



International Journal of Engineering, Science and Humanities

An international peer reviewed, refereed, open-access journal
Impact Factor: 8.3 www.ijesh.com ISSN: 2250-3552

Gender, Patriarchy and Women's Struggles in Easterine Kire's Don't Run, My Love

Rajni

Research Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages, MES College of Arts & Commerce, Zuarinagar

ABSTRACT:

The North-East of India has long been marked by a distinct socio-cultural identity that sets it apart from the rest of the country. Within this context, Easterine Kire, one of Nagaland's most significant literary voices, highlights the lived experiences of women in a patriarchal society. Her novella *Don't Run, My Love* portrays the struggles of two women—Visenuo, a widow and her daughter Atuonuo—against the backdrop of Angami Naga traditions. This paper examines how Kire represents issues of female subjugation, property rights, social expectations and cultural taboos, while simultaneously offering narratives of courage and resistance. The text foregrounds the dual burden of women in Naga society: their role as preservers of tradition and their marginalization under patriarchy. By doing so, Kire challenges the notion of "North-East Literature" as a homogenous category and presents Naga women as agents of strength, defiance and transformation.

KEYWORDS: Easterine Kire, Naga Society, Gender, Patriarchy, Women's Rights, Angami Culture, North-East Literature.

When investigating the north-east, it's crucial to look into the subject that best represents them, as well as bring attention to the problems they encounter. The Nagas' history reveals us that they are not Indians by choice, but by force of circumstance. In the aftermath of the Indo-Naga battle, the state of Nagaland was established in India's North-East and it is unlike any other state in terms of culture, language, history, politics and the physical look of its people. When it comes to Nagaland's history as a civilised state, the issue of Naga identity has gone unrecognized. There were various tribes before the arrival of the Britishers, such as the Ahom tribes, but after the British arrived in 1826, the Naga people gradually converted in Christianity. Nagaland is one of India's smallest states, with rushing streams, lush green hills, ever-changing skies, serpentine roads and a diverse range of colourful tribes. On December 1, 1963, it was restored to India's map as the sixteenth state. Nagaland covers 16,579 square kilometres and is bordered on the south by Manipur, Myanmar on the east, to North Arunachal Pradesh and Assam on the west. With fourteen primary tribes such as Ao, Angami, Sema, Lotha, Rengma, Chakhesang, Sangtam, Konyak, Phom, Chang, Zeliang, Kuki, Khiemnugan and Yimchunger, the population is estimated to be around twenty lakh. It has seven districts: Kohima, Phek, Mokokchung, Zunheboto, Wokha, Tuensang and Mon, with



International Journal of Engineering, Science and Humanities

An international peer reviewed, refereed, open-access journal
Impact Factor: 8.3 www.ijesh.com ISSN: 2250-3552

Kohima as its capital. The Nagas were made to feel alienated from the rest of the country because of this huge polarity, as well as their tragic history in the context of their 'forceful' marriage with the Union of India.

Writers representing Nagaland, such as Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire, have used their words to bring the state's unique traditions to life. Ao and Kire have stated their dissatisfaction with the titles "North-East literature" and "North-East writers" as they relate to the colonial legacy, joining the ranks of many modern North East Indian writers such as Mamang Dai, Harekrishna Deka, Dhruva Hazarika, Jahnvi Baruah and others. Easterine Kire, a prominent writer and Nagaland's most modern voice, conveys her beliefs and cultural ethos throughout her writings. Her most popular novels and short stories, such as: *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), *Mari* (2010), *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), *Son of the Thundercloud* (2016), *When the River Sleeps* (2014) and others, are focused on the people of Nagaland's lived experience. Kire fulfils her role as one of her region's best storytellers in her writings. She is the first English-language Naga writer to textualize "orality" in her writings to depict the Angami community's cultural life as well as endeavours to resurrect oral storytelling. Kire states; "The stories that still need telling are what I call the people's stories." (Easterine Kire, interview by Swati Daftuar, The Hindu, February 11, 2013.)

The current study looks at Kire's *Don't Run, My Love* and how it depicts two distinct female characters and how they deal with their harsh reality and surroundings. The narration investigates the agony of innocent Atuonuo and Visenuo as well as their struggle with the traditional Angami society to which they belong. Nagaland is a state where both patriarchal and matriarchal control co-exists but patriarchy has the superiority. Due to the numerous reasons the status of women in the North-East has not been different from the women in the mainstream of India. The conditioning and socialisation of women in society, as well as their depiction in literature, media and popular culture, are all part of the process of molding a woman. Literature is concerned with humanization, which leads to an understanding of the causes that drive brutalization and follows the historical connections.

In India, the concept of gender has become a kind of paradigm for discrimination based on gender. It exposes the restrictive tradition and reduces women's standing. The female gender was regarded as a second-class citizen and patriarchal rules were imposed on her status. What is appropriate and what is not appropriate for women is taken into account by society. Gender discourse can be witnessed in India's northeast region, in the context of Naga culture, through gender socialisation, social hierarchy and the relationship between man and woman. In Naga society, girls are traditionally preferred to assist with domestic activities. The birth of a boy child, on the other hand, is usually favoured because of the clan and family lineages, which are governed by customary and traditional norms. A woman is bound by traditional and customary restrictions



International Journal of Engineering, Science and Humanities

An international peer reviewed, refereed, open-access journal
Impact Factor: 8.3 www.ijesh.com ISSN: 2250-3552

that keep her separate from men. Lucy Zehol highlights the patriarchal system's oppression and asserts: “The patriarchal Naga society is reflected by notions such as the birth of a male child being auspicious, man as the bread winner and the protector of the society and women being subordinate to their house- holds.”

In Tenyidie, a dialect of the Angami people, the word for women is thenumia. Despite her proficiency and abilities, women's characteristics and standing in Angami Naga society appear to be lower. This text is about love and transgression cautionary tale. Kire tells a love story that defines the patriarchal system's societal rules. The story follows Visenuo and Atuonuo, a mother-daughter combo who meet a young and charming man named Kevi and have their lives thrown into chaos. Visenuo is a young widow who has the option to remarry but does not want to and Visenuo's only child, Atuonuo, is of marriageable age. Kevi has a natural attraction to Atuonuo. The young man leaving meat gifts illustrates the patriarchal Angami Naga tribes' marriage proposal rituals. The concept of a woman's property rights and reputation is being questioned here. The two women Visenuo and Atuonuo are not thought to be accurate by society or their relatives because it was deemed inappropriate for a widowed woman and a young unmarried girl to openly interact with a guy. This novella discusses the social and cultural construction of women's roles in society, as well as how a man who appears to have a decent quality at first develops an aggressive nature by the end of the story. The plot is crafted in such a way that the events twist and turn. Kire introduces the pastoral scenes with sentences from the literature such as: “the heat brought out the scent of new paddy. It was a sweet and strong smell—like sunshine trapped between husk and grain (6).”

Atuonuo and Visenuo are two ladies who are obliged to live and perform in specific ways in society. It depicts how gender is created. The importance of women's and men's roles has been highlighted. Kire outlines how women are expected to abide by specific standards and customs and that by doing so, they inadvertently promote the male supremacy status. The concept of property inheritance is also depicted at the start of the novella. Only the male kid owns the ancestral property, which is called as *Seiphro*. A widowed woman, like Visenuo, who works alongside her little daughter, can and has the right to use her deceased husband's possessions. Land that is owned by the community or inherited by the women cannot be passed down to the women. In the event that the family's patriarch, the father, dies, the property is inherited by the nearest male cousin. She will have to work hard and live without the land. The social and economic standing of Naga women is still influenced by customary regulations. Kevi, a young attractive man, assisted them in carrying their sacks and Visenuo and Atuonuo urged that he eat. It was the customary way of thanking someone who had aided you. Any woman from any Angami community is expected to execute the same jobs and responsibilities. Kire states, “At eighteen, Atuonuo was almost as strong as her mother. She had reached the age of marriage. In fact, her grandaunt thought she was in danger of



International Journal of Engineering, Science and Humanities

An international peer reviewed, refereed, open-access journal
Impact Factor: 8.3 www.ijesh.com **ISSN: 2250-3552**

being passed over because girls younger than her were already married and had borne children (5).” It demonstrates how women can be the leading proponents of conventional status and culturally constructed gender. The women were bound to their homes, rarely leaving them and their lifestyles were severely controlled. Girls who knew how to do all of the household chores were highly valued in society. Thus, committed and hardworking women were requested for marriage and this attitude is mirrored in the text, when Atuonuo, at the age of eighteen, is asked for marriage by a young man, but she declines. It was customary among the Angamis for a young man to propose to each female in turn and marry the one who accepted. The girl has the option of accepting or rejecting the suitor. Parents never permitted a girl to make her own decisions.

Visenuo, for example, preferred to work hard with her daughter in their field rather than live a life selling vegetables and home-brewed wine. In the narrative, a man named Vilhu asks the widow and her daughter for assistance in carrying their heavy goods. Visenuo respectfully declines since she does not want to harm her life, which displeases Vilhu's wife. Vilhu was once chastised by Visenuo for being more concerned with helping the widow and neglected his own portion of duties. The Naga mother or woman in a family has a regular work regimen. She begins her day by gathering firewood, obtaining water, cooking and then going out into the field. Kevi joins them for dinner and decides to assist them with their hefty suitcases. On his back, he carried the kephuo that Visenuo and Atuonuo had hoisted. By the time they arrived in Kija (village), it was already evening. When the widowed mom and her eighteen-year-old daughter arrived with a stranger, the women and men were intrigued. They started questioning:

“Who was the stranger? Was he a relative of Visenuo’s? He didn’t look like one of their young men. Everyone was curious about the stranger helping the widow bring back her harvest, but no one had the answer to the question uppermost in their minds: Was this a suitor for Atuonuo? (41).”

When a young man visits a woman's home without any male family members, people perceive it as a major issue affecting the woman's standing and reputation. The position of women in traditional Angami culture might be determined by looking at their responsibilities. Kire depicts the sorrow that pervades the lives of its women, particularly those who lack legal male relatives. After hearing about the attractive young guy Kevi, two of Visenuo's paternal relatives, Abau and Khonuo, pay Visenuo a visit to learn more about him. Abau says: The whole village is asking about the young man who carried our paddy home. We could not sit at home any longer and keep saying we know nothing about this business. Abau sounded upset and disappointed. She was in her seventies and considered it her right to know all that was going on in the lives of her children, her grandchildren and her nephews and nieces and their children, especially when it pertained to the female members (42). Naga women are classified according to their ethnicity. According to society, a woman's position in the home should be that of a virtuous woman who stays at home,



International Journal of Engineering, Science and Humanities

An international peer reviewed, refereed, open-access journal
Impact Factor: 8.3 www.ijesh.com ISSN: 2250-3552

learns household chores and maintains her status as a woman. In a male-dominated society, Visenuo's paternal family maintain gender inequality by oppressing females. They use the two women to maintain the community's culture. Kire focuses on the ways in which gender inequality exists within the same gender.

Don't Run My Love is a novella that depicts how women without a male partner work very hard and become self-centered. The two women understood that being a woman meant being committed to all of the traditional gender norms that the Naga society is built on. The novella highlights the patriarchal practices that are maintained within the society, which affect the lives of the young eighteen-year-old girl who is denied schooling in the society, by immersing the readers in the lives of the two women. Kire attempts to broaden Naga society's norms and laws in this way. The positions of Naga women are formed by the customs and policies, which have proven a hurdle to progression. She seeks to demonstrate to today's youth that fixing gendered problems will not improve women's conditions in Naga society since women are still under-empowered. Her works attempt to highlight how patriarchal rules and society have stifled women's creativity. They support the belief that women cannot be educated or reach to the same level as males. The novella's two female characters are shown to defy gender conventions and expectations. Visenuo, a widow and her daughter Atunuo, for example, summon a young gorgeous man named Kevi to their home to assist them in carrying their large, heavy grain. The group thinks that people must follow the norms and refrain from breaking taboos. The widowed woman and her young daughter drew the villagers' attention by inviting a young man into their home. Because Atunuo is of marriageable age, the locals thought it was an immoral behaviour. This situation indicates that women are treated as second-class citizens. The women's lives are made more difficult as a result of this tragedy. The type of difficulty depicted in the book has been passed down through generations, therefore the two women, Azou and Khonuo, go to Visenuo's to receive an answer. Visenuo does not believe that introducing a male member into the house is unethical, but the patriarchal society necessitates it in order to protect a female member's reputation. At first, Visenuo was unconcerned by the villagers' opinions. Such an act is regarded as a significant step forward by the two women in Naga society. Visenuo promotes women's opportunities by rejecting the notion of a female marrying at the age of eighteen, asserting that a girl might marry at whatever age she desired. She asserts; in our day, people got married much earlier, but time is changing with today's young people (44). Visenuo represents a new social system for the twenty-first century. She is a powerful woman who understands the dynamics of tradition while still being a symbol of progress. She is a modern-day replacement for the old methods of early marriage. She defies gender stereotypes that are socially established. This demonstrates that the undermining of female gender should be spread and that there should be women who fight up for what they believe in. Time has passed and there are now



International Journal of Engineering, Science and Humanities

An international peer reviewed, refereed, open-access journal

Impact Factor: 8.3 www.ijesh.com ISSN: 2250-3552

more rational causes in people's lives than the illogic of customs and rituals with separate names based on patriarchal framework.

Eventually we can say that Women are still not empowered in the current situation since they are still bound by cultural and traditional factors. Despite modernization and education, traditional attitudes and values continue to struggle to keep up with societal changes. The Naga society still has a long way to go in terms of fully embracing gender equality. This text usually refers to something that is outrageous, bold, or courageous. It's interested in grown-up activities and acting like a grown-up. These characteristics can be seen in Atuonuo, a character that thinks and acts very aggressively. Visenuo, a widow, is depicted as brave. Without relying on anyone, the two women were able to labour in the field successfully. They struggle and eventually achieve, which is extremely feminine behaviour. Easterine Kire creates a female and male-defined community in the novella based on their womanish views. Through the figure Kevi, Easterine Kire not only discusses the female character, but also the masculine authority. Easterine Kire believes in the equality of all human beings, regardless of race or gender.

CONCLUSION:

Easterine Kire's *Don't Run, My Love* reveals how patriarchy continues to restrict women's freedom in Naga society despite the presence of matriarchal elements and modernization. The lives of Visenuo and Atuonuo reflect the everyday struggles of women bound by custom, tradition and societal expectations. Issues such as property inheritance, early marriage and societal surveillance reinforce women's second-class status, while patriarchal structures are maintained even by female relatives who police women's behavior. Yet, Kire also presents moments of defiance and resilience. Visenuo refuses to bow to oppressive customs, asserting her right to live on her own terms, while Atuonuo represents a new generation that questions gender roles. Their strength in sustaining themselves without male dependence becomes symbolic of resistance against traditional constraints. Through nuanced storytelling, Kire demonstrates how women are not merely victims but active participants in reshaping social narratives. Ultimately, *Don't Run, My Love* underscores the urgent need for gender equality and re-evaluation of cultural practices in contemporary Naga society. It reflects Kire's larger vision: a belief in the equality of all human beings, regardless of gender, tradition, or societal hierarchies.

REFERENCES:

- Ao, Temsula. *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*. Bhasha Publications, 1999.
- Daftuar, Swati. "The Stories That Still Need Telling: Interview with Easterine Kire." *The Hindu*, 11 Feb. 2013.
- Kire, Easterine. *Don't Run, My Love*. Speaking Tiger, 2017.
- Kire, Easterine. *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*. Ura Academy, 2003.
- Lucy Zehol. *Women in Naga Society*. Regency Publications, 1998.



International Journal of Engineering, Science and Humanities

An international peer reviewed, refereed, open-access journal

Impact Factor: 8.3 www.ijesh.com **ISSN: 2250-3552**

- Zehol, Lucy. “Gender and Customary Law in Nagaland.” *Indian Anthropologist*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2004, pp. 43–56.