

An Ecofeminist Analysis of the Feminine Triad in Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud*

Kaviya B¹ & Dr. D. Dhanalakshmi²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English

Thanthai Periyar Government Arts and Science College (A), Tiruchirappalli

(Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli)

²Associate Professor & Head, Department of English

Thanthai Periyar Government Arts and Science College (A), Tiruchirappalli

(Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli)

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Abstract

The paper examines the relationships of the two sisters along with their third sibling in relation to nature in Easterine Kire's work *Son of the Thundercloud* (2016), which provides rich narratives that reflect the female characters, including Kethonuo, Siedze, and Mesanuo, alongside the spiritual journey of the protagonist, Pelevotso. Easterine Kire's works are connected more with the Nagaland people, and she also wrote historical writings. In this work, she brings out the strong character of the protagonist and the representation of the female characters by breaking the patriarchal and spiritual constraints. Pele traveled 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. 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. This paper analyzes the work with the themes of feminine powers and prophecy survivors with a detailed study of three female sister characters.

Keywords: Northeast India, Nagaland, Ecofeminism, Self-identity, Customs, Female Characters, Ecology



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Introduction

Easterine Kire, a notable author, was born in Kohima, Nagaland, in March 1959. 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 visualize cultural occurrences and historical events, which bring us vivid experiences in a picturesque way. Throughout this work, Kire brings out the elements like the supernatural beings, raindrops, hope, and mythical childbirth, along with the themes of women characters having respect and an interdependent relationship with the environment, which are a part of the Naga tradition. The female characters in this work are portrayed as the faithful sisters who are the guardians of hope and time, who play a significant role in shaping the environment. Kire observes the Nagaland landscape and skilfully intertwines the 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 textual analysis will be conducted by closely reading the key passages that navigate the themes of the female powers of the real and

supernatural worlds. It is further found in a thematic description of Kire's work that takes lead from the literary works and the critical articles that help to expand more on the complex identities of the supernatural with the real Naga beliefs and how the different villagers in the work shaped the characters. This is where the methodology aims to bridge a gap with the existing literature—by bringing in textual analysis and how Kire has been able to fulfill the idea of supernatural beings or elements in this work, "Son of the Thundercloud."

Analysis

By closely analyzing the text with the key parts, it is highlighted that the female energy plays a vital role throughout the protagonist's spiritual journey. It portrays how female characters fight with the actual world, along with the supernatural elements. It shapes as a rebirth for the sisters as well as for the villagers.

"Ecofeminism" was coined by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Feminism or Death* in 1974. It is also called "ecological feminism," a branch of feminism that connects nature and women in religion, culture, and literature. It examines the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. In the work *Son of the Thundercloud*, literature is not only a reflection of supernatural elements, but it also recovers the voices of women in the fictional world. However, Kire's portrayal of landscape is an active component that shapes the environment and the selfhood of women.

In Nagaland, people believe that nature is connected with God. People in the protagonist's village are fond of their homeland; on the other hand, they fear losing the village to the next generation. Here, the village is depicted as a heavenly place to live because of its richness

and abundance. The themes of social, cultural, and environmental issues are narrated to the younger generations through songs or folktales. Yet, the older generations lamented that the younger generations have not shown fondness for the village as they cared for it. The neighbouring villages of Pele were abandoned. In one of the villages, 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 led to a riot. The villagers finally understand the power and the dependence of nature after they witnessed the famine. The nature should be valued for its environmental landscape. Because of their increased sensitivity and consciousness of the damages inflicted on Mother Earth, spiritual feminism holds women especially accountable to safeguard nature and to preserve the richness of biodiversity. The feminine characteristics in the work are supportive, nonviolent, and cooperative, along with the environmental deeds.

In ancient times, male characters were mostly dominant over the environment and females. In Kire's works, female characters are equally important; they are connected with environmental movements. Pele, the protagonist, walked out of his village due to drought and famine. He lost his wife and children due to a natural calamity. Along with his family, he lost his friends and villagers due to starvation. He heard about the rumors that Weaver's village has enough food and water.

During his travel, he met with two ancient characters named Kethonuo and Siedze; he was confused as to whether they were humans or spirits in the village of Noune. The ancestral characters connect the thread between the past

and the present villages. In Nagaland, the real and the unreal beings, even spirits, are believed to share a common ancestral root, with a focus on kinship and interconnectedness.

The sisters had skeletal bodies that were covered in a tattered cloth and stringy hair that had not been combed for years. As per the customs followed by the ancestors, a woman should lead her life, which should not depend on her husband or father. The sisters led life without male support in their family for seven hundred years. At the arrival of Pele. The sisters—Kethonuo and Siedze—looked upon thunder, storms, 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 hope that one day the village will be fruitful and can be renewed from the drought and famine. Their spirit of hope is maintained until the birth of Mesanuo's son, Rhalie. It proves that the sisters are part of environmental protection. If the sisters were to die or to forget about the prophecy, then it would be impossible to recover the village from drought.

They insisted that Pele stay with them as the stars would appear in the east. The situation connects with the environment and the human relationship. Even though they are separated from the villagers, the sisters show love towards every human; like that, they protected Pele from not letting go at night due to the wolf's movement. The sisters often strove with the traditions and customs. They recognized Pele as a faithful man; thus, the sisters guided him to reach Weaver's village.

The sisters, even in this situation, are 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. As they lived in a drought world, they felt excited as the village was now regreening. It denotes a restoration of the village from the critical environmental situation. 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 and 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.

According to the villagers, time leads to death and famine, whereas for the sisters, Kethonuo and Siedze, time is a circle; they keep the past alive in the present. The sisters spent an immortal life for years. They recognized Pele as a faithful man, not because of his strength but rather because he has a good heart. Their hospitality is shown towards Pele by preparing food and comforting him to stay at their home; it is a sign that he will validate the birth of the son of Thunder Cloud.

Though the sisters are mythical characters, they stayed at the real home outside the village. The sisters act as the thread for believing in the

prophecy. The sisters were the ones who believed in the rain. For over seven hundred years, the sisters have been bound to the same home by preserving the historical and prophetic stories. The existence of the sisters transforms them to read as a "mystical sister" who got separated from her own village and who just embodies resistance and stability against erasure. The sisters and the environment have played a give-and-take policy role so that the sisters Kethonuo and Siedze have believed in ecology for years, and the cloud helps in two ways by helping Mesanuo to give birth to the mysterious child Rhalie and to end the drought in the village. Pele and the environmental conditions in the village were protected by the sisters. Pele can be described as a witness of the supernatural sisters.

The character Mesanuo plays as a bridge between the spiritual world and the natural world. She was a widowed woman, as her husband and seven sons were killed by the tiger. Thus, she is also called "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. 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. She is the one who made the prophecy a reality because of her pregnancy. In the dry village, Mesanuo's body remains fertile, and it isn't about the baby but the power she has to believe and receive it.

According to Vandana Shiva, women's particular knowledge of nature and also dependence on it for staying alive have been systematically marginalized in the wake of modern science. She points out that Third World

women are not victims of the development process but also have the power to change it. The sisters in the work, too, used the power that connects the women to nature.

The things that happened at work are connected with the background of nature and human relationships. The sisters—Kethonuo and Siedze—had played a passive but essential role as they connected the past and the present; Sister Mesanuo played an active role as she gave birth to the son who brings the future to the world. Without the help of two sisters, it was impossible for Mesanuo to get pregnant and to fulfill the prophecy. The power isn't about the individual, but it is shared among the three sisters—Kethonuo, Siedze, and Mesanuo. Pele was lucky enough to be invited and stay with the sisters, and they helped him reach the village.

In the weaver's village, Mesanuo too helped him as he was faithful towards them. The feminine energy of the sisters was understood by nature; as the sisters entered the village, the rain returned, and it made the land fertile. The unity of the sisters restores the ecological condition as they make the drought-ridden village into nourishing land. The Tiger-Widow

and the two sisters are separated from their own villages, which reflects the patriarchal structure followed by the villagers.

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