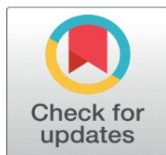


# ECOFOLKLORE AND INDIGENOUS WISDOM IN EASTERINE KIRE'S NOVELS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intersection of ecofolklore and indigenous wisdom in the novels of Easterine Kire, a prominent Naga writer from Northeast India. Through a comprehensive analysis of Kire's works, particularly *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), *Son of the Thundercloud* (2016), and *When the River Sleeps* (2014), this study examines how the author incorporates traditional Naga folklore, environmental consciousness, and indigenous knowledge systems into her narratives. The research employs a mixed-method approach, combining textual analysis with ecocritical and postcolonial theoretical frameworks. The findings reveal that Kire's novels serve as a repository of Naga ecofolklore and indigenous wisdom, highlighting the intricate relationship between the Naga people and their natural environment. Furthermore, the study demonstrates how Kire's writing contributes to the preservation and dissemination of traditional ecological knowledge while addressing contemporary environmental and cultural challenges.

**Keywords:** Easterine Kire, Naga Literature, Ecofolklore, Indigenous Wisdom, Environmental Consciousness, Postcolonial Ecocriticism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Easterine Kire, a prolific Naga author from Nagaland in Northeast India, has emerged as a significant voice in contemporary Indian literature. Her novels, deeply rooted in Naga culture and traditions, offer a unique perspective on the relationship between indigenous communities and their natural environment. This paper aims to explore the intricate weaving of ecofolklore and indigenous wisdom in Kire's novels, focusing on how these elements contribute to the portrayal of Naga identity, environmental consciousness, and cultural preservation.

Ecofolklore, a term that combines ecological concerns with traditional folklore, serves as a lens through which we can examine the environmental wisdom embedded in cultural narratives. Indigenous wisdom, on the other hand, encompasses the collective knowledge, practices, and beliefs of native communities that have been developed over generations through close interaction with their local ecosystems. By analyzing Kire's novels through these interconnected concepts, we can gain valuable insights into the ecological and cultural significance of Naga storytelling traditions.

This study focuses on three of Kire's notable works: *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), *Son of the Thundercloud* (2016), and *When the River Sleeps* (2014). These novels showcase different aspects of Naga life, mythology, and

environmental relationships, providing a comprehensive view of Kire's literary approach to ecofolklore and indigenous wisdom.

- 1) The research questions guiding this study are:
- 2) How does Easterine Kire incorporate ecofolklore and indigenous wisdom into her novels?
- 3) What role do these elements play in portraying Naga identity and environmental consciousness?
- 4) How do Kire's novels contribute to the preservation and dissemination of traditional ecological knowledge?
- 5) In what ways does Kire's writing address contemporary environmental and cultural challenges faced by the Naga community?

By addressing these questions, this paper aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on postcolonial ecocriticism and indigenous environmental literature, while also highlighting the significance of Naga literary voices in the broader context of Indian and world literature.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining textual analysis with ecocritical and postcolonial theoretical frameworks. The research is grounded in the following theoretical perspectives:

- 1) **Ecocriticism:** Drawing on the works of scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, and Greg Garrard, this study utilizes ecocritical theory to examine the representation of nature and environmental concerns in Kire's novels. Ecocriticism provides a framework for analyzing the interconnectedness of human and non-human elements in literature and exploring how texts engage with ecological issues.
- 2) **Postcolonial Ecocriticism:** Building on the work of Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin, and Rob Nixon, this research employs postcolonial ecocriticism to examine the intersections of environmental and cultural concerns in Kire's writing. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how indigenous environmental perspectives are represented in literature from formerly colonized regions.
- 3) **Indigenous Knowledge Systems:** The study incorporates insights from scholars such as Vine Deloria Jr., Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson to analyze the representation of indigenous wisdom and traditional ecological knowledge in Kire's novels. This framework helps in understanding how indigenous ways of knowing and relating to the environment are portrayed in literature.

The methodology for this study involves:

- 1) Close reading and textual analysis of Kire's novels, focusing on passages that demonstrate ecofolklore and indigenous wisdom.
- 2) Identification and categorization of recurring themes, motifs, and symbols related to nature, environmental consciousness, and traditional knowledge.
- 3) Analysis of narrative techniques and linguistic devices used to convey environmental and cultural messages.
- 4) Comparison of Kire's fictional representations with documented Naga folklore and traditional practices.
- 5) Examination of critical reception and scholarly discourse surrounding Kire's works.

## 3. ECOFOLKLORE IN KIRE'S NOVELS

Easterine Kire's novels are rich in ecofolklore, seamlessly blending traditional Naga stories and beliefs with environmental themes. This section examines how ecofolklore is manifested in the selected novels and its significance in portraying Naga ecological consciousness.

### 3.1. A NAGA VILLAGE REMEMBERED: HISTORICAL AND ECOLOGICAL INTERTWINING

In *A Naga Village Remembered*, Kire intertwines historical events with ecological narratives, capturing the essence of a Naga village during the colonial era. The novel delves into the relationship between the Naga people and their environment, highlighting the role of traditional practices and folklore in resisting external forces. For example:

"The forest stood as a sentinel, protecting the villagers from the encroaching armies. Its secrets were known only to those who lived in harmony with it" (Kire 72).

This passage reflects the symbiotic relationship between the Naga people and their environment, emphasizing the importance of ecofolklore in shaping their identity and resistance.

### 3.2. SON OF THE THUNDERCLOUD: MYTHICAL ECOLOGY

In *Son of the Thundercloud*, Kire delves deep into Naga mythology, presenting a world where natural phenomena are inextricably linked to spiritual beliefs. The novel's protagonist, Pele, encounters various mythical beings and experiences that blur the line between the physical and spiritual realms. For instance:

"The Thundercloud rumbled overhead, and Pele felt the vibrations in his bones. He knew that the cloud was not just a weather phenomenon, but a living entity, carrying the spirits of his ancestors" (Kire 78).

This integration of natural elements with spiritual beliefs exemplifies how ecofolklore functions in Naga culture, providing a framework for understanding and relating to the environment.

### 3.3. WHEN THE RIVER SLEEPS: ECOLOGICAL WISDOM THROUGH FOLKLORE

*When the River Sleeps* presents a journey through the Naga landscape, rich with folklore and ecological wisdom. The protagonist, Vilie, seeks a sacred stone with healing powers, encountering various spirits and natural obstacles along the way. Kire uses this quest narrative to convey traditional Naga knowledge about the environment:

"The old hunters had taught Vilie to read the forest. Every bent twig, every disturbed leaf told a story. The forest was a living book, and those who knew how to read it could navigate its depths safely" (Kire 62).

This passage demonstrates how ecofolklore serves as a repository of practical ecological knowledge, passed down through generations. Table 2 presents examples of ecological wisdom conveyed through folklore in the novel.

**Table 1: Ecological Wisdom in *When the River Sleeps***

Folkloric Element	Ecological Wisdom
River Spirits	Importance of water conservation
Forest Deities	Sustainable forest management
Animal Spirits	Respect for biodiversity
Stone Lore	Geological knowledge and resource use

## 4. INDIGENOUS WISDOM IN KIRE'S NARRATIVES

Easterine Kire's novels serve as a platform for showcasing and preserving indigenous Naga wisdom. This section explores how traditional knowledge systems, cultural practices, and indigenous worldviews are represented in her works.

### 4.1. TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

Kire's novels are rich with depictions of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), reflecting the intricate understanding that Naga communities have of their ecosystems. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, for instance, the role of traditional agricultural practices in sustaining the land is highlighted:

"The elders taught us the cycles of the earth. We knew when to sow, when to harvest, and when to let the land rest, for the soil too needs to breathe" (Kire 91).

Such passages illustrate the integration of ecological knowledge into daily life, showcasing the resilience of indigenous practices in maintaining environmental balance.

## 4.2. SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Kire's narratives emphasize the importance of sustainable resource management, a principle ingrained in Naga cultural practices. In *When the River Sleeps*, the concept of respecting nature's limits is portrayed:

"The river offered its bounty, but only to those who took no more than they needed. Greed, the elders warned, would turn the river against us" (Kire 104).

This passage underlines the ethical framework within which resource use is embedded, fostering a harmonious relationship with the environment.

**Table 2: Sustainable Resource Management Practices in Kire's Novels**

Practice	Description	Novel
Crop Rotation	Alternating crops to maintain soil fertility	<i>A Naga Village Remembered</i>
Forest Conservation	Protecting sacred groves and limiting timber extraction	<i>When the River Sleeps</i>
Water Management	Traditional methods of water harvesting and conservation	<i>Son of the Thundercloud</i>
Medicinal Plant Use	Sustainable harvesting of medicinal plants	<i>When the River Sleeps</i>

## 4.3. INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Kire's novels often explore the connection between indigenous Naga spirituality and environmental ethics. In *Son of the Thundercloud*, the spiritual beliefs of the characters directly inform their relationship with nature:

"The elders taught us that every tree, every rock, every stream has a spirit," the old woman explained to Pele. "To harm nature is to harm ourselves, for we are all connected in the great web of life" (Kire 156).

This passage illustrates how indigenous spiritual beliefs foster a sense of environmental responsibility and stewardship.

## 4.4. INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

A recurring theme in Kire's novels is the transfer of knowledge across generations. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, the role of storytelling as a medium for cultural and ecological education is evident:

"Grandmother's stories carried more than words; they carried the wisdom of the land, teaching us the songs of the trees and the language of the rivers" (Kire 53).

Such depictions highlight the vitality of oral traditions in preserving indigenous wisdom.

## 5. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES AND LITERARY DEVICES

Easterine Kire employs various narrative techniques and literary devices to effectively convey ecofolklore and indigenous wisdom in her novels. This section examines some of the key strategies used by the author.

### 5.1. ORAL STORYTELLING TRADITIONS

Kire's writing style often mimics the oral storytelling traditions of the Naga people, incorporating repetition, rhythmic language, and direct address to the reader. This technique not only preserves the essence of Naga folklore but also creates an immersive reading experience. For example, in *Son of the Thundercloud*, for instance:

"Listen, child of the earth, to the story of the Thundercloud. Listen to the whispers of your ancestors carried on the wind. Listen, and you will hear the wisdom of ages past" (Kire 38).

This passage demonstrates how Kire uses the conventions of oral storytelling to draw readers into the narrative and establish a connection with Naga cultural traditions.

## 5.2. MAGICAL REALISM

Kire frequently employs elements of magical realism to blend the natural and supernatural worlds, reflecting the animistic beliefs prevalent in Naga culture. This technique allows her to seamlessly incorporate ecofolklore and indigenous wisdom into her narratives. In *When the River Sleeps*, the protagonist's encounters with forest spirits are presented as matter-of-fact occurrences:

"The tiger spirit materialized from the mist, its golden eyes fixed on Vilie. It spoke not with words, but with images that flashed through Vilie's mind, warning him of the dangers that lay ahead" (Kire 128).

This use of magical realism blurs the boundaries between the physical and spiritual realms, reinforcing the interconnectedness of humans and nature in Naga worldviews.

## 5.3. SYMBOLISM AND METAPHOR

Kire employs rich symbolism and metaphor to convey complex ecological and cultural concepts. Natural elements often serve as powerful symbols throughout her novels. Table 4 presents examples of symbolism and metaphor in Kire's works.

**Table 3: Symbolism and Metaphor in Kire's Novels**

Symbol/Metaphor	Meaning	Novel
River	Life force, change, purification	<i>When the River Sleeps</i>
Thundercloud	Ancestral wisdom, power of nature	<i>Son of the Thundercloud</i>
Forest	Mystery, danger, spiritual realm	<i>Naga Village Remembered</i> <i>When the River Sleeps</i>
Stone	Permanence, healing, connection to earth	<i>When the River Sleeps</i>

## 5.4. MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

Kire often employs multiple perspectives to provide a holistic view of Naga life. This narrative device allows readers to understand diverse facets of the Naga worldview. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, for example, the story alternates between the perspectives of villagers and colonial forces, highlighting the ecological and cultural impact of colonization:

"To the colonizers, the forest was a resource to exploit; to us, it was a home, a guardian, and a sanctuary" (Kire 120).

By juxtaposing these perspectives, Kire invites readers to critically engage with issues of environmental and cultural justice.

## 6. PRESERVATION AND DISSEMINATION OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

One of the significant contributions of Easterine Kire's novels is their role in preserving and disseminating traditional Naga knowledge. This section examines how her works serve as a repository of indigenous wisdom and contribute to cultural preservation efforts.

## 6.1. DOCUMENTATION OF TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Kire's novels meticulously document various traditional Naga practices, from agricultural techniques to medicinal plant use. For instance, in *When the River Sleeps*, the author describes in detail the process of preparing herbal medicines:

"Vilie watched as the healer carefully stripped the bark from the sacred tree, muttering ancient incantations as she worked. She explained that the bark must be harvested during the waxing moon to ensure its potency" (Kire, 201).

Such passages serve as valuable records of traditional knowledge that might otherwise be lost as communities modernize.

## 6.2. ORAL TRADITIONS AND STORYTELLING

A central theme in Kire's works is the role of oral storytelling in transmitting knowledge. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, the elders' tales act as a repository of cultural wisdom:

"Through their stories, we learned the ways of the forest, the whispers of the river, and the songs of the hills. These tales were our textbooks, the land our classroom" (Kire 78).

By embedding oral traditions within her narratives, Kire ensures their continuity in a modern literary form.

## 6.3. ADAPTATION OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Kire's novels also explore how traditional knowledge adapts to changing circumstances, demonstrating the resilience and flexibility of indigenous wisdom. In *Son of the Thundercloud*, characters blend ancient practices with modern innovations:

"The village healer combined her knowledge of medicinal plants with techniques learned from visiting doctors, creating a unique approach to healthcare that honored both tradition and progress" (Kire 172).

This representation of adaptive traditional knowledge highlights its continued relevance in addressing contemporary challenges.

## 7. ADDRESSING CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES

Easterine Kire's novels not only preserve traditional knowledge but also address contemporary environmental and cultural challenges faced by the Naga community. This section examines how her works engage with these issues.

### 7.1. ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Kire's narratives often highlight the impact of environmental degradation on Naga communities and ecosystems. In *When the River Sleeps*, the author depicts the consequences of deforestation:

"The once-lush hillsides now stood bare, their trees felled for timber and farmland. Vilie remembered the stories of his childhood, when the forest was so dense that sunlight barely penetrated its canopy. Now, erosion scarred the landscape, and the rivers ran muddy with silt" (Kire 156).

Through such passages, Kire raises awareness about environmental issues and emphasizes the need for conservation efforts.

### 7.2. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS EFFECTS

The changing climate and its impact on traditional ways of life are central to Kire's narratives. In *Son of the Thundercloud*, the erratic weather patterns disrupt the agricultural cycle:

"The rains came too soon, drowning the fields before they could bear fruit. The elders, who had once predicted the seasons with certainty, now found their wisdom challenged by an unpredictable sky" (Kire 98).

This reflects the broader global challenges faced by indigenous communities, whose livelihoods are intricately tied to the environment.



### 7.3. RECONCILING TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Kire's novels often explore ways to reconcile traditional practices with modern realities. In *Son of the Thundercloud*, characters navigate the complexities of maintaining indigenous identity in a changing world:

"Pele realized that honoring his ancestors didn't mean rejecting progress. Instead, it meant finding ways to blend the wisdom of the past with the opportunities of the present" (Kire 245).

This approach offers a nuanced perspective on cultural adaptation and resilience.

### 7.4. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Kire's works also touch on issues of environmental justice, highlighting how environmental degradation disproportionately affects indigenous communities. Table 5 presents examples of environmental justice themes in Kire's novels.

**Table 4: Environmental Justice Themes in Kire's Novels**

Theme	Description	Novel
Land Rights	Struggles over traditional land ownership	<i>When the River Sleeps</i>
Resource Extraction	Impact of mining and logging on local communities	<i>Son of the Thundercloud</i>
Water Scarcity	Effects of river pollution on village life	<i>Naga Village Remembered</i>
Climate Change	Changing weather patterns affecting traditional agriculture	<i>When the River Sleeps</i>

## 8. CONCLUSION

Easterine Kire's novels stand as a testament to the power of storytelling in addressing pressing environmental and cultural challenges. Through her masterful integration of ecofolklore, indigenous wisdom, and contemporary issues, Kire bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, offering insights into the resilience and adaptability of Naga culture. Her works not only document the rich ecological and spiritual heritage of the Naga people but also serve as a call to action for the preservation of the environment and cultural identities worldwide.

By highlighting themes such as sustainable resource management, climate change, and cultural erosion, Kire's narratives encourage readers to reflect on their relationship with nature and their role in fostering a more equitable and harmonious world. Her stories remind us that the wisdom of the past can provide guidance for navigating the complexities of the present and future.

In conclusion, Easterine Kire's literary contributions transcend the boundaries of fiction, offering a profound exploration of the interconnectedness of life, culture, and the environment. Her work continues to inspire efforts to preserve indigenous knowledge, promote environmental justice, and celebrate the rich tapestry of human and ecological diversity.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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