



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Oral Histories and Cultural Identity in Easterine Kire's Select Novels

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### Abstract

This article looks into the concept of Oral Histories and Cultural Identity in Easterine Kire's select novels *When the river sleeps* and *Spirit Nights*. Easterine Kire's *When the river sleeps* was published in 2014. *Spirit Nights* was published in 2022. Both these novels explored the sustainable lives of Nagaland people reflecting Oral Histories and Cultural Identity. These two novels of Easterine Kire offer community resilience, Indigenous Knowledge system and cultural protection of Naga people integrating sustainability. In these two novels, the Naga people with their unique social and cultural practices transfer sustainable features in their daily routine from generation to generation.

**Keywords:** Oral Histories, Cultural Identity, global sustainability, literary reflection, community resilience, Indigenous Knowledge system, cultural protection

### Introduction

Easterine Kire was born in Kohima, Nagaland. She is a poet, novelist and short story writer. Her works deals with Angami Naga tribes and their lifestyle and stories.

*When the river sleeps* deals with quest of heart-stone in the river for its magical qualities by Vilie and other people. Vilie, the protagonist lives in forest near Zuzie. He is 48 years old. He has spent his 25 years in forest. Vilie captures the heart-stone, when the river falls asleep. His journey with the stone in the forest and its consequences are interwoven with cultural narrative which aligns with SDGs.

*Spirit Nights* is a novel based on allegorical folklore oral narrative. Tola, the old woman as protagonist leads the village with her wisdom. The community resilience, taboos, rituals and their unique festivals aligns with SDGs.

### Gender Equality

SDG 5 is about women empowerment and gender equality. In '*Spirit Nights*', Tola's father is a seer and he was a dream receiver about warnings of future. After the father's death, the seer position was transferred to his male relative and not to Tola, as she was woman. Even there were female seers in the far settlements and

not in their village. Tola gets sequence of dreaming from her childhood days about future but she ignores them. Tola with her wisdom helps the villagers even though she doesn't have seer recognition.

### **Sustainable management of forests**

SDG 15 is about sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and sustainable management of forest and to halt biodiversity loss. In *Spirit Nights*, "It was relatively easier to care for since the fast-growing millet plants required much less water than paddy." (*Spirit Nights* Kire, 5)

Here sustainable management of agricultural field is referred by preference of millets, as it requires less water. Millet is known as the food of war by native people. In wartime, tilling of the land is not possible. People could survive in wartimes, if they had millet in stock. And crop rotation is also mentioned by dividing patch of land for vegetables like chillies, tomatoes, eggplant and beans. Optimization of land use could be seen. In this novel, Kire mentions the word 'agricultural year', as the people formed the society with sustainable agricultural practices as backbone for sustainable life.

In "When the River Sleeps" novel, Vilie became recognized as the guardian of the gwi (*Bos frontalis*) by his Angami clan. And he became the official protector of the rare tragopan (bird) in the forest recognized by Forest department. Animals' part of the biodiversity was conserved as part of Angami clan and the halt of biodiversity loss is also managed by Forest department.

"No human sound polluted the forest where the river lay. The men breathed as gently as they could, feeling that the very breaths they exhaled were an affront to the utter purity of the place." (*WTRS*, Kire 101)

In "When the river sleeps" novel, Vilie and Kani went to the sleeping river. They find the forest as very silent and pure from human beings breath.

### **Inclusive society**

SDG 16 is about peaceful and inclusive society for sustainable development. In the novel *Spirit Nights*, the villagers in Shumang Laangnyu Sang (River Rock Village) form a community and guard their agricultural fields for harvest. There were twenty two houses in that village. It was not a big village but it was founded as a peaceful settlement by their ancestors. After the massacre by the enemy warriors, it was a taboo for the villagers to stay in their village. Now only nine households were left. But the seer in his deathbed, asks the survived members to withstand and rebuild the village. Here community resilience is evident.

"We will rebuild our village.... We will remain here, and grow strong again like the rock guardian of our village. We will not allow Shumang Laangnyu Sang to die. It will live to fulfill its destiny." (*SN*, Kire 33)

The village forms inclusive society even in the hardest time. The emotionally stronger members of the community have started to care for the weaker ones in grief. Sungmo, the older widow was childless. She started to take care of Namu, as Tola has lost her son and daughter-in-law and her father in deathbed. After Tola's father's death also, Sungmo extended her care for Tola and Namu. The widower Beshang shared his grain with survivors in the village. And the villagers in each household cooked food and shared with their neighbours. Soon the survivors in that village form a family with their healing process.

"Each tail stands for different forms of pride. Rebellion. Arrogance. Greed. Hatred of all that is good. Self-seeking. Envy... You have now cut off all connection the tiger had to the spirit world." (*SN*, Kire 129)

Through the allegorical oral narrative, the characters in the novel promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. Here the evil aspects of emotions like arrogance, greed and hatred are mentioned.

And its removal will free the human beings and sustain in peaceful society. Tola also tells to her villagers that we must stop hate, envy and ill-speech.

### Conclusion

SDG 5, 15 and 16 are traced in Kire's novels "When the river sleeps" and "Spirit Nights". We can observe the sustainable lifestyle embedded in the oral narrative stories of Naga people. And their observance of taboos adherent to SDGs and Naga customs is remarkable.

### Abbreviations

WTRS- When the river sleeps

SN- Spirit Nights

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