the redemption of the land through the birth of son of the thundercloud.

Folklore is seen as a subject, which represents both the physical and mystical culture. Vladimir Propp mentions that "Little by little we are becoming aware that the solution to many diverse phenomena of spiritual culture is hidden in folklore" (Propp 3). The people in the novel lead a peaceful life in the village, till their prophesies are fulfilled. After their purpose is over, they return to the spiritual world to get connected with the loved ones. Rhalie, serves his purpose of saving the entire village from the man-eating tiger. After his

purpose is over, he returns to the spiritual world. Grieving over the death of Rhalie, Mesanuo dies. Mesanuo hopes to join her sisters in after life after her death. The spiritual world is given importance in the novel *Son of the Thundercloud*.

The tiger mentioned in the novel, may represent the spiritual tiger and not the normal one. It cannot be killed with normal weapons. Kethonuo says

The tiger is a spirit tiger; he is no ordinary being. You cannot kill a spirit tiger with worldly weapons. The best, well-tempered spear is no match for a spirit tiger. The boy, on the other hand, had no pride. He was not fighting to earn a name for himself as the others were doing. He wanted to kill the tiger to stop it from hurting any more people. (Kire 85)

In this case the elder people try to inculcate respect for animals among the younger generation. Naga culture is bound with the tradition that each and other individual possess spirits. Both flora and fauna possess spirits of their own and they are given individual importance in the novel. Through the folk tale, the elders of Naga community address the major idea that no animals should be harmed unless it remains a treat to human being. They also instil the idea that people with anthropocentric attitude cannot kill the spiritual tiger. Only people with zero pride can kill the spiritual tiger. This encompasses eco-awareness among the younger generation. Animals cannot be killed under mercenary conditions. Only if an animal seems as a threat to human community, it is killed for the well-being of the community.

Kethonuo, in her dead bed explains that she couldn't feel her legs. Siedze gets alarmed and she finds that her sister's legs are disappearing from the physical world. This kind of oral narrative may represent the separation of spirit from the human body. The decaying nature of human being is brought out in the form of folktale. Kethonuo says that if only some people die, the new generation will find a place in the earth. This propagates the idea of ecological balance in the world, which paves the way for new generation.

Folktale often represents the social allegory of the particular region with the help of complex narrative strategies. Kire brings out the mythology of Angami tribe in *Son of the Thundercloud*. Rhalie safeguards the people from the man-eating tiger. On the other hand, he is killed due the jealousy which is bound in the minds of the people. Rhalie may represent the nature, which is tortured by human beings for his own selfish needs. The heroic deeds of Rhalie get thwarted by the jealousy which is bound in the minds of the people.

Killing man-eating tiger is one of the seasonal festivals brought out in the novel *The Son of the Thundercloud*. Killing man-eating tiger is one of the adventurous trips taken by Rhalie. Preparing arrowheads is itself a ritual among the ethnic group. The spear is fabricated with utmost importance and much dedication is given in the process of making arrowheads. Pele helps Rhalie in preparing the spearhead. Manhood is tested by the village people by means of killing the tiger.

Easterine Kire documents the native folk tradition of Angami tribe in her works, to pass it to forthcoming generations. Folklore plays a pivotal role in propagating the cultural aspects of particular region and in rendering eco-awareness. The native practices, myths, taboos and tales which are forgotten by the younger generation, gets revived by means of narrative spaces in the works of Kire.

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